

**TRANSCRIPT OF EXTRACTS FROM MEETING
OF THE BBC CHARTER REVIEW
HELD IN EDINBURGH
ON THURSDAY, 11 MARCH 2004**

(ACTORS NOT TRANSCRIBED)

FACILITATOR

So that gave us something to think about. What I am interested in now, I would like to know what your views are. Where do you stand on this argument about how the BBC should be funded? Do you agree with one of the people there that it should remain the same? Do you think it should change at all, and if so how?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think it should stay as it is, because I think for that amount of money we are getting a great range of programmes, and you are having as you say digital, you are having your BBCi and lots of information and it would cost an awful lot more if you were paying separately for all the information that you do get from the BBC, and lots of people can't afford that, and it is all right for people who seem to think they have got a lot of money to do this, but there are a lot of people in this country don't, and I think the BBC is a wonderful institution as it is, and the money that we pay for it.

FACILITATOR

So your argument being partly there, partly what is shown, but also partly universal access, that lots of people can get at and don't have to pay a subscription or whatever charge for it. Who else has got a similar or completely different view to that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

My view is very similar. I would argue that the BBC Broadcasting as a public service, broadcasting in general offers entertainment, the BBC as such offers the possibility of a quality service which goes beyond entertainment, and I think to that extent it must remain funded by the licence fee. I think the licence fee is an imperfect service, but it seems to me the only alternative at the present time. For example we subsidise other cultural services, such as art galleries, such as high culture opera, ballet and so on, and I think the BBC is an extension of that type of funding where as long as it is funded in this way it remains in existence. Remove the funding, place it in the commercial marketplace and there is every possibility that it will be lost. Owners in that type of situation will pursue profit and go downmarket and we will lose this very high quality service.

FACILITATOR

What is the high quality service that you would argue it provides?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would argue first and foremost for in particular the public service aspect, that is news, current affairs, documentary type programmes, the type of programmes that link the people at large with government and keep them informed about matters which they need to know. I think that is an essential part of making democracy work, and in a situation if that was left to the commercial sector it might be less than perfectly done, or alternately it might be more partially done.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I have to agree with what the other two people before me have said. I think the great thing about the BBC as a public sector broadcaster is that it doesn't involve any free market

concepts like profits or loss. The thing that is of central importance here is that people have access to a platform that can either give them information or allow them to somehow contribute to public debates.

FACILITATOR

What would you say then to someone who would say yes I hear exactly what the three of you have said, but why should it then fund entertainment, why should that £2.7 billion be used, I think one of the points that was made here, to fund independent programmes that independent commercial channels could make equally as well and probably would continue to make. What would you say to that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think educate, inform and entertain are the three values that the BBC has committed itself to to people living in the UK and I think entertainment is as much as a social importance as information and education is to people.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just on that point that you were saying, I think at the end of the day the question that you asked, it is still a business and you still need to attract viewers, and obviously we are paying for that service and we do need to get value for entertainment, so I think yes there is room for the news programmes, the current affairs, but there is also room for entertainment as well in terms of why you ought to have different programmes, or a different variety of programmes on the BBC, it still has to operate as a business.

FACILITATOR

But why do you think that there needs to be that mix of entertainment, information, education, why do you think that is important? Because some people might say look I am having to pay this, actually I can get all the other stuff I want from a subscription channel, or a number of channels, so why should I have to pay this flat fee and then they produce entertainment that someone else could?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Personally I think the fact that the BBC is a public service and therefore not influenced by the government, and so the current affairs, news ... delivered hasn't got that influence is a plus factor, but it still does need to operate as a business, they still need to attract people to view and therefore there is room for the entertainment, and personally I find that the majority of entertainment delivered by the BBC are the kind of programmes that I like to watch and find very entertaining.

FACILITATOR

So part of the purpose is to attract people in the first place to all those other public service broadcasting programmes that they might not otherwise watch. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but does that sound right?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It sounds right to me.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It is really a false dichotomy here because the best education can be entertaining, and the best entertainment often is educational. And as long as the BBC manages to hold to rather an old-fashioned idea, which is making the good popular, but also making the popular good, then I think it is performing one of its vital functions. But beyond that it also seems to me that the strongest argument for maintaining the licence fee is just to look at the interests

who want to get rid of the licence fee, and what their agenda is. So when Lord McIntosh quite rightly at the beginning said that he and DCMS and Tessa Jowell, and hopefully the rest of the government, would like to have a strong and independent BBC, that independence should not only be from the government of the day, whoever they are, but also from the strong commercial interests who push their own political propaganda and business interests a lot of the time, and the licence fee I think is the best guarantee of that, and I certainly for example don't want to see the licence fee top-sliced because I think that would be detrimental to the BBC.

FACILITATOR

So it is a guarantee of independence, not only from government, but also from, are you saying the political agenda or commercial agenda of other people?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Both.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I agree with much of what has been said. I think the BBC provides stability and a level of independence that other broadcasters don't provide. I think they do provide good quality programmes and I see them as supportive of all the people of the country, you know minority interest as well as majority interest. My own preference amongst broadcasters is the BBC, I watch their programmes, I listen to their radio programmes, I particularly listen to their Gaelic radio service. I was brought up in the Western Isles, I am a Gaelic speaker and I think they do a very good service to Gaelic speakers in the Highlands and Islands and throughout Scotland. I am concerned that if the BBC moved to a subscription service, that would be disadvantageous to minorities in this country and a lot of people couldn't afford to pay a subscription service, whereas they can afford the licence fee at the moment. So I am supportive of them and I hope they continue to support and develop minority interests in the country.

