

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

Mr. J Lawrence

Dated 14th Feb 2004

Dear Sir or Madam,

Having spend he last 6 months complaining about the BBC and Freeview neither of which have responded to any of my questions. I have sent the BBC 7 letters over the past 6 months, all they do is reply back with a standard letter stating that my complaints has been notified and will be brought up at the next meeting. Surely they should have had a meeting by now?. Freeview is worse, you cannot contact anyone by phone, except their call center, but they will only give you an address, no telephone number.

I have sent two letters, the last one to the Managing director Mr. Seaman Registered and signed for, and I have been waiting for a reply for over 5 months.

I apologize if you do not have anything to do with free view, but I do know that the BBC is funding them for their digital platform , this consortium of Yourselves, Crown Castle and Sky, seem to have locked themselves away, they will not respond at all.

I am at the moment in contacted my M.P. Mr. Kevin McNamara for Kingston upon Hull North who as written to both parties about their attitude and response to my letters.

I also now have the complaints forms to fill in to send my complaints to the Parliamentary Ombudsman MP Mrs. Tessa Jowell about this appalling state of affairs where, no one will respond at all, and even Ofcom say they cannot help me.

* * * * *

In your forward you state the BBC is a unique institution, and hold a place in the publics affections and trust, and is recognised throughout the world where it is seen as a benchmark.

It was until a few years ago, the BBC is now loosing its identity by copying bad habits of the commercial stations, by repeats, rating chasing , Idents, Logo's and now adverts, which the commercial stations have to do to generate income.

The BBC does not, it is subsidized by the license payer.

There are now more repeating programs, and copying of ideas (rating chasing) on the BBC than ever, and both the BBC and Commercial sides doing it.

We are now also subjected to groups of programs Pop, Gardening, DIY, Housing, Cooking, sometimes in 3 consecutive time slots of up to 3 hours.

Sports have increased out of all proportion, and now, as fast as one type of sporting activity finishes another one takes its place. A year or so ago at least there was a break between football, cricket and other sports.

I know there is a demand for sport, but not at 35% to 45% of the time, and now you have BBC Freeview why not put a sports channel on there 24 hrs a day like News 24 if necessary, so that the public that want to watch sport can do and leave the general broadcasting channels clear. This would also encourage them to go on Freeview, and making the change over to Freeview quicker.

Note Sat 14th Feb 2004

10hr 50 mins of sport on BBC 1 and BBC2 in 12 hrs approx 50%

At this present moment in time the BBC do not have anything on the Freeview channels to encourage the general public to the take up of Freeview.

You state an extra 6 new channels are available in your advert for FreeView :-

BBC3, BBC4, CBBC, Cbeebies, Parliament and News 24 .

1. BBC3 and BBC2 repeat programs in the late evening and BBC3 is only on for 9Hrs
2. BBC4 arts is a new channel with a time limit of 8 hrs
3. CBBC is shown on BBC2 every morning from 06:00 hrs except Saturday. Only 12hrs
4. Cbeebies repeat 3 4 ½ hour programs daily and call it a 13hr channel.
5. Parliament is a new channel, but not indicated in the TV Quick or TV choice TV papers and I suspect others as well.
6. News 24 is on most of the News times on BBC1 and BBC 2 ,and also on BBC1 from 03:00 hrs until 06:00 hrs in the morning . **not new channel.**

There are only really 2 new channels that can be seen Parliament and BBC4 and with the repeats and time limitations do you consider this a good enough scenario to promote FreeView. The rest of the freeview channels follow the same pattern.

Please see attached letter sent to Freeview last year to the managing director Mr. Seaman who has never replied. Also copies of letters sent to the BBC complaints department, who only reply with a standard letter, stating that the complaints has been noted and will be brought up at the next meeting. And after 6 months still no reply of what they are going to do, and no comment at all on why they cannot keep to time.

You state that this consultation is of crucially importance were everyone can have a say, how many of the general public know about this document. I for one had never seen it advertised, or heard about it and obtained it by chance, when trying to find out why my complaints are not being actioned .

Review of the Royal Charter

Page 7 The BBC Today

I agree the BBC have played a very important part over the past 80 years and the changes in that time have been immense, and your milestones are quite achieving, and looking to the future will be even more of a very big challenge.

Page 8 Ofcom PSB Review

Although only just got their feet under the table and has just begun its first 5 yearly review on Public Service Broadcasters (PSB's). Their requirements under the Telecommunications act 2003 requires them to review the BBC channels and are they fulfilling the purposes of PSB,s etc.

