

Section 1: Foundations of a 21st century BBC

1. The role of the BBC

Our policy

The BBC is the origin and cornerstone of public service broadcasting in the UK. It is a key part of our culture and our public realm and it plays an important role in making our democracy function.

The BBC's traditional mission has been to 'inform, educate and entertain.' But in today's complex media market, where many other broadcasters are fulfilling some part of this very general remit to some degree, the BBC's role needs to be more clearly defined and more widely understood. In this Chapter, we have set out the five enduring public purposes we expect it to fulfil through its programming and other activities. The next Chapter adds a sixth, additional purpose that has particular relevance for the next Charter period – building digital Britain.

In delivering these purposes, the BBC also needs to make sure its programmes are of high quality and that they are original, innovative, challenging and engaging. And together they need to continue to reach a wide audience across the UK, across the whole range of different genres of programming.

The BBC should aim to be distinctive from commercially-funded services: it should compete on the basis of quality, not aggressively for ratings. The vast majority of BBC programmes should contribute to its public purposes – those programmes that make no direct contribution must be able to justify themselves in terms of their excellence or distinctiveness. It should set standards for other broadcasters in terms of the quality and distinctiveness of its services and their contribution to UK programming and production.

Why is public money put into broadcasting?

- 1.1 Public service broadcasting costs the UK around £3.4 billion every year, and nearly £3 billion of public funding goes to the BBC in the form of the TV licence fee². But why do we put such a large amount of public money into broadcasting and not other creative industries, like the music industry or publishing? For two main reasons:
- broadcasting can contribute to society in ways that other media do not; and
 - as citizens, we wouldn't get everything that we have come to expect from broadcasting if we relied on commercial providers alone.
- 1.2 Television and radio audiences are huge. Almost every programme on the major terrestrial channels will reach millions of people simultaneously. That places such broadcasters in a

² Ofcom estimate that the opportunity costs of public service obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and Five total around £400 million every year – see Ofcom review of public service television broadcasting, *Phase 2 – Meeting the Digital Challenge*, p. 22

uniquely powerful position, and since the BBC was first established, in the 1920s, it has been commonly accepted that such power should be harnessed for society's good. Audience research shows that the public agree with this principle³. They want programmes to inform and educate as well as entertain. They recognise the positive contribution that broadcasting can make to the effective functioning of democracy. While they continue to watch television and listen to the radio in such large numbers, it will retain the potential to deliver these benefits.

- 1.3 Audiences will not reap the full benefit, however, without large-scale public funding. As the scale and sophistication of pay-TV options increase, television viewers may benefit from an increased choice and diversity of different types of service. Ofcom's review of public service broadcasting has concluded that fully commercial providers will never provide us with high quality public service broadcasting on anything like the current scale. There are some things that we value about television – for example its ability to interest us in new ideas, the way it can reflect the lives of other communities – on which we need to spend public money, and for which we need the BBC.
- 1.4 The case for public service radio is, if anything, stronger than that for TV. Even if audiences wanted to pay for the sort of distinctive content that the BBC provides, there is as yet no price mechanism that could allow them to do so. Radio is entirely free-to-listen. Commercial stations do fulfil a public service role in some ways – particularly through the provision of news and local information. However, the only available commercial models rely on advertising and sponsorship and commercial stations therefore tend to cluster towards the middle ground of taste, in order to reach the greatest possible audience. Whereas average audiences for the BBC's main television channels are falling as digital competition increases, in radio, digital development has yet to have a significant effect on audiences, which remain relatively stable for the larger, well-established stations.
- 1.5 In the last decade, the BBC has moved beyond broadcasting into online and interactive services. Such services do not generally have the same sort of mass impact as television or radio programmes – the internet is a more personal, one-to-one medium. Nevertheless the internet is an increasingly important source of information for millions, and the BBC has established itself as a central, trusted presence in the online world. BBC Online is the most popular site in the UK. In this context, the independent review of BBC Online conducted by Philip Graf⁴ identified some clear purposes for BBC Online that place it alongside the BBC's television and radio services – sustaining social values and providing high quality, innovative and accessible content for UK users. In addition, that review noted that BBC Online plays a valuable role in the development of the web itself: using the BBC's position as a trusted guide to bring new users to the internet; encouraging users to try new interactive technology; and setting a benchmark of innovation and creativity. The BBC's internet presence also offers valuable support to its traditional TV and radio programmes – for instance in its ground-breaking coverage of the 2004 Olympics. Increasingly, it will give viewers and listeners a new way of finding and using BBC broadcast content.

³ Ofcom review of public service television broadcasting, Phase 1 – *Is Television Special?*

⁴ Report of the Independent Review of BBC Online – see www.bbccharterreview.org.uk

What are the public purposes of the BBC?

The current Charter and the Communications Act

1.6 The current Royal Charter gives the BBC a general objective to provide, as public services, sound and television programmes of information, education and entertainment for general reception in the UK. Some of the purposes of the BBC are set out in slightly more detail in its current Agreement with Government.⁵ The terms of the Agreement are reflected in the statutory purposes of public service broadcasting (PSB) set out in section 264 of the Communications Act 2003. Even in the Agreement, however, the BBC's objectives are framed in quite general terms. To fulfil them, the BBC is expected to provide programmes of certain specific types. Box 1.1 provides a summary.

Box 1.1 The existing purposes of the BBC

The purposes of the BBC are to:

- deal with a wide range of subjects;
- cater for the widest possible range of audiences – across different types of programme; and
- maintain the highest standards of programme-making.

To fulfil these purposes, the BBC is asked to:

- inform, educate and entertain; and
- support an appropriate range and proportion of production outside London.

The BBC must also support the following types of programming:

- programmes that reflect UK cultural activity (through drama, comedy, arts, music and feature film);
- news and current affairs (domestic and international);
- sport and leisure;
- education;
- science;
- religion;
- programmes addressing international and social issues;
- children's programmes;
- programming reflecting different communities, interests and traditions within the UK (including those of local communities in particular parts of the UK).

The need for a new definition

1.7 The existing definition of purposes needs to be refined. The headline mission – to 'inform, educate and entertain' through a wide range of subjects targeted at a wide range of audiences – is essentially unchanged from the original remit given to the BBC in the 1920s. It has given the BBC the freedom to expand and develop its services over the past eighty years. But while it remains valid, it is no longer sufficient.