FACILITATOR

And the Gaelic Service you are talking about is delivered on radio, or television, or both?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Both, mostly on radio, they broadcast it on radio on FM from 7.30 in the morning, sometimes to 11.30 at night time, Monday to Saturday. They make very good Gaelic programmes on BBC as well for children and they are of interest generally, current affairs programmes that are watched by non-Gaelic speakers when they are sub-titled, so they do very well and I would hope they would develop that service even more.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think to return to the point about whether there is a need for popular entertainment programmes to be produced by the BBC, I think you should differentiate between whether programmes, popular entertainment or purely entertainment, again relating to the Gaelic and local cultures, it can be an entertainment programme but it wouldn't be a mass entertainment programme, which would probably be what the commercial broadcasters would be interested in. So I think the BBC can provide that type of entertainment. Also I think the BBC is maybe in a better position to take a chance. The actors were mentioning some of the new comedies that were discovered through BBC Radio, again if these weren't going to be popular or have a big name from day one, they may not get a break with the commercial broadcasters. So I think the BBC does a lot to introduce people to the industry as a whole who may become bigger names down the line.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just wanted to add that there are very few taxes that I particularly like paying for, but this is one that I absolutely wouldn't live without and I would happily pay more for this service, because at least you get a tangible return for your money on this particular service. I think it is revered round the world and it is an institution by which others measure itself against, which probably does show you that through the information, the education and the entertainment it provides is of a higher standard, I certainly feel that it is of a higher standard. I think that you would lose that definitely by any other type, whether you go to subscription, whether you fund it through the government through income tax, etc, I think there would be other influences that it doesn't currently have that would go against what the BBC currently delivers, and can deliver, and has done.

FACILITATOR

I think a point that didn't come out in that sketch there, just to amplify your point, I think it is something like 75% of all programming in the UK is home grown, and the amount of home grown programming that is produced in the UK by commercial channels is higher than anywhere in Europe, so just to kind of amplify that point because I think it is quite an interesting observation. Who else has got comments about how the BBC is funded, because at the moment we have got quite a views that it is a positive thing. Does anyone disagree?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I have one concern in funding, the compulsory aspect to it, particularly for people on low incomes. I know it has been a problem in the past. At one stage the higher rate of women in prison was a result of being unable to pay this fee. So I think that type of situation creates a bad name for the whole licence system and perhaps that can be more fully explored.

FACILITATOR

I am not sure that I am exactly accurate, but I think that something like 150,000 people get prosecuted, I think that is the right figure but I am not absolutely sure.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just want to say that I feel that is an issue for the way that it is enforced, not whether you should have the licence fee or not but just how it is enforced. And if we are moving towards having digital across the country, and I take it that everybody would require a digital box in order to receive all the channels, then it would be a case of you buy your card, or pay for your card each month and the licence fee would be collected that way. Because I am also concerned about how much licence fee evasion is taking place and whether that is potential funding that is being lost. So if you needed the card in order to receive the service, then surely that would mean that all the money was being collected, plus everyone who was watching the programmes was paying for what they were watching.

FACILITATOR

So there is an argument for using some of this new technology to make sure the fee is paid in the first place, but to also protect those people that perhaps can't pay. Does anyone else have a view on this, I don't want to force the talk about it when we don't need to, but has anyone else got anything else they want to say about the funding issue?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The other thing that crosses my mind is you were saying that this fee was going to be raised from £116 - £121, but I don't know how this figure was arrived at. If there was an option of raising it to £150 and saying that we will be able to give you x, y and z in addition, or we could lower it to £100 and we could do away with x, y and z. It just seems that the figure is arrived at randomly with no input. It is like if you were buying any other product, you could

pay a bit more to get better quality, or a bit less to get something cheap and cheerful, so I think there could maybe be some aspect to that about the level of service that you were prepared to pay for.

FACILITATOR

I can't answer, there is a formal settlement process. Would you like to address that now?

LORD MCINTOSH

Yes, it was the then Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, in 1999 said to the BBC that until the end of the current charter, in other words to the end of 2006, the BBC would continue to get rises for inflation, plus 1.5% a year. Now I am not going into the argument as to why he said it, but that is the formula he used and it did give the BBC certainty about funding over that 6 or 7 year period.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Could you explain to me anyway what the subscription idea actually means?

FACILITATOR

You are talking about the subscription in general?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, that is one of the options you have mentioned.

FACILITATOR

As I understand it, it just means that for example if you get services from Sky you have a box which comes with the television, you pay a subscription to them each month and it is scrambled and then you have a card that you put into the box, it decodes it and then you can watch their programmes, and as long as you pay the subscription you get to watch their programmes, and if you don't get to pay the subscription you don't watch their programmes. That in essence is what it is. The argument that some people put forward is that if digital television will be available by 2010 to most homes, which I believe is a target, then there is the possibility to say we don't have to charge a flat fee and we could say to you what is it you want to watch? And then you could say well I would like that, and that, and that and you pay the relevant subscription, so if you don't watch the BBC services you don't have to pay a charge for it. That is one argument. Does that make sense?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, I understand that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

When the deliberations of this evening's meeting are taken into account in the Charter Review process, I don't want the rather poor turnout at this evening's meeting to be used in any way as a qualification for the sentiments and ideas which were expressed by everyone here this evening. I think for the record I would wish to say that I am actually appalled by the lack of advertising for this meeting, I don't think the venue has been well chosen for Edinburgh. I would hope that DCMS would get its act together and perhaps when we are further down the Charter Review process have a meeting which is much better publicised because then you would get a wider range of opinion, although I am confident that the substantial majority of that opinion would reflect the views we have already heard. And I have had a quick look round, there are around 20 people here, and I know for a fact that at least a quarter of us are here because I heard of the meeting through the Voice of Listener and Viewer, and I looked through the Edinburgh media for information about this meeting,

and did try to tell other people about it, but I know that there are many people in Edinburgh who if they had heard about this meeting would have attended. (Applause)

FACILITATOR

I will ask the Minister to just note that and perhaps to comment on it at the end when he does a wrap-up.

