

Michelle McCarthy,
B.B.C. Charter Review

Dear Miss McCarthy,

Thank you for your letter dated 5th. March in respect of, and enclosing, the B.B.C. Charter Review.

I do not have access to the Internet and have therefore answered the questions within the "Key Proposals and Questions for Consultation" section of the document, as requested.

QUESTION 1: Yes, it is helpful to so define the B.B.C.'s purposes.

QUESTION 2: Up to a point, yes, they are the right purposes. However, I would take issue with "Promoting interest, engagement and

participation in cultural activity among new audiences." I trust that 'old', i.e. existing, audiences, will not be forgotten!

In addition, the Review states (page 8, "Reflecting the U.K.") ".... on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences." I would draw to your attention that digital viewers in Wales are frequently denied "shared experiences" on B.B.C.2, having to switch back to analogue to watch, for example, such favourites as 'Mastermind', 'Gardeners World', 'University Challenge' and 'Timewatch'. More recent examples include the excellent 'Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution' and part of the golf coverage from Augusta. In Wales, for several hours each weekday evening, we have B.B.C.2W occupying the digital B.B.C.2 channel. This offers for the most part (my opinion) a very inferior 'menu'. When analogue is switched off, how then do I obtain the programmes on B.B.C.2 that I want to watch? When, then, my "shared experiences"?

QUESTION 3: By and large, yes, I agree that these are the right characteristics, although I hope that the phrase "across every genre" includes sport as,

although still of the highest quality, the rapidly diminishing quantity of sport on the B.B.C. is worrying. Sky Sports channels are expensive and, as at present we view digital via 'Freeview' on an I.D.T.V., inaccessible. (With the exception of Sky Sports News.)

QUESTION 4: I agree that the B.B.C. should be at the forefront of technological, including digital, development. However, "maintaining ~~access~~ universal access to quality broadcasting" means, I believe, that I, watching T.V. in south-west Wales, should be able to access the programmes that I want to view at the same time as someone living in, for example, south-east England: and I refer you to my comments in Question 2 regarding, in particular, although not exclusively, B.B.C.2 and B.B.C.2W.

In respect of digital radio the Review states: "meeting its target to extend D.A.B. radio coverage to 90% of the U.K. population." This cannot be an accurate statement as, before analogue transmissions are switched off, it MUST be an absolute requirement that every home in the country has access to digital radio transmissions

and this prerequisite applies equally to digital "free to air" television transmissions.

QUESTION 5: Yes, I support the proposal for a further review of alternative funding methods, providing that these are not prohibitive.

QUESTION 6: I believe that, in general, the licence fee is excellent value for money. With regard to the concessions, these should continue providing that they are administered fairly. (The pensioners concession, for example, should be available in all cases where need is the factor, and not just for older pensioners.) Even if I had access to the internet I would not wish to conduct any personal monetary transactions via this as it seems to me that the system is open to abuse. I would have no objection to direct debit.

My particular complaint in respect of the way in which the licence fee is used is duplication and replication. Recently we have "enjoyed" the rugby union coverage — a moot point as I am a football fan! — from the B.B.C.: but I would dearly love someone to explain to me why it is necessary to duplicate cover on two

T.V. channels (B.B.C. 1 or 2 AND S.4C) and at least three radio stations (5 Live or 5 Live Sports Extra; Radio Wales AND Radio Cymru.) As well as five different sets of commentators and analysts per Welsh match, there are presumably also five sets of producers and technicians etc. In the case of replication, there appears to be an increasing vogue to 'copy' networked formats and reproduce them at regional level. If the regional version improves on the original then that is fair enough: often it does not.

Still on the subject of the licence fee, and referring to page 59 of the Review, sections 4.3 and 4.4, I would say that if Government expects the B.B.C. to help develop, promote, and help to fund the digital switchover, then the B.B.C. still needs the income generated by the fee. While I agree that subscription and on-demand payments are ultimately the future of T.V. funding, this should not be the case for B.B.C. channels whilst the licence fee is still in force. (Although I would be happy to pay a reasonable additional fee for a B.B.C. dedicated sports channel.)