⁵ See Chapter 2 for an explanation of how the BBC's Charter and Agreement are structured

- 1.8 Today's media market is much more complex than that of the 1920s. Viewers and listeners now have far more choice, and if they are to continue to pay for the BBC they need to have a much clearer understanding of what they can expect it to provide. The independent panel on Charter Review has concluded that the BBC's remit should give it a mandate to 'maintain a powerful presence over a range of content and channels' but that it should also set out the limits of that mandate.⁶
- 1.9 We agree that clarity of purpose is vital. It is not enough to say that everything the BBC does, being funded by the public, must constitute public service broadcasting. Many commercial media companies now provide elements of information, education and entertainment. To retain a distinctive role, the BBC needs to have a more closely defined set of purposes that can be understood by the Corporation, by commercial rivals and by the public.
- 1.10 Nor should the BBC's purposes be defined in terms of the sorts of programmes it is expected to provide. The case for the public funding of the BBC, and for public service broadcasting in general, is based on the benefits it can bring to society. The BBC should be set objectives that reflect those benefits. It should be defined by its goals as a public service – not only by its programming output.
- 1.11 'Inform, educate and entertain' should remain the mission statement of the BBC, but the new Charter should explain more clearly how we expect that mission to be achieved. It should set out a coherent set of public purposes. Over the last year, work has been done by Ofcom, by the BBC and through our own public consultation to define these purposes. The results, set out below, show a striking degree of consensus.

The public's view of the BBC

- 1.12 What do the public think those purposes should be? Research shows that audiences recognise and value the fact that broadcasting can fulfil a social purpose beyond entertainment. They agree that television should provide debate and information, high-quality UK programming and a 'balanced diet' of different types of programmes for different audience groups.⁷
- 1.13 We asked people what they particularly valued about the BBC, through quantitative surveys, qualitative research and wide consultation.⁸ There was very strong support for what respondents felt were two particularly distinctive characteristics: its independence and its lack of advertising. People also mentioned the BBC's positive contribution to society in a number of areas, summarised in box 1.2.

⁶ Independent Panel on BBC Charter Review, *Emerging themes*, pp. 8-9

⁷ Ofcom review of public service broadcasting, *Phase 1 – Is television special?*, p. 48

⁸ For full, detailed results see DCMS Review of the BBC's Royal Charter, *What you said about the BBC*

Box 1.2 What people value about the BBC

In our public consultation and research, people mentioned the BBC's role in:

Education

47% think the BBC can be described as 'educational' – more than twice as many as think the same of any other major broadcaster

53% watch documentaries on the BBC and 24% say they would like to see more

"If you want something a bit more educational then you go to BBC 1 and 2" (AB, 16-20, medium TV watcher, Scotland)

Sustaining an informed democracy

85% think the BBC has an important role in keeping the public well informed

62% think the BBC provides better UK news and current affairs programming than any other broadcaster

84% listen to or watch BBC news every week

Supporting the UK's culture

75% believe the BBC is important to British culture

Qualitative research demonstrated the value people place on the BBC's contribution to creativity in the visual arts, music and film

Representing the UK's different Nations, regions and communities

42% think the BBC is the best broadcaster of information about their area or region (level with ITV)

Many people feel the BBC is too focused on London

In the devolved Nations, there is a strong view that the BBC should aim to reflect the lives of different communities back to the whole of the UK – not just to those communities themselves

Promoting the UK abroad and reflecting international issues at home

49% think the BBC has a good reputation in the world – more than agree with any other prompted description of the BBC

The World Service is almost universally praised

In the US, 40% of opinion-formers in Boston, Washington and New York say they use BBC news every week

Setting standards for other broadcasters

The most common spontaneous response, when people were asked what they valued about the BBC, was 'high quality programmes'

64% agree that 'parents can rely on the quality of the BBC's children's programmes'. There was an even higher level of agreement among those with children.

Ofcom PSB review

- 1.14 Ofcom has combined an analysis of market failure in television with the results of its own audience research to put forward a definition of the purposes of public service television broadcasting (PSB) that is summarised in box 1.3. In establishing the principles that broadcasters should work towards, this goes beyond the Communications Act's classification of the different types of PSB programming (news, sport, arts, religion and so on). Indeed Ofcom is clear that public service broadcasting should no longer be defined in terms of 'specific types of programmes or the output of certain institutions', the BBC included.

Box 1.3 Ofcom's proposed PSB purposes and characteristics

Ofcom suggests that PSB should in future be defined in terms of purposes and characteristics, rather than in terms of specific types of programmes or the output of certain institutions. PSB should also aim to ensure that TV continues to provide high-quality material of a kind and on a scale that the market, left to itself, would not provide. Ofcom proposes that the purposes of public service broadcasting should be:

- to inform ourselves and others and to increase our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas;
- to stimulate our interest in and knowledge of arts, science, history and other topics through content that is accessible and can encourage informal learning;
- to reflect and strengthen our cultural identity through original programming at UK, national and regional level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences; and
- to make us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints, through programmes that reflect the lives of other people and other communities, both within the UK and elsewhere.

Ofcom also suggests that PSB programmes should have distinctive characteristics. These are:

- **high quality** – well-funded and well-produced;
- **original** – new content, rather than repeats or acquisitions;
- **innovative** – breaking new ideas or re-inventing exciting approaches, rather than copying old ones;
- **challenging** – making viewers think;
- **engaging** – remaining accessible and enjoyed by viewers; and
- **widely available** – if content is publicly funded, a large majority of citizens need to be given the chance to watch it.

- 1.15 Ofcom's purposes and characteristics will be the basis on which the programming output of the other major terrestrial television broadcasters is judged. But for the BBC, they do not represent the whole picture. The BBC also runs radio and internet services alongside its television operation, and in some areas it has a role as a public institution that goes beyond

programming, into community development, education and cultural patronage. Ofcom has itself acknowledged that there may be a different set of public purposes for radio, and is conducting further work to consider what these might be.

The BBC's view – Building Public Value

1.16 The BBC – in *Building Public Value* – has suggested there are five key areas in which it adds 'public value'.⁹ Its list is broadly consistent with Ofcom's and with the BBC formulation from the last Charter Review process. Three of the five forms of public value correspond to Ofcom's purposes. However, the BBC adds two additional BBC-specific roles: the creation of cultural value through the support it offers the creative sector; and the showcase it offers for British values, culture and talent to audiences overseas. The BBC also suggests that it will need to play a key role in the next decade helping to develop and extend new digital services across the UK.

Box 1.4 The BBC's definition of its own public purposes

The BBC creates public value in five main ways:

- Democratic value: the BBC supports civic life and national debate by providing trusted and impartial news and information that helps citizens make sense of the world and encourages them to engage with it.
- Cultural and creative value: the BBC enriches the UK's cultural life by bringing talent and audiences together to break new ground, to celebrate our cultural heritage, to broaden the national conversation.
- Educational value: by offering audiences of every age a world of formal and informal educational opportunity in every medium, the BBC helps build a society strong in knowledge and skills.
- Social and community value: by enabling the UK's many communities to see what they hold in common and how they differ, the BBC seeks to build social cohesion and tolerance through greater understanding.
- Global value: the BBC supports the UK's global role by being the world's most trusted provider of international news and information, and by showcasing the best of British culture to a global audience.