FACILITATOR

I want to move on now to think of governance, or how the BBC is run really. You have heard about the fact that it has worked perfectly for 81 years and why should we change it, and other views going this is a big operation now, can it really be run by 12 people who don't really know that much about broadcasting, so a couple of completely different arguments. Where do you stand on this?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think the first problem is the charter itself. I think we need a new system of creating the BBC as an organisation. A Royal Charter was all very well again in the 1920s, this point about being anachronistic was highlighted again in the argument of one of the actors, but I don't think it is appropriate any more and anyway the Royal Prerogative is very much the expression of the government of the day. What I think would be safer now would be to establish the BBC under statute and to consider in terms of its formation a separate board, a separate council which would regulate the body.

FACILITATOR

So some sort of external body outside the building, not even connected with them at all?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

First of all it would become a creature of statute, you would have an Act which would set it up and reappraise the whole organisation, but including in that reappraisal, do away with the charter altogether then and set up a statutory organisation and in the process also establish a separate regulatory body which would be independent of government and independent of government appointment as well.

FACILITATOR

Who else has a view on this? Should it stay the same, should we be happy with the way it is done at the moment, should there be a change. Do you care?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think that the Board of Governors, or whatever body is set up to replace it should that be necessary, should be more representative of the sort of people who watch BBC and the people in the UK in general, and perhaps that could be done by public office that these people are elected, and I think that is originally what the idea was for the BBC Board of Governors, that it was supposed to be a body of people that are able to say as normal citizens this could be improved, or that shouldn't be done.

FACILITATOR

What do you regard then as a normal citizen?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That of course is a bit difficult to define.

FACILITATOR

Because I certainly heard David Attenborough, I think it was, on Panorama the other night arguing that that was why they were there in the first place, that they were there to represent the interests of the viewer, they were people who weren't involved in broadcasting. I hope I am not misquoting him. But I would be interested to know if you think it should be other people, how one would choose those people.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It could be that there could be bodies on a regional basis, it doesn't just have to be 12 people representing the entire country, it seems a bit absurd to suggest that 12 people can do that, especially on a regional class-based basis as well.

FACILITATOR

So perhaps as that gentleman was saying, you could broaden it out and look at it rather more deeply than it is at the moment, rather than tinkering with it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would be interested to know how the board is put together and whether it is a bit like the Honours List where it is meant to be separate from the government but in actual fact it is quite heavily influenced, whether it is representative of the nations and regions across the country. And also I know that Ofcom regulate the other channels, so would they be able to regulate the BBC, or part of the BBC as well, how that would work, I don't know.

FACILITATOR

I can't answer any of that but we will certainly record that. Yes, Ofcom does now regulate the other channels and my recollection is that they do some sort of regulation of the BBC's quotas currently, regional quotas, but they don't impinge on other areas of the BBC's operation. So they do have a role in regulating the BBC currently but not that extensive. So I think in theory that could be one of the bodies that might possibly be considered as an independent body that that gentleman was talking about.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

No, I don't regard Ofcom as independent in the way that you seem to be indicating. Just a couple of points of information if I may. The BBC Board of Governors has a Governor for Scotland, a Governor for Northern Ireland and a Governor for Wales. One of the big discussions about Ofcom was the fact that the main board of Ofcom does not have that kind and nature of representation, so if you followed the debates around the Communications Act, that would be the place to go for that kind of information. And my understanding is that Ofcom, you are quite right, they regulate the BBC's commercial activities, and they also have some involvement which is a hangover from the Broadcasting Standards Commission on what used to be called taste and decency, but I think the current rhetoric is harm and offence when you discuss what is going into media content. But beyond that, I am not unhappy with the BBC Board of Governors as it is currently constituted at all, except for the fact that I don't want the Prime Minister, or the government, or the Secretary of State for DCMS to appoint the Chair of the BBC. Now I do know that attempts are being made under Nolan rules at the moment to broaden out the committee and the terms of reference by which the new Chair to succeed Gavyn Davis will be appointed, but I just don't want the government anywhere near that kind of process. So I would either go for some kind of appointment by parliament as a whole under Nolan rules, or perhaps even some electoral system, but I just want the government to keep away now from the BBC.

FACILITATOR

And your reason for that being, just to make it explicit?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just to make it explicit, and this is not aimed at the current government at all, any government historically going back to Anthony Eden, Churchill, Thatcher, Wilson, Blair, there is always a tension with the BBC and perhaps it is a very important tension, but politicians cannot resist getting fed up with the BBC when the BBC does things that they don't like. And if we want the BBC to be strong and independent, I think we need to enshrine its constitutional legitimacy and independence in ways which we separate from the government of the day.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would just like to agree with that completely, and I don't think it does need to be much more than 12 people. You tend to get more than 12 people and not a lot gets done. It could even be less. But if it is working at the moment then why change it, and I think it is sometimes when you have not got something that you realise just how good it was and by which point it could potentially be too late to go back and change it. So whether it has been around in the same format and the same system for 81 years or not, it has not done us really any harm thus far.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would just like to agree with the guy over there, but I am thinking that it is a public service, so presumably the public should be allowed to have a say in who is picked to be on the Board of Governors since it is a public service.

FACILITATOR

I will ask you the same question, how would you foresee that happening in a relatively smooth way?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I wouldn't actually know how it could work out, but I think some way could be found. I don't know actually. Maybe you could have people who are picked ...

FACILITATOR

OK, I think that is unfair of me to ask. Since I think the whole of Ofcom is looking at public service broadcasting remit, and there are various other people, so I won't push you on that one. But it does bring me to a question, which is do you think as a group that the BBC is sufficiently responsive to its viewers, and if so in what ways do you think it is responsive?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just want to say absolutely, yes, I have written to the BBC on one occasion where I was particularly unhappy and they wrote a lovely letter back, and I think that is more than I get from most organisations, commercial organisations certainly, and I think that you just have to watch the variety of what the BBC actually produces to know that it is responsive to its viewers and its listeners. And I don't want to make some sweeping generalisation that the great British public are not as well educated as they could be, but again what I would stress is that you don't often appreciate things when they are there in front of you, until they are no longer there in front of you, and I think it does listen.

