

**TRANSCRIPT OF EXTRACTS FROM MEETING
OF THE BBC CHARTER REVIEW
HELD IN LEICESTER
ON TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2004**

RT HON TESSA JOWELL

Can I just interrupt your discussion, which has already got going, and welcome you here this evening, and to say that I am Tessa Jowell, I am the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and together with my colleague, the Broadcasting Minister, Andrew McIntosh, we are holding meetings in different parts of the UK about the future of the BBC as part of the review of the BBC's charter. And you are all here because for the first time ever we are trying to get the views of people who pay the licence fee about how they think the BBC should develop. And this is a no holds barred discussion, you can raise questions or express your view about any aspect at all about the BBC's operation. And there is nothing unusual about the fact that the Charter is up for review now. It happens every 10 years, and every 10 years the funding of the BBC, should the licence fee continue, the governance of the BBC, is it right that Governors both regulate the BBC and also act as non-executive directors for the BBC, the role of the BBC in what is a very rapidly changing broadcasting environment, should the BBC do more, should the BBC do less, should the BBC do about the same, what about scheduling, are the programmes that the BBC carries the right and appropriate kinds of programmes for a public service broadcaster? And what about, having just come from the BBC Asian network, questions like what is the BBC's role in terms of community development and community outreach?

So those are the sort of questions, but if you have other questions beyond that that you would like to raise, or points that you would like to discuss, then please feel free to do that. Because what I hope we will have at the point at which the consultation closes at the end of this month, is a report of conversations with people all round the country that we will then be able to draw on in beginning to move to the second stage of the review of the Charter, which will be the formulation of proposals that will go in a Green Paper that will be published by the government in the early part of next year. Now a Green Paper, in government jargon, is a paper which sets out broad policy, takes some decisions and sets out what some of those decisions are, but leaves some questions still open for further discussion. And so the Green Paper would then be followed by what is called a White Paper, which is a final statement of policy, before the Charter is concluded, and ready to be concluded, which will be the end of 2006. So we are doing this with plenty of time. And I think it is quite extraordinary that this is the first time ever that members of the public have been involved in this process, but I see this as an incredibly productive and important part of getting the Charter right.

In addition to these open meetings that we are having around the country, we have a website. The website has already had about 20,000 visitors, and about 2,000 people have already put in their submissions, and I don't think any of these, or hardly any of them, have come from people in the industry. So these are again members of the public expressing their views about the BBC. Because we will all in this room have different tastes about programmes and have preferences as between radio and television and so forth, but the BBC is one of our greatest national institutions and it is one of the things that people in other parts of the world envy about this country. You know so often people say what they envy is our National Health Service and our BBC. And some of you may want to raise some questions about the row between the BBC and the government over the Andrew Gilligan claims which led to the tragic death of Dr David Kelly, and Lord Hutton's inquiry and the aftermath of that inquiry. What I would just say is that the tragedy in all that was that somebody died, but Lord Hutton's inquiry was a quite separate process from the process

that you are now helping us with, which is the process of charter review, and charter review actually began before Lord Hutton concluded and published his report.

There will always be arguments between the government of the day, and the BBC and other broadcasters, because there will always be occasions when the broadcasters publish things that the government doesn't like. But the important thing for the broadcaster – for the BBC in this case – is that it is strong and has the constitutional strength to withstand that pressure and is independent of government, and that it holds true to what I think is a very important founding principle which is a constitutional obligation for the BBC actually, and that is upholding accuracy and impartiality in the reporting of news and current affairs, and that is important for all of us because we know that when we go out and buy a paper in the morning that we are buying opinions, you don't have the same expectation of factual reporting when you read a newspaper as you do when you turn on the radio or television, and maintaining the integrity therefore of the accuracy and impartiality in broadcasting is very important indeed in terms of the wider public expectation.

So that is a little bit about where we are, and we are talking to you here today, I have got the privilege of talking to you here in Leicester. There is another meeting in Scotland next week, and I am in York the week after that, and we have also got two meetings planned with children because beginning to build a relationship between young people in the BBC is a very important part of making sure that the BBC is as relevant in the future as it is today, and the BBC has invested quite a lot in its children's programming, particularly the two channels which are on the digital platform on Freeview. So those will be interesting and that will be a new way of getting at the kind of information and reaction that we are seeking to pursue.

So I think that is enough from me by way of general introduction, and I hope that gives you a flavour of what I hope can come from the discussion this evening. I am now going to hand over to Aidan Elliott who is going to be the Facilitator and who is going to guide us through the proceedings this evening.

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I do take issue with the BBC on a couple of points. But may I begin by paying the BBC a compliment. I do indeed believe, and I have travelled, and I have listened to broadcasting in other countries, and I do believe, very much so, that the BBC is indeed the best in the world. I have no issue with the quality of programming from the BBC. Let that be established. I do however take issue with the way it is funded. I notice in the little sketch that all the arguments coming from the person playing the pro-BBC side were arguments in favour of the quality, but the argument in favour of choice, there was no choice if somebody did not want to pay the licence fee. I see it in this context. Say for example I am, whatever, selling apples at the front of my house and somebody walks by and they choose not to buy my apples, but indeed to buy apples from my neighbour. If I was to say: "Excuse me, that will be 4p per apple anyway", of course the idea is ludicrous. If I worked for the Natwest Bank and nobody wanted to bank with the Natwest, wouldn't it be ludicrous to charge them fees. The BBC, as far as I know, is the only business in this country that get paid, whether or not anyone takes their services, and with that I do take issue. I believe that the opportunity is coming up when, and I think it may still be if, in 2010 the analogue signals are switched off. The opportunity arises, if and when we all go digital, one way or the other – satellite, cable, Freeview – for a scrambling method to be put in position so that those people that want to take advantage of the BBC's high quality programming may do so. But I think it is wrong on moral grounds for the public at large to have to pay for the BBC, whether they want it or not, simply because they have a TV set in the home. And I do appreciate that when the

whole funding structure was set up, your very decoding equipment was that television set, or was indeed that radio set. However, that has led to an attitude problem on the part of the BBC and I do find them incredibly arrogant. I have been discussing issues with one or two of the other people here, prior to the opening of the meeting, and I found that the issue with regard to the BBC's arrogance, if someone wants to contact them, if somebody has issues which don't support the BBC's particular view, then they more or less dismiss it. And indeed they can afford it, because at the end of the day they are getting paid anyway, and it is that that I take issue with.

