

26 May 2005

BBC Charter Review
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Sirs

We write to make the following observations in regard to the forthcoming review in respect of the Royal Charter.

From its inception the BBC has had a world-wide reputation for its integrity, its honest and objective reporting. It is the consummate of broadcasting and it is crucial that this is up-held and that the BBC continues to operate under a Royal Charter, with the very minimum of contracting out. Its educational, documentary, cultural and classical programmes are second to none.

Over recent years we have observed that there are several aspects which need to be reviewed if this impartial independent high standard is to be maintained.

We have noted claims that the role of the present-day journalist is to 'make' news, and to make it 'more exciting'. We fully accept that this may be expected of tabloid newspapers and independent TV but the BBC licence payers are from all walks of life and of all political persuasion. If the BBC goes down the same path as the commercially based media, then where is the ordinary person to find unprejudiced information?

In many news programmes (both radio and TV), the interviewer's intonation of voice conveys a bias. Questions are phrased in a negative self-fulfilling manner: it would seem that the editor has a pre-determined news head-line. Snide comment is inappropriate (e.g. in the Sunday morning after the marriage of Prince Charles and Mrs Parker-Bowles, commenting on the photographs, "The Queen could only afford the Prince 52 seconds of her time".)

It is essential in a democracy that journalists have a right to put probing questions, especially to politicians, but there is no excuse for aggressive hectoring or a rude, almost dismissive attitude.

It is recognised that time is limited, but the reporting of key news items often focuses narrowly on certain chosen aspects to the exclusion of others: (this was evident in the reporting on the Butler Report, and on the myriad occasions when the Iraq situation was discussed, rarely was the fact that Saddam Hussain disregarded United Nations' directives for some 12 years ever mentioned).

The frequent question "Who do you blame?" is over-simplistic but often used in respect of an issue that has many facets not presented in the interview, and which involves a number of different people or groups.

The standard of humour of comedy and satirical programmes all too often comes over at the level of junior school-boy lavatory jokes. There seem to be 'no holds barred' in terms of destructive ridicule, whether of an individual or group in society.

The seemingly incessant often invasive 'background music', whatever the subject of a television programme, and which often over-rides the voice of the presenter, is quite unnecessary and can spoil an otherwise excellent programme:(e.g. why did the voice of a female presenter at the Chelsea Flower Show describing alpine plants have to be accompanied by the omni-present distracting sound-track of "Sound of Music"?)

Incipiently a tendency to 'play to the lowest common denominator' seems to have crept in, which is demeaning of the audience, and contrary to the original principle of the BBC to 'inform and educate'.

We offer the above criticisms because we care what happens to the BBC and only wish it to flourish and to uphold the highest calibre of broadcasting which is so important in this shrinking world.

Yours faithfully

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