FACILITATOR

So for you it is responsive. Do you think it responds sufficiently for example to Scottish affairs? Do you think it gives a fair enough reflection of what is going on up here, and if so why not and how might it be done better?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I am sorry to speak again, but there is a small group and everyone is going to get their view in I hope. I think it is too responsive in some ways because I think it tries too hard very often to make the programmes too accessible, leading to what I call the Venice/Italy problem. In the Harrison Ford film, the Indiana Jones one, they say that he is going to Venice, Italy, because there is an assumption that people don't know that Venice is in Italy, and I think that many BBC programmes sometimes try too hard to be accessible, instead of encouraging the viewers to be perhaps more active and letting the viewers grow and develop in an educational way. But beyond that, as a Scotsman who lived in England for nearly 20 years and has come home to Scotland, I am absolutely clear that we need a Scottish 6. But I would also like, perhaps more broadly, Ofcom to require ITN/STV Grampian to do the same kind of activity, not just the BBC.

FACILITATOR

OK, so more of a focus. Is it sufficiently responsive really was the question to what viewers are looking for, to what you are looking for? Eventually you can only comment from your own point of view.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think it is maybe too responsive to an extent by default in that if there is a successful programme on the commercial channels then you tend to get a BBC copy of that produced, like there was Pop Idol, then Fame Academy and the makeover programmes that have been mirrored. So I suppose that is being responsive because they are seeing what is popular on the other side and then trying to mirror it, but then there is maybe an argument as to whether that is really the job of the BBC, or should they be looking at if that group of viewers, if their needs are being met by the commercial broadcasters, what can we do to satisfy those who are not switching on.

FACILITATOR

That does contrast with the argument made earlier, about is it really their role – which we will come on to – to be doing those sorts of programmes at all. Should they be copying?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think there is, I think perhaps that sometimes it is the quantity of them rather than the fact that they do it. I think there are some programmes that are of particular value that may not get ratings, Question Time etc that has been put on later in the evening, where you could sit and watch house programmes, and makeover programmes all night until you are ready to fall asleep, and then the one that you want to see comes on. But that is under a different heading.

FACILITATOR

We will move on to that. That is fine. This is a bit of a false distinction to say let's talk about funding, then Governors, then role of, because it is all intertwined really.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just to refer to the Gaelic language again, I feel that Radio Nagael (phon), the Gaelic radio broadcasters, are very much in touch with the public. As a member of that community I feel very close to the BBC services on radio, and they do involve, one might expect them to keep their programmes very localised to the Highlands and Islands, but they don't do that, they involve people in Edinburgh, and Glasgow, and Aberdeen, and all over Scotland and make sure that there is a spread of interest on their news, on current affairs programmes. So I am very satisfied with the service they provide to our community.

FACILITATOR

So that is an argument, as I am understanding it, for saying yes there is a relatively – for want of a better word, I don't particularly like this – but niche audience, or an interest audience, but what they are giving you is a rather more broader panorama of views.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, they do give a broad range of programmes. A lot of them are contributory programmes where they have the public phoning in and contributing to their programmes, but they also take account of learners of Gaelic and have special programmes for them as well.

FACILITATOR

I just want to make sure, before coffee, that you have voiced everything you want to voice about this issue of how it is governed, before we close this down, have a quick coffee and then we will come back and think about the broader role of the BBC now.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just wanted to say that I think the DCMS as a state organ should be able to organise a sufficient turnout, and this is absolutely dreadful. I have been to public meetings organised by civic campaign movements which were overflowing, and you can do wonders with leaflets and posters, and I don't think that there was any thought put into promoting this event at all, not for the larger public.

FACILITATOR

OK, so that is a amplification on that point. Thank you. That will certainly be recorded.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would like to reiterate support for Scottish 6, I think to offer news and current programmes that are attached to UK-wide programmes and I think that we need more stand alone programmes to emphasise the importance for example of devolution and the Scottish Parliament's work and to give a more Scottish focus.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think that I am not sure about that point, because sometimes the programmes that come out of Scotland are not nearly as good as come out from London or the national networks, in fact there have been some very poor programmes and only occasionally do you actually get one that is good.

FACILITATOR

Can you explain to us, certainly for me who is not living up here, what you would regard as poor as opposed to good?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think certainly River City for a start, that sort of programme.

FACILITATOR

And what sort of programme is that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It is like Eastenders and this sort of thing, and quite a lot of the programmes that do come from Scotland are not as good as the national programmes. And as long as they are the same standard, that is OK, but if they are going to be poorer then no.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Sorry, but I want to disagree with that because that is kind of the Scots, and the Scots are very good at fighting amongst themselves in many ways. If you look at the Gaelic programme, Eorpa, it is actually the best programme on British television for dealing with continental European issues. Beyond that, the BBC does make a number of mistakes, and doubtless we will talk about them later. So I think most people here this evening might call themselves critical friends of the Beeb, as it were. But calling BBC 4 a place to think seems to be extraordinary to me, because surely BBC is 1 and 2, not to mention 3 and whatever else, should be places to think. So there is an issue there about what kind of programming the BBC is aiming to put on for its various audiences.

FACILITATOR

Which is a very nice place to finish this particular section, given that we can then pick that point up with any luck to draw us into the broader role of what the role of the BBC is.

- BREAK -

FACILITATOR

As I said, this is a very broad area, we could have a debate just on commercial activities, we could have a debate on programming content. So really it is kind of down to you where you want to start on this. What do you feel is the role of the BBC now? Do you think it should be listening to some of those views shunted into the corners to do with public service broadcasting, do you think it should have a broader remit, do you think it ought to be going on subscription. What is your view about the role of a public service broadcast like the BBC in the 21st century?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I feel that the BBC as an institution should strongly support indigenous minority languages throughout the UK, and I would like just to make that point, that the protection and development of minority indigenous languages and cultures throughout the UK should be something that the BBC should strive to work towards.