FACILITATOR

I think that is an excellent summary of the situation. So rather than me reply, let's have some other responses to that position.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The main response after that is regarding the rest of the services provided by central government and the other things that are provided, like the NHS for example, someone might not use that in an entire year, might not go to the doctor, some of them might not go into a library, use sports facilities from the council, but they still pay for them. And as regards the ideas of choice, if somebody had more choice, if the BBC was a commercial provider they could choose not to buy from the BBC. However I believe in the long run that would seriously degrade the choice available because the BBC doesn't have to chase after subscribers, viewers, listeners, then it can offer the kind of services that are completely different to a commercially competing organisation, and not only would it have to change the quality and style of its broadcasting if it were to be competing, it would also change the entire marketplace because it would move down the spectrum. At the moment it is at one side of the spectrum and it pulls all the other broadcasters towards it, so I believe that if it did have to compete then that would change not only the quality of its own output, but it would change the quality of the entire broadcasting output as well.

FACILITATOR

Can you tell us briefly what is in your head when you are saying competing? Are you meaning competing in an open marketplace, are you meaning having reduced funding, because let's say it went to – taking up this gentleman's option – subscription, less people took it up, therefore there was less of a fund for it. Where are you coming from in terms of how competitive the BBC has been?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

At the moment it gets a set amount of money every year from the licence fee, and it is pretty much guaranteed at a certain level. If the amount of money that came into the BBC was dependent on the number of people who listened, viewed, subscribed, either from a set subscription fee or from advertising, then obviously it would have to pitch its programmes at a level to get the maximum number of viewers or subscribers. Obviously if it didn't perform commercially, the amount of money would go down. I think that would be very detrimental.

FACILITATOR

That point seems to go to the heart of this idea of whether a broadcaster is going to a citizen or to a consumer, ie giving them what they want or what perhaps the government or the broadcasters feel they should have.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I am one of the fortunate ones that doesn't pay the TV licence because of my age, so I have an absolutely open mind. I don't argue whether it is worth it or not, it doesn't cost me

anything. But we find that having got that choice, and having exercised it by entering into a contract with BskyB, for the programmes that perhaps I haven't got access to on the BBC, I really don't bat an eyelid at the fact that I am paying nearly £400 a year for that choice, and I don't gloat over the fact that I am not paying for the BBC. I just would be very happy, to be honest, to pay something towards the BBC in order to retain that independence and that quality, for which they are so well known. And I too have lived all over the place and I know the poor quality of television and radio in other countries. What I would be interested in is, what is the total income in the media field from radio and TV operations? Obviously BskyB must have billions of income, you have mentioned so many billions being collected through the licence fee, are we getting the lion's share of what is paid out in this country for media entertainment? And also how does this £116, shortly to be £121, how does that compare with other countries say in Europe – Germany, Italy, France? Are we absolutely unique in the set-up that we have in this country for BBC or broadcasting in general?

FACILITATOR

I can't answer the second question, the first question, as I understand, is around about £9 billion, so that is what those other broadcasters get in as advertising revenue.

TESSA JOWELL

... the value of the BBC, about £3 billion, and the others in subscription sales and so forth, about £3 billion.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Inaudible.

FACILITATOR

Yes, that is about right, yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Inaudible.

FACILITATOR

Yes, from what the Minister is saying, that accounts for about a third of the total.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So there is plenty of scope for an increase I look on the BBC as paramount, far more important to me than the commercial side of the business.

FACILITATOR

Just quickly, what is it you value about that independence, before I move on to someone else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Well a programme last night was absolutely outstanding on the brain surgery, for one hour, absolutely brilliant.

FACILITATOR

Our Life In Their Hands?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes. Now I can't imagine any other organisation being capable of making a film of that quality. It is that that I enjoy, the really good well thought, well produced entertainment.

And you can keep all your game shows, and all your soaps and all the rest of it. I don't want any of that at all.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Someone in passing earlier made a distinction between citizens and consumers, and I think that is an important distinction. There is an argument I think for a public service broadcaster to broadcast to citizens appropriate programmes. I don't think there is any justification for a licence fee for entertainment programmes to consumers. That should be a consumer decision. So what I would say I think needs to happen is that the BBC needs to divide up its programming into channels which are designed as public service broadcasting for citizens, and those that are designed as entertainment. Now the channels that are public service broadcasting for citizens could be paid for by direct taxation, you wouldn't need a licence fee. Those that are entertainment channels should be paid for either by subscription or by advertising, or some combination of both. So I don't see the argument for making people pay a licence fee for makeover programmes, gardening programmes, soap operas, quiz shows, all those things that are the standard programming for BBC 1 for example, and increasingly a lot of BBC 2, but I do see an argument for BBC News 24, which I think is an important channel, which should go to all citizens in a way, but that could come out of direct taxation in some way.

FACILITATOR

And how would you respond, I seem to remember a point being made on the Panorama programme.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, which I saw.

FACILITATOR

Talking about that precise issue, saying well look if you took the entertainment off the main BBC offerings, that wouldn't be available to everybody, and part of the remit is to entertain. So how would you respond to that point that your entertainment that you are putting on a separate subscription channel is no longer available?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I don't see why it has to be part of the remit, to entertain. There are plenty of commercial stations that can do that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would take issue with what has just been said, because sometimes there is a sense whereby you just look at the TV or listen to the radio and you are thinking this is all, you are getting education, you are getting information and you are getting good entertainment. So I think it would be quite tricky to know where to draw the line. The point I would like to make is – and maybe I ought to declare my hand because I happen to be the Chairman of the local BBC Radio station – but the point I want to make is that I think you have to pay for quality and independence, and the presenter did make the point, although she lost her notes, very well about the actual amount one is paying each week. I think it will come into our conversation later. I do have issue about how some of that money and resource is spent, so I think it is about adjustment within the BBC, maybe television from what I am told and I have learnt costs a lot more than radio and online, and maybe it is that key thing that needs to be made. But I would put a strong plea in for saying we are getting good value for money, let's look at the way it addresses quality, but my argument would be strongly to accept what we have got at the moment – good value for money – and go with that.

FACILITATOR

Because you are saying that it is proven that it is delivering quality as it stands, is that what you are saying?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That is the gist of it. As I say, further down the line we will talk about some things that maybe I rail against, but that is the essence of my argument.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

On the subject of breaking up the BBC so you have public service broadcasting and entertainment broadcasting, I think that would be negative in two ways. The first of which is that they had a recent campaign on caring and foster caring and those kind of issues, it ran across the networks, so that is the kind of public information service that a commercial provider is never going to sign up to and is never going to give to the community, and by running that across all the radio networks and the TV it reaches a much broader, well virtually all the population, whereas it wouldn't achieve that if you were trying to do that through commercial broadcasting. And also in the modern business age you find that companies all over the world, multinationals, they are all combining together and creating bigger companies all the time to offer economies of scale and synergy between all the different arms of organisations. The biggest companies in the world now are like Time Warner, AOL Time Warner in America, and we have an organisation in this country which can compete with that and provide all the benefits of public service broadcasting as well. And I think if you broke it up into public service and entertainment then you would lose major advantages of a big broadcaster who can reach the entire population.

