

March 4th 2005

Dear Michelle McCarthy,

Please find attached my response to the BBC Charter Review Green Paper Consultation, as requested.

For clarity I have presented my response in Report form.

NOTE:- As mentioned on page 18 of the Green Paper, I do not give permission for my name and address to be released on request to any third parties.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course,

Yours Sincerely

REPORT ON BBC CHARTER REVIEW GREEN PAPER CONSULTATION

1.0 TERMS OF REFERENCE

I was asked to respond to the proposals within the BBC Charter Review Green Paper Consultation.

2.0 PROCEDURE

After reading the Green Paper in full I have sought to answer each of the Key Proposals and Questions for Consultation contained on pages 8-15 of the Green Paper.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Do You Think It Is Helpful to Define the BBC's Purposes in this Way?

They are alright as far as they go, but are too vague for their meaning not to be ambiguous and to be interpreted by different people in different ways. They should be written more clearly and definitely so to give a clear idea of their meaning and purpose that cannot be blurred by someone wishing to get around them in some way.

3.2 Are These the Right Purposes?

Again, they are alright as far as they go, however there are several areas that are not included that should be, as follows.

3.2.1 Who Are the Audience?

The majority of programmes on the BBC and their tone are aimed at a younger audience, whereas many of the younger audiences are either out for the evening, studying, on the Internet or socialising. Whereas the older agegroups, particularly pensioners, are more likely to be watching and are increasingly frustrated by the lack of programmes aimed at their agegroup either in content or in tone.

It would be sensible to undertake a comprehensive nationwide survey of who watches the BBC most in terms of agegroups.

It would also be sensible to provide for the older agegroups increasingly on BBC1 and BBC2, whereas the younger agegroups should be provided for increasingly on BBC3 and, instead of terrestrial television, through Internet services of the BBC that they use more anyway.

Commercial channels might concentrate on younger agegroups more because they are the most fickle and pliable in terms of commercials that sustain commercial channels, however, the BBC is a Public Service Broadcaster and has no need to follow suit.

3.2.2 British Identity

The role of the BBC should be to reinforce morality, not to question it or to blur it through showing extreme viewpoints for whatever reason.

The role of the BBC should be to reinforce the fact that all Britain are one nation and subjects of a Monarchy, rather than encouraging fragmentation of groups.

The role of the BBC is to reflect the religious beliefs of the majority of Britons, rather than to reflect the views of minorities and ignore the rest or assume that the rest are Atheists. Some 75% of Britons at the last Census in 2001 said they were Christian - a clear majority that should be reflected by the BBC as the national broadcaster and as a Public Service Broadcaster.

3.3 Are These the Right Characteristics?

They are all too vague and are open to interpretation by populist broadcasters who would continue to provide for the lowest common denominator. The characteristics must be clear enough for this not to be the case and must state clearly that the BBC must not follow commercial trends and provide for the lowest common denominator.

3.4 Do You Agree that the BBC Should be at the Forefront of Developments in Technology, including Digital Television?

The BBC is the best placed to do this, given its track record over the years.

3.5 Do You Support the Proposal for a Further Review of Alternative Funding Methods Before the End of the Next Charter Period?

Yes, I think it's vital to keep this as an ongoing issue through 2016 and beyond.

3.6 Do You Have a View on Any Aspect of the Operation of the License Fee - Concessions, Collection or its Enforcement?

It should be made free to all over 60s, rather than the current over 75s.

3.7 Have We Defined the Roles of the BBC Trust and the Executive Board Sufficiently Clearly?

They are clear enough as far as they go, but they should clearly state that their purpose is not to blindly defend the BBC against complaints which is what happened prior to the Hutton Inquiry and that they are answerable to the license fee payers, the viewers, rather than to the BBC. They must be totally impartial, like a Judge would have to be in a court of law.

3.8 Is This the Right Way to Define the Public Interest Remit of the BBC Trust?

They are too vague and should be more clearly defined, as mentioned in 3.7 above.

In addition the 4th point, 'doesn't unfairly or unduly damage commercial media businesses' must be removed entirely because it is an open door for a continuation or return to lowest common denominator programmes and to follow commercial trends.

