

**BBC Charter Review Consultation**  
**Department for Culture Media & Sport**  
**2-4 Cockspur Street**  
**LONDON**  
**SW1 5DH**

24<sup>th</sup> March 2004

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Your BBC: Your say** BBC Charter Review Public Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the BBC as part of the process of the current review of the Charter. May I say, first of all, that I believe the BBC to be the UK's most valuable cultural and media asset, and that, as such, it should be treasured and nurtured equally by any self-respecting government whatever the latter's political colour. I fully appreciate that it takes a degree of political sophistication and integrity to welcome, and learn from, media criticism. I live in hope that the UK is finally approaching this all-too-elusive level of political development.

I respond to the 'key questions' you chose to pose in your leaflet inviting contributions to the debate in the order suggested.

1. **What do I most value about the BBC?** The variety, breadth, quality and depth of its coverage. Its willingness to challenge accepted beliefs; to cater for minority interests *where there is a proven need*, and its efforts to avoid the mundane and mindless. I especially admire its journalistic persistence and (in almost all circumstances) its ethical standards. The World Service is without peer. I could wish for fewer repeats, especially at weekends, and far less sport – let the commercial channels waste money on this expensive, money-hungry element of media coverage. The BBC should not feel bound to compete if other free-to-air media tackle some areas of programming. Nor should it produce programmes which mirror or mimic what is available elsewhere.
2. **Adapting to changes in technology and culture.** The BBC must be willing to move on, to think the unthinkable (e.g. why produce any programmes at all for sections of the community who demonstrably have other interests and media preferences), to stand alone, if necessary, by continuing to produce quality programmes and dealing with difficult subjects while all other media are chasing easy popularity. However, the BBC should also find ways of remaining sensitive to the needs of older and aging audiences, who may never wish/be capable of adapting fully to digital multi-channel media. The radio generation could – with increased longevity, be with us for another forty or so years; their preferences and dignity should be respected as they become less physically mobile and thus more dependent on the broadcast media for intellectual stimulation and a window on the world.
3. **The BBC's television, radio and on-line services** are of generally high standard. News, drama, current affairs, music and other cultural output, including both traditional and experimental/avant-garde comedy output is varied and usually of excellent quality. The Corporation appears willing to learn from its less successful ventures. Beyond ceasing to compete head-to-head with commercial channels at their (generally lower) level, I do not think the BBC should change in any substantial manner.

4. **Commercial operations.** Providing the full and true cost of each such venture is fully calculated and entirely off-set by income gained from commercial activities, I see no reason why the BBC should not continue to provide commercial services to its viewers and listeners.
5. **The licence fee.** In its way, this is a form of taxation. It funds very much more acceptable activity than is currently the case with many other aspects of overt and covert tax. I believe the benefit to all UK citizens offered by the BBC fully justifies the imposition of this 'tax' and that, therefore, the licence fee should remain. It should, however, be subject to regular review and linked (though not necessarily *tied*) to the rate of inflation. The government should be required to supplement the licence fee whenever its actions or policies impose additional expenditure on the BBC.
6. **Organisation of the BBC.** Every organisation should review its organisation and management on a regular cycle. However, such exercises should be rapid, pragmatic, and as paper-free as possible in order not to distract from the business at hand. It is essential that the BBC is – and is allowed to remain – independent and free of political pressure to perform to government order.
7. **Regulation and running of the BBC.** The BBC should have published standards of probity, integrity, impartiality and accuracy to which it is required to perform. It should be required to demonstrate annually, or biennially, how far it has conformed to these standards, perhaps by means of user surveys. It should be entirely free of any and all forms of political, religious or sectarian input or pressure. The government of the day should be entirely 'hands-off' and be constitutionally barred from exerting any form of patronage or persuasion as far as programming or output is concerned.
8. **Accountability of the BBC.** The BBC should, rightly, be accountable to the UK public *and only to the public*. I do not believe that parliament, the government of the day, any politician, political party or religious body should have any form of influence, control or say in how the BBC is run or what its output should be. Beyond abiding by the law of the land in all its activities, the BBC should develop a system of public consultation and involvement for real members of its audience – i.e. ordinary viewers and listeners who can demonstrate that they hold no political office, do not represent special interest groups, religious or trade union organisations or any other body. There may be some justification for a secondary forum of interested groups to gauge 'group' opinion, but advice and input to the management of the BBC on present and future direction and output should lie in the hands of the very *individuals* who make up the disparate, ethnic and age-unspecific audience to which the Corporation caters.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of your deliberations in due course. I should like to feel confident that the present review will serve the BBC as well, and for as long, as its original charter. I live in hope, if limited belief, that this will prove to be the case.

Yours sincerely,

  
Sue Reeder

*For the inevitable monitoring purposes you will no doubt wish to conduct of those who have responded, I am 53, divorced (with no financial settlement of any kind from my ex-husband who lives and works abroad), qualified to degree level and earning £14,250 p.a. working as an administrative assistant in a private language school.*