FACILITATOR

Yes, that is certainly a point that hasn't come out yet, is the economies of scale that can be achieved by a country as small relatively as this, compared with a country as big as America for example.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Whilst personally being in favour of a licence fee, I get more I guess from the BBC Radio than I do from TV because of my lifestyle. The point I would make is that if it was going to be open to some sort of subscription, I believe it should be somehow a key to unlocking either the entire services, including radio, or nothing. I don't think to have different channels of the BBC competing for advertising would be advantageous to anybody. That seems to be a road to disaster as far as I was concerned. One point I will take issue with was, and various people have said it, and it was said by the actress up there, the licence fee guarantees high quality programmes. Who can forget such gems as Noel Edmond's House Party?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Inaudible.

FACILITATOR

All in the eye of the beholder.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I have a question. Has anyone calculated how much it would cost in case the licence fee were not retained, how much it would cost to the citizen who wanted to look at the BBC to be able to do it? Because if it is not a universal service any more, clearly the fee is going up. And the sense of a universal service is that we all pay so that even people who don't have a lot of money can access it, but if one breaks this principle then it becomes a commercial

service like every other commercial service and the prize cannot be controlled any more, unless the quality goes down because you have less money available.

FACILITATOR

OK. I certainly haven't seen a figure, but that is part of the argument, as you say, that has been articulated earlier, it is when you break that loop, about how much more is there to invest in services and will it be universally available. So we will certainly record that point, but I personally have no response I can give.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

When we are talking about the television, and being Asian we haven't got any programme for the Asian community. Back in 1963, when BBC 1 had started ... Asian community, and that ... was offered for some time, and then completely has been taken out, and we don't know what the reason was behind that, although we are part of this society and we are paying the licence. Right, let's talk about the radio, because we haven't got any television programmes so I can't really talk about the television programming, let's talk about the radio. When we talk about the quality, as long as I can listen to Asian networks, or Asian programming, I cannot see any better quality than any independent Indian radio – Sunrise Radio ... - those are the main radio stations. So BBC only starts to increase the ... for Asian radio's output when we already have Indian radio stations exist, which I don't know why the BBC thought that let's increase the output for the Asian community when we already have a radio station. And also, as I am saying that, the BBC Asian network presenters have been picked from the streets, the same as others, so why people have to pay the licence to listen to BBC Radio when we get the best programme on independent radio stations, on other radios? So these are the points I want to make. And also the BBC, I don't think they really have respect for Asian culture and the custom. Why I am saying this, the BBC have produced a lot of programmes about Asians, but nothing for the Asians, about the Asian ..., very cheap quality comedy, to making Mickey out of Asian peoples, which is only ... Asian people ... but all generations will get offended by those jokes. Because Asian people are not making that many complaints to the authority and the BBC think oh we are doing a lot of things for the Asian peoples, but I think the BBC, the management committees, they need to look into this and have a steering committee which is also Asian people need to sit in that committee and advise them. Because when we are Asian .. she or he, when they go and tell their bosses, look we are doing this for Asian people, obviously the boss doesn't know, him or herself, about the Asian culture, they will say that is great, good, come on, good idea, but they never go back to the public and try to find out if they do like it or not. I am sorry to say that. The Asian network has been around, I don't know, over 25 years, but if you go around in the street within the Asian community they will be listening to more like independent radio than BBC.

FACILITATOR

Thank you. And there will also be another opportunity, because there is a question later about what does the BBC offer various minorities throughout the country, and how responsive is it, and obviously your answer is not particularly, in your opinion.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

As a person on low income, putting up the licence fee and I have got to pay it, otherwise I am put up in court, I will obviously listen to radio an awful lot via the internet, and so I am against the licence fee for people on really low income. I think I am going to pay exactly the same as a millionaire down the road who it will not even hurt him. It will hurt me and my wife a lot. So I think it should be done, some sort of system where it has got to be done on your income rather than just pay it.

FACILITATOR

The next section, some of these divides I would have to say are slightly arbitrary, because obviously when you start talking about funding you start talking about quality, and when you talk about role you talk about funding. So within that constraint, I want us to think about governance now, which I think for most of us translates to how is something run, this rather odd word.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

As an accountant, I would be most interested in this annual report that was referred to earlier on as being available to us, to see whether or not this charter is going to be asked to fund some massive deficit that we know nothing about at the moment. I don't know. Maybe it is making a surplus. Until that report can be circulated to people like ourselves that have come here tonight because we are interested, then we are very much in the dark.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

One of the suggestions there was that because the BBC is such a big organisation now with billions of pounds budget, that it couldn't be run and governed by the same group of people, but surely that is what happens in every multinational across the world, eventually it all goes up towards a single board of governors, or directors in the case of companies, and that they do the same for every company in the world.

FACILITATOR

So the argument here is it is just the same as any other company.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think that is a critical point, ultimately all companies are run by a board and they set strategies as well as being ultimately accountable. I think the issue is how do you get rid of those governance in a company allegedly obviously with some ... in front, some people have been gotten rid of, is how would that actually transpire, and is it appropriate that it is 12 people, or a range of different options to actually govern an organisation. Can you lead strategy in that way to 12 people, or do you need to bring a range of experiences to that which needs actually more than 12 people, different mechanisms to do that, mechanisms like today. Maybe it is not the issue of ultimate governance, it is the issue of intelligence and intelligent thought that is brought to those people for them to consider, because otherwise we will just end up with a group who is setting strategy, and a group ultimately who is watching targets, performance managing. What if they disagree? Who ultimately has the say – the Governors or the people who are saying you are not meeting the demands that we are making of you? In that situation, who is the paymaster?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I might tend to vacillate a little bit on this one, depending on the time of the day. When I took on this job, I didn't have a clue who the Governors were and what they were doing, and obviously they have been really put into sharp relief for all these things that have happened recently. I really do think, and this is why we are here tonight, this does need some thinking through. My feeling is that they don't really have a major handle on strategy. It is a bit like the relationship between the school governor and the head of the school and the staff. Really all right, by name the governors have to take that ultimate responsibility, but the real strategy is done in staff rooms and the Head's office, or whatever, I think there is a parallel there. I think there is definitely the need to continue with the regulation, I think that is very important and clearly it has been caught short recently, but this has really been the big challenge. So I tend to say, yes, regulation, leave them where they are, keep them in, but I think more debate needs to be gone on around what does it really mean with regard to

strategy, what are they actually doing, what could be improved again in terms of the way they go about that task.

