

30th. March, 2004

BBC Charter Review Consultation  
To whom it may concern:

To begin with the concluding but arguably the most important question in the DCMS document on this first stage of Charter Review, what kind of BBC do I want for the future ?

I want a BBC which serves me at least as well as at its best, it has till now, a BBC which strives always to be at its best and to this end resists political and commercial pressures and the selfdefeating pressure of underestimating those who listen and watch.

The BBC at its best ? For that I turn first to radio. Radio 4 remains a good companion and a rich source of well researched <sup>and</sup> presented news and current affairs programmes, of documentaries, special series and features, of drama, poetry, humour, inquiry and reflection. Radio 3 offers a range of music and more often now, opportunities to hear performances live or soon after recording. The recent broadcast of Thomas Adès' " The Tempest" from Covent Garden is an example of this policy as, of course, the annual Proms season has long been. In spite of my dissatisfaction with some aspects of both services, for much of the time Radio 4, Radio 3 and Radio Scotland, are, for me, the BBC.

And television ? I have stuck so far with terrestrial analogue reception, perhaps because for me television is not as important as radio. I have therefore a choice of BBC 1, BBC 2, ITV and Channel 4. There are programmes which attract me to Channel 4 and ITV but I am loth to watch programmes interrupted by adverts so I am always more likely to watch BBC channels than others.

And does not BBC television offer news, current affairs and documentaries as does Radio 4? Yes, but more and more at times when I don't choose to watch and/or -and more important- in a style in which the tricks of the trade involved in what is seen on the screen distract rather than concentrate the attention and what is said is too often oversimplified and almost patronising: such a style undermines what might otherwise be informative and thought-provoking programmes. Panorama, alas, on Sundays at 10.15 PM is at the moment an example of such timing and such style.

What then of comedy and drama on BBC 1/BBC 2 television? At the moment little of it appeals to me. Too often what is offered as entertaining and/or searching strikes me as tasteless, crude and/or trivial.

" Everyone needs a place to think " says BBC 4, an ill-chosen slogan. Is the implication that BBC 1 and BBC 2 are no longer such places ? Is it beyond the BBC to strive " to make the good popular and the popular good? Remember " Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy" ?

How then are we to have a BBC at its best in the future ?

In spite of its shortcomings, many of us still trust the BBC, turn to it " at times of national crisis or celebration " and of national loss, take for granted, I hope not naïvely, that it is a force for good in our democracy, a patron of the arts and more and expect of it high standards of information, entertainment and education, its founding values and keys to what we mean by public service broadcasting.

In the above context, let me turn to the questions posed in the DCMS leaflet.

WHAT DO YOU VALUE ABOUT THE BBC ?

To what I have already said about the BBC's contribution to democracy, high and popular culture, setting and promoting high standards of content and presentation and to our sense of ourselves, I would add representing the UK in other parts of the world, in particular through the BBC World Service, not, of course, that that is the main remit of this service.

CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE ?

The BBC is to be supported in its readiness to take advantage of technological developments. It should however resist any pressure to switch off the present analogue transmitters before digital broadcasts are universally available to all UK households on a free-to-air basis.

PUBLICLY FUNDED SERVICES ?

I began by saying how much radio means to me. The range and quality of BBC radio programmes is perhaps taken for granted even by those who would be lost without them. BBC radio's once generous provision for children however has not yet been reinstated after its jettisoning in April, 1998, in spite of Radio 4's welcome introduction of a weekly magazine programme for children in 2000/2001.

## COMMERCIAL SERVICES ?

I see no reason why the BBC should not make money out of what it does, provided it does not lose sight of its main aims, does business fairly and uses the money to make more and better programmes.

## FUNDING ?

I am opposed to funding by advertising or sponsorship, both likely to threaten the range and quality of programmes and certain to involve intrusive ' commercials '. The licence fee is still the best way of funding the BBC: it should be retained and its value stressed.

## ORGANISATION ?

I would argue for the BBC's remaining a single organisation providing radio, television and online services in the hope that this promotes stimulating professional contacts, training, talent spotting and fostering, research and development. I would also support a mix of in-house production and external commissioning with more or less the current proportion of external commissions.

One important reservation under this heading: that the BBC is perhaps still too little inclined to look furth of London.' No need to move services, departments or even large numbers of BBC employees out of London. Bringing more programmes from the different parts of the UK to the ' national ' schedules would add a lot to these schedules and let us listen more to each other.

## GOVERNANCE, REGULATION AND CONSTITUTION ?

How to ensure the continued and perhaps still greater political and commercial independence of the BBC ? The BBC should continue to be a public corporation, provided for by ( Royal ? ) Charter supported by a defining Agreement.

It is important to look at the powers and duties of the BBC's Governors and at who is appointed and how. The Governors appear however generally to have done a good job and I am against the BBC's being any further subject to the control of Ofcom, an untried body which may see things in commercial terms rather than in those of public service broadcasting.

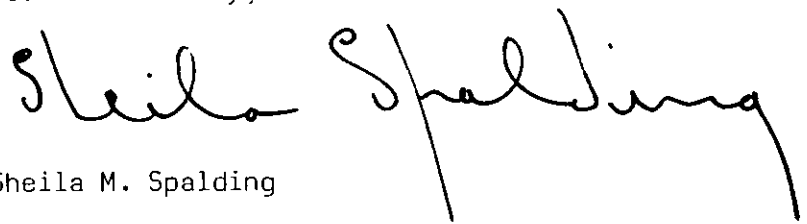
It may be time to make even clearer the separation of the Governors' responsibility for setting objectives for BBC services, monitoring these objectives and ensuring that the BBC is managed in the public interest from the professional management of the BBC. It is certainly high time to restate the importance of being a BBC Governor and to stress the qualities required which include a passion for the BBC, commitment and awareness, if not personal experience of, a wide range of points of view.

ACCOUNTABILITY ?

The BBC is already obliged to report to a number of different bodies, perhaps too many and it may not follow that the more the obligations the greater the accountability. What is needed appears to be a review rather new provision, perhaps making the BBC directly accountable to Parliament rather than the Government.

I am aware that this is a limited response to the opportunity to take part in the consultation. Personal circumstances and poor publicity , of which more in a separate letter mean that I am writing at the last moment to try to meet the closing date of 31st. ~~March~~, 2004.

yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila Spalding". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Sheila M. Spalding