FACILITATOR

And would you like to see them make some sort of commitment to do that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes I would if that is appropriate to be in their charter, I feel that a public service broadcaster should support these vital parts of our society that are indicative of our Scottishness, or our Britishness, or whatever, but we need to maintain these languages and cultures, which are under threat, not only here but worldwide, and particularly in Scotland. If Gaelic dies in Scotland, well that is it, it is not going to survive anywhere else in the world, so we need to look after it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just wanted to pick up on one of the points that was made by the actors there, and that was that across the country the BBC News at 6.30 gets better figures than its commercial alternative. I come from Aberdeen and up in the Grampian region it is actually the commercial broadcaster that gets better figures, and I believe that is largely because they are based in Aberdeen, whereas the BBC for the whole of Scotland is based in Glasgow. And I know it was mentioned earlier about Scotland fighting among itself, but I do think that is a serious issue, that it is so Glasgow-based, Glasgow-centred, BBC Scotland, and if we were going to move towards a Scottish 6 that the other cities – Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Kirkwall – would all need to have their output increased to reflect that.

FACILITATOR

Given that people will read this feedback on the website, could someone articulate what Scottish 6 is?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The Scottish 6 is a proposed version of the 6.00 News which would come wholly from Scotland, so it would all be one programme from 6.00 – 7.00, so rather than having the British London-based news from 6.00 – 6.30 and then the regional news from 6.30 – 7.00, the whole running order would be dictated from Glasgow and presented from Glasgow, so that you wouldn't lead with a top story that maybe wasn't particularly relevant to people in Scotland, and then the Scottish programme would also incorporate the international stories as well.

FACILITATOR

So there you are talking about a role for a more regional colour as well. Going back a point, now you have explained the Scottish 6 thing, the thing about Aberdeen is that the BBC perhaps needs to be slightly more regional in its coverage in your opinion in this area?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, and as a viewer I would probably argue between even Edinburgh and Glasgow. I feel living in Edinburgh there is more a Glasgow bias, so I think that purely just to have the whole programme coming from Scotland wouldn't be enough, it would need to be looked at that it was representative of the whole of Scotland, and not just part of the West coast.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I don't really feel I am very good technically, but I am not quite sure why the BBC in future shouldn't be able to take advantage of the selective payment for programmes, as they do in the commercial world, particularly when you have got the new technology coming in. I am very much uncritical of the BBC as it is and I certainly wouldn't wish to change it too dramatically, and I think the licence fee is fine. But why shouldn't the BBC, if it wishes to, raise extra revenue for for instance more sport or more selective sport as the commercials do. Maybe this could be incorporated at some stage in its charter.

FACILITATOR

OK. I was tempted to say something then, but I shouldn't do in my role.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would just like to come back on the subscription point and say that the idea behind the subscription would be that you would pay for the type of programming that you would choose to watch, and I don't have any children, so I probably wouldn't pay for children's programming, but I think as a society, and there is maybe a moral aspect to it, that just because I wouldn't pay for it because I don't watch it myself doesn't mean that I don't think it should be there and should be supported. My taxes pay for schools, and I don't have kids, but I do feel that children should be educated, just like I feel that children should have access to children's programmes. So I am quite happy for the BBC to decide how to divvy up the money that I am prepared to give them, rather than it purely going towards what I want to watch.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just on that point on how you feel about the BBC now as an adult. From a very personal point of view, the BBC influenced me with two particular programmes which would be Grange Hill and Newsround. Newsround offered me as a child current affairs from a perspective that I could understand, and I have continued and maintained an interest in that

as an adult. Grange Hill broached such subjects as drug taking and various other issues in a way that was sensitive and addressed these issues. And I certainly know that any child tuning into the BBC can have access to these kind of programmes, whereas if you look at commercialised programmes for children they are extremely violent, inappropriate and you just don't have the control as you do for the BBC. So I think it is really important, as an adult, to have the opportunity to fund these kind of programmes because they influence children that then turn into adults, that then watch the programmes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture? It needs to recover its confidence. With the recent retiral, far too soon, of Alistair Cook, one of the things that was said in the many comments about his contribution to our society was that the BBC nowadays wouldn't have room, or give the support, to something like Letter from America. And it seems to me very strongly that the BBC actually should have room for that kind of initiative in the future. Beyond that, I would want to put in a plea for the BBC not to take advertising, and by that I include its own advertising, because I detect amongst many people I know an increasing irritation with the number of trailers that the BBC puts on for its own programmes, and the branding of the channels and all that kind of stuff. So although it sounds as though, I am not trying to go back to the 1930s elitist patriarchal patronising BBC, I don't think that is appropriate, but it does need in an age which has been described as post-modern, to nonetheless have a bit of confidence in its programming and in trying to do quality things.

FACILITATOR

Which comes down to the point that you are making I think really, which is the tension between the citizen and the consumer really. So the consumer part of you might say I want to buy this because that is what I want, and I think the citizen part of you, which I think is what you are articulating here, is actually that there is a broader aspect of the individual in a political society, you know what do we need to do for everybody, and who would do it? So it is a kind of roundabout answer to the point that you are making, it is a balancing of that tension. And I read something in the Economist, funnily enough, which made exactly the same point about Alistair Cook, which is would they have room for someone like that now, in a soundbite culture, to do 15 minutes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just if I could come back on one additional point, and then I will be quiet. Recent events have destabilised the BBC, as we all know, and it is an extremely dangerous time for our culture, democracy and society if the current government don't get things right, and the BBC don't get things right for the future, because this is the most dangerous time for the BBC in decades. I am not going into the rights and wrongs of the Hutton whitewash, I am just saying this is a dangerous time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I wish to go back to the point about the national news and Scottish News. I think it should stay the way it is. I don't think it is for people in Scotland to decide what we might want to know about things that are happening nationally, what is happening in England, what is happening in other parts of the UK. I know there are a lot of people who just want to have Scotland separate, I don't think that is necessary and I think if we have Scottish news as well as national news, I think that is quite important.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I am concerned about this issue of the BBC getting it right. This was pointed out just now. I don't think the BBC is an institution which acts as a glue to hold the nation together. I think