FACILITATOR

OK, let's pick up that first point perhaps about strategy, about the direction it is going. Who has got views on that? I have heard views which say there is only one of the Governors who has real experience of journalism/broadcasting, hence the problems they got themselves into with Hutton. How would you respond to that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would say that it is fairly important that the Governors aren't just another set of journalists or people involved in the industry, I think it is advantageous that they should bring other skills and not have a kind of interest from that area. I think with the Hutton inquiry quite clearly the Board of Governors were torn and had to come down one side of the fence or the other, and the very fact that they were forced into that position proves to my satisfaction that the dual role can't work. They should be regulated independently outside. The Governors should act as the champions, just as the Board of Governors, as this gentlemen mentioned, of any public company or anything else, that is what the board of governors does. But companies have to be regulated somehow, and not from within. It doesn't work.

FACILITATOR

What is the virtue for you of having the governors composed as they are at the moment, of if you like non-experts in broadcasting?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

You would hope that they are more representative of us the public. I think it becomes incestuous if they are all part of the same industry and all believe the same thing, they just become another layer of management and I think they need to be more than that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think they should just be got from members of the public who just apply for the job and use life experience. At the end of the day, it would be better to have people like myself who have got an interest in different disability issues and life issues and whatever, and we could feed back to the people that make the programmes, and we are there. We seem to be at street level, rather than high up management, just one or two. But unfortunately people like me, I try to get on boards, and I am afraid that unless you have got the right colour, you don't get on it.

FACILITATOR

Just to pick up that point, does that necessarily mean that you would need to be a governor, because that is the point that you are really making, about what are my issues, are they considering me, or should you be on some sort of panel. Now for example I think I am right in saying Ofcom, who have got a consumer panel that advises on consumer issues, are you talking about that sort of thing?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That is right, that is right. Ofcom has just come into being, as you know, and they seem to be putting out, asked for feedback from the public, a sort of forum if you like, but that forum must have some sort of power rather than just doing it for the sake of doing it, and it must feed back to somebody who can take those ideas and put them into practice.

FACILITATOR

So a further step for you is that you need to feel that they are going to do something with what you are saying.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

With what we are saying, yes, that is right, because I don't think that it happens now.

FACILITATOR

So what is the pick-up on any of the points made there?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

One issue to do with that is that I would point out that the BBC I think is more accountable to its public and its viewers and listeners than almost any other organisation I can think of, because it has programmes such as Points of View, or Feedback and those kinds of things, so virtually every week there is feedback from members of the viewing public going back into the organisation, which I am pretty sure that the governors would probably be aware of.

FACILITATOR

How would you respond though to someone who could say to you that is a more tactical feedback, as opposed to strategic feedback, on issues such as a minority interest, whether that is from a racial background or a disability background or whatever, that what you are talking about is feedback on a specific programme?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was thinking about this as the question was being asked, and I realise that I couldn't come up with an answer, because how do you feed back the entire country's wishes and desires for how the broadcasters are run, unless you devolve it out to various committees in a hierarchy going to local level, who sort of all feed up through each other to the top, and then involving maybe thousands of people at the bottom, tens of people further up, I don't know how you could achieve that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I am not sure exactly what the BBC's arrangements are for feedback, they don't seem to be very systematic to me. But even when there is feedback, and it is usually I suspect in the form of ratings for programmes and people watching or listening to them, that feedback doesn't have any bite as such because they are going to get the money anyway through the licence fee, so in that sense it doesn't matter what is put out, whether it is meeting the particular needs or preferences of the listening audience.

FACILITATOR

Do you know that, or is that your impression?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Well that is my impression. It is largely impressionistic, this, but I can't see under the present system, with the licence fee, why they should be that particularly bothered about feedback, but it seems to me the issue of feedback, to my way of thinking, is more important than the issue of the Board of Governors, because it is about getting the opinions of large numbers of the viewing and listening audience, rather than the opinions of 12 people who sit round a table in a boardroom.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

For those who don't know, maybe you ought to show something on the slide, the whole infrastructure below the governors with regard to regional advisory boards and local advisory boards, there is an infrastructure. I am not saying again it is brilliant, some people

would shake their head and say it is probably not very good in certain instances, but I serve as a chair of this board, there are 11 other members, we try and get diversity within. I feed, as Chair of this group, I feed into the East Midlands, which includes Nottingham, Derby and Lincoln, and we sit in a Regional Advisory Council. We then feed through to ultimately Ranjit Sondji, who is a Governor to the regions, and there was a very clear indication that local news should be increased in time from 2 minutes, most people will know that it is now 4 minutes, and in fact we did win that argument and get 4 minutes. So I am not saying it is perfect, but there is a system there for the feedback and then the top-down stuff coming in.

FACILITATOR

Not that I wish to put you on the spot, but given that you have raised the subject, how did you receive that feedback?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It comes down, we get plenty of briefing sheets, but it comes down through the regional councils, so let's say the national body make a decision, that would then be fed down, it is just a trickle down to the regional group, and then as Chair for Leicester, I would then be obliged to feed that into the Leicester group. But there is a big question here, and I know Andy is going to ask it later on if I don't raise it, there is a sense whereby how much do we get out to the local punters in terms of what is going on and how they feed into us.

FACILITATOR

I think that is what I was driving at, where does it trickle it up?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think there are some big questions to be asked there, and let's put it this way, there is room for improvement.

FACILITATOR

Let's take one more, because I just want to explore this area of regulation, which we haven't particularly done yet.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

... how they are actually appointed, because I understand recently that Martin Bell was one of the people who put his name forward to be the new Director General, or Chairman of the Board of Governors. They are asking for people with experience of journalism over many years, and politics as well, and he seems to be both of those, having been in the BBC for 25 years and an independent MP for 4, but he was not considered to go any further in the process. I was a little surprised at that kind of thing, and it is the actual appointment of the governors coming from the political sort of head and the government at the top that I am concerned about and the fact that it is open to prejudices from time to time, or influence, or people who might be seen as more accommodating.

FACILITATOR

Again I don't want to put words in your mouth, are you talking about greater transparency in the decision making process?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Well both greater transparency and perhaps moving away from being a political decision, because instead of it being appointed by the government, then perhaps being appointed by an independent appointments committee.

FACILITATOR

I am always quite intrigued by this idea of who is actually independent, so who are you talking about, do you think?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Well obviously the current government, sort of ... people, they have a political point of view and a political bias, and obviously they can be subject to the criticism that ... from the BBC.

FACILITATOR

And what sort of people do you think wouldn't be in that position? Given that we would have to make a choice, someone would have to be appointed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Obviously more of the second house, rather than the House of Commons, whether that be currently the House of Lords or a body that supersedes that, because they are less dependent, or it could be seen as maybe less party political or less dependent on votes and those kind of issues.

