



One voice for sport and recreation

**Review of the BBC's Royal Charter.
CCPR Response to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport
Consultation. March 2004.**

Background:

The CCPR (Central Council for Physical Recreation) is the umbrella body for 270 national sport and recreation organisations. Its role is to represent and promote the interests of voluntary sector sport and recreation. Of the 270 member organisations, 170 are UK/British and English national governing bodies for sport and recreation. The other 100 CCPR member organisations comprise groups working in the youth, education, local government, armed and civil services; and professional groups concerned with sports development, coaching, teaching, administration or management.

Amongst our members are British Blind Sport, British Wheelchair Sports Foundation, Disability Sport England, Friends for Young Deaf People, National Federation of Women's Institutes, Rethink Disability, the UK Sports Association for People with Learning Difficulties and the Women's Sports Foundation. We also enjoy close working links with Sporting Equals. Through our association with these organisations we are very aware of the concerns they express over the lack of media coverage for women's, disability and minority sport, particularly on terrestrial television and the radio.

The CCPR welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation on the BBC's Royal Charter, and has consulted with a cross-section of membership organisations to inform this response.

The Challenge for the BBC:

Television, radio and the print media has a crucial role in informing our knowledge and attitudes towards sport and sports personalities. In particular, the popularity of the BBC's sport coverage with the viewing public, and the unrivalled access it has to UK homes via the TV license, means that the BBC is everyday influencing the nations' attitude towards sport and its participants.

Because of this, the BBC is central in the battle to raise the public profile of women's, disability and minority sport in the UK, highlighting role models from those groups and encouraging participation. This was evident at a recent debate on women's sport in the House of Commons:

Tessa Jowell: the lack of coverage, or under-representation, of women and their success in sport by the media is a fact, as recent analysis of the coverage of women's success, as opposed to men's success, in the Commonwealth Games

*clearly showed. On the BBC, that is why the review of its charter will be accompanied by an unprecedented level of public involvement and public consultation so that those issues are raised.*¹

The BBC pledges “its role in supporting and promoting sport, through coverage of a wide range of events and activities”. CCPR believes that the BBC could do more to adequately meet that role. Although being one of the better channels for coverage of women’s, disability and minority sport, it is still not as good as it might be, and is at best inconsistent. Recent research by the WSF² has shown that whilst the BBC offers a generally balanced coverage of athletics, tennis and major events, there is no reliable or regular broadcast of results for women’s football, cricket or rugby. As it is those sports that have the lion’s share of media coverage, this failure to include the women’s games is sending a negative image directly to the public and the participants.

Facts relating to sporting media coverage in the UK:

- Women’s, disability and minority sports receive significantly less media coverage than men’s sport, particularly men’s football, cricket and rugby.
- 40% of women over the age of 18 take no part in physical recreation and as a result are at risk of obesity, heart disease and associated health problems.
- One of the reasons for the decline in participation after 18 is the negative image of female sports in the media and the lack of media attention given to successful female sporting role models.
- People with a disability are less likely to participate in physical recreation. This is due to a lack of awareness of available opportunities, lack of confidence and lack of role models; all issues which greater media coverage of disability sport could help to address.
- The Paralympics receives less coverage on the BBC than the Olympics, despite the GB Team achieving considerable success and winning more medals than their colleagues competing in the Olympics.
- There are a considerable number of highly articulate and media friendly athletes competing in women’s, disability and minority sports, many of whom are at the pinnacle of their sport; however, they do not receive the media attention proportionate to their success.

The results of these failures by the media are:

- Interest in sport is now being media lead, rather than public interest driven.
- Sports in which UK women’s teams and others excel are not gaining the recognition that they deserve, with attention being focussed on sports where National teams are less successful.
- Minority sports are failing to attract new players, as their profile is not being raised through the media, despite significant successes. Example: England Women’s Cricket Team.
- Women’s, disability and minority sports have greater difficulty in attracting sponsorship, as they cannot guarantee air time. This results in fewer resources

¹ Hansard, debate on Women’s Sport, 20th November 2003.

