

30th March 2004

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

Dear Sirs

BBC CHARTER REVIEW CONSULTATION

A. CORE CONSIDERATIONS

1. I consider that the fundamental characteristic of a 'public service' broadcaster should be total independence of governmental, political, and commercial bias. – This is what the public pay for, above all, that the BBC shall be free of all influences which can come from "he who pays the piper"

2. It should follow that the service aims for maximum possible factual accuracy in its news reporting; that facts and opinions should be clearly distinguishable from one another; and that 'objective' analysis should have at least equal place with 'subjective' argument.

Note: "News" covers all forms – including current affairs, commentary, etc., etc..

3. I believe that a British public service broadcaster should be basically 'pro-Britain' – and 'pro' the primary factors which have made the country what it has become – and in that I particularly include the Monarchy and the Christian Faith.

4. In the sphere of 'entertainment' we most encounter issues of 'taste' and questions of quality. I vote for high 'quality' in both subject-matter and 'production values'.

B. 'COVERAGE'

1. If we are going to have digital TV, it should be made universally available rapidly – rather than many areas waiting 'in limbo'. Conversely, I loathe the *assumption* of online access. (See B5 below.)

2. On the whole I support 'programme separation'. (For example, I wish the BBC would keep to classical music on Radio 3, put plays etc. with the other 'talk' programmes on Radio 4, and consign jazz somewhere far away!) This would also help to separate 'popular' entertainment (BBC1) from more 'specialist' material (on BBC2) – not forgetting that 'the news' is of interest to everybody.

3. (As part of being 'British') I would like to see *much* more of our literary and drama heritage being presented on television. Our history too – preferably undistorted, so that we cannot confuse fact and fiction.

4. I would like to see 'video' recordings on TV of all worthwhile plays from theatres in London and around the country. Plus operas and ballets. [I believe that simple and cheap filming technology is now available.]

5. I would like to see programme repeats for principal programmes – especially (3) and (4) above – possibly within the same week, possibly a week or two later; and in some cases, (such as major drama productions,) at two, three, four, or (at most) five year intervals.

(Relatively speaking, this might save some money, or encourage higher 'production qualities'.)
The 'ideal', of course, would be that we could 'order' them for a time of our own choosing!

6. (And/or) programmes from (3) and (4) above should be made available on 'video' at *much lower* prices than currently charged.

7. Programming should seek to *avoid* situations in which individual viewers find there are two, three, or even four programmes they want to watch all at the same time. ~~The BBC should absolutely avoid~~ such clashes between its channels, and seek arrangements to avoid them with ITV. Inter alia it would be more 'cost effective'.

8. I doubt very much whether 24 hour television is justified. Reduce the quantity and improve the quality.

9. Cut out the repetitive padding – twirling dancers, extended routine introductions to programmes or switches to local TV news, endless repeats on how to contact Radio 3, etc..

C. 'REGULATION'

1. It would be 'nice' if self-regulation was sufficient. General experience – far wider than the BBC – suggests it usually is not.

2. Therefore, keep the Governors for 'hands-on' public oversight of the BBC, but add an independent 'watchdog'.

3. Inter alia, all such oversight should guard against political 'leanings' (other than 'pro-Britain') in news items, against 'low' standards in entertainment, and against cruelty/violence.

D. FUNDING

1. Public service broadcasting implies a service available to all, and paid for by all.

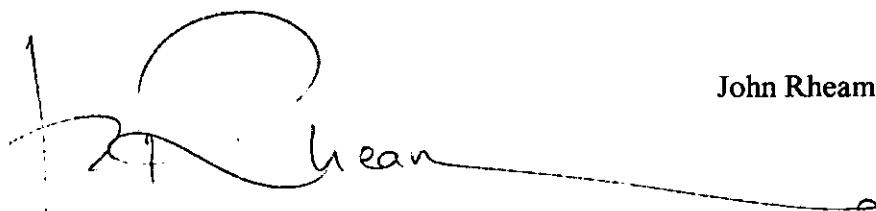
[Note: In my opinion absolutely no British news media should be owned – or ownable – by overseas interests.]

2. Many items in life cost the same – or are available at standard prices – regardless of the purchaser's income. A flat fee is consistent with being a 'public service' (equally available to everybody).

3. I fear that a subscription scheme would lead to much reduced income for the BBC, which would lead to a much reduced or poorer service – as well as being inconsistent with a 'public service'.

Yours faithfully

John Rheam

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Rheam', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.