FACILITATOR

Before we move off the subject of government, I just want to explore what people think about this idea of regulation, whether the people who are developing strategy can also be regulating themselves. Is this, as I think they made the point up here, is that judge and jury, is it quite an acceptable way of behaving? Do you want to say anything about it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I don't have any particular reason for my feeling, it is just that it is a gut instinct that you shouldn't have people both regulating and governing.

FACILITATOR

Who else wants to react to that? Do you think she is right? Do you think it should stay how it is? Do you not care? All of which views are acceptable.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was just thinking it is similar in a way to any corporation or company, that if the shareholders or whoever, I am not impressed by the performance of that board, then by using the vote they can remove them and get the people they want. And it may be that what you should do is give a vote to everybody that pays a licence, and then through the modern media that we have got, let them record their vote as to whether they want this person to stay, or they want someone to replace them. They are the nearest equivalent to the shareholders that I can think of, unless you are going to privatise the whole lot.

FACILITATOR

So the equivalent of a shareholder conference?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Inaudible.

FACILITATOR

Did you hear that? He said that there should be a programme called "Governor Idol". Very good.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Now if you ask people to express their opinion, whether the Board of Governors should do both, but you don't explain the difference exactly between regulating and governing. We are just doing a useless exercise.

FACILITATOR

So you are saying that I should explain what the difference is between the two of them?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes, what does it mean to govern, and what does it mean to regulate?

FACILITATOR

Certainly as I understand it, and I don't want to get drawn too deeply into this, being just the facilitator, but the regulator is the person who looks after certain standards. So again as I understand it, if I am right, the contents and standards, the programme standards. Ofcom will look into, so for example if someone has a comment about a programme on one of the channels tonight about the material that is on there, that is the subject of independent regulation by Ofcom. They will send a complaint into Ofcom, and if there are sufficient of them, or they think that there is sufficient gravity, they will then investigate it and they will make a judgment about whether that programme should be changed in future, or given guidance. But that is really what regulation is. So the argument is, is it the people who are saying these are the sorts of things we should be doing, can also say actually this is a good way to judge whether people think it is the right programme or not. Do you see what I am driving at, or not?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

What is not coming out clearly is what is the problem in doing both, and you didn't explain what governance is, as opposed to regulation.

FACILITATOR

Unfortunately that is not my role, and I suspect therefore that if you don't know, that is something that needs to be explained by other people. But thank you for raising it, because it is a good point.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just wanted to know whether Ofcom has any role to play with the BBC then, or are they just concerned with the commercial channels?

FACILITATOR

They do have a role with the BBC, don't they? Am I right?

OFFICIAL

They are responsible for ensuring that the BBC complies with certain requirements quotas for regional productions, for independent productions, original productions. And they also are responsible for the BBC's commercial services.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So would they not be able to expand their role and take over the regulation side of the BBC?

OFFICIAL

Well the answer is yes they could if the general view was that that was a good idea.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just wanted to give an example of one of the things that I think that regulators could look at in the BBC, and the sort of gripe that I have which I don't feel is expressed, is given a voice, and that for example is the operation of, I think it is BBC Enterprises, isn't it, the part of the BBC that actually sells BBC programmes on video and DVD. Now my point about that is that it seems that the licence fee payers are being asked to pay twice for those programmes, so they pay for them to be made and be broadcast, and then they have to pay for them again to receive copies of them on video and DVD, and they pay the full price, they don't get a discounted video or DVD I don't think.

FACILITATOR

What is the relevance there in terms of regulation?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think it is immoral quite actually, that licence payers are being asked to pay twice for that, and I think that those programmes should be put out on a BBC channel. The BBC does not really utilise its enormous archive of programmes, which there is obviously a market for, because they sell those things through BBC Enterprises, and my suspicion is that they don't because they want to sell them to us again. So they don't put them out on BBC 4, or whatever, they want to do it commercially. Now I think that they should be putting the archive, the backlist, out on some sort of digital channel.

FACILITATOR

OK, so that is a different aspect of it, that is a sort of moral aspect to regulation which we haven't touched on?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes.

FACILITATOR

You have also quite nicely pre-empted what we are going to discuss next, which is the role of the BBC, so thank you for doing that, that will give you all something to think about. We are going to take a quick break for coffee – 10 minutes or so – and then we will come back and we will discuss the role.

FACILITATOR

OK, so a bit of a reprise of some of the subjects that we have covered, a broad area. You know we have talked about, you are just listening there, the programming that is aimed at me and I can get it on subscription, that is great because that gives me more choice. You might also argue, something like Lock or Mill I think argued about the tyranny of the majority, does it mean therefore that you get what everybody else wants. So what are your views, what do you think the BBC's role is? Is it supporting the citizen, is it supporting the consumer, does it have a dual role?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think you have to be very careful going down the branding line of different channels for different types of people, I think that is incredibly dangerous, because otherwise you will have everyone for the Discovery channel, or the Over-50s channel, or the Under-5s channel, which I think there is role in CBBs in certain types of programmes, but the beauty of the BBC surely is that it gets people to experience things that they wouldn't have done, it gets people to be challenged in a way they wouldn't do. I constantly listen to Five Live, being on the motorway half the time, and is that entertainment, is that news or is that sport? I am not quite sure, I think it is somewhere inbetween, and splitting that up and listening to some of the debates that I listen to because that is why I tune into it, is not my usual viewing. If

someone tried to look at the marketing sheel (phon) of the kinds of things I would be interested in, I don't think it would come up with me listening to Five Live, yet I do because it challenges me to listen to a range of things, and that is what kind of stimulates me. I think things like One Extra Show where the BBC is innovative and leading the field, I take in Dave's point, I think the actual approach that the BBC takes in reflecting the multicultural society is absolutely poor, it is pathetic. Most of the so-called black programming happens at midnight, so I don't know if people think we are still in a different time zone, therefore we are still up at night, but there is something seriously wrong with the quality. Just looking at something like Eastenders – no linking I promise - the current Asian family in it, I have never met anyone like that, ever, and I think programmes like that should reflect some element of truth. That story is a great story I think in itself right now, but the essence of that family, I don't know what planet they are on. So I think that there are some real responsibilities the BBC needs to play in reflecting society, and challenging society. And issues like subscription actually begin to break down that fundamental of reflecting all societies, it begins to have stakeholders for certain areas. And where is the notion of cohesive communities, where is the notion of challenging people. I think that is quite a bit of a worry. And just a final comment. I think this issue of if the BBC drops out and changes, what will happen to the rest of the market, if they had sponsorship and adverts it would destroy the rest of the market because that share of spend would be spread across a range of organisations. I think as we move forward the range of commercial companies we have in charge and owning the range of broadcasting and the media, looking at newspapers, looking at TV, looking at radio, will shrink. Market forces will mean that in 10 years, 50 years time, there will probably be 5 or 6 global brands, and I think the BBC could be one of those brands if it stays the way it is, it could be a world leader, not a world follower. I think it was in 1976 Nabran (phon), the first Asian radio station started in Radio Nottingham of all places. It should be leading and innovating in that area, not necessarily duplicating what has been done by others, but that is a critical issue of branding, it can't just do innovative work or work for specialists, because that is all it will get, people who are prepared to try something new. It needs the Eastenders, it needs the others to pull people into watching a brand that they have faith in, and I think the issue of branding is extremely important.

