

26th March, 2000

Dear BBC Charter Review Consultation,

Re - page 10 of the Consultation Paper, the BBC provides a unique and very important service in making available reliable news and entertainment, not distorted by competition, which tends to push output towards the lowest common denominator of sex and violence.

It is a known, quotable source of news and entertainment familiar to every-one whatever their age, sex, ethnic group or religion.

It provides a uniquely valuable service because it does not have to compete.

The Charter duties certainly appear to be discharged.

There appears to be no advantage in changing the structure or balance between regions and communities.

Re: page 13, digital broadcasting needs to be pursued, also possibly new technologies used if and

when such come into existence.

The BBC is catering for the recently developing 24-hour society, with the World Service and Radios 3-5 broadcasting all the time.

An educational service for musical appreciation, world affairs, perhaps economics would be beneficial, but I accept there could be problems with short-term commercial television.

Re.16, no real changes needed except perhaps background and/or history not provided by commercial interests.

Core purposes of news and entertainment are met.

The BBC can provide analysis ~~and~~ and background, unlike commercial interests, which need to balance time and costs against revenues.

This is a proper differential ^{role} from the commercial interests, but writing, play-reading/analysis could be taken further. The BBC should provide something for every-one. It is a unifying force.

Re. key questions, page 17, BBC's commercial services provide a valuable addition to the joint-stock-company-funded services and help the BBC finances.

My understanding is that the BBC cannot benefit from its highly-capitalised infra-structure in tendering. I would like it less restricted as more public service provision is needed, not distorted by commercial pressures.

Re. page 20, direct taxation would be better than the licence fee, as the poorest elements in society, not otherwise directly taxed, have most trouble in paying it, yet the service is most important to the poor who have no choice of alternatives.

There is value for money, mainly because so many people benefit from the expenditure.

The FCO grant-in-aid is probably the best way that is also politically practical to fund the World Service. This is a form of direct taxation.

Re. page 22, the BBC should continue as a single organisation, as this is the most economical way ~~of~~ providing an inherently expensive service to many people.

I regret I have not understood the argument for commissioning outside productions. There is movement of talent in and out.

Please keep Kingwood Warren and other research or training facilities.

Re. page 25, I have more confidence in the Governors than Ofcom but perhaps the balance is right.

The Royal Charter has worked satisfactorily so far.

Re. page 27 the BBC seems responsive. It should be not subject to the big lobbies, which are usually commercially-funded. This is a painful, perhaps imponderable question. I hope the present balance continues to prevail.

Yours faithfully

Jim Whitehead.