They are not going forward at the moment (See attached letter from Ofcom).

Page 9 para 12 We are interested in what you value about, for example :-

1. The news, current affairs and political debates were all right, but since the introduction of News 24 which you can switch on at any time on Freeview and get the news that's a good point, the general public have a choice.

But then the question of all the other news broadcasters doing the same thing every day at their appointed news times. This gets a bit overbearing, especially when there is news flash, or a major incident, and then all the TV channels want it on their channel, resulting in mayhem at times, and schedules are either canceled, changed, or swapped over to another channel (BBC1 BBC2), or postponed for a future date. The latest incident was the Hutton report and all channels were on about it from 15:00 hrs for the rest of the evening, there is no need for it.

This to me is completely unacceptable

2. On the educational impact I think this is well catered for, I do watch sometimes the learning zone 01:00 hrs - 06:00 hrs although most people are asleep, but I am told some people record it and watch it at a more convenient time. I enjoy watching it and I have gained knowledge, and hopefully this could be transferred to an Education Channel as they do on Satellite on Nile Sat at 7deg West. I would like to see it have its own channel when Freeview as been sorted out.
3. There is far too much sport and associated sport programs on terrestrial analogue at the moment, and appear to be increasing **every week as mention above**, hopefully this can be accommodated on Freeview as a sports channel and if necessary a second sports channel and if it is so popular again like one of sky's good points a sports news channel. I feel the general public is getting fed up with all the sports nowadays including the commercial stations, some of which broadcast sport all night. How much more can we take. ?

4. The arts I believe is covered quite well at the moment with BBC 2 and BBC4 but again as with the sports in para 3 on Freeview a dedicated channel could be used for art, as soon as you can get the channels freed up. The sooner the better.
5. In this paragraph on training and improving the quality, and the health of producers, and acting as a source of cutting edge research and development. Again the learning zone has a lot to offer. I don't know why the health of the producers has been brought up. If he does the job he gets paid for it like anyone else so why differentiate. The BBC2 go a long way to achieving the cutting edge with their excellent Horzion series.
6. On the international face and World wide Services directed at foreign countries, I think it should be kept up. A question which you may not know, but is relevant, is why are some of these services scrambled and have to be paid for. ?
One especially on satellite is BBC Prime on Arabsat 2a it is now scrambled, it used to be on Thor free to air. This is also one channel that the BBC own, and the material is from their own archives so why not put this channel on to Freeview, it consists of old favorites which was shown on BBC a few years ago, and would stimulate the change over from analogue to digital far quicker.? When I made an inquiry about BBC Prime there was no comment ??? Why
7. The fostering of communities through services does have a role to play, and is helped in TV by the short news slots in the main news on local issues, which could be broadened out even more on the freeview platform, but there is a negative side to this.
At the moment the minority services and programming are being sacrificed to the extended amount of sport that is being put on now. At its peak up to 14 hrs a day. (Averaging between 35% and 45%) most weeks. The community fostering is much more evident on Radio where now most cities have their own local radio station.
8. There role in supporting digital television take up is quite complexed has you have to deal with the technical switchover and promotion in the best interests of the citizens and the nation as an whole.

See Page 11 A Changing Landscape

How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology

1. Terrestrial

The promotional side has to encourage the general public to change over, and at this moment in time the distribution of the channels leaves very little to encouragement to get the general public to change over, because a lot of freeview channels are either repeats of analogue transmissions, and five channels of bidup tv, selling, and travel channels which are not what I call programming channels and a channel "Community Channel" which is only on at 02:45 until 05:00hrs in the morning, and its on for 8hrs on Sky Free to air.??

(See letter addressed to Mr. Seaman managing director freeview enclosed)

Who up to the 1st Feb 2004 after 6 months still has not replied,
STOP PRESS and I have just found out that he has resigned.

Page 10 Continued

9. I can think of one area which is very important, that for the partial sighted and hard of hearing, these services must be kept. This is where the BBC makes an important contribution, and how you have reached a pinnacle, but unless you recognize most of the old BBC charter values you will lose a lot of your reputation for been the worlds most recognized best broadcaster.

Do not spoil your chances by trying to please all of the people all of the time, there must be give and take, unfortunately you have gone to far in messing about with the programme content and your ability for keeping to schedules, time and your attitude to wanting to use logos, indents, and advertising is not helping at all.

10. I don't think I need to make any comment on whether any of the above should be changed in the future as it as all now been said. I sincerely hope someone will take notice.

