

24 March 2004

**Tessa Jowell
Minister of State
House of Commons
London**

Dear Ms Jowell

BBC Charter Review 2004

Introduction

I am sending this document because I care about the BBC and want it to be viable, independent and effective.

Principles underlying the governance, management and output of the BBC

The BBCs governance, management and output should be legal, decent and honest.

Governance and watchdog

The BBC Governors cannot effectively govern and also be a watchdog on the BBC. The two functions should be separated.

Terms of reference

The BBC terms of reference, should be more explicit, particularly its role in 'holding the government of the day to account'. The bias against the current Government is endemic and blatant in TV and radio news and current affairs programme. Criticism of the Government can be valid, but it needs to be balanced with positive comments when appropriate.

New and current affairs

The BBC should report news, not seek to make news. I have numerous examples of BBC interviewers and reporters putting their own point of view, and slagging off the Government and Government ministers. A regular technique is the BBC interviewer putting words into the mouths of interviewees. Even if the interviewee refutes the point, it's already hit the airwaves. eg Eddy Mayer on the PM radio programme to Lord Donaldson - 'I know you have been very critical of the Government over their handling of the situation of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay' - Donaldson 'No I haven't, I think they've handled it pretty well'. Daisy Sansom on TV The Daily Politics show to Paul Keech Libdem MP - 'I know you and your colleagues think that Geoff Hoon is a useless minister' - Keech 'I don't think that Geoff Hoon is a useless minister, and I am not calling for his resignation'.

Another technique is to have only anti-government people on discussion panels - eg on the day the Hutton Report was produced The Daily Politics show had a panel comprising Robin Cook and Malcolm Rifkind. It ended up with Robin Cook giving a summary of his House of Commons resignation speech. On the Thursday evening version of the TDP show panel members are Diane Abbot and Michael Portillo. There is a constant 'get the Government' theme to the programme. Michael Portillo does occasionally offer points supporting the Government.

Management

The Director General cannot keep tabs on all BBC outlets. The management structure should reflect the size of the BBC, the need to operate within clear guidelines, and monitor output and performance, and to process complaints.

Strategy for developing services and programmes

The BBC should not copy services produced by other TV and radio broadcasters. For example, News 24 is already provided by Sky, and Sky's news services are now provided to BBC viewers via the BBC digital service. We also, of course, get all the advertising that goes with Sky and other commercial stations broadcast by BBC, including invitations to pay to view certain programmes on Sky etc. This whole approach - the range of providers, the advertising, method of payment and collection of fees for programmes, will surely have fundamental implications for the BBC's services programmes and funding. Because if all of this is available via the services of the BBC through its digital service, why shouldn't it also apply to the BBC.

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The BBC should not seek to compete for audiences with other media outlets, and should use its privileged position of having a guaranteed income, to produce programmes for mainstream broadcasting which other media outlets tend to ignore, eg the sciences, documentaries about the planet and universe and the countries and peoples of the world.

Advertising on the BBC

There are far too many advertisements on BBC TV. There can be as many as three ad's separating two programmes. Choice of ads is infuriating at times, eg those for the FA Cup this season, which prove a right turn-off. How much does all this advertising cost?

Funding the BBC

The current system of funding the BBC is a regressive tax. People pay for everything the BBC does, even though they may not have access to all the services, or do not want to use all the services. If we are to have so much advertising on the BBC, why not do some of it commercially, and use the proceeds to help fund the BBC. Why not have 'pay to view' for some services.

The method of chasing up non-payers of the licence fee is archaic and should be replaced by another method. The supply of Telecom services is controlled through the service. The BBC should be able to switch to control of supply through the digital analogue when it is universal.

Yours sincerely



David Cheeseman