

19 February 2004

Dear Sirs,

**BBC Charter Review Consultation.**

During a BBC interview the other week Lord Tebbit said he believed the BBC should concentrate on quality rather than audience share. I think that this is probably the first time that I have agreed with anything Lord Tebbit has said and my answers to your key questions are based on this view of the BBC.

I can still remember when I could switch on the TV, and know which channel I had tuned in to by the type of programme being transmitted. This is no longer the case and I believe is the result of competition for audience share. There can only be competition if the participants are playing the same game or selling the same type of product or transmitting the same sort of programme. The BBC should set its own standards for high quality programmes and not attempt to compete with other channels.

What do I value most about the BBC ?

In news, its breadth of coverage, its impartiality, its accuracy and the depth of its analysis. I do not like the confrontational approach and the attempts to force interviewees to make commitments they may not wish to make or to agree to one of a limited range of options set out by the interviewer or any of the other attempts at creating controversy which have crept into some interviews. This is not an argument for failing to probe or the unquestioning acceptance of the views of the interviewee but the prime aim of the interview is to get accurate information not to create headlines. In sport I would like to see a wider coverage of some of the minority sports in which the UK falls well behind other nations. The main sports are well covered on the other channels and in the newspapers. The BBC can not compete with the financial rewards offered by the satellite broadcasters to the governors of the main sports. I would like to see and hear less time spent on marginal issues in sports news eg. the financial problems of sports clubs, disagreements between players and their coaches or clubs etc. In the arts I would like less time spent on reporting award ceremonies and more time on encouraging an informed appreciation of the arts. In education there may be a case for a separate educational channel but if education is defined as the acquisition of information and the development of understanding then this should underly all programmes not intended purely for entertainment. There is a bias towards London and the South East in all the activities in the UK, so it is not surprising to find this in the BBC. I can see attempts to avoid this in the BBC, but do not expect to see any major changes until there are more general changes in the organisation of the UK.

How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture?

By applying the principles outlined above and developing its own style and character. Technology offers an opportunity to create channels specialising in subjects such as DIY, foreign languages or travel. At present these seem to be treated as entertainment.

I have no comments on on-line services and think that the BBC should continue with its excellent commercial services and expand these wherever possible.

I think the licence fee is the best way to pay for the BBC and would be very concerned if any attempt was made to introduce other methods of payment which would be based on or influenced by audience share.

Is the BBC organised in the most effective and efficient way? How should it be run and regulated? How can it be made properly accountable to the public and Parliament?

I think that a board of governors is probably the best way of achieving all these aims. I do not think the public should have a greater say. This would lead inevitably to a descent to the lowest common denominator of programmes, an electronic version of the Sun or the Mail.

The problem lies in the selection, responsibilities and authority of the board. Who should make the selection, the criteria which should apply, the length of the appointments etc. There can be no answer to these questions which would satisfy everyone but the present system has worked fairly well until recently. So I suggest no change provided that the Governors are all clear about their aims, authority and responsibilities.

Among the reasons for the recent problems may have been the attempts to compete and the loss of control, some of it stemming from the increase in sub-contracting and the use of contributors not directly employed by the BBC.

Yours sincerely,



GD.Knight