Conclusion

1.17 The BBC should continue to meet all its legal obligations to provide certain specific types of programmes. Ultimately, however, it should be defined in terms of its broad public purposes rather than by the number of hours of any particular sort of programming that appear in the schedule. What matters is the impact of its activities and the benefits they bring the public. Our public consultation, and the informed seminars that Lord Burns and his independent panel have held, have demonstrated that there is broad agreement among the public and the broadcasting industry with the sort of analysis set out by Ofcom and by the BBC itself. The process of consultation has helped us define the core purposes that we think BBC services should fulfil:

⁹ As part of Charter Review, the BBC submitted papers outlining the contribution it makes to building public value in each of these five ways. The papers can be found at bbccharterreview.org.uk

Sustaining citizenship and civil society

- Informing ourselves and others and increasing our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas

Promoting education and learning

- Stimulating our interest in and knowledge of a full range of subjects and issues through content that is accessible and can encourage either formal or informal learning
- Providing specialist educational programmes and accompanying material to facilitate learning at all levels and for all ages

Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

- Enriching the cultural life of the UK through creative excellence in distinctive and original programming
- Fostering creativity and nurturing talent – using the licence fee as venture capital for creativity
- Promoting interest, engagement and participation in cultural activity among new audiences

Representing the UK, its Nations, regions and communities

- Reflecting and strengthening our cultural identity through original programming at UK, national and regional level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences
- Making us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints, through content that reflects the lives of other people and other communities within the UK

Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

- Making UK audiences aware of international issues and of the different cultures and viewpoints of people living outside the UK
- Bringing high-quality international news coverage to a global audience through radio, TV and new media

The BBC's commercial services also have a role in supporting this last purpose by showcasing the best of UK creativity, culture and talent for global audiences, thereby generating additional value for the BBC licence fee payer.

A separate section, at the end of this chapter, provides more detail on the ways in which we expect the BBC to fulfil each of these public purposes. Chapter 2 explains the role we expect the BBC to play in fulfilling a sixth purpose – building digital Britain.

What sort of content will contribute to these purposes?

- 1.18 The BBC's public purposes represent the organisation's reason for being – they are the justification for spending billions of pounds of public money. They mainly deal with the first two parts of the Corporation's mission – to inform and to educate. But viewers also look to the BBC for high quality entertainment, and the BBC needs to provide programmes that large audiences enjoy, so the public feels that its money is being well spent. It should not be a broadcaster that only shows minority-interest programming. It should provide a wide

range of programmes, across every genre, trying to reach the widest possible range of audiences. Where possible, programmes should appeal to new viewers as well as their existing audience.

- 1.19 This conclusion is consistent with Ofcom's view that public service TV should display certain **characteristics** or qualities. One such characteristic is 'widely available', and BBC services should certainly all be made widely available (on a range of digital platforms, where appropriate). In addition, publicly-funded programmes should be excellent, distinctive and entertaining. In delivering public purposes, therefore, BBC content, in radio and new media as well as television, should aim to follow Ofcom's suggestion that it be:
- of high quality;
 - challenging;
 - original;
 - innovative;
 - engaging.
- 1.20 All BBC services should strive to fulfil the full range of public purposes. Not every individual programme (or piece of internet content) will always fulfil such a purpose – although the vast majority should. However every programme should display at least one of the characteristics listed above.

Performance measurement

- 1.21 All BBC programmes should aim to contribute in some way to at least one public purpose or to display at least one of the characteristics of excellence and distinctiveness set out above. The set of purposes and characteristics should form the basis for a new, more rigorous system of regulation and performance measurement. That system needs to measure the extent to which audiences value programmes and services, and their impact, as well as measuring the amount of each sort of programming that has been provided. It should also ensure that the BBC meets all the requirements made of it in the Communications Act. We make more detailed proposals about the way such a system might function in Chapter 5, on governance and regulation.

Setting a benchmark

- 1.22 The BBC exists within an ever-more complex broadcasting market, and within a system of public service broadcasting that extends to ITV, Channel 4, Five, S4C and Teletext. The Communications Act established the BBC's position at the top of the hierarchy of public service broadcasters. As such, it should:
- broadcast programmes across the full range of the public service broadcasting remit set down in the Act, both on television and radio;
 - support the types of programmes – for instance in classical music – that commercial broadcasters don't tend to commission.

1.23 There was a marked perception in the focus groups we conducted – both last year and at the start of this year – that the standards of BBC TV programming were declining. In particular, there was concern about the number of repeats and the extent of ‘dumbing down’, derivative and ‘copycat’ programming. Ofcom research (for phase 1 of its review of public service broadcasting) suggests that television viewers are also concerned by the amount of competitive head-to-head scheduling that the main terrestrial channels engage in. The BBC should aim to complement what is available on commercial channels, rather than always competing directly against it. Its role should involve:

- setting high benchmarks, across all types of programming, that the rest of the industry has to live up to – avoiding derivative formats, for example, and being clear that it should compete on grounds of quality not just share;
- ensuring that all journalism is fair and precise and that all journalists are thoroughly trained;
- adopting a public service approach to scheduling – not competing aggressively to take audiences away from PSB content on other terrestrial channels, but seeking to offer a complementary schedule that offers the widest possible choice for audiences.

1.24 As our major publicly-funded broadcaster, the BBC also has a particular responsibility to serve UK audiences by:

- providing more original programming (not repeated or bought-in) than any other broadcaster;
- supporting local and regional programming and out-of-London production;
- offering a fair deal and transparent terms to independent producers, to ensure the best ideas are commissioned.

The BBC should stay out of bidding wars for expensive foreign imports except where it is clear that no other terrestrial broadcaster would show all the programmes or films in question, or that the acquisition would clearly contribute to a public purpose.

1.25 The BBC recently unveiled a new programme strategy that makes welcome steps towards re-establishing its position as a standards setter. It commits the BBC to:

- set standards of excellence and innovation;
- reduce the number of peak-time repeats and derivative or formulaic programmes;
- invest more in original UK drama, comedy, news, documentaries, the arts and music.

A strategy for other BBC activities

1.26 The BBC is not only a broadcaster. Beyond its programming output, the BBC runs cultural educational and community outreach projects that often have no direct link to television or radio services.