Key Questions Page 10

- a. The BBC contribution to life in the United Kingdom and the wider world, is quite satisfactory, and should keep in the same vein but change with the times
- b. The BBC were doing a good job on value and provision, but it is now been eroded away by beginning to appear to follow the commercial attitude. The BBC don't have too, they had to good a reputation, please keep it.
- c. As mentioned above they were doing it successfully, but not now.
- d. . The BBC was unique in that it broadcasting was straight forward and very good quality programs, sound levels and scheduling , and no adverts, logos, indents, or swapping programmes and not to many repeats and especially kept to accurate time keeping, which made them easily recognized throughout the world.
It would help if the BBC would used the PDC signal for the start and finish of programs, this program control is already built into the system.
 The ITV and commercial channels won't use the PDC as it would interfere with their advertising but the BBC doesn't or shouldn't have any advertising (Davis report) which is costing the license payer at least £10-£12 a year in wasted time. **WHY** when this money should be going into programe quality etc.
- e. As regards to serving the constituent of the United Kingdom. I do not think any changes are necessary .
- f. The current balance between national, regional, and community level programming seems about right, possibly a bit more on the community side.
- g. The regionally current diversity content seems all right, but slight changes might be required in the future.

Page 11 A Changing Landscape

How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology

15. The pace of change is accelerating and should be developed and merged in

The main ways of receiving television and radio programs

1. Terrestrial

The traditional analogue method of television and radio signals will in the future be replaced by the digital platform for both Television and Radio (DAB).

Before we can accomplish this there are certain factors to overcome.

Here there are two views the first is the technical side, there are quite a few areas where the signals are too weak to support the digital platform, and you cannot increase the power levels or the number of channels until the analogue service is closed down, even then there will be areas where a complete service may not be possible, as in my area of Humberside served by the Belmont transmitter which is only 35 mls away and line of sight, even so, we can lose all transmissions in very hot weather, and during cool nights in autumn interference from the Dutch stations on the continent interfere with channel 5 analogue and the digital platform. I suggested a solution over two years ago to ITV ON Digital who refused to acknowledge the problem and stated it was my aerial. Since then I have spoken to a BBC engineer **who does agree** with me, but of course cost would be involved but he did agree it could be a solution that a low power satellite transmitter be located on the Yorkshire Wolds on the north bank of the River Humber, this would alleviate most of these problems, as the reception aerials would be then facing in a northerly direction.

P.S.

I rung the BBC FreeView technical advice line on the 13th Feb and I was puzzled by shortage of so called channel availability, and that you cannot expand until the analogue is closed down. (A General Statement) therefore,

**HOW DID ITV ON DIGITAL RUN OVER 30 TV CHANNELS
2 YEARS AGO ?**

The reason was that they were working on a smaller bandwidth , and now Freeview has increased the bandwidth by a factor of four, and therefore reducing the number of channels available.

Looking at this scenario it appears that Freeview/Crown Castle/BBC have sacrificed the number of channels for quality (and are now shouting that they

have not enough room for any more channels) until the analogue has closed down.

IN OTHER WORDS THE CART IS BEFORE THE HORSE

Has the quality on the ITV ON DIGITAL PLATFORM 2 yrs ago was quite acceptable, why did they change it.

So why not reduce the bandwidth temporary now, and then put more channels on Freeview which would speed up the change over and then close down the analogue stations and increase the band width back to where they want it.

BINGO!!!

2. Cable

On the Cable side I don't see any problems except for the amount of channels that will be available in the future, and will the cable/ optic fiber be able to cope due to the available bandwidth needed, but to as what is in place now , it is working and it is only for people that cannot receive digital at all, or people who do not want aerials on their houses, or have other restrictions and of course large communal buildings.

3. Satellite

This is the most popular, but of course it comes with a price tag, it is wholly commercial, unfortunately I object to the cost of reception and the way Sky operate compared with terrestrial setup and Sky's minimum fee per annum approx. £150 + a normal license fee.

He does have some good points the way he organizes his channels except in certain instances there is a lot of rubbish etc., but basically he sets up his channels as the demand dictates, for instance 3 sports channels and a sports news, he has 4-5 film channels which can be delayed so if you want to watch one and there is another on at the same time (you can record it now) but you can also view it later.

There are comedy, nostalgia, history, National geographic, the good point is that you do have a free choice of what you want to see , that is if you like watching his 3-4 times a day repeats (one of his bad moves), of course if you want everything you are talking £400+an annual TV license Approx. £500 per annum. What price commercial TV.

