

Ref 15/c

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BBC Charter Review
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As a lifelong supporter of the BBC, I am glad to take this opportunity to contribute to the review of its Charter. Especially so when, in my opinion, the status of the BBC has fallen significantly as a result of the changes effected under Director-General Dyke.

I recall a previous BBC Charter when it was explicitly required that BBC programmes should set a standard against which all other programmes could be compared. Thus all viewers and listeners, not only of BBC programmes, would benefit significantly from the maintenance of standards. By greatly increasing the number of BBC channels of television and radio programmes, quality has given way to quantity, and the drop in quality of television programmes is very evident in this household. The introduction of the much-vaunted extra channels offering more choice has had the effect of giving more of the same.

I did complete the questionnaire distributed before the introduction of these changes. The questions were all of the multiple-choice type, allowing one to express the degree of approval for each proposal. There was no opportunity to express reservations or to propose alternatives. I had misgivings at the time and these have been justified by the current situation.

There are three areas where the BBC is open to severe criticism. These are:

- (1) TV programmes for children of school age
- (2) Technical quality
- (3) Concept of BBC3 and BBC4 TV programmes,

and I enlarge on my criticisms in the following notes.

(1) TV programmes for children of school age

In a climate where children are bombarded by the media with material which is commercially biased, the BBC is uniquely situated to offer some alternative of benefit to children. At present the BBC offers an unimaginative diet dominated by animated cartoons and some pop culture.

Would it not be more appropriate for a public service broadcaster to transmit programmes which would not only entertain but also complement the education (including social skills) provided by schools. For example:

- (a) story reading by adults
- (b) quiz programmes and competitions of a challenging nature and requiring reference to dictionary, encyclopedia or atlas
- (c) details of careers and qualifications necessary, all provided by current members of trades and professions.

This programming would be supervised by someone experienced in working with children and getting the best from them. Someone of the calibre of Gervase Phinn!!

(2) Technical Quality

For a very long time the technical quality of broadcasting in Britain has been envied throughout the world, and the BBC has justifiably been the recipient of much of this acclaim. In many markets around the world British broadcasting has been the hallmark of quality.

Now however the situation is quite different. Digital radio is increasingly concerned with cramming more stations into the bandwidth available, to the detriment of sound quality (the digital bitrate.) This to the dismay of listeners who invested in digital radio (including me) for the benefit of better sound.

With television, high definition television is available now in Japan and the USA, but in this country only Sky is set to launch such a service next year.

(3) Concept of BBC TV programmes BBC3 and BBC4

BBC3 was introduced as a programme aimed at a limited section of the younger working population with an age span of 15 years (20 - 35 I think.) In answering the questionnaire for its approval I could not imagine what this implied. When the first BBC3 programmes were listed in the *Radio Times* my fears were confirmed. The content was of the most lightweight variety (liquid news for example) and appeared to compete directly with similar programmes on commercial channels. Had I been of the age group specified, I should have been very offended.

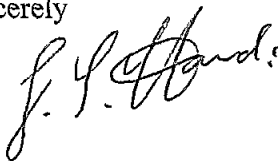
BBC4 was introduced with a vague remit, comparing it to BBC Radio 4. Again I looked at the *Radio Times* to find the programme content quite unattractive with much content of foreign origin.

Then I learned that the budgets for BBC3 and BBC4 were 90 million pounds and 35 million pounds respectively. One could only conclude that BBC3 was the important consideration and BBC4 was an insignificant makeweight. At this stage I ceased to take any further interest in digital TV.

I believe the situation now is much improved but it would be good to have an official statement confirming a more reasonable programme content and budget allocation for these two channels.

In conclusion, I enclose a cutting from *The Times*, a reader's letter the content of which has my fullest approval. It is also consistent with the Prime Minister's current stand on decency and respect.

Yours sincerely



J S Hand

Hopes for better things at the BBC

From The Reverend John Wynburne

Sir, I believe I am one of many in this country who would not consider themselves to be exceptionally prudish or morally virtuous but who have become increasingly disturbed by the decline in the quality of public service broadcasting, especially popular entertainment. The latter has become a morally anarchic wasteland with the unrestrained use of obscene language and violent or sexual images that increasingly serve no artistic purpose.

The media have immense power to influence the moral climate of the nation. The focus on so much that is sordid, coarse or lascivious only feeds our self-indulgent culture of contempt. We see the consequences of this in dysfunctional social relations and in the breakdown of our social ecology.

It is my hope that the new Chairman and Director-General of the BBC will do their part to promote social values in broadcasting that enhance the dignity, decency and principled civility that many of us believe are essential for the good of the nation.

Yours sincerely,
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