that that was an old-fashioned view and it required far too much of the BBC. I think it has created an institution which is rooted in consensualism, that it is not concerned for diversity of view, it is made up of many middle-class people with a middle-class background, ... type of education. I think it should be a public space to reflect the whole country. I think it should create in fact many voices and many critical voices, it should include dissent. So often all we hear on BBC is a confirmation of the government view, or opposition view, there is no sense that it is an institution involved in progress and change, in making people think about things and challenging them and taking them forward, everything is done in a very controlled fashion, even the late night discussion programmes are carefully controlled, everyone is given his soundbite and it ends there. I think the BBC in the 21st century should be a far more dynamic body, you know creating a society which is more appropriate to the 21st century, and also more rooted in the idea of democracy, which is debate, which is the expression of many voices. It should become again a truly public platform, and not one of the institutions bolstering up the government and the monarchy of the day.

FACILITATOR

A very good point. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I wanted to say that as a public service broadcaster I think the BBC should make people aware a lot more that we all live on the same planet and in doing so promote issues that affect people all over the world and create a sense of multiculturalism that exists in our society, but doesn't seem to exist within the BBC, which Greg Dyke once described as hideously white.

FACILITATOR

Let me put this view to you then. You say it should have a greater range of views on it. What would you say to someone who came back and said well that is fine, but actually that is not what people want to watch. You know they have got 400 channels, you could put all the public service broadcasting you like on the BBC, but they don't want to watch it, they want to watch something else. What would be the point of that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think for example that when I turn on the TV sometimes I can tune into a programme that at first may not exactly conform to what I feel like doing at that particular moment in time, but it does respond to me by appealing to me by being informative or entertaining or educational. My point is that these programmes fulfil a basic role in telling us who we are, and I think it is up to the producers to see how they can make them appeal to people without losing the importance of telling people that, and there are basic social issues that have to be discussed and debated.

FACILITATOR

This is certainly a point that has been made elsewhere, that part of the function is to draw people into issues that they otherwise wouldn't perhaps even be aware of or care about.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The answer to your conundrum is what you do not do is push public service broadcasting into a ghetto where it is only serious or educational programmes, news, current affairs and documentaries, but you support, monitor, regulate the current ecology of British broadcasting so that you don't diminish the BBC or top-slice its licence fee, so people go to the BBC as a matter of course and the reach as well as the ratings matter, and what you do is you get them going for the entertainment programmes, and the entertainment

programmes and the news and current affairs programmes together provide a package which people are willing to support.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

This is obviously a matter of topic, but one of the things, and I wouldn't want to misquote, but Sue MacGregor commented that she was challenged when she said that it would be really good for us to have BBC World Service broadcast in the UK, and somebody had said to her oh we are not ready for it in the UK, and she said well I think you ought to ask them the question. I have to say that during the last general election we were abroad and watched the BBC World Service. It is a fantastic service that is offered, and why don't we have it in the UK? And what I would say is that perhaps the only thing that I would bring the World Service and replace is News 24, because I think there is already sufficient news of that nature.

LORD MCINTOSH

If I may, BBC World Service is broadcast on BBC radio digital, you can get it in the UK but only if you have digital radio.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

But not everyone has digital.

LORD MCINTOSH

No, I accept that that is a very small minority, but it is available in that way.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It was the TV service that I was speaking about.

LORD MCINTOSH

The TV service? OK.

FACILITATOR

And what would you say then is the benefit of the World Service coverage, what does it give you that these other things don't?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

John Simpson. It is a bit like the Guardian in Europe, it is actually a better read sometimes, even though they ... their stories from here.

FACILITATOR

Are we talking about a broader brush?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, because I think the point has been made, I think there is an interest for local, national, regional news and world news, I think it is bigger than just the UK, and the stories that are selected, the stories that you are able to see on the World Service, especially in the news programmes that they show, gives you a more holistic view.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think there is a case for the present position where you have got BBC 1 for example providing a mix of programmes. Quite a number of people have made the point that it enables people to come upon programmes. For example for myself I have found out with Gaelic I would probably not choose specifically to watch a Gaelic programme, but every so often I come across Gaelic programmes, or I specifically maybe choose to watch Eorpa. But

as a result I enjoy these programmes, and I think it is the ability to offer that range of programme, and it is also a discovery too, and it would bring people to programmes they otherwise might never watch. But there is the other issue too of BBC 2, I think it provides still an important function, and it must retain that function of serving a minority audience, and recognise that it is always going to be a minority for that type of programme. Nevertheless it is a function because we have got to serve the whole country, and in an increasingly pluralistic society, I think that type of channel becomes even more important, and perhaps that needs to be extended, again to reflect that diversity. I think the era of the mass audience has gone, the national audience, I think we now have to serve a much more diverse society, and we can do that by providing a range of common programmes which will serve the whole country and where there is the opportunity to discover programmes we might not otherwise watch. And then there are speciality channels where you are serving the various sections of society.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just on that point, I would like to agree with you. And in terms of the Gaelic programmes – am I interested? No. I am English. I have not been raised with Gaelic. Do I support it? Yes, because it is important to the Scottish society, or whomever, and I think that that is really important. So although I don't tune in, that doesn't necessarily mean that I don't support it, which is why fundamentally I support the BBC, because I know that they offer that as a public service, and again I guess it comes back to taxes and the point that this gentleman raised here is that you might not want everything that your taxes provide, but that doesn't mean that you don't support it, and I think that is really important.