Whereas I would not envisage anything like this in the next couple of years it does give you an idea of what people want, Multi channels so the public can choose when and what they want to watch and enough room for extra channels if the demand is there.

Page 12 Digital TV

Although digital TV is more efficient in bandwidth, you don't mention in your preamble that digital does have its problems on weak signals and poor signal conditions. The effect on analogue is a noisy but watchable signal. On digital under the same conditions you will either receive it all right or be face with the signal blocking of freezing and the sound spluttering which is more irritating than a noisy

analogue signal. So you must be aware of all weak areas that are in this category, to try and elevate it.

Multi Channel

Again you state what you can access with multiple channels on one set, may I point out that you could do the same in analogue, but it would be very inefficient and to costly.

Broadband

I agree that this recently introduced range of communication at a high rate of data exchange does not suffer, as the links designed for this high rate of data are designed, but at a price.

Page13 Digital Switch Over

It is essential that if you want to the public to change over you must encourage them, however I don't think you will succeed unless you put something on freeview which will attract them and encourage them to go on to freeview, and the reasons why they will or will not (see my suggestions mentioned earlier) from page 9 and Page 11

Page 13 Key Question

How should he BBC respond to the development of new technologies and changing viewing and listening habits.

One sort of channeling we don't want is Sky's with its numerous shopping, bidup, and Travel channels these are not programs but selling and advertising all he time. **For purely commercial reasons.** (Freeview has 5 of these Sky related programmed already, and Freeview state they are short of space) Plus 1 channel on for only 2-3 hrs in the early hours of the morning 02:45-05:00 approx. called Community Channel, on sky the same program is on for 8 hrs, there's some more extra space for you to use ?.

Unless of Sky are claiming it is their channel as with all the other commercial sky born channels, bid up shopping and travel channels and they will do as they want.

Who is getting the income from these channels. ?

SKY or FREEVIEW

Take these off, and put the extra channels to a better use.

I don't see how Sky got involved in terrestrial TV (Freeview) to me this is a confliction of interests. Is he going to let Freeview get ahead and challenge his own satellite system, or will he start Pay to View Channels ????

I sincerely hope not with a name like Free View

These channels could be freed up for other uses to promote the public to change to Freeview.

Page 14 Publicly-funded services and functions

What do you think of the television, radio and online services.

1. These services should be left as is, a recent effect on all BBC channels is the amount of advertising and information on what will happen in next weeks episode is unnecessary and unwanted between programs. It is fast becoming like another set of commercial channels, and will soon loose its identity of **THE BBC** This advertising, logo's and indents are now accounting for at least £10 of the license payer fee, and then have the cheek to put up the license fee by £5 again this year. (This also looks, to becoming an annual increase of 1.5% above inflation) Has I have stated above you are not (**YET**) a commercial channel, and I don't want the BBC to even look or act like one.
2. The main core of the publicly-funded services were all right, but the BBC and Freeview seems to have a deaf ears, see my introduction paragraph, and letters to the BBC and Freeview.
3. Has I have mentioned before above, **DON'T COPY THE COMMERCIAL CHANNELS** they have to make a living and need advertising :-

THE BBC DOES NOT

Page 16 Key Questions

1. Question What do you think of the publicly -funded services provided by he BBC, on television, radio, and online? What changes, if any, would you like to see.

I am repeating my self again, but you asked the question again so I will reply to it The BBC should basically stay as it was, irrespective of what individual controllers schedulers seem to want.

Is it what the general public want ?

2. Question How well do the BBC's publicly-funded services deliver its core purposes ?
I presume the core means purposes means the main programs, in general they seem reasonable.
3. Question In what way should the BBC services differ from those of the commercial service broadcasters and other purely commercial broadcasters in order to add value? To what extent should the BBC provide " Something for everyone "

My answers to the above 3 questions have been made already through out the previous headings and pages. **DONT COPY THE COMMERCIAL CHANNELS**

Page 17 Commercial Services

Key Questions

- a. As I have stated before yes, I think they should be able to run commercial services, but as you state they must be kept separate from the public services.
- b. If the people in the BBC are not sure then contact the Office of Fair Trading ?.
- c. I think there should be some limits, but I am not in a position to say what they should be, but they should be fair dealings on both sides.

Page 18 Paying for the BBC

Some alternative funding options

At last someone has some sense as the Davies review considered a number of alternatives options for paying for the BBC.

