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**BBC Charter review public consultation document—“YOUR BBC- YOUR SAY”**

*“What do you value most about the BBC?”*

The simple reply must be “Integrity and Independence” and, I hope, “Impartiality”. Like most other organisations, the BBC can seem to be pompous and disdainful of criticism—since it is impossible ‘to be all things to all men’, this comment may seem unfair. Reith’s original concepts about ‘educating, informing and entertaining’ seem very relevant today. But the public has very high expectations of broadcast programme quality and diversity, which sadly cannot always be met.

But the programmes, both radio and television, do always appear to have Integrity, whether the content has universal appeal is another question. Dramas, News, or Documentaries— all are well researched, well produced and well informed. Unfortunately, there will always be the occasional mistake, as the Kelly affair has demonstrated. But then, no organisation is ever perfect, and occasionally we must face the reality that mistakes will be made—and admitted. There are of course some programmes that fail to meet these high standards, almost by design, but the BBC must never appear to be elitist and thus must appeal to a very diverse public taste.

“Independence”. The BBC gains its authority and integrity as a result of its Independence. It is not subject to the pressures of advertisers or market place dominance. It is absolutely essential that this situation must prevail. Whilst it continues to receive its funding directly from the licence-payer, it is not directly, or indirectly, subject to the whim of the Chancellor of the Exchequer of whatever Party, for funds. The BBC must remain as a provider of broadcasting, as a public service to be paid for by all the members of the public—rather like the Royal Opera House or the British Museum or public libraries. Unlike these three, the BBC does not have to beg for its income. It must be seen to be clearly ‘Independent’ of governments of any persuasion. The BBC stands as a pillar of our heritage.

“Impartiality”. This is the most difficult asset to quantify. Whether the BBC is or is not ‘impartial’ is a matter of informed discussion. In reality, there is no pure white and no absolute black—it’s all a matter of hue. By most tests, the BBC is not always impartial, it can’t be. Directors, writers, commentators, and reporters inevitably, all bring their own “baggage” to the job. But compared to the USA where partiality (or ‘bias’) is the norm, the BBC does an excellent job. This probably could not be quite so easy to achieve, if the Government of the Day (of whatever Party) were known to be holding the purse strings.

These comments apply equally to both BBC radio and television, across the UK.

*“How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture?”*

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It is difficult to answer this question without separating the words underlined above.

If the question is "How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology?" the answer is very simple. It must continually adapt to survive in the ever-changing world of radio and television programme production. In order to serve its licence payers, it may choose a number of very different 'vehicles' to convey these programmes to the user. The conventional radio and tv transmitters whether terrestrial or satellite based could be used, as could the Internet employing broadband cable or mobile telephone 3G techniques. The user may insist that 'interactivity' becomes part of the programme. 'Convergence' in these fields is inevitable.

The BBC has not only a leader but also an important participant in the implementation of the technology of the "Digital Revolution". It should now be encouraged to maintain this lead in the use of these developments for the production and distribution of high quality radio and television programmes by whatever appropriate means.

Perhaps the BBC could change its name to the BCC, the British Communications Corporation, whilst still using its Royal Charter?

"....adapt to changes in culture?"

Culture is part of the nation's heritage, and as such has always been subject to change. Over the centuries invaders and immigrants have continually 'changed' the Country's culture. Traditions and religions, poverty and affluence influence changes. If the BBC failed to adapt to these changes, the resulting programs would be sterile and worthless. Currently, they are not.

Since its formation in 1927 the BBC has continually adapted to cultural change as, for example, has the film and advertising industries. It may be argued that it is the BBC that is an agent in this change-not the other way around.

*"What do you think of the television, radio and on-line services the BBC provides?"*

In a very competitive market, the BBC appears to be a major player, as it must do.

An organisation, the size and complexity of the BBC must attract a realistic section of "The Market" to survive. This does not imply that only the BBC are competent to reach the audience, but rather that it is in direct competition with commercial companies that are forced to produce programmes having mass appeal to win advertising 'sponsorship'.

*"Should the BBC run commercial services?"*

Certainly not commercial radio and tv services. If the BBC has a product that has a market, then it should make it 'freely' available to would-be buyers. The format chosen may be VHS, DVD, audio cassettes or the Internet. Any profit should be ring-fenced for programme production. These conditions should apply to all sales through BBC Worldwide, and even the Radio Times.

*"How should we pay for the BBC?"*

The licence fee is THE most user-friendly way of ensuring 'Independence' for the BBC.

There are of course many ways of assisting payment, which should be continued. Perhaps some disadvantaged groups of the population might be excused payment-those below a specified Income Tax code number perhaps?

The Licence maintains the integrity of the BBC, and as such should remain. No sponsorships or advertisements should be permitted on the networks.

*“Is the BBC organised in the most effective and efficient way?”*

How is the public to gauge either of these two different criteria?

This must be the role of the BBC Governors as detailed below.

*“How should the BBC be run? How should it be regulated?”*

In the past, there has been confusion about the precise function of this Board. Its only function should be clearly defined to ensure that the BBC is organised in the most effective and efficient way. The Governors should not have a managerial role but simply a function of scrutiny.

As an example of this procedure. It is a regulated function of a School Governors Board to ensure that a school is performing to its potential as defined by the Government's inspectors Ofsted. The Board delegates the everyday management of the school, including the recruitment of staff, to the Headmaster -neither the Governors nor their Board have the right to interfere with this process even though in law they, as a legally constituted body, bear the responsibility of its performance. The Governors nominate and elect their own Chairman or Chairwoman. Here, there is an obvious parallel.

The BBC Governors should be selected on the basis of programme production, financial and cultural expertise. The different nations and regions of the UK could also nominate them. The assembled Governors should be permitted to nominate their own choice of Chairman to the Prime Minister and Queen for 'approval'. The Board would be answerable only to the PM, and not the Secretary of State or Ofcom.

The functions of the Director General (or Managing Director) must be defined.

The Chairman of the Board's role would similarly be distanced from the executive arm and not be permitted to 'interfere' as a number of Chairmen have done in the past.

*“How do we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament?”*

“.....accountable to the public?” How does the public ensure that the NHS, or the Rail Authority, or the Ministry of Defence is accountable? In the case of the BBC, accountability can be achieved by ensuring that the BBC's Governing Board is truly representative of all the different aspects of the UK's diverse culture, and that the Governors could be able to demonstrate their competence by the results of their management scrutiny. To do this, the Board must be given the authority and power to ensure its independence in a commercially harsh environment.

“.....accountable to Parliament?” The BBC Governing Board should be answerable only to the Prime Minister. The role of Ofcom should be restricted to the regulation of commercial radio, television and telecommunications companies. Ofcom is correctly answerable to the Secretary of State and thus to Parliament.

CONCLUSION

The BBC is an integral part of British society.

It employs people of many different trades and professions. It has nurtured music in all its many forms, including the Proms and "Top of the Pops". It produces programmes of international acclaim. Programme production includes a wide diversity in children's cartoons, education, soaps, news, dramas and documentaries.

It fulfills a need for local and regional radio, which is an integral part of its function.

The BBC is a unique organisation, funded in a truly British way, with an international reputation for integrity and impartiality-listened to daily by millions of people worldwide.

It has built its reputation on 80 years of independence; there are very many good reasons for not destroying a structure built on trust.

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