

F.A.O: CLAIRE VICKERS, BBC CHARTER REVIEW TEAM
DEPT. FOR CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT,
2-4 COCKSPUR ST, LONDON SW1Y 5DT

PLEASE FIND
ATTACHED MY
SUBMISSION. THIS

COLIN F BRITTON

With Compliments

WAS SENT IN FEBRUARY 2004 BUT HAS BEEN LOST. COPY
SENT AT REQUEST OF NICK CROWTHER.
I WOULD APPRECIATE E-MAIL TO CONFIRM RECEIPT.

Thanks & regards.

Colin Britton

01/04/05.

13th February 2004

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

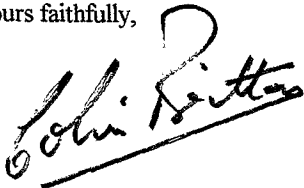
Dear Sir/Madam,

Ref: BBC Charter Review Consultation

Please find attached my submission (four pages) to the above Review.

Please note that I tried to email this as a file attachment which was not accepted.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Colin Britton". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

COLIN BRITTON

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department of Culture, Media and Sport
2 - 4 Cockspur St
London
SW1Y 5DH

To Whom It May Concern

REFERENCE: BBC Charter Review Consultation

I am writing to you with regard to the expiry of the BBC Charter in 2006 and to outline my views as to the future of the BBC after that date.

INTRODUCTION

I am a long admirer of the BBC and have appreciated much of the radio and TV output over many years.

Listening to radio programmes such as 'Childrens Hour', particularly 'Toy Town, 'In Town To-night', 'Monday Night at Eight' and 'Dick Barton' during the war and in the late 40's and 50's brought much pleasure and enjoyment. In later years, the series 'Learning About Music' presented by Anthony Hopkins opened a new era in music education for thousands of listeners. I have particularly enjoyed radio drama productions and was most disappointed when 'Saturday Night Theatre' was dropped from the schedule. The opera relays from the Metropolitan Opera in New York are wonderful and thankfully still on-going.

The earlier BBC TV programmes were excellent - outstanding productions remembered include drama series such as the 'The Deep Blue Sea', and other series such as 'The Great War' and 'Civilisation'. Successful comedy series such as 'Steptoe & Son', 'Rising Damp', 'Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin', 'Fawlty Towers', 'Dads Army', 'Yes, Minister', 'The Good Life' were outstanding. The more recent comedy 'The Office' continues these successes.

The radio and TV programmes outlined above are, in my view, the essence of 'public sector broadcasting'. However, what do we have now?

rating war but is in danger of losing its purpose¹ Lord Tebitt stated on the 'Today' programme that the role of public broadcasting should be the pursuit of excellence, not ratings². For some time now, I believe the BBC has become too large and bureaucratic and is trying to do all things in its present activities in competing with the commercial broadcasting channels.

There is no doubt that BBC 1 has been downgraded over the years to compete with the commercial channels. Documentary programmes that have survived such as 'Panorama' or 'Question Time' are now scheduled late at night whereas arts programmes have been nearly all excluded. BBC 1 schedules for Friday and Saturday are demonstrably so debased to exclude myself as a viewer.

Fortunately, BBC2 still has an interesting schedule but this can be adversely affected by sports specials such as snooker tournaments or high profile athletic events, removing large time-slots from the schedule.

The recent expansion of the BBC into digital channels for both radio and TV is unwarranted. All these channels employ their own reporters who all travel to overseas events such as conferences or special events. For example, in last night's schedule (10/02/04) for Radio 4 (07.15 - Front Row) and Radio 3 (09.30 - Night Waves), both programmes covered the same item (El Greco exhibition) as evidence of duplication of activities³.

I am particularly irritated by the continual channel and cross-channel trailers (TV to TV and TV to radio and vice versa), for other BBC services.⁴ The BBC will not reveal how much it spends on making its in-house adverts. I totally agree with the comment that the BBC is, in fact, one gigantic advertisement, namely, programmes, magazines, books, videos and demands for purchase of television licences⁵. Another deplorable trend of late has been the recent practice on a Sunday evening of including a trailer item in the closing news headlines of BBC 1 news for the next scheduled programme ('Panorama').

