

19 March 2004

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

Dear Sirs,

BBC Charter Review

I appreciate that the key questions outlined in your leaflet may be the most relevant to the Charter Review, but find it difficult to respond in those terms. I hope, nevertheless, that my comments will be contributory.

The most important, and valuable, feature of the BBC is its longstanding reputation, nationally and world-wide, for independent, impartial and accurate reporting and scrutiny. Its independence from any government must be maintained and secured and, at present, the licence fee seems to be the best way of ensuring this, though a subscription service might ultimately be inevitable. Broadcast commercial advertising should never, ever be considered. (I do not see a problem with the commercial services listed.)

As one who cannot afford a digital television set, internet service or a mobile phone, I am not qualified to comment on technological advances (and feel no pain.)

We need a lot more information to be able to comment on how the BBC is organised. I would have thought it was already *set up* to provide the best public service – it just is not doing it. If dual responsibility (for internal operation and public interest) is to remain in the hands of the Governors, then that body should be entirely divorced from the BBC – and from national government. If it is considered that responsibility for internal operation has to be from inside, then a separate body should consider public interest and *it* should ensure that the BBC is accountable *and does account*..

So to what exercises most of us – content and quality. First on news coverage. The producers of news programmes seem to have a very poor sense of priorities (example: how does Greg Ruzedski's drug charge acquittal rate first place, and four minutes, over probable electricity shortages, two minutes?) National trivia overrides global concerns.

Good documentaries seem almost to have disappeared. Programmes such as *Your Life in Their Hands* are informative and uplifting, but they are rare. Docudramas (e.g. *Michelangelo*) are patronising and irritating and give the impression that viewers are incapable of taking history straight.

Arts programmes are seriously neglected. Individual plays, classical music, painting and sculpture scarcely appear. The occasional Arena is gold dust. Why has the BBC never attempted to emulate the South Bank Show?

But the most serious complaint has to be the dreaded dumbing down. A strong impression is that the BBC does not just reflect and encourage yob culture but that it invented it. The cult of celebrity, crude and offensive behaviour, the incessant pop beat (however inappropriate) and deliberate humiliation are not funny and do not represent democracy, they merely lower standards.

The best Director General the BBC had was Hugh Carlton Greene, who was responsible for the introduction of radical, controversial, thought provoking programming that was almost continuously stimulating and entertaining. His example has since been ignored. The one admirable area of BBC broadcasting now lies in radio: to be treasured and maintained at all costs.

What is needed at the Beeb is thought and reflection as opposed to reaction. Judgement, a critical eye and mature thinking need to replace knee-jerk responses to what programme makers seem to consider popular appeal. These are the BBC's responsibilities as a public service broadcaster.

Yours truly,



W M Davies