

25th March 2004

Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH.

BBC Charter Review Consultation.

I wish to submit the following comments as a contribution to current discussions:

A fundamental feature of the BBC should continue to be its independence from government and freedom from advertising, with their inevitable demands for influence. Without the constraints which would arise from commercial or political inputs the BBC can be more open to varieties of viewpoint and more able to experiment and be innovative.

The present arrangements for control work well in the main and are an example of British pragmatism at its best. Any recent failings should not be allowed to materially affect the proven high quality of performance.

No aspect of control, and certainly not ownership, should be allowed to pass out of the country. Britain has a distinctive culture to offer to the world - if anything, more European than American.

TV and radio advertising, unlike the print media, buys the viewers' or listeners' time and it cannot be skirted over. The core public network should not make this unreasonable demand. Also, BBC programmes, having a public remit, generally call for closer and more thoughtful attention than the commercial outputs which tend to provide visual or sound 'wallpaper'.

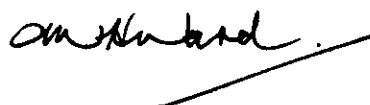
With its two main TV channels and five national radio networks the BBC provides a range of programmes for every taste. It can afford to avoid a populist stance or a patronising attitude.

It is a strange paradox that the World Service with its internationalist approach to world events is a far better ambassador for Britain than if it became a mouthpiece of the government or even of the popular mood of the country. Trust for impartiality breeds respect.

The licence fee is sometimes criticised as a type of poll tax, but there is no widespread call for it to be scrapped or even replaced. (There will always be people who think they can get something for nothing.) Unlike in general taxation where all goes into

the pot, the public can see what it is getting for its money. There might perhaps be an extension of present exemptions for needy groups.

In general the BBC works well and does not need mending. It is part of our national heritage and should be cherished.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A.W.H. Ward", with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

A.W.H.Ward