1.27 For example, the BBC says it ‘creates a range of learning output because it aims to reach everybody and to engage them in active learning’¹⁰ and it provides online resources such as GCSE *Bitesize* and *Skillswise*. For hard-to-reach communities, the BBC told the Independent

¹⁰ BBC, *The BBC's learning impact* (September 2004)

Panel that its commitment to universality moved it to find 'non-traditional ways of reaching people'¹¹. This activity extends to running 7 Learning Centres and 12 Learning Buses, helping to deliver skills and learning to hard-to-reach groups throughout the UK. It has also included the publication of a free magazine, *Cashwise*, to teach basic financial management skills through distribution to libraries, colleges and Jobcentre Plus.

- 1.28 Much of this activity is valuable. Some of it has high impact – 69% of Year 11 pupils use GCSE *Bitesize*, for instance. However, the link to the Corporation's publicly-funded broadcasting services and its public service broadcasting remit is not always clear. In future, therefore, where such activity is worthwhile and the BBC is the only provider, it should continue, but only where it is part of a coherent, published strategy in pursuit of one of the Corporation's five public purposes. Structures should be put in place to review its public value against its market impact, as part of the performance measurement system that operates for core services. Such activity should not be undertaken where it is going to be unsustainable in the longer term (except where activity is being piloted), and where possible the BBC should work with external partners to ensure that this is the case.

¹¹ BBC, *The BBC's contribution to informed citizenship* (September, 2004)

What should each public purpose mean for the BBC?

This section provides more detail on each of our proposed public purposes, explaining the BBC's current remit in each area and the future role that we think it should have.¹²

It is important to note that at present none of the proposals put forward for future BBC activity have been fully costed. It will be an essential part of the next phase of Charter Review to scrutinise the costs of such activity as well as the potential for efficiency gains in existing BBC services, before final decisions are made about the future shape of the BBC and its funding package – see Chapter 4 for more details.

Sustaining citizenship

Informing ourselves and others and increasing our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas.

Current BBC commitments and services

A commitment to informed citizenship has been at the heart of the BBC's remit since its establishment in the 1920s.

The BBC's Agreement requires it to broadcast impartial coverage of news and current affairs in the United Kingdom and throughout the world and to support fair and informed debate at local, regional and national levels. Amendments to the Agreement at the time of the Communications Act required the BBC Governors to establish quotas for the amount of news on BBC1 (including a quota for news in peak time) and the amount of current affairs on BBC1 and BBC2 (again including a peak-time quota). The Governors must secure Ofcom's agreement before they allow such quotas to be set at any level below 2002 levels of output.

In its submission to the independent panel on Charter Review, the BBC suggested that one of its roles is 'to help equip the public with the knowledge and capability necessary to act as informed citizens', by:

- providing accurate, impartial and balanced coverage of news and current affairs in order to help the public make informed choices;
- reporting the proceedings of the political process in the UK and internationally;
- stimulating the public debate on a range of social, political and other current affairs issues.

In *Building Public Value* the BBC identified some new ways to pursue these aims, some using new technologies – 'personalised learning tools, access to previously closed archives, new ways of connecting communities, more convenient ways to watch and listen to programmes, more localised content, and tailored services for minority groups.'

¹² References to public and industry opinion can be found in more detail in *What you said about the BBC*, at www.bbcharterreview.org.uk. References to Ofcom's PSB definition are taken from the three reports it has produced in its review of public service television broadcasting – see www.ofcom.org.uk

The Neil Report

After the Hutton inquiry in 2004, the BBC commissioned a panel chaired by Ronald Neil, former Director of BBC News and Current Affairs, to review the BBC's editorial standards. The Neil report set out recommendations and guidelines intended to strengthen BBC journalism.

The Report says that 'as the largest employer of journalists in the UK, the BBC has an obligation to take the lead in strengthening training in craft skills and promoting debate about journalistic standards and ethics in broadcasting'. The Report set out journalistic standards for:

- truth and accuracy;
- serving the public interest;
- impartiality and diversity of opinion;
- independence;
- accountability.

The Report includes a proposal that the BBC should establish a college of journalism. This would help train journalists in defining and applying journalistic standards. Ultimate responsibility for meeting the five principles would lie with editors.

Ofcom's PSB definition

Ofcom has concluded that one of the four purposes of public service broadcasting (PSB) should be 'to inform ourselves and others and to increase our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current ideas and events.' We have adopted this wording in defining the BBC's role.

In Ofcom's audience research, 55% of people said television was their main source of news, and 87% said that they thought it was important for television to provide 'news and other programmes to keep the population well informed'.

Public and Industry opinion

It was clear from responses to our Charter Review consultation and accompanying research that, for the British public, there is a strong association between the BBC and the functioning of democracy in the UK. The BBC has a reputation amongst the majority of the UK public for reliable, accurate and impartial news reporting – more than twice as many people consider the BBC to be accurate and trustworthy than say the same about ITV, Channel 4 or Five.

At the seminar held by the independent panel, and in responses to our consultation, concerns were expressed by some in the broadcasting industry that in using new services such as the internet and digital television to engage the public, the BBC with its licence fee funding had an unfair advantage over competitors and could ultimately become monopolistic in these areas.

Future role

The BBC should continue to inform the public and increase our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas. Its news and current affairs coverage should set standards of quality and should be resourced accordingly. It should continue to engage the widest possible cross-section of the UK population with differently-targeted services, including BBC Online. It should show a continued commitment to local and regional news, although the proposed ultra-local digital TV news services should be subjected to a public value test and market impact assessment before any decision to launch.

The BBC's programming outside news and current affairs should also where possible and relevant contribute towards stimulating engagement with social and political issues – for example through themed seasons or campaigns.

The BBC has a particular responsibility to help people understand Parliament and the UK political system, including the devolved administrations, so that they can be informed, media literate participants in our democratic system. BBC Parliament should continue to carry dedicated coverage of Parliamentary matters, and there should be regular coverage of Parliament in both news and other programming on mainstream channels.

The BBC should be able to contribute to democratic debate in forms other than broadcast content – for example by organising seminars and e-discussion forums, distributing information and working on campaigns with partners in the public and voluntary sector. But such activity should have clear limits and clear links to broadcast output – it should be part of a single clearly defined, published strategy for sustaining citizenship.

We welcome the BBC's recognition and implementation of the core recommendations of the Neil report – concerning fairness, precision and the need for thorough training of journalists. These will be reflected as appropriate in the next BBC Charter and Agreement.

Promoting education and learning

- *Stimulating our interest in and knowledge of a full range of subjects and issues through content that is accessible and can encourage either formal or informal learning*
- *Providing specialist educational programmes and accompanying material to facilitate learning at all levels and for all ages*

Current BBC commitments and services

Education has been at the heart of the BBC's remit from the start. The Agreement commits the BBC to produce 'programmes of an educational nature (including specialist factual, religious and social issues programmes as well as formal education and vocational training programmes)'.

