

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
2 – 4 Cockspur Street
Westminster
London SW1Y 5DH

25th February 2004

Re: BBC Funding & Licence Fee

Dear Sir or Madam

I believe that the BBC has seriously lost its strategic way in recent years with its unilateral decision to increase the diversity of BBC services, thereby diluting the funds available for mainstream programming.

It is particularly annoying to witness licence fee expenditure utilised on the marketing of these additional services at the apparent expense of continued quality television production on core channels BBC-1 and BBC-2.

An additional frustration is felt when observing these marketing initiatives in areas where reception of the new services is currently unavailable - or likely to be. Digital terrestrial television is simply pie-in-the-sky on the west coast of Scotland for instance and so the use of licence fee income from these particular areas to produce programming for BBC-3, BBC-4, News 24, CBBC, CBeebies plus four obscure digital radio networks is annoying enough, but to then view endless marketing trailers for these additional channels is simply insulting to those who pay for them, yet cannot receive them.

The extravagance of BBC News 24 in particular is most inappropriate.

For those who wish continuous news information, many alternatives already existed prior to the BBC decision to invest in this duplication of activity.

For headline news, Teletext was, and indeed is, an immediate source of news information whilst the satellite service Sky News was available for those who wished to subscribe to a rolling U.K. television news service along the lines of America's CNN. It was simply un-necessary for the BBC to invest in such an operation which inevitably diluted much-needed funds from elsewhere in its portfolio. A breaking news story of significance continues to appear on one of the main BBC channels when appropriate – and rightly so.

The decision to seek audiences with a younger profile – apparently the *raison d'être* of BBC-3 – is again misplaced. This section of BBC society seek out or produce their own live entertainment far from the traditional television armchair of their seniors and are unlikely to remain at home on the basis of a television channel with programmes allegedly tailored to appeal to their youthful outlook.

The published viewing figures merely endorse this view.

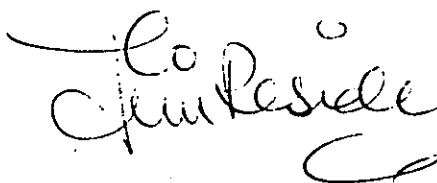
Two channels for children, yet none for sport? The driving force behind Sky Television's successful foray into British broadcasting and the exponential increase in satellite dish sales was coverage of sport. Yet the BBC have presumably the best sports library in world television having covered every Olympic Games and Football World Cup since live coverage of these historic occasions. Bizarre strategic decision – unexplained – and unacceptable.

All of the above has reduced available funding for the production of high-quality programmes on BBC-1 & BBC-2. Costume & contemporary drama, thought-provoking documentaries have given way to so-called docusoaps and an obsession with viewers' texts & e-mails. Garden & home makeovers, cooking with or without celebrities, travel shows with or without celebrities, airport goings-on at home & abroad, holiday reps or lager louts & ladettes, learner drivers & their inability to drive without expletives, plumbers/joiners/electricians from hell, hand-held cameras dizzily operated by all & sundry. In short, Cheapo Television – and it looks it.

If the BBC wishes to reduce the quality of mainstream broadcasting in favour of home-movies, it has certainly succeeded – and its income from consumers should reflect this. The licence fee should be reduced forthwith to a level which is sustainable only by BBC-1 & BBC-2. Other tastes and channels should be optional and accessed only by subscription or similar funding. The BBC should focus solely on its public service remit and not be sidetracked by its desire to be all things to all viewers at all times. The increase in radio and television channels allows viewers and listeners a bewildering array of choice and the BBC should be dissuaded from participating in every area of broadcasting – if necessary by limiting its financial options.

BBC-1 & BBC-2 for network television viewers, Radio One to Radio Five for nationwide radio listeners – period. All local radio stations to be commercially-funded. No other side issues, no other distractions from the main BBC focus – to report, explain, inform and entertain with authority, credibility and panache. Let's leave the 'celebs' to 'Hello' and 'OK' and concentrate on Attenborough, Dimbleby, Paxman, the Proms, the Olympics and Jane Austen. History suggests the BBC does this best. Remind them – please.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Reside". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized hand.

Mr Jim Reside