The BBC owes nothing to commercial interests and must not provide for them or allow lowering of standards for them. The BBC must remember that it is a Public Service Broadcaster. The BBC must lead - not follow!

3.9 How Many of These Options Would You Like to See Adopted in the Trust's Statement of Promises? Are There Any Other Options That You Would Like to See Considered?

These options are fine as long as they are carried out against the points outlined in 3.7 and 3.8 above.

3.10 Have You Any Views About How the BBC Trust Should Handle Complaints?

As mentioned above, the complaints must be handled totally impartially, totally independent of Government and of the BBC itself. They should be considered with the same impartiality of a Judge in a court of law. In fact it would be a good idea for those who are chairing the complaints meetings to be retired judges because of the impartiality they would bring to the hearings as well as their strong impartial views on morality and legality.

3.11 How Many Members Do You Think the BBC Trust Needs?

As few as possible. The more members there are, the more viewpoints have to be considered and the harder it is to agree on a consensus of opinion, leading to a lowest common denominator verdict.

3.12 What Skills and Expertise Do You Think They Need?

As mentioned in 3.10 above, they should have a legal background, but they should also have a Broadcasting background so that they understand Broadcasting as a Broadcaster, not as an Accountant or Economist.

3.13 Are There Any Particular Communities or Interest Groups That You Think the Trust Members Should Represent?

Apart from Judges and Broadcasters, No. This is because for every group included there is another not included.

It is also vitally important that the Trust not be allowed to be 'hijacked' by minority and/or pressure groups with their own minority viewpoints and/or extreme viewpoints that they wish to aggressively pursue.

3.14 Do You Think a Window of Creative Competition Can Be Made to Work? If Not, Would You Support a Raised Quota for Independent Production in BBC Television?

To the former, no. Any competition will ultimately lead to a continuation of or return to lowest common denominator programmes.

To the latter, no. Too many independent programmes made for the BBC rather than by the BBC will dilute the aimed-for quality of BBC programmes.

3.15 Do You Think a Voluntary 10% Quota for Radio is Sufficient? Should the Quota be Increased or Made Mandatory?

There should be no increase. The voluntary 10% could, however, be made mandatory.

3.16 Do You Agree That the BBC Should be Able to Propose Changes to its Range of Services Over the Course of the Next 10 Years?

I see no merit in the proposed changes and do not recommend any of them.

3.17 Do You Agree with Our Proposals for Handling New Services?

Same answer as 3.16 above. Same reasons.

3.18 How Strictly Should the BBC's Commercial Services be restricted to Those Businesses that are Linked to Public Purposes and Public Services?

Very strictly, however I refer you to the comments made on BBC Internet services in 3.2.1 above.

3.19 Is the Existing Fair Trading Commitment a Useful Addition to the Arrangements for Regulating the BBC's Commercial Services? If Not, What Option Would You Prefer?

Yes it is, however, I refer you to the comments in 3.19 above.

3.20 Do You Agree That the Case for a Plurality of Publicly-funded Broadcasters Should be Kept Under Review?

Yes. However, any plurality must not be read as competition as this would unduly and ultimately lead to a return to lowest common denominator programmes.

3.21 Additional Points.

3.21.1 Tone and Dignity.

Over the decades the BBC used a succession of idents to introduce programmes that featured the globe. This reflected dignity and quality. In 1997 this was partially replaced by a balloon featuring a globe pattern. This looked less dignified and cheapened the overall tone of the BBC's image to viewers.

However, this was nothing compared with the damage done by the introduction of the current images introduced in 2002. To say that they lack dignity is putting it mildly. They lack dignity, charm and quality. They reduce the image of the BBC, at least on BBC1 where they are used, to some sort of pseudo-MTV ghettos for lowest common denominator television where the only people watching are yobboes, tramps drug-addicts.

If the BBC seriously wants to improve its perceived image, these images on BBC1 must be scrapped immediately and replaced with something with dignity. A return to the BBC globe image or the BBC crest, used on BBC News from 1993-1999, would be good for the BBC's perceived image of dignity, quality and history as the nations broadcaster as the 70th anniversary of television approaches in 2006.