² ‘Britain’s Best Kept Secrets’, Women’s Sports Foundation, 2003, London.

for competing athletes and less funding for sport development. Example: current fiscal plight of the UK Paralympics team.

Whilst the CCPR would agree that all television channels, radio stations and newspapers are biased in their sports coverage, the special role of the BBC as a 'public service broadcaster' puts them in a prominent position, and we would encourage the BBC to become a flagship organisation for increasing coverage of women's, disability and minority sport. For example, more use could be made of the BBC website, digital channels and radio; with programming reflecting the diversity of the audience. 51% of men said that they would definitely watch more women's sport if it were televised.³ The same percentage is likely to watch more disability and minority sport as well.

A recent debate on the BBC Grandstand website⁴ about disability sports prompted a very positive response, with many calls for increased coverage:

Sport is sport, whoever competes. It's time for the barriers to be firmly removed and for recognition that quality in their field is the only thing that matters. Disabled people are not 'less than' - so neither should be the coverage.

Cazzie Cardus, Bedford

How many people in Britain knew that the world summer games 2003 Special Olympics was held in Ireland this year. It was the biggest sports gathering in the world this year. How much air time did the BBC give to this? Shame - I hope this attitude is changing.

Des O'Boyle, Dublin

Praise should go to the BBC for hosting the debate and having part of their website dedicated to disability sport, but incorporating the successes of disabled athletes within the main website would be an even greater step towards equality. The employment of Tony Garrett as the BBC's disability sports co-ordinator shows a willingness to increase coverage, however, a year later, the public perception is that few changes have been implemented.

For minority sports, coverage is even harder to achieve. The 'other sports' section of the BBC website, still features sports that would be considered by many to be in the mainstream. Many of the sports played by the UK ethnic minority groups are not given coverage by the BBC, despite their rising popularity. When they are covered, it is usual in fill-in slots and are not treated with the same gravitas as other more traditional sports.

However, when teams and events are given coverage, the affects upon participation are significant. All tennis clubs in the UK see a rise in participation following the excellent coverage of Wimbledon by the BBC. Interest in rowing increased following the Sydney Olympics and rugby clubs are recording record attendances, especially amongst children, following the Rugby World Cup. Indeed, after the BBC broadcast the Women's FA Cup immediately prior to the Men's in 2003, the FA received more enquiries about women's football than ever before. These few examples highlight the power of the media, particularly the BBC, in encouraging participation in sport and recreation and will be an essential component in reaching the Government's participation targets for 2020.

³ Women's Sports Foundation public opinion survey, www.wsf.org.uk

⁴ 27th February 2004, BBC Sport Grandstand.

Conclusions:

It is winning that counts. Viewing figures from the Men's Coxless 4 Olympic rowing final in Sydney and the Women's Curling final in 2002 (the latter a minority sport) show that what viewers want to see is GB teams competing at a high standard and being successful; regardless of their sport, gender or physique. The BBC exists to meet that desire and has a role to play in promoting all sports and subsequently participation in physical exercise.

The BBC is in a prime position to effect a culture change regarding sporting role models and to educate the next generation about healthier lifestyles, behaviour and activity. The range of BBC audiences and the variety of media the BBC uses (internet, printed press, radio and television) will allow that message to reach across the UK. The BBC will be essential in the fight to achieve equality for all athletes and in countering the rise of inactivity and obesity in the UK.

As Patricia Thompson of the National Federation of Women's Institutes stated: *"The BBC has a social and moral duty to raise the public profile of women's, disability and minority sport in the UK. Many NFWI members take up sport, particularly minority sport, after retirement, in order to keep fit and help them live healthier lifestyles. Sport also plays a large part in their social lives, giving them confidence, particularly when participating in team sports. As health is a key concern, the BBC must promote sport to the elderly sector of society so that they can live physically active lives."*⁵

The CCPR would welcome all efforts made to increase coverage of women's, disability and minority sport and, along with key National Governing Bodies and Voluntary Organisations, would be delighted to work with the BBC to provide advice and information to help achieve that aim.

⁵ Response to consultation by CCPR.