Its most recent Statements of Programme Policy commit the BBC to 'contribute to education for all by creating a wide range of accessible programmes and services that feed curiosity and enable people to learn throughout their lives – across all ages and needs, and this year to include piloting the digital curriculum service'.

The BBC defines its provision in this area under three categories:

- i. *Formal learning output.* These services are defined by their intent – all are closely linked to achieving a particular learning objective or qualification and are often related to nationally-set educational goals. Examples given by the BBC include the digital TV channel CBeebies, and the schools services, Skillswise and Webwise. Since 2000, the BBC has also rolled out seven Learning Centres and twelve Learning Buses as part of an experimental scheme for delivering learning support directly to communities, offering a range of facilities from basic skills to creative 'digital storytelling' assistance.
- ii. *Informal, targeted learning.* These services aim to provide relevant, engaging learning opportunities to every citizen over the age of seven. These opportunities are not connected to formal or course-related learning. Examples include factual landmark programmes such as How to Be a Gardener, online factual services, social action campaigns around subjects such as domestic violence, the digital children's channel CBBC, and continuing learning services such as OneMusic.
- iii. *Informal learning from general programming.* This includes a wide range of factual, current affairs and drama programming that the audience learn from simply because it is good, informative programming. This output is not created with specific learning objectives in mind, but the explicit aim is to make complex factual subjects accessible for a wide audience across television, radio and online and interactive television.

Ofcom's PSB definition

Ofcom states in Part II of its Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting that one of the core principles of PSB should be 'to stimulate our interest in and knowledge of arts, science, history and other topics through content that is accessible and can encourage informal learning'.

Public and Industry opinion

Our public consultation showed clearly that, for all ages and social groups alike, the BBC's contribution to learning (both formal and informal) is one of the BBC's most important roles: one of the things that sets the BBC apart from other broadcasters is its educational element. It is seen as having a particularly important role in the educational, social and cultural development of children, young people and adults alike.

These findings are supported by Ofcom's research into public service television – 76% of people think that it is important that terrestrial channels should provide 'specialist educational programmes for children and adults', and 58% thought 'programmes that promote or support educational and other public initiatives' were important, although the majority thought that these elements should be there as a social, not personal, benefit.

Contributors to the independent panel's work in this area supported the BBC maintaining an educational presence on all mainstream TV channels, radio stations and online given that so much learning is gained 'incidentally' through watching balanced, high-quality content delivered in an accessible manner. The majority opinion also supported the idea that the BBC should have a clearly articulated statement of strategy and purpose in this area, and that any interpretation of its remit 'to educate' should show that the BBC fully understands, and is sensitive to, the market within which it operates.

Future role

We believe the BBC, with its considerable reach and impact, should continue to be a major force in education and learning. It is well placed to stimulate our interest in and knowledge of a full range of subjects and issues, from traditional support for curriculum topics to areas with a wider impact on society – for example, healthier lifestyles (as recently illustrated by the BBC's *Fat Nation* season).

In line with our principle of clarity of purpose, we believe the BBC should publish a coherent long-term strategy for its contribution to education. That strategy should make a clear distinction between:

- the formal educational material that will be provided, particularly through BBC Online, in all areas of the curriculum; and
- the role it expects to play in encouraging informal learning through mainstream programming, particularly factual programming – engaging audiences in new issues and areas of interest, and taking account of the different systems of formal education in the Nations.

The strategy should also set out how the BBC will meet the different needs of different audiences, ranging from pre-school and school to adult learners and those in further education.

The BBC's education strategy should be complemented by a set of performance measures and an annual review of its impact – including an element of independent scrutiny and an appropriate emphasis on measuring educational benefit. The framework for this system is set out in Chapter 5.

Technological changes such as the switchover from analogue to digital television, and the growth of broadband and interactive opportunities will change the way in which audiences engage with content and learn. The BBC should be at the forefront of harnessing these opportunities, to deliver both formal and informal learning.

However, some of those in greatest educational need are those least likely to have access to new technology. In developing and promoting digital technologies, the BBC should aim to encourage these audience groups to take full advantage of the technology and learning opportunities open to them, and drive up media literacy amongst all social and age groups.

The BBC should make use of all its services, as appropriate, for educational purposes, including its larger broadcast channels, its archive and its local services. BBC1 and 2, for

example, have a key role to play in supporting education and directing audiences to educational material and opportunities available elsewhere.

In delivering all its aims, the BBC must keep in mind its privileged position and its potential market impact. The BBC brand is a particularly powerful tool in drawing people to learning, and the BBC must make the best use of its trusted and renowned status. It should work with appropriate partners within the educational community and the commercial education industry. The development and publication of a forward-looking strategy should help potential partners and competitors know what the BBC plans to do.

Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

- *Enriching the cultural life of the UK through creative excellence in distinctive and original programming*
- *Fostering creativity and nurturing talent*
- *Promoting interest, engagement and participation in cultural activity among new audiences*

Current BBC commitments and services

The BBC's Charter requires it 'to organise, present, produce, provide or subsidise concerts, shows, variety performances, revues, musical and other productions and performances and other entertainments (whether live or recorded) in connection with the broadcasting and programme supply services of the Corporation or for any purpose incidental thereto.'

The BBC Agreement places a requirement on the BBC home services to 'stimulate, support and reflect, in drama, comedy, music and the visual and performing arts, the diversity of cultural activity in the United Kingdom'.

Under the Communications Act, all public service television services should ensure:

'That cultural activity in the United Kingdom, and its diversity, are reflected, supported and stimulated by the representation in those services (taken together) of drama, comedy and music, by the inclusion of feature films in those services and by the treatment of other visual and performing arts.'

In *Building Public Value*, the BBC argues that its purposes should be considered in terms of the public value created. One of its five specific purposes is to create:

'Cultural and creative value: the BBC enriches the UK's cultural life by bringing talent and audiences together to break new ground, to celebrate our cultural heritage, to broaden the national conversation.'

