

# BBC CHARTER REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The BBC is more important now than ever before. As the proliferation of broadcasting continues, the quality and range reduces. It requires an independent organisation, free of interference and influence of Government and the commercial imperative to please. It must do more than just entertain and inform, all be it in an entertaining way. It should at times also be serious or even dull providing for those who require accurate information and argument.

### Notes on the text.

10. At the same time we have expected the BBC to deliver value for the license payer and an element of competition with other public service broadcasters, with the aim of driving up quality. A key question is whether we have the right relationship between the BBC's output and what is provided commercially.

The current "value for money" is excellent. What other organisation would provide what the BBC does at the cost of around £10 per month. I would pay that for the Radio and the T.V. comes free, as does the Web Site. I understand that the licence fee is paid by all and that will spread the cost burden. Opponents are quick to call the licence fee a tax, but it is a charge which like taxation can be used to benefit the majority. Commercial broadcasters such as ITV and commercial radio stations can only broadcast programmes that will be listened to or watched by large numbers of people, and that will attract advertisers willing to pay to support it. These constraints must affect the programme content, and it does. The BBC is being forced down a similar route so it can "compete", which it does very successfully to the detriment of the commercial companies. If this restraint to compete was removed the BBC could return to its roll of innovation without counting the cost, a policy, which in the past has been able to produce the best broadcasting in the world.

Commercial Satellite broadcasters can only provide what customers are prepared to pay for directly and consequently they ask you to pay for a "package" which will include only what is paid for, perhaps sport or films. How do you choose? If money is no object, then there is no problem, you pay the maximum for the maximum benefit. The problem is only some of us can afford such a Rolls Royce service. The rest have to make do with a reduced choice.

12. We are interested in what you value about, for example:

- the BBC's contribution to the democratic process, for example through coverage of news, current affairs and political debate
- its educational impact, for example through specialist educational programming on radio, television and online, including the forthcoming digital curriculum, broader genres (eg documentary, drama, entertainment, children's programmes and religion), and through print media, at all levels – schools, further and higher education and lifelong learning
- its role in supporting and promoting sport, through coverage of a wide range of events and activities
- its patronage of the arts, including film and sponsorship of the creative industries more widely, for example through its role as a major commissioner of new work
- its impact on the broadcasting sector, for example through training the industry, driving up quality, stimulating the health of independent producers and acting as a source of cutting edge research and development
- its international face, including the World Service, those of its online services directed at residents of foreign countries, and commercial services designed for a non-UK audience, eg BBC America
- its role in fostering communities through services in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions, minority services and programming, including the role of local radio

All the above are important and should be encouraged to continue. I could comment on each but it is better if all continue and develop.

- **its role in supporting digital television take-up and helping implement switchover in the best interests of citizens and of the nation as a whole.**

Digital television should continue to be made available in number of ways, and the analogue service should not be switched off until the whole country has easy access. My limited experience with terrestrial T.V. complete with a new Ariel, is that the signal strength varies and frequently shows "NO SIGNAL" because we are low down in a Vale. Not to forget the Radio signal too. The FM reception at this location is very variable, but digital is better. It should not be the purpose of digital transmission to free up the analogue bands so they can be sold off to commercial interests, which will not be sufficiently regulated so as to avoid interference with other services.

- **any other areas where the BBC makes an important contribution**

The BBC must continue to provide a range of programmes for those who are deaf or blind, and supply information for the elderly or those disabled who may not have access to other services.

- **whether any of these should be changed in the future.**

No reduction should be made in any areas, nor should charging solutions be considered.

- **How should the BBC respond to the development of new technologies and to changing viewing and listening habits?**

The BBC should remain flexible enough to meet all the challenges of the new technologies. The changes will become rapid and a quick response will be required. The Internet and Web Site integration will grow, with more and more programmes being demanded as required, when people want to see or listen to them. During the lifetime of the next BBC Charter, the delivery of broadcasting services may be unrecognisable to what we have been used to. The integration of Computer and broadcasting will be more seamless, but this will leave many people without access to many broadcast services unless the BBC provides it in a traditional way.

- **Do you think the BBC should continue to run commercial services alongside its licence fee-funded services?**
- **If the BBC should continue to run commercial services, how should we ensure that the relationship between the public and commercial services is fair to the BBC's commercial competitors?**
- **Should there be any limits on what the BBC is allowed to do commercially and, if so, what should those limits be?**

Yes, commercial activity should continue. All broadcasting companies around the world sell their programmes and programme ideas to others. I would like to see or hear more programmes made in Europe instead of the all-embracing USA, however there are language and translation issues. This revenue does supply much of the money required to run the BBC, which helps to keep the licence fee down and that, should be welcomed by the Government.

I am not so sure the BBC should be publishing programme related books and magazines, the purpose of some seem to be only to promote the presenters. The content of others, perhaps Music and History could have a wider role in education.

- **Does the licence fee remain the best way to pay for the BBC's public services?**
- **If not, what alternatives would you like to see explored?**
- **Does the BBC deliver value for money?**
- **Does a grant-in-aid via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office remain the best way to pay for BBC World Service?**

The licence fee must be the way forward. It is the only way to ensure the services will be available to all.

The BBC is excellent value for money, provided one uses the service. The BBC opponents try to suggest that most people do not. I believe we would be much poorer as a country if the services were curtailed or cut on this assumption. I see no workable alternative to achieve the above.

The World Service has proved to be of great value around the world, and must continue and if possible expanded. If necessary it should be funded by the Government in some way.

- **How should the BBC be organised to deliver its functions and services? Should it continue to operate as a single organisation?**
- **Does the BBC broadcast the right balance of independently produced and in-house productions? How important is it that the BBC makes programmes as well as commissioning them?**
- **How should we ensure that the BBC continues to foster world-class broadcasting talent?**

The BBC must remain a single organisation, broadcasting Radio and T.V. How else could it combine groups of programmes together across the networks and regions on an important topic such as for instance joining the European Currency? It also has the responsibility of looking after the archive of both Radio and T.V. with its wealth of historical detail.

The BBC should and does use a balance of productions, and on all counts they will only discover new talent in writing, music and presentation if they take risks with new things, new ways and new people.

- **Do you think that, in the regulation of the BBC, there is the right balance between the Governors and Ofcom?**
- **Does a Royal Charter continue to be the most appropriate basis for the establishment of the BBC?**
- **Is the BBC sufficiently responsive to its viewers and listeners and to Parliament? What improvements, if any, could the BBC make?**

There appears to be plenty of safeguards built into the system already. The Board of Governors has worked well enough for many years and the Royal Charter should perhaps continue as long as we have a Monarchy.

The numbers listening and watching seems to indicate that in a multi-channel world, the BBC is providing much of what is required, so they must be listening. They certainly ask for comment on almost each and every programme, and if you have access to the Internet, you will see they get it. What must be avoided is interference from Parliament and its political agenda, and the last thing it needs is an Independent Advisor or body. The advisors would be under greater pressure from interest and pressure groups to do what they, or the press wanted to see happen, without the experience of BBC to defend them.

From Charles Crisp - 14 January 2004