

3.3 Programmes that enrich our lives and culture

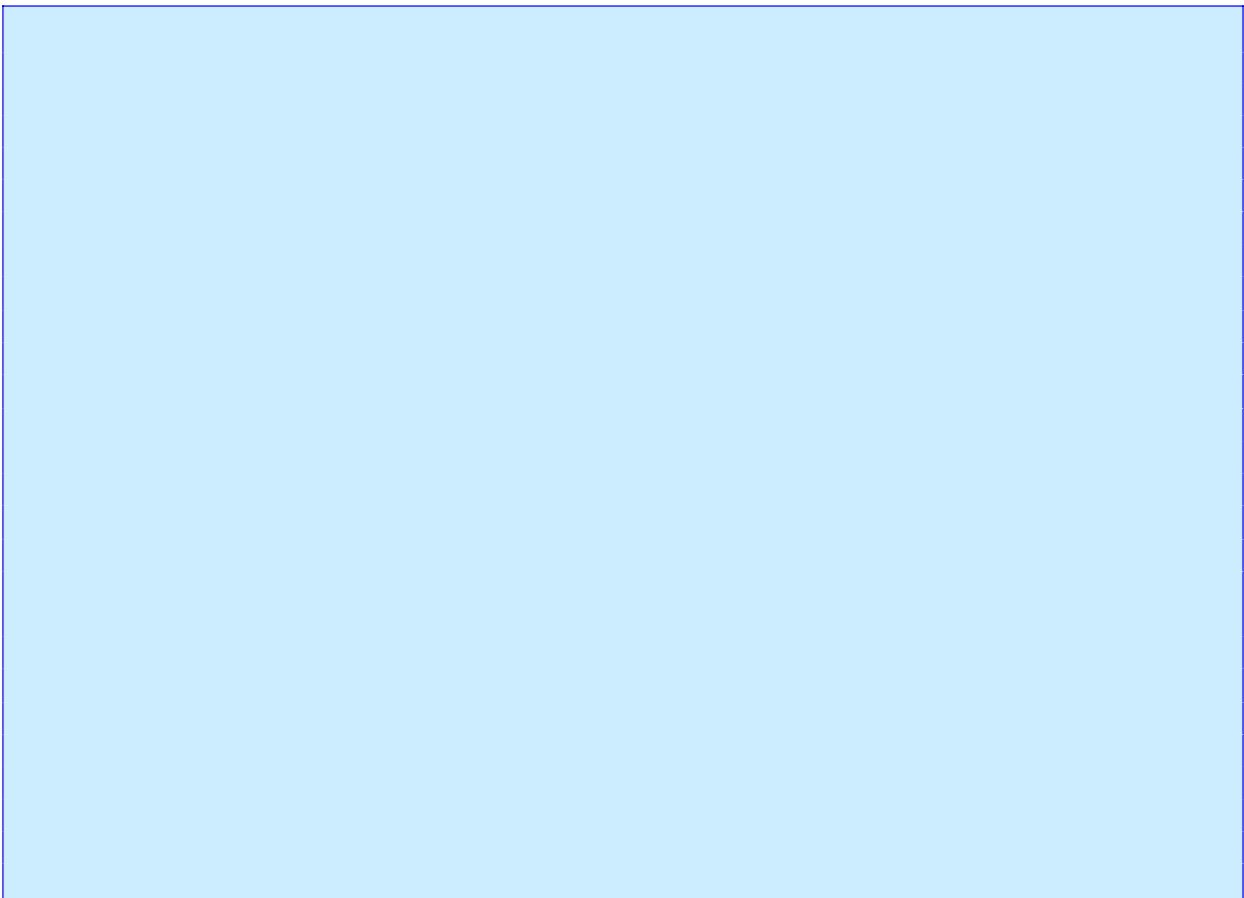
One of the BBC's most important priorities for the next Charter period will be to lift the creative ambition, quality and innovation of its programmes. Change and fragmentation in the media markets mean that high-quality UK programmes will become harder to make for many broadcasters. At the same time, the demands are growing from today's increasingly diverse audiences for a rich mix of surprising, enjoyable and memorable programmes.

In many areas, the quality and range of the BBC's programmes are second to none. People judge BBC One and BBC Two to have a better range and quality of programmes than ITV1, Channel 4, five and Sky One in 17 out of 22 genres⁶¹. Its best programmes continue to capture the imagination of millions. But, as noted in Chapter 1, there is more to do. Audiences tell us that they want a wider range of more imaginative programmes. They want a richer mix of programmes at the heart of their schedules, in home-grown drama and comedy in particular. This is the creative challenge of the next decade, and we intend to rise to it.