FACILITATOR

Thank you. In case you were wondering why he was looking at the back there, Shobu was in Eastenders, so that is why he was looking at her.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think the first question is wrong, because asking how should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture, as far as I know the BBC has made the technology and the culture in the last 80 years, it has been at the leading edge worldwide. So I can't understand why do you ask this question.

FACILITATOR

So you think the question is suggesting that they haven't changed, is that what you are saying?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

No. This question implies that the BBC is backward and it has to change in order to adapt to changes in technology and culture which have happened elsewhere. It is not true because it is still at the leading edge and it has made a culture of a country, it has had a big role, and not only of this country, it has set standards of what public television should be and its role in culture.

FACILITATOR

So the mis-drafting of the questions has prompted a very good point, which is what is its role, why is it so good, why do you think it is a leader. Why do you think that the BBC is a leader, what does it do which is so special?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

This is what maybe we should focus on, because if the character that he is making is asking, what would life be like without it, maybe we just have to go to the United States and it would be very clear, it might have 800 channels but not a good one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would say this, wouldn't I? I think the BBC is an institution that can be sort of positive or negative. I think the BBC is very true to its word, it is educating, entertaining and informing. Again I have been very privileged, I have been to three workshops that have been called recently. One was about the portrayal of the Asian community, this was called by Ranjit Sondhi, and again you would need to look this up on the website, but there is a very, very interesting piece of research being done by a lady called Chantal Benjamin which is all about, and in fact in a predominantly Asian community the conclusion was that the one programme that really did portray very well, and I am going to be howled down now, was *Holby City* where you had two very clear ethnic minority roles very central, so I think the acknowledgement. The other one is about the place, and you did mention it in the preamble, the Arts, and we have criticised very heavily, when I say we, you know from within that seminar, that we don't think the BBC is doing enough quality programming around the arts and there is a really big question about sport. I think they would like to get more, but they can't afford it. But I think we have just got to remind ourselves, like Shobu said, you know it is whether you are on the motorway listening to Radio Five, or whether you are in your living room picking out a channel on the TV, or whether you are on to the internet, I think we should not be complacent but I think we really should not throw the baby out with the bath water, I really think we should be trying to hold on and build on what we have got already.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture, what type of programming should it offer? I do have a mental picture of the BBC as being rather backward in its own culture. Technically I have no problems or issues with it, with regard to the quality, there has never been a problem in that regard. However I do have this mental picture of the boardroom of the BBC and it is the mental picture, illustrated by Kenny Everett, of crusty old men of about 150, with white hair and cobwebs all over them, just sitting round and agreeing with each other. I realise, I certainly hope that is not really strictly accurate, but I certainly imagine them to be, shall we say senior, as I would expect them to have some experience of life, but I see them all agreeing with each other, and I see them all nodding and smiling, because they are getting paid anyway via the licence fee, and I see them as being very arrogant, as I have illustrated before, again for the same reasons, and I see them as ignoring the proletariat, basically because they are arrogant. The BBC has been there since what, 1922, and it has had its licence money since 1922, and consequently who wouldn't develop a sense of sort of self-importance. I for example work for British Gas and if I were to suggest that everyone who had a gas cooker or a gas appliance should pay us a levy or a surtax in some regard, whether or not they chose to get their gas from British Gas, or they might choose to get their gas from Powergen, but if I suggested they pay us a levy of, shall we say £50 a year, there would be a national uproar. Yet the BBC can get away with that. If you have the facility for receiving a TV signal you have to pay for the likes of Chris Moyles. OK, personalities shouldn't enter into it, but I think you see the principle involved here.

FACILITATOR

Although you make a pretty light-hearted point in a way, what you might be saying is whereas a company might have what might be called a forcing function in the share price, either I do well, it goes up, I do badly, I don't do what the customer wants, it comes down. You are saying there is no apparent – I don't want to put too many words in your mouth – but no apparent forcing function to make them do something different, because they are going to get their money anyway.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That is about the size of it really. They have this attitude problem I believe.

FACILITATOR

Anyone agree or disagree with that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Picking up on the changes in technology, it has been said that from the year 2010 it will be digital signal only, no terrestrial television. Where I live I can't get the digital signal, I can't afford a new digital set and why should I buy Freeview etc when I have only got so many hours in a week to watch television. Radio is a better medium for me. So if I am being asked to pay for the licence or subscription fee or whatever, I need to be certain I receive the broadcasts, and what will be the ecological impact of these obsolete TV sets?

FACILITATOR

As we said over coffee, there is not much of an answer I can give you, but that is a rather broad subject, but I think that is a very good question that I haven't actually heard raised before about the environmental issue, if there is one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

What I would like to address is the fundamental role of the BBC, how we want it to behave and what we want it to produce. What I would like to suggest is that I believe good managers should basically employ the right people, give them a task and let them get on with it, and I think to a certain extent that is what we should do with the BBC, we should find the best broadcasters, journalists, creative people out there, give them the task and then sit back and let them do it. I think a lot of places around the world with commercial broadcasting, what they do is they go out and they say we want you to do this, but then they don't back it up as well. In America programmes are scrapped after 4 episodes if they don't work, and what the BBC can do is get the better people, let them create great broadcasting for us and then we can go and find it, instead of it having the commercial imperative of success or die straight away, we can let people create great programmes for us and then we will find it, there is no sort of cut-off for it, it is not if you don't succeed within 5 weeks you are off, because in that way I think programmes like Only Fools and Horses and some of the most cherished BBC products weren't big to start off with. Things like the Office recently, the biggest success, that didn't start off as a big success and if it was on commercial TV they would have cut it off. Men Behaving Badly was on ITV, it wasn't a success, they threw it away, the BBC picked it up and then it turned into a great success. So I think that the BBC should create good programmes and let us come and find them when we realise how good they are.