In its submission to the independent panel on Charter Review, 'The BBC's impact on culture', October 2004, the BBC states that it does not have an 'overarching cultural strategy'. It states that:

‘The BBC’s contribution to culture is broad, its impact not limited to the content of its “cultural” programmes. Rather this impact stems from the entirety of the BBC’s activities in pursuit of its public service remit’ (p. 2). The BBC outlines the role it believes it should fulfil in:

- Developing the culture of broadcasting
- Providing universal access to culture
- Creating new works
- Supporting, promoting and encouraging creative talent
- Investing in the creative industries
- Training the industry
- Facilitating cultural events across the UK
- Promoting UK culture overseas

Ofcom’s PSB definition

Two of the purposes that Ofcom set out for PSB relate, indirectly, to the BBC’s own conception of its cultural contribution, as follows:

- To stimulate our interest in and knowledge of the arts, science, history and other topics through content that is accessible and can encourage informal learning; and
- To reflect and strengthen our cultural identity through original programming at UK, national and regional level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences.

Public Opinion

A recurring theme of our qualitative research and public consultation was the value of the BBC’s cultural role. This value was placed not only on what the BBC brings to audiences and communities, but also on its role in supporting the wider creative industries and bringing on talent across a range of areas like the visual arts, music and film, as well as its contribution to other elements of the UK’s culture, like sport. When asked what type of programmes they personally watched nowadays, ‘films’ was the most popular choice amongst participants in our quantitative survey.

Many people who work in cultural sectors – as well as those who are familiar with the BBC’s cultural activities – responded to our consultation. In general, such respondents acknowledged the excellent work already being done, but urged the BBC to use its broadcast services to encourage viewers and listeners to participate more in cultural activity. The Arts Council, for instance, argued that the BBC should increase its commitment to the sort of campaigns that can promote grass-roots participation in the arts, particularly among children and younger people. It cited the recent Roots project as one successful example.

Some respondents also argued that the BBC needs a more coherent cultural strategy, running across all genres and networks. From this perspective, the newly formed

Creative Board is a welcome step towards such a strategy, and a framework for measuring its effectiveness.

Future role

The three elements we have identified for the BBC's cultural purpose amount to:

- *Showcasing excellence* – celebrating the very best across the genres, to stimulate, inspire and challenge new or established audiences through distinct content of the very highest quality. As well as new comedies and innovative BBC dramas, the Olympics and Music Live are clear examples of the BBC's ability to provide a platform for, and mass access to, the very best that British cultural life has to offer. In addition, the BBC has a responsibility to use its unique funding position to take more risks than its commercial counterparts: from programme content, its format and production, to its distribution, the BBC's output should be distinctive and at the cutting edge of innovation – challenging, as well as entertaining, its audience. The BBC should also accept the Select Committee recommendation to put together a film investment strategy to ensure that the best UK films are shown to a wider television audience.
- *Fostering creativity and nurturing talent* – The BBC has a unique ability to inspire, support and showcase the work of the best of the UK's creative talent. Many artists and performers receive huge support from the BBC, and our cultural landscape is richer for it. In particular, the BBC should maintain its vital contribution to new music, from Radio 1 to Radio 3.

The BBC's film strategy should reflect other aspects of BBC strategy, including its commitment to original content, its contribution to skills development and training and the way in which it reflects the UK's cultural identity and its different communities.

- *Promoting engagement with and participation in cultural activity* – by providing audiences with a gateway to cultural experiences and pathways to further exploration. The BBC provides a cultural space in which significant numbers of people can explore new ideas or experiences in a safe and trusted environment. That space should reflect all aspects of UK culture. For example, in sport the BBC can help to promote interest and participation in the sort of smaller, minority-interest sports that are less well covered by commercial networks.

The potential benefits offered by **partnerships** are also important. Many respondents to our consultation cited examples of how major BBC programmes had contributed to a rising interest in their sectors – *The Big Read*, *Restoration*, and *Proms in the Park* being the most obvious examples. The BBC can do more of this, in partnership with other public sector organisations. We welcome its new draft partnership code, which should ensure that both sides of any deal obtain the maximum value from their collaboration – for the benefit of both organisations and ultimately for the viewer and listener.

Reflecting the UK's Nations, regions and communities

- *Reflecting and strengthening our cultural identity through original programming at local, regional and National level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences*
- *Making us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints, through content that reflects the lives of other people and other communities within the UK*

Current BBC commitments and services

The BBC is committed, through its Agreement with DCMS, to services that ‘contain comprehensive, authoritative and impartial coverage of news and current affairs in the United Kingdom and throughout the world to support fair and informed debate at local, regional and national levels’. Amendments to the Agreement following the Communications Act:

- require the Governors to set quotas for high quality National and regional programming on BBC1 and BBC2 – including quotas for peak-time provision – which cannot fall below 2002 levels without agreement from Ofcom;
- require the BBC to produce a significant proportion of all UK-made programmes (constituting a significant proportion of production spend) outside the M25, at a significant range of different production centres, in a significant range of genres.

The BBC submitted two documents to the Independent Panel on Charter Review setting out its role in representing nations, regions and communities.

In these documents, the BBC sets out how it seeks to “celebrate and reflect the diversity of the UK and connect its changing communities” by:

- providing programmes and services intended to meet the needs and interests of audiences in different parts of the UK – through programmes provided on national and regional versions of its television channels, through its range of national and local radio stations, and increasingly through a series of local interactive services;
- ensuring that programme-making talent from all parts of the UK makes a proper contribution to the BBC’s UK-wide services;
- developing a positive and active presence in communities across the UK.

The BBC defines the main elements of its representational provision as encompassing:

- providing relevant national/regional/local news accessible at all times;
- developing platforms for community debate and creating community connections;
- delivering localised learning opportunities to enhance and complete the BBC’s network provision;
- showcasing and celebrating national/regional/community talent, culture and events;
- empowering people to be active citizens and to release their creativity;
- giving people a voice and creating a richer cultural experience for everyone in the process.

Ofcom's PSB definition

Ofcom's phase 2 report stated that its "proposed future framework for PSB" includes:

"a new approach to programming for the nations and regions: regional production and, if possible, regional news on ITV, a transfer of non-news regional obligations to the BBC and the use of digital opportunities to create a new tier of more local services".

In its final phase 3 report, Ofcom suggest that the BBC should find new and different ways of providing more regional programming beyond news, to be the lead provider of such content.

Public and Industry Opinion

The Department's public consultation and research showed that the public values the work that the BBC does to represent the nations, regions and communities, with 42% asked thinking that the BBC was the "best broadcaster of information about their area or region" (although ITV registered a similar approval rating) and 63% of the view that the BBC is "good at representing cultural diversity". From a nations perspective, views about the BBC's output in Northern Ireland were particularly positive, and the BBC's commitment to Welsh language is evidently highly valued by Welsh speakers.

There were critics, however. There was concern from across the UK that the BBC was too focused on, and around, London and from organisations representing minority groups that felt that more could be done to capture all social, cultural and geographic groupings. There was also a feeling from Scotland that – with the exception of Gaelic programming, which was well received by Gaelic speakers – media coverage, generally, of Scottish issues was thin.

