

NICHOLAS WELLS

**THE FUTURE OF
BROADCASTING IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM**

SUBMISSION TO BBC CHARTER REVIEW

MARCH 2004

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This document presents the views of the named person and should be considered as their opinion. It is intended to enlighten the debate on the Royal Charter for the BBC, which is due for renewal in 2006.

About the Author

Nicholas Wells is an Avionic Engineer who resides in the West of England. Aged 42, he holds a BSc in Mechatronics Distinction from the University of Paisley. He left school at the age of sixteen, first working on an apprenticeship in Grimsby, before he decided he wanted to see the world. On joining the Royal Air Force in 1980, he served the majority of his career within 45 miles of his beloved Blundell Park, home to Grimsby Town FC, in Lincoln, where he met his future wife!

After serving 9 years, he joined British Aerospace, where he strived to continue his work on Aircraft. A back injury curtailed this career move, forcing a period of study at Ayr College and the University of Paisley, he returned to work in the Aviation Industry in the South West of England.

The author is a recipient of the Gulf Medal 1990-91

Attitude to Current Funding

The Author has, to the best of his knowledge, has been in possession of a valid TV Licence throughout his adult life, though this may have been held in the name of his wife for some considerable time. The author would like to point out though; the direct debit mandate used to pay for this was suspended without notice on 13th September 2001. The licence running from May 2001 to May 2002 was shortened to March 2002. Since that date, renewals have been made on 31st March each year. Indications as to whether this would continue will be available from the appropriate source on or after 31st March 2004.

1 Introduction

Since the introduction of ITV in the 1955, as a political wedge against the BBC by the government of the day, there has not been a thorough discussion on the continuation of Broadcasting within the United Kingdom.

The introduction in 1989 of Direct Satellite Broadcasting increased the number of channels available in the United Kingdom from the miserly four to the multitudes that are available today. The BBC must during the next Royal Charter Renewal ensure that the Licence, should it remain be used to the benefit of all Public Service Broadcasting.

The BBC has taken increases in recent years over and above the rate of inflation, against a commercial background of reducing costs and low inflation. This cannot be allowed to continue into the future without a complete overhaul of the Free to Air Public Service Broadcasting in the United Kingdom.

For this reason this document is possibly more exhaustive than the Question and Answer posed by the Commission.

2 Current Standing

2.1 Television Media

2.1.1 Drama and Comedy

The BBC has throughout its history used a medium of drama and comedy to enlighten, enthuse and diversify its viewer. This has led to British television being arguably the best in the world, both in the public service broadcasting and across the commercial broadcasting sector.

2.1.2 News

Television is a trusted medium that is used by the majority of people for their updates on events, not only at home, and throughout the world. The United Kingdom is fortunate that the news broadcast across the spectrum is free from outside interference and censorship.

News is available in a variety of formats, and a choice of times to suit. Mainstream Broadcasters have marginalised news broadcasting in recent years, first with the demise of ITN News at Ten and the scheduling of the main BBC Evening News at 10pm.

2.1.3 Sport

The BBC once held the bastion of Sports excellence throughout not only the UK, and the world, with innovations such as instant replays first used during the Football World Cup in 1966 and colour transmission of Wimbledon some two years later.

During these years of excellence, the BBC had little or no competition in this field until, in September 1978, ITV managed to get a contract to be the sole provider of televised football, which was overruled later. Since this time, Football broadcasting has constantly shifted from ITV to BBC, without aplomb until the FA Premier League was formed.

With the introduction of Direct Satellite Broadcasting in the 1980's and subscription services, all sports has become a major player, with service providers battling it out with the fattest cheque. Prior to the FA Premier League, BSB was a minor player, and probably would have stayed so, without a major investment. It is now thought to be

the main provider of diverse programming in the United Kingdom, unfortunately without a commercial counter balance, major sporting events may be lost to the free to air viewer. The so-called 'Jewel of the Crown' events only serve to stay the day when all will be lost to subscription services.

The debacle of the ITV Digital Football Contract ensued the demise of a second medium for the broadcast of a wide-ranging Digital Programming. Its effect has been far reaching and may not be at an end when the BBC Charter is renewed. This has only left one major supplier of Sports Broadcasting that has the commercial weight to outbid all others.