FACILITATOR

So there is a pitch for a BBC that is experimental perhaps. It brings me on to the subject of should they be producing that sort of distinctiveness in programming, or should it be the same as other channels are producing? So thinking of that, and also something like I think 80% of the films that we watch in this country are produced in America, whereas 75% of

the television is produced in the UK, so it is an interesting kind of balance. So let's pick up any of those points.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think it is actually already distinctive, which is why we have the type of broadcasts we have in this country. If we didn't have the BBC, as has been pointed out, I think we would have a very different system. If we are saying it is working only in the UK in its particular way, it is because of the BBC, it is already distinctive and has already skewed the market in a particular direction. If you took that away, the pound sign and the dollar sign would be the most important thing that will drive quality and quantity. A classic example, ITV – a little known story to not many people – dropped wrestling, the 3.00 slot, from its network in the mid-80s I think it was, not because of viewer ratings, but because the viewers who were watching it didn't have a high enough spend value and therefore the commercial advertisers said no, we don't want this particular programme at this time.

FACILITATOR

I have to say, much to the dismay of my 85 year old Great Aunt in Ashton in Makerfield.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think for the whole Asian community actually, it was one of those things that they used to really enjoy. But that kind of shows what happens if you allow this occurrence to occur. And to say it is distinctive, or should it be distinctive, I think it already is and that is why we have the range of programmes that we have. Which other channel, something like Walking with Dinosaurs, you had a programme, you had an internet site, and then you have displays going around museums that kids can interact with. The Walking with Dinosaurs exhibition that came to the ... Museum in Leicester had absolutely enormous numbers going through that museum that gave people the experience to get involved in that, and without the BBC that wouldn't have happened.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I would congratulate the BBC on the Video Nation series, because I took part in it and I thought to myself well that was a wonderful idea of getting local people to actually video their lives and get it on a website, apparently it did go on the television but I never saw it. But at the end of the day I think that should be brought out more and included in the radio side, because at the end of the day I feel that yes the TV side was OK, but if people could put their own programme, perhaps a half an hour within a local radio and present themselves in their own lifestyle or whatever they do, I think the BBC ought to take that on board if they are going to start, shall we say, wanting real life rather than Eastenders-type documentaries.

FACILITATOR

So a rather broader sort of John Peel programme that you would do yourself.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes that is right. They obviously would work the machinery and you sort of go in and present your programme on the air in whatever format you decide to do it, whether it be rock music, or current affairs, or whatever. It just isn't there.

FACILITATOR

So that is a community role.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I really can't see the argument about the distinctiveness of the BBC. I cannot see the difference between let's take BBC 2 and Channel 4, they seem virtually identical to me in terms of their programming, in terms of the number of people that watch the channel, they seem totally equivalent. So I don't know what it is that is distinctive about the BBC, I don't understand that at all. And actually while I have got the microphone, I would like to make another point. Somebody mentioned films earlier on, and I have got a particular interest in those as I teach film. The BBC is showing fewer and fewer films. I scan, well not the Radio Times, I have stopped buying that, I have gone for a cheaper option, but I scan it to find films on the BBC and you might be lucky to get one in the morning on BBC 2, hardly anything on BBC 1, maybe BBC 4 will show a sub-titled film as part of its programming once or twice a week, but films have virtually disappeared.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

My daughter has just completed a GCSE English course, ... a title – What is the role of the BBC.

FACILITATOR

You should have invited her here tonight.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I should have. What she said was basically the BBC is owned by like everybody in the country, it is not like Sky TV which has got one owner and important British people who drive it. She said when you look at ITV it is driven by the needs of consumers and advertisers mainly, but the BBC, she feels as a viewer that the BBC puts her first. And I think that people who criticise the BBC for being too downmarket or populist, well the BBC is criticised for being too successful, but if it doesn't get the ratings then governments are going to say look, we actually can't just throw the licence fee, so they are wedged between this rock and a hard place, and I do feel sorry for the BBC.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

In answer to what is distinctive about the BBC, I think the best example I can give is when you are talking about sports commentary, listening to Radio Five live, because the commercial broadcasters, when they do sports commentary, in particular say Premiership football for this, because they are selling a product they have to put it across in a very happy shiny way, and this is the greatest product we have got out there, and this is fantastic, and it might be a goalless draw between Southampton and Stockport, which is the dullest thing on earth, and on the BBC Alan Green will stand there and say that this is the dullest thing on earth, this is absolutely terrible, and if you watched it on ITV then they will try and hype it up and pretend it is the best thing ever, and it is not. And so the BBC will represent things more how they are, whereas the commercial broadcasters distort things to make a great product, and that goes with things like comedy as well. If you look at something like Friends in America, which comes from commercial TV, then that doesn't represent anything at all like life in New York, but comedies on the BBC are more down to earth, you wouldn't get something like Dinner Ladies on TV in America, you wouldn't get something like Home Truths with John Peel on any other radio station I don't think, and that is what is absolutely unique about the BBC.

FACILITATOR

I still have to say, I am not agreeing with this gentleman at the back particularly, but I will just push you on what is particularly distinctive about it. Yes I hear what you are saying about enthusiasm of ITV, but surely you can see it is boring and you can turn it off, that doesn't give a rationale particularly for why it is distinctive. Do you want to add something more to that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It does give a rationale because it is telling the truth, or more accurate, whereas the commercial broadcasters can distort things to suit their own needs. And how to actually describe it as unique is a bit difficult, why is your face your face, and everyone else's face is their face, you recognise it, you know what it is, we have all lived with it for as long as we have lived, and if you listen to a BBC programme and if you are somewhere else in the world, I am sure you would recognise it and you would be able to pick it out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

... that the BBC has existed for the last 80 years, and I think BBC people must be clever enough to know all the answers of these questions what we are discussing here. When people are ready to pay to other channels to watch, and people are complaining they don't want to pay the licence fee to the BBC, they must understand there is something wrong. Yes, no? At the end of the day, never mind, it doesn't matter how good they are going to make the programmes, when you are talking about the different programme, what kind of different programme are you going to make? Soon they will make, other channels will start to copy of that one. When you come to the fee, £121, the BBC need to think that rather than increasing that licence fee, they need to decrease that. I think that most of the money goes from the BBC is to salary, to the staff. Because I am thinking when independent radio can be run by one manager, 24 hours, and the BBC probably have 8 – 10 producers to run the same programme, so I think the BBC needs to cut down to the staff and bring the expert people and try to save money from there and put less pressure on to the viewer and public and increase the licence fee. I think that is the best way.