Future Role

Programming

The BBC should provide network programming that reflects the activities and cultures of the diverse range of different communities within the UK. It should take care to ensure that such output provides an accurate and balanced reflection of the community in question. The BBC also has a role in bringing audiences together, across the UK, for shared experiences, for example by broadcasting sporting events of particular national importance.

The BBC should reflect modern Britain's diversity through the on-air portrayal of ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those from other minorities in mainstream as well as specialist programmes. For instance, it should attempt to address the fact that some young ethnic minority age groups appear to feel alienated by the mainstream media.

It should also provide a range of programming reflecting different religions and other beliefs that is appropriate to multi-faith Britain. Such programming in prominent positions in both TV and radio schedules, reflecting diversity within, as well as between faiths and beliefs. Such programming should include coverage of acts of worship and

key events in the religious calendar as well as drama and current affairs programming that explores religious issues and other belief systems in different ways, for different audiences.

The BBC should continue to provide news and current affairs programmes on television at a regional level. It should also maintain its network of local radio services and locally-focused internet sites. Together, these services should continue to promote community debate and localised learning. The concept, which has been touched on by the BBC in only the broadest terms to date, of an “ultra-local” service is one that could – in a fully digital world – bring production and programme-making within the reach of many more people. There are potential implications for commercial competitors. The BBC should explore the possibilities with Ofcom.

In line with Ofcom’s recommendation, the BBC should consider what scope it has for expanding its contribution to regional programming. Whilst opt outs have been utilised in news programmes for some time, there has been evidence more recently of the BBC using it more imaginatively (for example, by way of a regional opt out at the end of *British Isles: A Natural History*) and the BBC should consider how these and other ideas could be used to expand regional programming in new and valuable ways. However, the BBC should not simply compensate for the reduction of ITV regional output.

Devolution has changed the political fabric of the UK, and the BBC should continue to provide a larger amount of dedicated programming in and for each of the devolved nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). That should include provision in indigenous minority languages across a range of platforms – the internet has particular value in supporting these languages. More detail on Welsh and Gaelic is set out below.

S4C

The principle of the BBC contributing to Welsh language programming is well established, but the obligation on the BBC to provide ten hours a week of Welsh programming free of charge to the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority, S4C, has not changed since S4C began in 1982. The Laughton report on S4C, commissioned by DCMS and published in July 2004, noted that BBC expenditure on Welsh programming for S4C had not risen in line with the Corporation’s overall public expenditure or its expenditure in Wales on English language programming in recent years. It recommended that the BBC and S4C be invited to agree a new formula for the supply of programmes and other services by BBC to S4C, appropriate for the current needs of Welsh language public service broadcasting.

Ofcom has recommended that there should be greater transparency in the relationship between the BBC and S4C, with clearer commitments from the BBC. Further consideration will be given to the details of any new BBC/S4C settlement, including the level of the BBC’s contribution; whether it should be expressed in monetary terms rather than in hours of programming; how best to ensure its value is maintained over time and where responsibility should rest for decisions on content.

The Government is committed to a sustainable future for Welsh language television broadcasting. S4C's relationship with the BBC will be important in stabilising and strengthening its position over the coming years. The Government also accepts the Laughton report's conclusion that 'a revised settlement...for the digital age is a target worth achieving and a priority for all who care about the ecology of public service broadcasting in Wales'.

Gaelic broadcasting

The BBC has a crucial role to play in safeguarding Gaelic cultural heritage, and it has a history of commitment to Gaelic across a number of platforms. The Government is keen to see a better deal for Gaelic – perhaps including a dedicated channel, as Ofcom suggests. We are currently working to bring the Gaelic Media Service together with the BBC and a number of other parties (including Ofcom, Scottish Media Group and the Scottish Executive) to put together a sustainable strategy for Gaelic television. The BBC will have a key role to play in any future channel.

Production

Out of London production can bring some benefits to local audiences if the programmes produced reflect local characters, stories or settings. It also provides economic benefits – in terms of jobs and investment. The BBC's role in supporting out of London production is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Bringing the world to the UK and the UK to the world

- *Making UK audiences aware of international issues and of the different cultures and viewpoints of people living outside the UK*
- *Bringing high-quality international news coverage to a global audience through radio, TV and new media*

The BBC's commercial services also have a role in supporting this last purpose by showcasing the best of UK creativity, culture and talent for global audiences, thereby generating additional value for the BBC licence fee payer. However, as discussed in Chapter 10, it is important that all such commercial services are also linked to the other public purposes of the BBC.

Current BBC commitments and services

In its evidence to the Independent Panel, the BBC defined the core purpose of the BBC's global news operations as being 'to provide trusted and unbiased news to audiences around the world'. The two principal elements of the BBC's international role are BBC Global News Division – comprising BBC World Service, BBC World (a commercial television service), the BBC's international online news sites, and BBC Monitoring – and BBC Worldwide, the BBC's commercial subsidiary, which exploits the BBC's intellectual property in the UK and around the world.

The World Service is funded by the tax-payer in the form of a grant-in-aid of £225 million (rising to £239 million in 2005/6) provided through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Recent increases in funding have enabled the World Service to continue its development of new services, including its successful expansion into online services. The BBC's international websites are paid for partly by the World Service's grant-in-aid, and partly by the licence fee. All foreign language internet offerings are provided by the World Service.

The BBC's international news operations have been combined into the BBC Global News Division to ensure greater global co-ordination and impact by allowing the strengths of television, radio and new media to complement each other.

The Agreement

In relation to the BBC's international role, the Agreement concentrates on the BBC World Service. The Agreement commits the BBC to broadcast or transmit programmes and deliver other services in the World Service to such audiences overseas and in such languages as agreed with the FCO. The BBC undertakes to plan and prepare its World Service programmes in the national interest, while maintaining high standards of editorial integrity and programme content and quality.

The Agreement also sets out the general long-term objectives relating to the World Service's operations, including the provision of an accurate, unbiased and independent news service covering international and national developments, the presentation of a balanced British view of those developments, and an accurate and effective representation of British life, institutions and achievements.

Statements of Programme Policy

In its Statements of Programme Policy 2004-5, the BBC undertakes to 'support the UK's role in the world by being the world's most trusted provider of international news and by showcasing the best of British culture to a global audience – including BBC World Service, BBC World and BBC Prime, and by developing long-term global co-production and broadcast partners'.

