

What do you value most about the BBC?

Its factual (when even handed and not based on speculation) and light entertainment programmes.

What do you think of the television, radio and online services the BBC provides?

News and current affairs

News repetition is obviously cheap so we get it over and over again on TV and radio throughout the day. This is a very tedious interruption to programmes, particularly when no major incident has occurred or nothing has changed since the previous bulletin and because there are other sources of news in addition to radio and TV. The introduction of the all news (and sport) Radio 5 should have reduced significantly the amount of news on Radio 4 but this has not happened. There is no need for news on Radios 2 and 3 since news is more than adequately covered on Radios 4 and 5 and listeners can switch over if it is news they want.

To avoid the BBC wasting licence payers' money, there needs to be co-ordination of news on television with BBC News 24 and on radio with Radio 5. Both need to tailor certain of their output to enable simultaneous programming with their sister channels. For example it is wasteful to have separate extended news bulletins at 1.00pm, 6.00pm and 10.00pm on BBC1 and News 24. The same programme should be broadcast on both at such times, with interchange between the channels of presenters as necessary. The same is true with regard to BBC Radio 4 and Radio 5, despite the claimed difference of approach to news of the two stations. Only one presenter per bulletin is needed.

The BBC has more broadcasting hours than it can usefully fill and there is a strong case for again closing channels down late at night or use night time broadcasting just for repeating programmes from that day, which some will not have had a chance to see, and originating nothing new when the night audience will normally be small.

There is now too much speculation on news and current affairs programmes, which is particularly pointless when this happens immediately before the actual event, for example trying to anticipate the Chancellor's decisions on the eve of or day of the Budget. This is a total waste of licence payers' money. If there is nothing positive to report a programme should not begin until there is. There is also too much over reporting, clearly contributing to the requirement to use up as much of the over allocation of news time as possible by telling the audience things of which it is well aware. For example most recently there was constant repetition, so soon after the actual events, of the background to the Kelly and Shipman cases.

There is clear bias in some news/current affairs coverage which is regrettable. For example, when UK forces are involved in war/conflict with another country, it is not acceptable for the BBC as the state broadcaster to employ reporters who report as if neutral and say "the British claim" rather than "we.....". The BBC should also not one minute report enthusiastically when a serious criminal is sentenced and imprisoned only to take a different stance shortly afterwards and embrace claims (which the BBC has no way of proving) of an "unsafe" conviction. The BBC should also not employ journalists who seem to take the view, as they invariably do, that any British person arrested and/or imprisoned abroad is innocent and should be released forthwith.

Use of the same performers and "experts" time and again

There is too little effort both in entertainment and drama to develop new performers and the same fairly small group of people is used over and over again producing overkill. Some examples of this are Jonathon Ross, Johnny Vaughan, Nicky Campbell, David Jason, Terry Wogan and Steve Wright, certain of whom are very excessively rewarded for whatever talent they have.

Similarly when so called "experts" and interested parties are used for all aspects of BBC broadcasting, it is the same faces that appear time and again even when what they are going to say is totally predictable as they are used so often, or a statement of the obvious. Just a few examples of this are Yasmin Alibhai Brown, Vanessa Feltz, Germaine Greer, Bonnie Greer, Tom Paulin, Amanda Platell, Lowri Turner, Max Clifford, Raj Persaud and Helena Kennedy all of whom are continually on our screens and BBC radio programmes.

Politicians claim expertise on everything and the use time and again of the same predictable handful of politicians by the BBC is tedious when we all know that all they are going to say is to quote the party line. MPs Simon Hughes and Menzies Campbell along with MEP Claude Moraes are amongst those who could do with being given a very long rest from BBC programmes.

Some "experts" appear in their capacity as representatives of lobby organisations, such as "Liberty", or the immigration/race relations industry etc. These too can always be relied upon to be totally predictable, negative and to oppose automatically whatever it is that the authorities are proposing. There is, for example, no point in giving an organisation such as Liberty a platform on an issue such as identity cards since every single viewer will know they will be opposed to it. Why not just ask the man in the street who might at least say something original and not be so predictable and negative?

Former spokespersons for Liberty (then called the "NCCL") were, as I recall, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt. Now, in their 2004 role of Government ministers, they have become the establishment advocating the opposite of what they used to say, thereby demonstrating the inappropriateness of having given them a voice in their earlier incarnations.

Sport

The BBC is good at sport but must stop giving it priority by delaying subsequent programming. Hour after hour of complete weeks of TV coverage of snooker tournaments throughout the year, for example, is excessive on a channel, like BBC2, which is not dedicated to sport. The constant repetition of even obscure sports on Radio 5 prevents enjoyment of other output on that station.

Ballet and Opera

The BBC should broadcast home produced ballet and opera and not go for foreign productions (which doubtless involve expensive and attractive foreign travel for its staff!).

BBC3 and BBC4

Money should not be expended on programmes for these digital channels whilst not all licence payers can receive them. In any event the programmes would better form part of the variety of the mainstream channels BBC1 and BBC2 to attract viewers to a wide range of programming, as has traditionally been the BBC's policy and a key reason for its past success.

Mockery

The BBC should not be selective in the targets it mocks. If it does not have the courage to mock Islam, it should equally not mock Christianity. It tends to go for the easy targets and reins back on others for fear of offending particularly intolerant and litigious groups.

Should the BBC run commercial services?

Not if it continues to employ the likes of Chris Moyles on Radio 1 or if it means yet more cooking, gardening or DIY programmes.

How should we pay for the BBC?

Through the licence fee but with a 25% reduction off the licence fee for single households (as with Council Tax).

There is much obvious wastage within the BBC and it ought to save money by such things (already mentioned above) as duplicating news bulletins with BBC1 and BBC2. They should also save money by stopping the silly practice of always having the reporter standing outside a building linked to the story even late at night when nothing can possibly happen there. Similarly the BBC presents a perfectly satisfactory filmed report yet invariably insist on following it by "going live" to the same reporter in a street somewhere (often on the other side of the world) and asking him/her for much of the same information all over again.

**How should the BBC be run? How should it be regulated?
How do we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament?**

BBC Governors need to come from a far wider cross section of society not just from the list of the "great and the good" and friends of Ministers. It should even be possible for suitably qualified individuals to apply for the posts and for those applications to be given serious consideration (unlike those for the so-called "Peoples' Peers".) The tales one hears of the unworldliness of Governors appointed under the present arrangements is a cause for concern.

C M Willson

2nd March 2004