

BBC CHARTER REVIEW CONSULTATION

Accountability and Regulation:

The present system of management and regulation appears to be satisfactory. Historically it has proved to be so and there is no reason to doubt that this will continue. Government and Parliament are well able to make their views known both to the BBC Governors and to the general public, and have demonstrated their influence by the recent regrettable post-Hutton resignations.

The BBC has shown very commendable attention to the views of the public at large, a fact which is demonstrated by this current document, past regional public consultations, the airing of views on various public participatory discussion programmes, and the encouragement of individual responses to broadcasting issues.

The Corporation is already properly and sufficiently accountable to both Parliament and to the public. It is difficult to conceive of practical means by which the public could have a greater part in the running of the BBC. More fundamentally, it is not clear why they should have directly a greater say. Should they have a greater say in the actual running of, for example, the National Gallery or the British Museum or other comparable national public institutions?

Organisation and efficiency:

Who is to say that another form of organisation would be more effective and /or efficient, or what the criteria might be to decide that it was so? Both the current form of overview and of management seem to be generally satisfactory. The current organisation on a regional basis, both within the UK and also in the World Service, appear to be rational and to reflect the requirements of the target audiences. The same comment would apply to the radio channels; it is not so clear that it applies to the television channels.

Licence Fee:

The licence fee is without doubt the best method of funding, since it is the firmest basis for the independence of the BBC. Advertising as a revenue source should be totally rejected. The general quality levels of broadcasting in many European countries and the USA, and the fate of public service broadcasting in the USA, Canada, and Australia serve as a warning of paths to be avoided.

Commercial Services:

Certainly the BBC should be able to profit from its own productions when they have served their initial public service purpose. There can be surely no objection to the production and sale of the Radio Times and there is no valid reason why the BBC should not be able to generate income for itself (and for the public!) from activities directly related to its main purpose.

General Comments:

The most important feature of the BBC is its reputation and stature both nationally and internationally, and of these there is ample evidence. Most importantly, this high regard is almost certainly due the nature of the Corporation, which again is intimately associated with the method of funding coupled with that of the system of oversight and management and the relationship of the two.

It is necessary to distinguish between radio and television; the former appears to be ignored quite frequently particularly by some politicians. However, its quality is unsurpassed in range of output, quality of talks and discussions, and perhaps above all in the range of music of all kinds which is provided - all areas in which pictures are not essential or possibly sometimes undesirable.

With regard to television I would quote from the foreword to Kenneth Clarke's book based on the TV series "Civilisation":- "People who sit down to an evening's viewing expect to be entertained. If they are bored they switch off. " While this may be true it all depends on the definition of "entertainment". "Entertainment" is one somewhat diffuse category. "Educational" is another diffuse category - introduced in your very first question. Lord Clarke's programmes demonstrated that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Many viewers found the OU/BBC programmes could be described by both terms. The same could be said of the many admirable natural history programmes you produce, of Michael Palin and "Round the World in Eighty Days" etc. There appears now to be a strong tendency to emphasise the "entertainment" at the expense of the "educational", as if their co-existence were incompatible, hence perhaps the excessive use of music and drumming as if vision without noise were insupportable. I feel the BBC is missing out on things geographic and ethnological (I have no professional involvement) which are areas, both nationally and worldwide, which are highly visual .

BBC TV's most annoying feature - repetitive, noisy, offputting interprogramme advertisements.