The BBC, that has been limited and accountable in its bidding, has, by its restrictive charter, being prevented from being commercially able to bid for significant Sporting Events, the latter being the UEFA Champions League from season 2003-04.

2.2 National Radio

2.2.1 Music and News

The BBC was set up and was the sole player in the United Kingdom for many years, only evolving after some people in a boat took the time to give the public what they wanted.

Since the launch of Radio One and the reorganisation in 1967, there has been little change in the attitude of the BBC with regard to its radio output. The digital age has allowed for further diversification, but these are only safe minority subjects, a middle of the road radio station and one that only repeats are broadcast.

The introduction of Classic FM in the 1990's has further marginalised Radio 3, which if it did compete in a commercial environment, could be construed as being rather stagnant by now.

Radio Five Live resorts to the level of media spiv and auto-garble when news is so low, there is nothing to report.

2.2.2 Sports

The BBC can be well placed with its continued success in the field of radio sport, its latest achievement being the Rugby World Cup Final in November 2003, the last 30 seconds of which will remain, to many, a piece of sporting gold.

The BBC is can excel itself with the luxurious picture it paints as sporting events progress with glees of delight at victories and calculated post-mortems in defeat. The system is working well and is seen as a bastion of broadcasting excellence.

2.3 Local Radio

BBC Local Radio is objective, encompassing all people in the area with news, views and guidance. The author lives in Gloucestershire, so can only comment on BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

2.3.1 BBC Radio Gloucestershire

The Author supports the need for the BBC to provide a local platform, a conduit for views to aired and comments reflected upon. This can be only benefit society when this is done objectively with fairness. The BBC should be encouraged to ensure that this continues in a dignified and balanced way.

2.4 Children's Television

2.4.1 Advertisements

All advertising on Children's Television to be banned. Licence fee funding of specific Children's Channels across all age ranges from 0 to 18 years.

2.5 New Media

2.5.1 Teletext Services

Teletext services, such as the BBC CEEFAX service were developed in the 1970's to provide suitably adapted TVs with a range of information

This has now transgressed to Digital Services Available today, from Interactive Television to the Internet

2.5.2 Internet

The BBC has built itself a credible Internet site, which is free from commercial pressures. It is thought that this been set up outside the scope of the previous Charter in 1996, events being such, the BBC had to take a bold decision to do so.

It is felt that the BBC, with its commercial weight and breadth of knowledge from other areas has led to an imbalance, in some respects as to the viability of this project

2.5.3 Mobile Media

It is some what regrettable that most media advances have been made at the behest of sexual appetite, the CD, DVD industry being one which took off with these ideas

3 The Future

British free to air broadcasting should continue to be the bastion throughout the world of broadcasting for excellence, quality, deliver and impartiality.

3.1 Televised Media

3.1.1 Mainstream Channels

3.1.1.1 BBC 1

BBC 1 to be completely funded by the Licence Fee, although at a reduced rate than that of January 2004. It should be compelled to produce 90% original and unrepeated programming.

3.1.1.2 BBC 2

To be part funded by the Licence Fee and Commercial Sports Sponsorship

3.1.1.3 ITV 1

To continue to provide a commercial range of programming and funded by the licence fee to provide diverse factual programming.

3.1.1.4 CH 4

To continue in a commercial environment, encouraging diversification minorities in its current form.

3.1.1.5 CH 5

To continue in a commercial environment as present.

3.1.1.6 Gold Extra

A conduit from the current UKTV output, to showcase recent and old drama from all free to air channels

3.1.2 News and Sport

Commercial sources of News Output have been available in the United Kingdom since the introduction of ITV in the 1950's. ITV News has been renown for its innovative approach, having the first newsreaders and first scheduled evening news service. In the 24/7 Society of the 21st Century, news is available day and night. It is

vital that this continues. Three output sources; ITV News, Sky News and BBC News should be commercially funded, providing their services not only to their own channels, but other broadcasters.

Editorial Control should be seen as those standards used presently.

3.1.2.1 Parliament

Continue in its current format.