The Review further states that viewing may not now "be confined to T.V. sets" but by whatever

means people choose to view, if they are watching a B.B.C. channel, they are still using B.B.C. services and these still have to be funded! As to commercial funding, I would say "No" to advertising and "Possibly" to sponsorship; but (to quote) "direct funding from Government" — No! No! No! and NO! again!

QUESTION 7: For the most part the roles of the B.B.C. Trust and the Executive Board have been defined well. I am a little unsure, however, who will be arbitor for the "public value test." Who decides whether my life would be enhanced by watching Premiership football or whether it would be better for me to watch ever more of that ghastly man, Jonathon Ross?

QUESTION 8: Yes, this is probably an adequate definition of the public interest remit of the B.B.C. Trust.

QUESTION 9: Of the options given, I would like to see 1 and 3, i.e. "meet in public" and "publish the minutes of meetings and the results of every piece of research" adopted

QUESTION 10: There should be an efficient telephone complaints procedure to enable the B.B.C. Trust

to deal with viewers' and listeners' complaints promptly. Written complaints to the B.B.C. should be dealt with by the person or department to whom it has been addressed and not passed to regional level — with the complainant receiving an off-hand, 'take it or leave it' reply!

QUESTION 11: I think that the B.B.C. Trust needs a minimum of five members: maximum, twelve.

QUESTION 12: In addition to the skills and expertise listed in the section headed "Membership of the Trust", I believe that members should be in touch with or, at the very least, aware of what viewers and listeners of all age-groups, across all areas of the country, really want from the various services provided.

QUESTION 13: It is surely obvious that Trust members should represent all communities and interest groups whilst not favouring one over another.

QUESTION 14: Always assuming that the quality of programmes does not suffer, I agree that a "window of creative competition" could work; my support for

"a raised quota for independent production in B.B.C. television" is also subject to that assumption. In the section 'Organisation and Infrastructure' however, it is also stated "that will involve making a greater contribution to regional programming for regional audiences." This statement assumes again that viewers (and listeners) in the regions are not interested in the B.B.C.'s main, networked output. Take, for example, the excellent political discussion programme "Question Time". Those viewers in Wales who wish to interact with the programme cannot do so as here it is shown at least 30 minutes later, preceded by the remark that "some interactive services may not be available". The reason for this is the repeat showing of the regional programme 'Dragon's Eye' which has usually already been shown two hours earlier on B.B.C.2W! My point being that this regional programme should not interfere with my viewing of a networked programme which I have enjoyed for years.

QUESTION 15: I am in full agreement with the B.B.C.'s proposition to extend its existing voluntary 10% quota. As a dedicated viewer/listener of all sports, any increase in coverage - especially on the B.B.C. - is very good.

news; providing that everyone who wants to listen to it is able to receive the channels on which it is broadcast. [I am thinking especially of 5 Live Sports Extra which I can only receive at present if our I.D.T.V. is not being watched.]

QUESTION 16: Yes, I agree that the B.B.C. should be able to propose changes to its range of services during the course of the next decade - providing that such proposals are not to the detriment of the service as a whole.

QUESTION 17: Broadly speaking, yes, I agree with the proposals given for the handling of new services.

QUESTION 18: I feel that there should be some degree of flexibility with regard to the B.B.C.'s commercial services. As the Review indicates that these are to be encouraged so as to generate income, then surely, as long as such services are of good quality, only a tenuous link to programming need be apparent.

QUESTION 19: I would be happy for the existing fair trading commitment to continue.

QUESTION 20: No. I disagree strongly that part of the licence

fee should be award to other broadcasters. Commercial channels were set up as that and should not receive any part of a fee specifically aimed at a non-commercial (by which I mean no on-screen advertising) organisation.

To summarise, I feel that the B.B.C. offers an excellent service to its viewers and listeners. I am worried, however that my region, Wales, is becoming increasingly marginalised and is being deprived of some of the network's programmes, especially on B.B.C.2. This situation will worsen when analogue is switched off in the case of households unable to receive digital transmissions by any other method than 'free to air' either because the "main" B.B.C.2 (or 1) channel is unavailable in the area, or because of financial restrictions.

If you print my views, please do so without publishing my name and address as I have no wish to antagonise any of the more Nationalistic factions in Wales — or, indeed, any of my relatives who do not share these views.

In conclusion, I hope that my observations will be useful to the Review and I look forward to learning of its findings in due course.

Yours sincerely