Another aspect deserving criticism concerns the news programmes. The BBC is now not only reporting news but continually attempts to 'create' news arising from several sources (commissioned reports or surveys) and reporters investigating current interests. The BBC Governors have been concerned that ... 'the culture of the Radio 4 'Today' programme had been one of creating rather than reporting news'⁶. It has also been reported that the recruitment of Andrew Gilligan to the 'Today' programme was related to ... 'initiating a competitive strategy to compete with the tabloid press'⁷.

Bearing in mind the development of technology resulting in the increase of various broadcasting mediums since the formation of the BBC, i.e., TV and internet, in which

it can be argued that the BBC should be involved, there is no valid reason for the BBC to be involved in commercial publishing and other commercial ventures. The introduction of News 24 has already led to criticism by a Government Report⁸.

The question of political bias is another issue - I was particularly incensed by the anti-war stance shown by the majority of BBC interviewers and commentators in the latest war in Iraq. Simon Jenkins has made similar comments on this aspect⁹. Reports provided by Gilligan from Iraq 'were all doom and gloom' in that '...the Republican Guard were always about to regroup' and '...coalition forces were hopelessly bogged down under heavy fire' amongst others¹⁰.

Another area for controversy concerns the use of public money for providing material for newspaper articles. Many BBC reporters, producers, and commentators have contributed to these articles¹¹. I am pleased the BBC has recently recognised this situation and is addressing this problem..

The arrogance shown by the BBC shows no bounds. I believe in twenty or so years of listening to 'Feedback' (Radio 4) I have heard very few occasions when a BBC producer or Channel Controller admitted a possible validity when a listener/viewer made a complaint¹². Before I renewed my last licence (May 2003) I wrote to the TVLA requesting a reduction in the fee as I did not wish to receive the digital channels. I was informed (by letter) that the TVLA had no authority to give a reduction as the licensing conditions and licence fee were the sole responsibility of the Government. Since that time I have purchased equipment and should advise only two BBC programmes were worth watching over a period of six weeks. What about the viewers who cannot receive digital channels - why should the licence fee paid by these people be expended on these services when the viewing public is so small?

RECOMMENDATIONS

I suggest the BBC is downsized to provide an essential service characterised by the function of a 'public broadcaster' providing desirable/essential services not provided by the commercial sector. The minimum services should be as follows -

(a) Radio - Radio 1 Should be abolished.

Radio 2 Should continue but with reduced air-time (06.00 to 23.00)

Radio 3 Should continue but to include music only - so many times lately have I tuned to Radio 3 hoping to hear music only to tune into speech - all speech and news programmes should be dropped

Radio 4 Should continue based (more or less) on the present Radio 4 service. It is doubtful if 24 hour scheduling is required - I would suggest 06.00 to 23.00.

Radio 5 Should continue as at present

should cover current affairs, the arts to be reinstated (particular drama, which has been badly neglected for some years now by the BBC TV programmes) with news programmes scrapped. Sports coverage to be scrapped - let the commercial channels bid for this.

(c) BBC Internet services to be abolished

(d) The BBC should not be involved with any commercial enterprise. Existing activities (BBC Worldwide Ltd and BBC Ventures Ltd) should be either licensed or franchised.

I am not familiar with the finances as the BBC does not publish detailed finances. I understand the present licence fee plus commercial ventures produce approx. £3 billion For the suggested services outlined above I would suggest annual licence fee of around £20 - 25 at the upper value producing an income of approx. £0.375 billion - more than adequate for the suggested programmes outlined above. The BBC Caversham Monitoring services could probably continue under BBC aegis.

The failure of the BBC Governors relating to the BBC's News 24 programme has already been reported and is clear from the Hutton report that other failures have occurred¹³.

The present Board of Governors should be abolished and a board appointed similar to that utilised in a plc company; comprising a chairman, chief executive officer and other members representing the BBC radio/TV channels.

The BBC should be regulated by Ofcom.

Finally, I should add that I have no connection or affiliation with any broadcasting organisation.

COLIN BRITTON

11th February 2004

¹³ BBC told to overhaul 24 hours news channel, Guardian, 06/12/02