None of them were considered to offer a better solution than the license fee.

On direct funding he found that it could lead to what we are getting now, an eventual transformation into a full commercial broadcaster.

On Advertising although the Davis review determined that the sums raised through advertising on the BBC would be massive, it concluded that the **introduction of advertising on the BBC public services would be neither desirable nor practical, on the following grounds,**

I have typed the full Davis report as published in the Review of the BBC's Royal Charter so I can refer to comments made below.

1. Likely to alter the range and quality of BBC programs
2. Commercial pressures could threaten the freedom and independence of programme makers and schedulers.
3. Advertising on BBC programs would be intrusive into programme content, reducing viewer satisfaction.
4. It would reduce the advertising revenues of Channel 4 and existing and prospective commercial television services and of the press
5. Advertising becomes a less certain source of income as the number of competing services grow.
6. In a number of European countries, reliance by public service broadcasters on advertising has resulted in rating wars, falling audiences and reduced revenues, and there is evidence of an adverse correlation between advertising and the proportion of output dedicated to factual, children's and cultural programming.
7. Evidence suggests that taking advertising would generate complaints from commercial broadcasters and would raise regulatory quires about the legitimacy of public funding

In conclusion of this report, can anyone explain to me why the BBC is so tight lipped on the subject of adverts, logo's and indents, and the inability of keep to good time keeping, which were the mainstay of the BBC's excellent programming.

By keeping their original charter, and not trying to be one jump ahead of the commercial stations, this rating chasing is bringing the BBC into line with their commercial competitors, this has been shown over the last year by putting indents and advertising between most programs which puts their schedules out by up to 3 minutes, which is most annoying especially when trying to record the programme **(Why can't the BBC use the PDC marker)** I know why the commercial channels don't want to, they would lose their advertising and income. The BBC does not have this problem.

Page 20 Key Questions

- a. The license fee is probably the best method, especially when you have recently agreed a non-payment after the age of 75.
- b. The only other alternative as you stated has been thought about is by taxation, here there are a lot of people who don't either pay tax, tax reduced, and get benefits, a quite complicated procedure. So I agree forget it.
- c. Value for money, to me **not at the moment**, too many repeats, interruptions, bad time keeping, adverts, logos and indents etc. as mentioned above.
- d. Has I do not know how the grant-in-aid works via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office I cannot say which way is the best.

Organisation and Infrastructure Page 21

Is the BBC organized in the most effective and efficient way

- a. As I have no idea on the organisation or infrastructure in the BBC I cannot really comment but from the outside but it seems top heavy, but it should stay as a single organisation.
- b. The BBC responsibilities as an employer etc and its own staff and other organizations should be fostering new talent for the future.
- c. I am not an expert in balancing between in-house productions and those commissioned, therefore I cannot make a true decision.
- d. Again I cannot give a truthful answer, but I have heard locally of a £2 million studio which was built, and over 80% of the local people thought it was a waste of license payers money.
- e. I suppose that the role in research and development, will have to be maintained to keep up with the cutting edge of technology.

Page 22 Key Questions

1. I think it should continue as a single organisation.
2. I think the balance is about right, although I cannot recognize the difference between independently produced and in-house. I think that it remains, and important that the BBC makes and commissions them.
3. Again the fostering of world class talent is a bit of a mystery to me, but if it is looking for world wide talent (as in talent spotting) they should be encouraged to do it.

Page 23 Governance regulation and constitution

How should the BBC be governed and regulated.

Key Questions Page 25

1. It is far to early for a decision on balance as Ofcom as only been in office officially 1 month. I have already been in contact with them on the subject of the BBC and Freeview their response was that I was doing the right thing **but we cannot help you ?**
If that is their attitude I don't reckon much to them, or how they hope to create a balance.
2. I believe under these circumstances as long as you listen to the general public and take action on what they say, and stay with the charter.

Accountability

How do we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament.

Page 27 Key Questions

Is the BBC sufficiently responsive to its viewers and listeners and to Parliament ?
What improvements, if any, could the BBC make.

1. The answer to this is definite **NO THEY ARE NOT RESPONSIVE** to its listeners and viewers.
(See 6 months of letters sent in complaining and their replies)

STOP PRESS FREEVIEW HAVE LAUANCHED A PAY PER VIEW CHANNEL CONSISTING OF 10 CHANNELS (I WAS INFORMED THERE WAS A CHANNEL SHORTAGE) and is it still FREE VIEW

Signed Mr J Lawrence