3.1.2.2 History Plus

A conduit from the current UKTV output, to showcase recent and old documentaries from all free to air channels. Commercially funded.

3.1.2.3 Sport Extra

New commercially funded Channel used as centre of excellence to showcase top drama, comedy and sports. This could use the best of Commercial and BBC Sports programming as a counter-balance to BSB.

The restriction placed upon the BBC by its Royal Charter prevents the BBC from being in a commercially viable position to bid for the rights to some sporting events. The commercialisation of a new channel, Sport Extra, which should be available free to view, should be considered a priority.

Using a mix of sponsorship and advertising, sports events can be shown at their best on a dedicated service.

3.2 Radio Media

Radio media is vital to the diversification of the society and should be kept free to air for all services.

3.2.1 Chart Music

Commercially funded radio station to replace Radio 1

3.2.2 Radio 2

Remain in its current form

3.2.3 Classic FM 2

Radio 3 to be scrapped. Licence fee to part fund a second channel on Classic FM that provides new music.

3.2.4 Radio 4

Kept as is

3.2.4.1 Radio Five Live

News output on Radio Five Live should be commercially funded. Sports output funded by the licence fee

The Sporting programming covered by Radio Five Live is the Best in the World, it should be encouraged to grow, in the digital age, numerous matches should be available, possibly via a premium on the licence fee or some other funding to give sports fans greater choice.

3.3 New Media

When the BBC was set up, as an arm of the Post Office, no one could have seen the advancements that have been made by the end of the 20th Century, not even those who were consulted on the previous Charter in 1996 could foresee these new forms of deliverance.

3.3.1 Teletext Services

It is thought that during the course of the change over to digital transmission, current Teletext services will be withdrawn during the period of the next charter in their current form.

3.3.2 Interactive Services

Digital Broadcasting has allowed the introduction of new forms of 'Teletext' other than those first introduced in the 1970's.

3.3.3 Mobile Media

The use of mobile media entertainment is going to grow exponentially during the course of the next Royal Charter. Broadcasters should be encouraged to provide a

diverse range of products to be available on a 'pay as you view' basis in a commercial environment. The licence fee should in no way fund these products.

3.3.4 Internet

The BBC has built itself a credible Internet site, which is free from commercial pressures. It is thought that this been set up outside the scope of the previous Charter in 1996, events being such, the BBC had to take a bold decision to do so.

It is felt that the BBC, with its commercial weight and breadth of knowledge from other areas has led to an imbalance, in some respects as to the viability of this project

The BBC has now developed what could be considered a large sophisticated service that has been funded by the Licence Fee, possibly at the detriment to the concept of the Internet, that of 'Free Information and Connectivity'.

Other, older media institutions such as newspapers and newer providers such as BSB have to fund their activities commercially. Although the jury is still out as to whether the BBC has encouraged diversification of Internet Media within the UK, the licence fee gives the BBC an unfair commercial advantage in this activity when placed head to head with a competitor.

This has already had a detrimental effect on the Internet rights to Football within the UK, where Football League teams have been able to hike of BBC Local Radio Commentary to highest bidder. Whilst this may only be trivial, the commercialisation of the BBC Internet will allow the BBC to provide this service to a more discerning audience.

The BBC should commercially fund its Internet Activities.

3.4 BBC Worldwide

The commercial Arm of the PSB!

The BBC should be encouraged to grow this sector by 25%, year on year.

4 Safeguards

Digital Transmission in the United Kingdom is possible only a few years away from completion and the Analogue System is shutdown. It is paramount that safeguards are put in place that allows the Listener and Viewer to receive free to air broadcasting without hindrance and interference.

5 Funding

The Licence Fee should remain although at a reduced cost than £116. The reduced output that has been transferred to commercial outlets can help this. A Target of no more than £60 a year from 2007.

Scrapping of the Black and White TV Licence

Any increase in the licence fee to be justified on the following formula

Retail Price Index – 1.5% for the first five years.

Retail Price Index – 2.5% for the remainder

Any increase in the licence fee should only be allowed if the following conditions are met in full:

- BBC Worldwide grows 25% every year
- All BBC Costs reduced by 15% every year
- Audience growth of 3% every year