

BBC Charter Review
Dpt. for Media,
London.

Dear Sir or Madam,

You ask for public comment to review BBC programmes so I submit mine. I have written several times in the past and it seems never to have had any effect so I hope this is not just a public relations exercise but a genuine request for opinion with a view to making changes.

There was a time when I barely watched any channel other than the BBC. It could be relied upon for excellence and high standards and there is still evidence of this in some programmes but, in the past few years especially, I have turned off more and more.

To begin with the News and news related programmes, the format becomes increasingly irritating and repetitive. Intrusive background row is one reason, often carried on over people speaking and repeated footage of the same film is another. I always preferred television to radio. Like other members of my generation, born at the end of the second world war, I was raised on BBC radio and did not have television until 1963. It was a delight to me to be able to see people speaking as well as hear them instead of listening to disembodied voices, however distinctive they may have been. This is because, when people speak, they do not just use their voices, they use their faces too. A world of information is conveyed from a person's face. Watch people in a café and see how intently they watch other people's faces. Notice how women, who usually choose opposite seating so they have the best view, observe their companion or lover. So, to have a brief glimpse of an announcer, followed almost instantly by film footage shown over and over and over and over again during the day, from day to day and later, when the subject is resurrected, is criminal. Unless a picture or a moving picture enhances, informs or enlightens, it is worthless. It is far better to observe the face of the broadcaster giving the news, something we are deprived of in radio. When the 'foot and mouth' coverage was happening, I had a dream about carcasses of dead animals being shovelled into pits because that was what I saw on every news item. Why producers of the news think the public wants to be assaulted continuously by obnoxious images such as crying babies being jabbed with needles, women being mammogrammed, albeit from behind, teeth being drilled etc. I cannot imagine. Who are these people? Are they sadists who enjoy it themselves or, more likely, are they simply inured to horror and expect the rest of the population to be the same? When the David Kelly tragedy was being reported, we saw the same footage of him arriving for his interview, carrying his briefcase, for weeks on end. Everyone who watches the news knew his name, knew who he was and what it was all about so what was this endless repetition for? More recently, especially at the weekend, we are assaulted, not only by audio intrusion but visual intrusion with a speaker or interviewer and interviewee being backed by slow moving, swimming figures of enormous proportions. This is the point at which I SWITCH OFF, thereby missing the frequently interesting content altogether.

Use of language is another affront and one where younger presenters are more likely to let themselves down, although I was horrified recently to hear Bill Turnbull, an exemplary presenter, refer to the Pope '*laying* in state'. Do we have to adopt *all* the American blunders in grammar? The most appalling mistakes made are in sentences where reporters fail to make the verb agree with the noun. 'There's' seems to have become an umbrella term which never becomes 'There are' as in 'There's millions of people'. A weather forecaster was heard to comment, "It will be a bit *more breezier*". While reluctant to refer personally to personalities, I am amazed that someone like Declan Curry continues to present and to be seen expanding his interviewing. Though he is a pleasant enough man, I can never understand him and he gasps after every couple of words. The BBC used to teach their broadcasters to *speak*. Is there no-one qualified to do this any more? Also, to my knowledge, the word THE is only pronounced THEE before a word beginning with a vowel.

Since the loss of the *balloon*, much missed, in between programmes, I turn off the sound and close my eyes, asking myself why, when interviewers claim to have so little time to let people speak, the BBC wastes so much of it in mindless film of cavorting figures. I suppose, like reality television, it saves money.

To mention more specific programmes, I should like to comment on the Songs of Praise School Choir competition which I enjoyed but was astonished and disappointed that a person like Sunita should be appointed a judge. I had never heard of her but was shocked to hear her say she did not realise young children could sing so well! What was she there for then, making inane comments that contributed nothing? Also, as last year when I telephoned to point it out, I did not know which hymn had won, not being able to remember all the school choir names so was none the wiser as the choir did not sing its winning entry again.

I see many references in the press to the political bias of the BBC and can only say that that it seems to be the champion of the Labour Party and does not give coverage to anything that rocks their boat. Coverage given to the U.K. Independence Party during the election was almost non-existent, despite their having had considerable success in the European elections. I am also sick of programmes which emphasise political correctness. Does every drama programme have to contain the obligatory homosexual? I have no objection to this in proportion but it is not representative of fifty per cent of the population as implied!

The interview with David Blunkett by David Frost recently, on Sunday morning was a fine example of how well things can be done. Questions were sensitive and searching without being intrusive and the responses from the previous Home Secretary were accordingly sincere and quite moving. This is so far removed from the crass 'chat' situations of which we see too much.

The 'Bill Oddie Goes Wild' programmes embody all that is wonderful about the BBC. The photography is breathtaking and the natural way Bill Oddie behaves, with no attempt to create an image or dress in any particular way, is refreshing and informative. Most importantly, there is a pleasing melody to introduce it and NO CRASHING DRUMS to ruin it in between shots. Silence is a wonderful thing as a background. There are so many more informative programmes I would watch if it were not for this continual racket.

I should like to suggest that the Weather Forecast be shown on the News *before* the Sport so that people who have no interest in the latter can then switch off.

I know I am not alone in my grumbles about interruptions at the ends of programmes, before the credits have gone and while music, presumably especially composed for the purpose, is still playing. How rude and infuriating to barge in at this time particularly when some programmes have moving or thought-provoking endings and the viewer wants quiet thinking time for it to sink in.

The BBC is often criticised for repeating programmes but surely it would be better to repeat some high quality programmes again at an off peak time in the same week. There are programmes I would have loved to see but missed the one opportunity when it was shown and would have appreciated the chance to see it or record it. I never saw the drama serial, "Clayhanger" in the 'eighties' and would love to see "The Cazalets" again which, amazingly, was only shown once! Dramas can be shown several times, like good films. What has happened to films like "Becket", "Royal Hunt of the Sun" etc?

This letter is long enough and, I hope, warrants a proper reply. Just to add that not everyone has E-mail so a telephone number should always be included when comments are invited on a programme. This is not always so.

Thank you for your invitation to write. I hope the time it has taken me has not been in vain. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

J.D.Wonnacott