



**The Constitution Unit**

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BBC Charter Review  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
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Dear Review Team

I am writing to provide some input into the Charter Review process. Earlier this year I wrote a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled *Must Politics Disappoint?* which looked at the much-discussed issue of political disengagement, falling electoral turnout, and trust in politicians. In this I argued that we must go much further than simply tinkering with our political institutions if we want to rebuild an engaged politics, including looking at the broader culture in which politics now exists.

One of the chapters in the pamphlet addresses the question of the media, and in particular emphasises the importance of the BBC as a cultural asset. It suggests that the BBC has a key role in maintaining a healthy British democracy, by providing balanced political coverage and the information on which citizens must base their political decisions. However, it also proposes that the BBC needs to change in order to fulfil this role adequately. At present it has become infected by the 'culture of contempt' which the political media in general shows towards the political class, and which – I argue - is helping to corrode our trust in politicians. It is also not doing enough to counter the deficit in political information left by the commercial media. I suggest therefore that the BBC, and the government during the Charter Review process, should carefully reflect on the unique role that it has in maintaining democracy. Rather than joining the 'pack mentality' in aggressively pursuing and blaming politicians, responsible journalists should more often present the dilemmas politicians face in ways that will engage people and help us take collective decisions as a society. In fulfilling this important role the BBC cannot and should not be expected to compete in a market which too often drives quality down. Instead we should celebrate and nurture the reputation that the corporation has built as a purveyor of reliable news, and seek to build upon and improve it.

I enclose a copy of the pamphlet. The relevant section is on page 27 – 34.

Yours sincerely

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