

To the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

My BBC - My Say

My first observation is that, however much I personally may value the BBC, it is of itself a remarkable institution.

Conceived and carried through Parliament by the then Sir John Reith, who was running a commercial company manufacturing radio sets and making programmes for them, came to the conclusion that such a powerful means of communication must have a special set up to make and distribute programmes. Hence the Royal Charter and Licence, subject to Parliament and paid for out of a licence fee for all those owning radio sets

Thus the BBC from its beginning was an independent Corporation, not dependent on Government control or on advertising for its money. Now, with changing technologies and many more channels, the BBC seems, on the face of it, rather outmoded, though I personally think what it stands for and what it provides is more important than ever. Most of the new channels tend to concentrate on one thing - either sport, talk shows, popular music or whatever. It is the diversity of the BBC's output which is so valuable offering the possibility, though few people nowadays seem to take advantage of it, of coming across something unexpectedly surprising and interesting. It seems to me that it serves its large and diverse audience pretty well with its television and, above all, radio services. And it has adapted successfully to the new technologies such as on line, .

While it is perfectly legitimate, it seems to me, for the BBC to back up its programmes with such things as magazines and DVDs which make its output more available, it should be careful not to extend its commercial activities too far, particularly when they seem to impinge unfairly on existing commercial ones.

I can think of no better way to finance the BBC than the licence fee, paid, after all, by the public who use it - and nearly everyone turns to the BBC from time to time and most rely on its news and information programmes. State funding would gravely affect the BBC's independence and give too much power to the Government to interfere. Subscription is too unpredictable and would prevent the BBC from planning its schedules ahead

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All organisations should look at themselves regularly to ensure their efficiency; to get rid of dead wood and outmoded ways of working. The BBC always had regular reviews conducted by an outside commission and these should continue.

The present system of regulation by the Governors has worked well and, provided those who appoint Governors choose the right people, should continue to do so. The Governors must appoint a competent and informed Director General who gives the staff inspiration, leadership and the freedom to experiment (even if sometimes unsuccessfully). The role of the producer and/or director is crucial and they should, with the minimum of supervision, be allowed to develop their skills and creativity to the full. The best programmes are made when producers and directors are enthusiastically engaged in their production. The Director-General is, of course responsible to the Governors for ensuring high standards of accuracy, fairness and impartiality

It seems to me that the BBC already has a number of ways in which its accountability to its public is checked. Letters, E-mails and telephone calls pile in and are sorted and answered; there are increasing phone-ins with the public; there are programmes which invite people with opinions to write in for those responsible to comment; the press is only too ready to pounce and expose so-called deficiencies in the BBC's operation; and MPs are not slow to complain either. As to the public having more say and greater influence on the BBC's output, who is this public? Anytime the public is invited to have a say there are as many opinions as there are invitees and it is rare a real consensus emerges.

That is not to say that the Corporation should not seek other ways of making sure it is in touch with the public which pays for it, and provide a diversity of programmes to suit all tastes.

Provided there are regular reviews of the BBC's operations, I think myself the present system isn't broke and doesn't need much mending. After all, as an institution it is admired throughout the world and many countries would wish to emulate it for themselves.

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