- **We will dedicate all the BBC's services to originality and excellence.** Initiatives will include:
 - *Eliminating derivative programmes and ideas from BBC schedules.* Audiences want and expect greater innovation from the BBC. We will avoid ideas and formats that are derivative or copied, and eliminate programmes that are tired and lacking in originality.
 - *A broader search for the UK's most talented writers and producers.* We will build on the success of initiatives such as *BBC Talent*, which has discovered many new writers, directors and performers since its launch in 2000. For example, Lee Edmenson exchanged life as a welder for the 1Xtra radio studio where he is now a producer, and Linda Thompson, a former administrator, now writes for BBC One's *Doctors* series. Our writing initiative, *writersroom*, currently works with more than 3,500 aspiring writers and receives over 10,000 unsolicited scripts every year.
 - *More freedom for creative risk-taking.* Audiences want the BBC to play less safe. To do this, we will support in-house and independent programme makers in taking more creative risks. We will amplify the importance of programme reach over share as the headline performance measure for BBC programmes, and help to lead an industry-wide initiative to develop new audience indicators that capture the memorability and appreciation of a programme.
- **The BBC will defy standard programme categories to open up challenging subjects to large audiences – from arts and history to science, religion and music.** Some of the most exciting recent programmes have sprung from ground-breaking collaborations between different programme-making departments. *Dunkirk*, for instance, brought together the differing skills of documentary and

⁶¹ BBC/TNS, *Licence Fee Value survey*, 2003

drama to great effect, and *Eroica* combined classical music and drama. The BBC will increase its investment and risk-taking in cross-genre productions.



- **We will fund and support the next generation of high-quality British comedy, entertainment and drama.** Audiences particularly want the BBC to offer great British comedy and drama. One of the challenges will be to strike the right balance between programmes that reflect the growing diversity of the UK, like *Babyfather*, *Monkey Dust*, *Silver Street* and *Burn It*, with an ongoing desire for programmes that create shared experiences, like *The Archers* and *EastEnders*. We will aim to provide a rich mix – popular and minority, challenging and relaxing, innovative and reassuring. Not every one will succeed – the creative process will never be that predictable – but all our programmes will aim for an edge of ambition and originality to provide quality and distinction overall. Initiatives will include:
 - *Using the BBC’s radio and digital TV channels – particularly BBC Three – as test beds for innovative comedy and drama.* Radio 4 has always been recognised as a valuable nursery slope for new comedy and drama talent, with programmes such as *I’m Alan Partridge*, *Dead Ringers*, *The League of Gentlemen*, *Little Britain* and *Goodness Gracious Me* all beginning life there. The BBC has now also begun to incubate riskier shows on its digital TV channels. Successes like *Nighty Night* and *3 Non-Blondes* started there and have since been shown on BBC One and BBC Two.

- *Strengthened commitment to comedy.* The growing diversity of UK society is making successful comedy even more challenging. Many broadcasters will have no choice but to fall back on importing good US comedies. From *Fawlty Towers* to *The Office*, comedy has been a powerful expression of British culture, and the BBC remains fully committed to creating the next generation of British programmes that make the nation laugh.
- *Entertainment programmes with modern appeal.* The BBC will broaden its range to cater for all tastes as audiences become increasingly sophisticated in their expectations of entertainment programmes. We will strive for unpredictability, freshness, edge and talent with strong flavours and inclusive appeal.
- *A greater range of single dramas to reflect the complexity and reality of life in the UK today.* Ever since ITV's *Armchair Theatre* and the BBC's *Play for Today*, single dramas have always held a special place in UK broadcasting. They can make a powerful statement about life in contemporary Britain. Unfortunately, they risk disappearing from today's broadcast media as familiar series come to dominate many parts of the schedule. The BBC's ambition is to revive the success of the single play on television, as it has done already with *Home*, *This Little Life* and *Flesh and Blood*. For listeners, Radio 4 will continue to air a wide range of single plays and Radio 3 will continue to commission original drama like *The Wire*, ambitious and challenging in scale.
- *A range of British feature films to complement drama output.* With several Academy Awards to its name, BBC Films is building a strong reputation as a creative leader within the film community. The BBC is committed to co-producing six to eight feature film projects per year. They will reflect the cultural diversity of modern-day Britain and will be produced in partnership with other leading British and international film producers, including the UK Film Council.
- **We will seek to bring our shared historical and cultural heritage alive for a modern audience.** A striking feature of the past few years has been the growing passion of UK audiences for understanding the past through popular programme initiatives such as *A History of Britain* and *Meet the Ancestors*. More recently, this has been seen in the fascination among all age groups inspired by *Dunkirk*, which reviewed the extraordinary events of that epic rescue through the eyes of those who were there. In the next decade, the BBC will increase its commitment to making sense of the past in order to illuminate the present. We will increase investment on BBC Four and guarantee a more prominent place for culture on BBC One and BBC Two. Initiatives will include:
 - *Bringing the past to life.* The BBC will develop a new range of ambitious history programmes such as those marking the 60th anniversary in June 2004 of the D-Day landings. These programmes were broadcast on radio, television and online, in a collaboration that included a mix of individual eyewitness accounts, social, political and military history, drama, documentary and opportunities for audiences to contribute.