FACILITATOR

So it is a broader principle.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It is a very simple point. One of the pleasures of watching the BBC is you don't have these wretched adverts. (Applause)

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just a follow-up on the diversity and the minority programming, like the Gaelic. I agree that Gaelic should be supported, but also that we have got to reflect the current society that we are living in, and society has changed quite a lot in recent times and there are more and more people coming to this country from different cultures, and you know they are paying their licence fee as well, they are part of the audience, part of the system, and that if we are going to have money set aside or devoted towards existing cultures – Welsh, Gaelic – then we should look at directing money towards these incoming cultures as well to create everyone's understanding of them and that will help integration.

FACILITATOR

So again to broaden the understanding.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Absolutely.

FACILITATOR

An issue we haven't touched on yet is the issue of the digital channel particularly. Specifically should the BBC actually be involved in delivering these things? So should it be

involved in the business of investing in digital channels? The criticism of that would be when they look at the annual accounts, looking at the number of people who are watching some of those things like BBC 3 and BBC 4, and looking at the amount of money it has cost and then dividing the number of heads watching it by the amount invested, and saying it is no business of the BBC to be doing this.

How do you react to that argument? Should they be involved, or not?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The major point I would make is that it provides a better quality service, and for that reason it should if it wants to remain one of the premier services within the UK, it should do that for that reason alone. And it is a problem, the commercialisation of the BBC and how far that should go, but it is very difficult to disentangle itself at this stage. But it certainly should be a concern of how far it does go, because I take the point from the commercial broadcasters that it does on occasion reflect unfair competition, you know from a subsidised broadcaster.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think I represent the common man, because I have seen these BBC 3 and 4, and I wonder if in fact they are spreading money a bit too thinly and whether what is produced on that couldn't be very well added to what they have already. So I am unsure as to why in fact they have developed those particular channels.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Is your argument that the programming that you are watching on them is not distinctive enough from the other channels?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It is a comment rather than an argument, I wouldn't argue the toss, I just was unsure as to why they should introduce two further channels, I don't know why they did it, because it seems to me they are spreading the money too thinly.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

This is a difficult question for everybody, including the BBC. But clearly the market thus far has not delivered digitalisation and the mess which ITV Digital got into, which contributed in large measure to the crisis that ITV has had recently, is one factor that we need to take into account. The BBC has furthered the UK government's objectives substantially by launching Freeview and by launching these digital channels. Now I don't have digital, my 72 year old mother doesn't have digital, and we are paying for it to some extent, I guess to the licence fee. And your point about spreading the money too thinly is a powerful one. But having said that, the BBC still has those commercial activities, out of which, according to the DCMS document, they make about £126 million of profits each year. I guess those profits from BBC Commercial are going into BBC digital, rather than the licence fee going into it, but I am not clear about the overall funding. I suppose I should be. And I think the BBC is doing us all a favour by advancing the country as a whole towards digital television which will help e-commerce, which will help electronic democracy as well and interactive services, and more choice in the future. But when you kind of come down to it for me, I don't believe that in broadcasting the market delivers choice. You just need to look for example at the multiplex cinemas near here – and that is the market – and it is dominated by American film product, and there is not a wide choice, and you say to yourself well does the market deliver choice? Not for me it doesn't. And therefore the importance of regulation and the importance of having the BBC is the best way to deliver a wider choice, and that includes in the digital future for me.

FACILITATOR

That point is certainly commented on, I think in a BBC report which as I said earlier there is something like 75% of TV programming is home grown, but 85% of our films are made in the United States. So I think that is basically the point you are making there, isn't it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

My views on the digital is that perhaps the programmes that are shown on BBC 3 and BBC 4 really were the kind of programmes that would have initially been broken in BBC 1 and BBC 2, and maybe there is an argument about dumbing down by moving the thinking programmes to a separate thinking channel and that you are not having to incorporate them in the mainstream. So I think perhaps that could be reversed so that these programmes are integrated back into the mainstream channels, and that perhaps the digital channels could be used for showing the repeats that are so popular on UK Gold, these types of channels, for showing the movies that the BBC has the rights to, but instead people have to subscribe to cable channels and to Sky in order to receive these popular services that the BBC could actually provide as part of its package anyway.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

All I would like to add to that fact, and the fact that they originally produce them, and also about commercial services like Hass (phon), perhaps more of an extremely large video and DVD collection is actually BBC TV series and programmes that they have produced, so I definitely wouldn't want that to stop.

FACILITATOR

What do we think about – a point that we haven't covered particularly yet, although we have touched on it – commercial activities. I heard someone certainly at one of these meetings describe the BBC's commercial activities as immoral, in that we were already paying for it, therefore we shouldn't be charged for it again. I have my views about whether that argument stacks up, for various reasons, but what do you think about that argument? Is it immoral? If so, why; and if not, why not?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think it is about compromise. In an ideal world, yes you would like the BBC to be entirely funded through tax or through the licence, but I think because of increasing costs of broadcasting, and if you want an increasing diversity of broadcasting and good quality programmes, it is one way of subsidising that and keeping the licence fee down. But I think there should be a constant check on it. I think at a certain point it would become seriously offensive to people, and to particularly the competitors of the BBC.

FACILITATOR

Thank you. There is a crowd singing in the background. Can you hear them? Any more points, just thinking about this broader role. There is something quite off-putting about football chants in the background.

OFFICIAL

I am not really supposed to do this, but I just thought I would join in because it has been such a fascinating conversation this evening. On the necessary evil of commercialisation, one of the things that happened at the Golden Jubilee weekend in London, which I was closely involved with, was that we were able to defray a huge, huge amount of the costs of that event with the subsequent sales that the BBC achieved in selling the concerts out across the world. And in terms of where the BBC sits in our society, the other thing that happened was that all around the world people joined in that celebration and saw images of this nation – sorry, of Britain – that were significantly powerful in terms of our place in the

way people look at us as all the nations of Britain. So there is a necessary evil, but sometimes it works to huge effect in terms of promoting us as a people around the world.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

There was a lot of discussion earlier on about choice, and surely it is choice, I don't see that it is immoral at all. If I choose to pay – well I don't choose to, but I pay for the service and I am happy to – and I watch a programme and I happen to really enjoy that programme, I like to have the choice to then be able to buy that programme on video, DVD, audiotape, CD, etc.