In relation to the international provision on its television channels, the BBC is committed to reflecting the increasing importance of international affairs to UK audiences. Examples given by the BBC include a Panorama special looking at the atrocities committed in the Rwandan civil war, and the programme *Iraq: Untold War*. In addition, the BBC says it aims to maintain a broad agenda across international affairs with one-offs and shorter series, 'such as *World Wedding*, which will view social, religious and health issues around the world through the prism of young couples living in different cultural environments', and BBC 4's *New Kids on the Bloc*, which explores the politics and culture of the ten new Member States of the European Union. In addition, BBC News 24 will continue its commitment to its international coverage.

The BBC also promises to continue to connect the UK and the international community via its website. It says that 'bbc.co.uk coverage of the Iraq war brought people from across the UK into dialogue with individuals and opinions from as far afield as Fiji, Ghana, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the USA'.

Public and Industry opinion

Responses to our public consultation recognised the high value of the BBC's international role abroad through all three of its media – the World Service, BBC World and the international pages of the BBC website. Many respondents, however, wanted an improved domestic coverage of international issues including genres other than news and current affairs. There was a high level of support for the World Service – most people want it to continue with an appropriate level of public funding.

Both UK and international contributors to the Independent Panel's seminar reflected these views. In Europe, contributors felt it was important that the BBC continued to provide independent, reliable and unbiased news and a choice of quality programmes (on BBC Prime). Domestically, some commentators felt that the BBC's coverage of international affairs for the UK market could be enhanced.

Future role

The BBC should continue to explain international issues to UK audiences – not only through news and current affairs but also through other forms of output, including drama, documentaries, schools programmes and sports coverage. To this end, it should develop a coherent, published strategy for its coverage of international affairs in both the developed world and the developing world.

The BBC's commercial services should support its international role in two ways:

- Added value returned to licence fee payers; and
- Better promotion of UK culture, talent and intellectual property overseas.

The BBC should not restrict itself to the sale of BBC programmes. It should look to work closely in partnership with other UK broadcasters in developing its programme sales strategy. It should use the scale and power of BBC Worldwide to showcase the widest possible array of UK talent and secure the best possible deal for UK plc. However, nothing it does in promoting its commercial services should run counter to any other of its public purposes.

The BBC should continue to provide international news to the rest of the world, through its outward-facing internet sites, the commercial television news service BBC World and the World Service. To this end, the World Service should adapt to meet the complex challenges posed by the major shift in the listening and viewing habits of its audiences in recent years as a result of the revolution in global satellite and cable communications.

The World Service

The World Service should be maintained as a Government-funded arm of the BBC, providing high quality, impartial international news to audiences who might otherwise not receive it. However, there are two key questions to consider about the future of the World Service:

- Should the World Service reduce the number of vernacular languages it currently broadcasts in?
- Given that TV ownership is now widespread even in parts of the developing world, should the World Service run some TV as well as radio services?

These issues are discussed below. They will be examined in more detail by the independent review of public diplomacy currently being led by Lord Carter, due to report in Summer 2005. (Public diplomacy is defined by the FCO as ‘work which aims at influencing in a positive way the perceptions of individuals and organisations overseas about the UK, and their engagement with the UK.’) The government will take account of Lord Carter’s conclusions before publication of the Charter Review White Paper.

Reducing the range of vernacular languages

The World Service’s linguistic expertise and output distinguishes it from other parts of the BBC, giving it an enhanced capacity to interpret events in the light of specialised local and regional knowledge. However there are difficult challenges to face, and decisions to be taken, with respect to the viability and justification for the range of languages in which the World Service currently broadcasts.

The 42 language services currently offered are more a product of the World Service’s historical development than of a realistic assessment of the United Kingdom’s role in the 21st century. Likewise, the World Service’s offering of broadcasts in 16 vernacular languages spoken in countries which formed part either of the Former Soviet Union or the Eastern Bloc of countries formerly under the Soviet Union’s domination is beginning to look anachronistic. Eight of those countries are now members of the European Union, while three more are expected to become members in the near future. In planning for the future the World Service needs to look seriously at the political justification for continuing to broadcast to some of these countries in any language other than English, which is rapidly becoming the accepted international language. The aspiration towards democracy, respect for human rights, freedom of speech and association, which had been the BBC’s rationale for developing Eastern European vernacular services, has now shifted eastwards and southwards, and in particular to the Middle East, the Far East and parts of Africa and the sub-continent.

The World Service, in consultation with the FCO, needs to consider a radical and creative reprioritisation of its vernacular output to take account of these shifts in global political and economic priorities. It must also look at the changes in audience size and preferences both in terms of content, and the delivery of content, across media. The vernacular language choices made by the World Service for its online service provide useful guidance for reprioritisation. There will undoubtedly be a case to be made for a number of other

vernacular services to be offered by the World Service. However, the BBC's limited list of eight online language services (Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Persian (Farsi), Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Urdu) should be the starting point for this discussion.

The possibility of expanding into television services

The BBC's view is that to fulfil its international remit it must continue to provide a tri-media service: in other words to maintain a global presence across radio, television and internet services. The Government is sympathetic to this ambition. It cannot, however, be taken as given. The BBC must plan against the reasonable expectation that the pressure on all streams of public funding – whether from the tax payer or the licence fee payer – will increase, not decrease with time. The BBC's global television outlet – BBC World – has so far failed to generate sufficient revenue from advertising to cover its costs and continues to experience some difficulty in competing against other providers – local, regional and international.

The outcome of recent public spending rounds – an extra £48 million in SR2002 and an extra £19 million in SR2004 – has enabled the World Service to continue its development of new services, including its successful expansion into online services and its presence on FM in 139 capital cities. Its continued success will depend in part on its willingness and ability to adapt, or shed, outdated services in order to create the financial and creative space necessary to develop new products, and new ways to deliver those products, to existing and new audiences.

There may, in the future, be a case for the World Service to consider providing niche foreign language TV services to specific audiences, in countries where the switch in consumption from radio to television is very marked. One example currently under consideration is the possibility of an Arabic language TV service broadcasting to parts of the Middle East. The challenges are enormous, however – any new grant-in-aid funded operation will find it hard to compete for audiences against local competitors, and other established global broadcast operators.

Against this background, and notwithstanding the strong case for diversifying broadcast options to those parts of the world where access to impartial news reporting may be restricted, a case for new and additional funds will always be difficult to make. In its initial consideration of the desirability and practicality of developing niche vernacular TV services from within the World Service the Government came to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it could not justify any additional resources. Any move to a tri-media offering would need to be financed by a strategic reprioritisation by the World Service from within its existing funding. Initial work suggests that resources could be freed up in either of two ways: efficiencies from better use of resources and a reduction in the number of vernacular radio services on offer (see above). It will be for the World Service, in discussion with the Foreign Office to decide whether and how expenditure could be reprioritised to allow for the development of vernacular television.