

7 March 2004

To:- BBC Charter Review Consultation
Dept for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur St
London

YOUR BBC, YOUR SAY

I give below my answers to the questions in your pamphlet on this matter.

1. What do I most value about the BBC?

The news, documentaries, arts programmes (opera and ballet), science programmes, current affairs. Particularly the wealth of informative and entertaining features on Radio 4. Music, both classical and jazz.

I appreciate the overall freedom from political bias (I regard the Gilligan affair as a very temporary aberration). Very important for me in all sorts of programmes is the absence of advertising, which I write more fully about under "How should we pay?".

2. How should the BBC adapt?

The free-to-air digital services should be developed. Participation in operations like Freeview are acceptable as long as channels carrying advertising are kept to a minimum. The BBC should aim to retain what has been described as a "social glue" in an age of increasing fragmentation by retaining programming right across the spectrum as exemplified by Radio 1 on one extreme and Radio 3 on the other. It must not be forced into an elitist ghetto by robbing it of - for instance - R1 and R2, thus giving windfall quick bucks to commercial operators whose interest is not the public good but shareholder value.

Interactive facilities will no doubt grow, but should not intrude too much on the mainstream programmes.

3. What do I think of radio, tv and online services?

Other than as above, I do not wish for great changes. "Reality" shows of the Big Brother variety should be avoided, in favour of true reality in documentaries like "A life of grime". All in all, I believe the BBC output as a whole to be unrivalled in the world for quality, range and fairness, and the organisation should not be weakened or broken up to satisfy free-market dogma.

4. Should the BBC run commercial services?

I have no objection to magazines or sale of recordings which are spin-offs of licence-based programmes. Radio Times is indispensable. Unconnected productions should not be made.

5. How should we pay for the BBC?

There is no alternative to the licence fee as a fair and convenient way of funding the BBC which keeps it reasonably free of political pressure and commercials. It is vital to preserve in this country a range of stations and channels which are free from advertising breaks, product placement and subscriptions. (Subscriptions do not guarantee freedom from commercials, as Artsworld for instance shows.) Advertisements in all but the most trivial programmes destroy the mood and the train of thought; they are irritating when the same commercial comes up

again and again, sometimes within one programme.

Publicity regarding the licence fee should emphasise how small a weekly sum it is for the range of analogue and digital services it pays for, and contrast this with the often higher charges for one channel or one group of channels. It is not a poll tax, because one fee covers a whole house, and there are means-tested and age-related exemptions. BBC radio is free anyway.

6. Is the BBC organised for the best?

No comment, except that the results speak for themselves.

7. How run and regulated?

I feel the Governors are a better alternative to OFCOM. Regulators in the OF... mould tend to be hawkish and unhelpful.

8. Accountability to the public and Parliament.

I do not feel any changes or additional measures are needed.

Yours faithfully,



(Peter R C Dancer)