

30-03-2004

Dear Sir/Madam

BBC Charter Review

I am writing to give my opinions for the consultation for the future of the BBC Charter. The main issue that has to be addressed is the current funding arrangements for the BBC. As a one-time supporter of the licence fee, I have now come to the conclusion that it should be done away with.

It is a most unfair and undemocratic way of funding. It is totally unfair since a person or household living on basic state pensions below the age of 75 or those on the minimum wage pay the same as people whose income puts them into the top tax bracket. So the 74 year old pensioner with an old portable or 20 inch colour TV pays the same as the well off household with home cinema set-ups or modern stereo TV's in every room. It is undemocratic since despite so called consultations like this, the public gets very little real say in how the BBC is run or how it spends our money. Shareholders and taxpayers have a far greater say in how their money is spent and can vote for those who run the business or government. We can't vote for who's on the Board of Governors. The TV Licensing Authority is an organisation which must go – it's inefficient and unfair in that it seems to spend more time harassing innocent people than catching the genuine license dodgers.

I would like to see the BBC funded by a percentage tax on all new equipment capable of receiving your TV (and radio?) transmissions. This would ensure that in the example given above each household would pay each according to their means. The possible arguments against this, such anomalies of what equipment qualifies or difficulties in administration, don't hold up. The anomalies of video recorders used as only players or TV's used solely as monitors or the complicated tax or VAT regimes already running in this country, are worse than likely to be encountered with a straight forward percentage rate on all equipment.

Whilst the BBC should invest in new technology such as DVB, DAB and the Internet, this is of most benefit to the more well off, and of no or little benefit to the 74 year old pensioner. He or she may be able to buy a Freeview box, now that they have come down in price (and assuming the aerial doesn't need replacing), but DAB equipment needs to reduce in price considerably to make the switch from analogue worthwhile and affordable. Also it's likely that they do not have readily available access to the Internet. I find the constant reference to your web site to obtain information, help etc. annoying, as you seem to assume we've all got easy access to the Internet. Here again those on limited incomes cannot take full advantage of your services to the public.

The BBC should run commercial services, such as BBC Worldwide or your stake in the UKTV channels. I think some of the prices you charge for videos, cassettes etc are a bit steep compared commercial equivalents. Also you are still sitting on a wealth of recorded material (assuming you have thrown it away like some early TV and Radio programs) which could be made available to the public, not just the most popular stuff. Unfortunately your Web site has very little information on how to get details of your old programmes, let alone obtain copies of

them. For example, I did manage to track down a play broadcast on Radio 3 or 4 a few years ago but only by referring to the National Sound Archive web site, and the John Peel radio session I was looking for I couldn't find anything about. Whilst we're still lumbered with your costly license fee, getting better access and use of your "back catalogue" (at a reasonable charge) would go some way to get our money's worth from the fee.

The general standard of programs on the TV and radio is generally OK; the emphasis on children and youth programming may have gone a bit too far, and the standard of journalism on news programs and documentaries can be sloppy. The overboard coverage on particular events or news items, with all the so-called experts and their speculation, gets very annoying, particularly when normal programming is cut. Did we really need the hours of coverage for The Budget on Radio 4 and Radio 5 live? I broadly welcome the new digital radio and TV channels and there is scope to expand them and introduce new ones. Radio 7 is particularly welcome (UK Gold radio equivalent) and I would like to see another radio channel for repeats of single dramas, documentaries, science and nature programs etc.

I hope the BBC maintains its independence, not the smug "we know best" attitude type of independence which crops up too frequently, but the properly researched investigative journalism and inventive programming sort of independence.

There are other issues or topics I could go into but there's probably already enough here for you to digest.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Harper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Mr. R. Harper