

Arthur Goulbourn

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

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Dear Sir/Madam, CONFIDENTIAL & NOT FOR PUBLICATION IN WHOLE OR PART

I listen to or watch a great deal of the output from the BBC but I am mostly interested in news and current affairs so it is on these subjects that I mostly wish to comment:

We used to be able to rely on balanced viewpoints and fairness from the BBC but in recent years that has sadly changed. BBC editorial policy follows the tabloid press where British journalistic standards are often considered poorer than at any time.

I realise that controversy is always going to be more newsworthy than agreement but the Kelly affair clearly demonstrated how far the BBC has lowered its standard of integrity. The BBC Heads have apologised but not the journalists and editorial staff so we can expect no change in that direction.

For quite some time, programmes have joined the tabloids in character assassination techniques where members of the Government could be criticised. No attention seems to be paid to the effect on Ministers and their families. No acknowledgment when they are proved right seems permitted. Of course there is always room for questions and criticism but not the cynical approach favoured on so many programmes. The BBC should not behave as if it is Her Majesty's Official Opposition

Political programmes often invite E-mail responses and choose to imply they represent public opinion. We know how political pressure groups are set up to immediately respond and monopolise this opportunity. Editors are fully aware of this and it is false to pretend it is genuine.

Editors mostly invite people on programmes who agree with their policy on particular issues and, in time, people realise the line they should take to be invited back. Some seem to have made a career out of it.

In "What The Papers Say", the BBC frequently quotes from infamous tabloid editors who can easily predict and prepare outrageous headlines which they know will be favoured for inclusion.

Even "Thought For The Day" contributors seem to know that frequently introducing words such as "trust", "apology" and "the need for truth," will be welcomed by the editorial staff because listeners will think it only refers to members of the Government.

I no longer have any faith in the BBC Governors to protect viewers and listeners interests. They have failed to realise that taxpayers fund the BBC as a public service and they are not paid simply to protect political prejudices amongst senior editorial executives. I shall look forward to an outside and independent body being appointed to protect our interests.

The BBC's job is to ask questions, raise issues and debate them. It should always seek to be truthful and fair. Lord Hutton said it all but the BBC seems not ready to listen.

Yours Faithfully,

A. D. Goulbourn