FACILITATOR

Yes, I think from a purely argumentative point of view, it would only become immoral for me if I was forced to buy it again. But there we are, that is just my view.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was just going to say that the only concern I have about commercialisation is when they have these phone polls on the television and if that is using premium rate in order to cream off more money. I would be concerned about the BBC using those kind of tactics, because they should be encouraging people to take part and to be interactive, and not to put financial barriers in the way.

FACILITATOR

A good point. Thank you. Now before we move on to doing a little vote about some of the issues that we have covered, are there any other points that you have got in your heads, either about funding, about governance, the gentleman who has left now made a point about Gaelic, anything about the role in society, anything you came here that you thought I really want the DCMS to take this on board?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would just like to say that I do support the BBC and I hope that it is something that does carry on.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just want to raise the issue of impartiality. For long it has been a cornerstone of BBC practice, but it never has been an absolute reality. I think it is certainly something that should be addressed, particularly with the review coming up, it is a standard and it is spoken about round the world, and yet so often it is not reflected in our national programmes, and particularly in news-related programmes, and I think this needs to be reassessed. I think there is a case, for example some American broadcasters are looking at the idea of opinionated broadcasting anyway, and again should the absolute standard be impartiality? Perhaps it would be a more interesting service, a more dynamic service if greater diversity was allowed, and a much more opinionated type of broadcasting. I think it is time we looked at this and not run away from it, because it is not some sort of sacred service and it hasn't got an unblemished record. Repeated research has shown that it is not impartial in any way at all, despite its so-called record.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I disagree entirely with the previous speaker in all kinds of ways and regard the impartiality and due balance as being, not sacrosanct, and to use a phrase which I heard our Prime Minister use not that long ago, despite what the previous speaker said, I think you have to look at what the totality of the BBC has done and meant to our society over many, many decades. And impartiality, like objectivity, is an aspiration, it is never going to be 100% achieved, but my goodness the BBC in its totality is as good as it gets.

FACILITATOR

Are you saying, just to pick this point up again, that there may be a space, if not the whole service, for a partial view on occasions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, exactly that. One gets the impression that impartiality rules, and as a result it has made the BBC very tame, from top to bottom there is increasing concern about getting it wrong, particularly since Hutton. I gather within the BBC in terms of its operation they are constantly referring upwards, any critical area, any area which might get them into trouble. And as a result, as I say, what is often produced is a very tame organisation. There must be space for more diverse voices, more opinionated voices in a stronger language. I think in that respect it would be a more dynamic institution.

FACILITATOR

And that would come back to your point made earlier about stimulating debate in the wider society?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes exactly. We are marked today by a lack of interest in politics, a lack of interest in things beyond our private sphere. The BBC provides the opportunity for doing something about this I think in a very real way. It has the attention of large sections of the community. It needs to activate them, or reactivate them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

One of the great dangers which I have heard put by people associated with News International is that in a world where people are increasingly media literate there is no need for impartial news, people can make up their own minds in the same way that they can make up their own minds about newspapers, and therefore you could have a whole range of television channels, each of which is opinionated. Well if you want that, go to Italy and watch Berlusconi's TV channels. I think that would be not terribly positive for our society.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Above all I think I would like the BBC to remain independent, because as soon as the government, as it already is able to, has a say in how certain parts of the BBC are to be administered, or run, or in selecting certain administrators, it is able to influence the content and the entire form of the BBC's output, and if that takes its course you end up with a situation like in Italy. And also I think that there has to be serious effort to implement measures that make the BBC in the way it chooses its programming and in the way it produces it accountable to the wider public, and that engages in debate issues about how and what form of content it should have with the wider public. So there has to be a pro-active process, not merely a condescending form of saying well we should give them this, and that, and that, it has to be debated and engaged with the wider public.

FACILITATOR

It is a bit unfair to ask you this before you put the microphone down, but the Minister mentioned that one of the givens, if I am not misquoting him and Tessa Jowell, was to say the BBC will remain independent. I am asking you what would independence look like to you?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The administration should be appointed for the greater good of the BBC and should be appointed from within society. Every time someone is appointed as chairman, or chairperson

of a public service broadcasting channel such as Channel 4, he has a background from in the corporate management, or corporate politics, and I think it needs to be wider than that. If we think of the BBC as an institution akin to a public school for instance, you wouldn't want the Director of McDonalds to become the head teacher of a public school.

FACILITATOR

You are referring to the restaurateur who was appointed as head of Channel 4, is that what you are referring to?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I don't mean him personally.

FACILITATOR

I just thought the food allusion was a bit ..

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just to go back to whether the BBC should be impartial or opinionated, I feel that it should strive to give a wider platform to people who have opinions, but not the BBC itself, so it should provide a platform for maybe extreme groups like the BNP, this kind of thing, because they are all part of society and I think society deserves, and should be respected to have the intelligence to take on board what all people have got to say, but I don't think the person who is reading the news should be putting their opinion inbetween the stories saying what they think about it.

FACILITATOR

So it is an enabling function.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, absolutely.

(VOTING NOT TRANSCRIBED)

LORD MCINTOSH

Thank you very much Aiden, a very few words indeed. Clearly we don't have quantity, but we certainly have quality, and I am very grateful to everybody for the contribution that you have been making. This is an agonising process for me. I am an opinionated person and I want to burst in all the time with my own views and the rules don't allow me to do that, and it is a measure of the quality of the discussion this evening that it has been more agonising for me than on any other occasion. Thank you for giving me that agony.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)