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Dear sir/madam,

as a 32-year-old viewer and listener
of the BBC I still believe with all my heart that
the BBC should continue to be funded by the licence
fee, as there is no better mechanism for providing
high quality programmes across a whole range of
genres (from light entertainment to documentaries to
news).

There should be no 'communal pot' of
public money for public service broadcasting to be
used by Channel 4 and other commercial channels
as well as the BBC. I give my reasons below.

Subscription or sponsorship should not be
an alternative to the licence fee either. Only with
the secure funding of the licence fee can the BBC
provide programmes as diverse as 'The Singing Detective'
on BBC television or 'I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue' on
BBC Radio 4, for example.

I find it disheartening that we have to
defend the BBC again, so soon after the last Charter

Renewal in 1996. It is a precious institution and only the enemies of the BBC want to alter its funding in order to undermine it. I'm certainly no 'old fogey' (I'm 32) but I, like most people, cherish the BBC and if you have already decided to keep the licence fee then do not bother reading further. There is no need. But if you require further persuasion to keep it then read on.

We might not like the licence fee but it is better value-for-money than any other tax we pay. The breadth and quality of programmes that the BBC produces in television and radio could not be provided by subscription. People only subscribe to something once they know what it is. Who would have subscribed to a programme like 'The Singing Detective' when it was first broadcast? It doesn't fit into any one genre. It is a musical and a detective story, but something much more profound and at first glance is completely bewildering. So if the BBC was funded by subscription one could safely assume that the subscription rate would tail off as people switched to channels like 'U.K. Gold'. There is of course a place for 'U.K. Gold' but the majority of the programmes on it are ones that the BBC made with licence fee money years ago. The BBC took the risk to make these programmes which now draw in millions of viewers. No one subscribes to an unknown quantity (which is what the BBC is because it is always making new programmes). Even the most loyal of BBC devotees will not renew their subscriptions year after year to provide the security of funding that the corporation needs to create diverse, well-made, innovative programmes all year, every year. It made me quite angry that someone from one

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of the commercial channels suggested some time ago that once the BBC had made a successful programme it should be sold to a commercial channel.

Everyone knows that the BBC needs to broadcast repeats of earlier series. It works perfectly for the licence payer because many people miss the first showing of a 'quality' series. Indeed many innovative programmes fail to gain a decent audience on their first transmission (for example 'Fawlty Towers').

If the BBC is not allowed to show repeats of its successful shows, which it alone has worked so hard to create, what incentive is there for it to produce those programmes. And why on earth should those programmes be handed on a plate to the commercial channels? What better way to undermine the BBC's audience share and therefore its relevance to the people of this country? Tessa Jowell said herself, that the BBC should use its repeats in its schedules.

Another alternative to the licence fee is advertising, but that like subscription (or indeed sponsorship) stifles the BBC's duty to be innovative. Sponsors and advertisers will not take risks with the kind of programmes that the BBC needs to make in order to justify its existence. The intrusion of advertising and sponsorship would undermine the integrity of the BBC - perhaps its most cherished quality.

The idea of a 'communal pot' of public money to be shared by the BBC with the commercial broadcasters for the making of public service programmes suggests that there is a specific kind of programme which is 'public service' and another that is not.

But as people rightly argued in the run-up to

to the last Charter Renewal in 1996, public service broadcasting can be any kind of programme that is original, well-made, with careful attention to production. Many would like to confine public service broadcasting to news, documentaries and current affairs. Perhaps if that were the case then a 'communal pot' would make sense. But the BBC at its best produces high quality live music programmes ('Jools Holland'), game shows ('I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue') and comedies ('The Office'). And once again, a communal pot for which the BBC would have to compete with other broadcasters would undermine the security of funding that only the licence fee provides.

Finally I think the BBC should continue should continue to be governed by the governors and not by Ofcom. If the 'Iraq Dossier' is the only mistake the BBC has made in its 80-year history then things are not broke enough to fix fundamentally. By all means reform the governors but don't put the BBC under Ofcom. After all, Ofcom has not handled its job of regulating Channel 4 very well and it wouldn't safeguard the strong, independent BBC that the government says it wants to emerge from the Charter Renewal process.

As a post script, perhaps the strongest argument for keeping the BBC roughly as it is is that it works so well. Only the enemies of the BBC argue for alternatives, in order to destroy it.

I would like the BBC to go back to how it was years ago - not afraid to make television it believed in. But I am still grateful that it is here

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because it is a safeguard against not only poor quality television (although it does produce a fair amount itself), but also a voice of freedom throughout the world.

Yours sincerely,
Mark O'Callaghan