3.21.2 The case for Repeats.

Viewers clearly enjoy repeats of vintage programmes, either for nostalgia, or for social interest, or as new viewers seeing them for the first time to whom they are, in effect, new programmes.

In recent years, the BBC has simply shown repeats of repeats of repeats - the same series over and over again. Examples being Keeping Up Appearances, Allo Allo, The Good Life, Dad's Army, Steptoe and Son and Blackadder. Excellent as these programmes are, viewers grow weary of them and, therefore, there should be variation of repeats. Repeats have their place as mentioned above, however, they must be varied and fresh as newymade programmes are. It would be a good idea to have a question included in any future questionnaire for viewers asking them simply what series they would like to see again, or see for the first time, on BBC1 and BBC2. Repeats on BBC1 and BBC2 should also be seen as an introduction of the heritage of the BBC and of British Broadcasting and could lead viewers, in turn, to purchase BBC Videos and to view even more of the BBC's archives elsewhere. Repeats of vintage programmes of ITV should also be considered as they have been shown in the past, examples already shown include the ATV Morecambe and Wise Show.

3.21.3

British Heritage Shown in Films

A recent study showed that the majority of films shown on terrestrial television are less than 20 years old and American. This must change. Viewers can and should

be able to view vintage British films the same way as television mentioned in 3.21.2 above. Also many pensioners, viewing in the afternoons, would find this particularly nostalgic. Examples of vintage comedy shown to great effect on the BBC in the daytime schedules include Laurel and Hardy, The Falcon and the Basil Rathbone Sherlock Holmes films.

Examples of British performers not shown on BBC television for many years, but very popular on video indeed, include George Formby, Will Hay, The Crazy Gang, Old Mother Riley, Gracie Fields and Charlie Chaplin. This issue should be considered very seriously as the great British heritage of British film-making and performers of the 20th century must not be ignored.

3.21.4 Presenters and Newsreaders.

There has been a great change in the presentation of news and other current affairs programmes, where the style of presentation has become laboured and mechanical. Individual presenters and newsreaders are:-

3.21.4.1 Talking Too Quickly

3.21.4.2 Talking Too Melodramatically and Forcefully

3.21.4.3 Behaving in a Manner Best Described as Manic, Hyperactive and Overexcited.

This is particularly offensive to the ear in news broadcasts and weather forecasts.

3.21.4.4 Reading News Broadcasts in a Style Far Too Laidback and Casual.

Newsreaders and correspondents must remember that their audience are mature thinking adults and not the viewers of Newsround and Top of the Pops.

3.21.4.5 Using Arm Movements and Pointing and Gesturing Too Often in a Mechanical Ritual That Looks Like a Nervous Twitch and Is Distracting and Offensive to the Eye.

This is particularly noticeable on news broadcasts and weather forecasts.

A good example of how to look and behave is American newsreaders and weather forecasters that emanate maturity, respect, trust and dignity that news and current affairs programmes must have if they are to have any credibility with the public.

Compare and contrast last year's controversy with Dan Rather of CBS getting a story wrong and apologising personally on the air for the loss of trust this engendered. Also the great sense of loss by the American public of the retirement from NBC Nightly News of Tom Brokaw and the imminent retirement from CBS Evening News of Dan Rather and the continuing respect for Peter Jennings presenting ABC World News Tonight.

Compare and contrast this with the view of the public towards the BBC following the Hutton Inquiry and after the publication of the Hutton Report. The public should have been behind the BBC if it trusted the BBC. However, the public was mistrustful of the BBC's reporting methods and held both the Government and the BBC in equal suspicion. This is not good for a national Broadcaster and must be addressed.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Green Paper must be tightened up in several key areas and be made more clear and specific in the intentions of the BBC over the next decade.

Of equal importance is the BBC's need to increase its perceived image with the public - to be more upmarket in its programmes, more mature, dignified and sober in its presentation and image.

I hope that these issues will be taken into account and included in the ongoing Renewal process.

March 4th 2005