FACILITATOR

So your impression is that there is quite a lot of fat in the system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It is as I am saying again the Asian network radio I am talking about, they probably have 6, 7, 8 producers, they are not making any commercials, they are not making any agendas, God knows what they are doing the whole day. When independent radio, they have got only one manager and they are running very well and they are making a lot of money. Why they can't make it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

As to what the difference is between say Channel 2 and Channel 4, you have to sit through advertisements in Channel 4 and they drive you barmy. I would do anything rather than watch that half the time. But also there is the question of education, because very often you don't intend to watch the programmes that you do watch, but you turn it on because there is something coming on later, you find to your surprise that you end up watching perhaps an educational programme you wouldn't have chosen, you might not have subscribed to, but you find it is actually very interesting. And if you want to raise the general level of awareness of a country, or of education of a country, you can do it through a public sector broadcast, which you can't do through subscription because people won't pay for those programmes.

FACILITATOR

That does raise this rather broader philosophical issue of this, which is about the improvement of the people through showing us things that we wouldn't necessarily watch, and as you are saying that if they were on a subscription channel we just wouldn't choose to watch them, but when we do watch them we realise that there is something to it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Inaudible.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Just to come back on the distinctiveness of BBC 2 versus Channel 4 and this notion of ads, it is a fallacy to believe that the BBC doesn't have ads. The BBC endlessly advertises its own programmes and products, admittedly between programmes rather than within them, but I find that just as annoying, if not more so, than the commercial advertising on Channel 4.

FACILITATOR

Just on that, how do you respond to someone who might argue that the distinctiveness of the BBC, one of the roles of it, is that in putting BBC 2 up against Channel 4 it pushes the quality of the programming up on Channel 4, and if BBC 2 wasn't there the programming quality would drop. If someone put that argument to you, what would you say to them?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Channel 4 has to have advertising because it has no other means of supporting itself in the way that the BBC does. The BBC has the luxury of not having advertising because we pay a licence fee for it, but if programmes were based on subscription, that wouldn't be the case. Do you see what I mean?

FACILITATOR

Yes, but I am just interested in what you think about this aspect that BBC 2 – this is the argument – has a certain quality standard and because Channel 4 is kind of competing against it, it is kind of parallel to it, the argument goes, it has to increase the quality of its programming to keep up with BBC 2. Do you think that is a valid argument?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

You can say that would result from any competitive system. It is just it is not a level playing field at the moment. The BBC has guaranteed income, Channel 4 doesn't.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

On the point of distinctiveness, if we get better quality because we have created an unlevel playing field, isn't that a good thing? Are we actually saying that actually if we create a level playing field, and that is the overriding objective that we want, I don't think it is, I think it is about quality and standards. I think the issue of distinctiveness isn't about BBC 2, BBC 1 or Radio 1 versus Virgin or whatever, I think it is about the mere state of having those programmes changes not only the quality but the style of programming, and I think that is the important thing, because otherwise the distinctiveness we should be looking at is what is the UK compared to other countries, not what BBC 1 is compared to BBC 2. The second point, just very quickly, was what are young people saying about the BBC and their future in it, because you can ask us all you like, the question is that tomorrow's consumers and tomorrow's viewers should have a central role, not take up 20% of your time, but actually a fundamental role that it should be built around their aspirations, not around yesterday's consumers, because you need to be looking 80 years ahead, not the next 5 years ahead.

FACILITATOR

Someone over coffee asked me where these children's groups were taking place, I don't know whether you want to comment now or at the end?

ADVISOR

Inaudible.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I am not very good at this, but on the question of sport with the BBC, the chap just mentioned that the coverage is not as good as it used to be because of the expense. I know of one sport which has got 30 professional teams and 10 semi-professional teams and they totally ignore that, they have ignored it for several years now, and that is Speedway racing. So why?

FACILITATOR

I just want to see are there any other points. We have drifted across quite a few subjects, and we are going to do a bit of voting in a minute, so before I get to that stage I just want to make sure that there is nothing that any of you have come to say that we haven't covered.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I have listened very carefully to all the arguments, but the basic problem seems to me that you are charging everybody a certain fixed fee in order to listen to radio, satellite television, BBC or whatever, and I sort of liken it in a way to the fact that I pay a road fund licence, and if I have got two cars I pay two lots of road fund licence, and if I have got three it is three times. And I go out on the roads and I use them in that way, the extent to which I use the different cars, or use the different televisions in my house is up to me. And when I have got it on the road, we have got toll roads coming in and they will come in more and more, and congestion areas and things like that, and I will have to pay a bit more if I want to use that particular route, or that area, and somehow it seems to me that to get this level playing field for the broadcasting media, that fee that we pay ought in some way to be distributed to everybody whose services if you like come through either the terrestrial, or the satellite system or the digital system, whatever, and that basic fee should cover these public interest programmes. If any of the channels want to do something different then we have got the means now of people paying a bit more, such as at the moment I pay a Sky fee, well I could pay perhaps a bit more to the BBC because they have got these Freeview boxes with so many more programmes, and we are only going to get equity between all the ways of doing it if somehow or other that basic fee is looked on as something that they are all entitled to a slice of and then we alter our attitude as to what it is that we want over and above that from each of those channels. I don't know whether I have explained myself properly, but I liken it in a sense to the road fund licence, which I am not exempt for, despite my age. And there again that is an anomaly. I can't see the point of saying that I should have free television if by the same token I ought perhaps to have a free road fund licence. It is one of those things anyway.

FACILITATOR

OK, a pitch there for a free road fund licence.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

This is going to sound terribly sycophantic, but I would like to thank the Minister and the Secretary of State for actually coming. I don't think, where round the world would you actually get the Secretary of State to come out and listen to real people, so thank you for coming. But I would like to make the point that I think you need to improve the communication channels leading up to this, because it seems a pity that maybe we could have had more, and we have had a quality audience of course, haven't we, but we could have had probably more people here. So I think you do need to look at how your information is going out. I would just like to ask this last question. The information that comes in, you are going to record it, how ultimately is the decision going to be made with regard to this? Because it seems to me if this works you are going to be inundated, so you might have more of a problem. So I would just like to know how those key decisions are going to be made.

RT HON TESSA JOWELL

I will talk about that at the end.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I notice the BBC is getting more interactive with its audience. Is the BBC going to expand on this, ie with webcams, video projector and things. I notice that the BBC is like four hours behind everybody else with the webcam, it is rather slow, and whereas obviously the commercial boys have got it almost like a movie, so I hope the BBC are going to improve on that because I do feel that interacting with the BBC, like I do sitting at home, is a really good idea.

(VOTING NOT TRANSCRIBED)

RT HON TESSA JOWELL

Aidan, thank you very much indeed. And in closing, I am not going to go anywhere near trying to summarise the vast array of points and issues that have been raised this evening, but what I did just want to pick up on was your question, Steve, about how we are actually going to respond to the consultation. What will happen is that sometime after the end of March, during April, we will go through all the reports of the public consultations like this, and also the contributions that have been put on the website, and from that we will pull out the themes which have dominated in the consultations, and we will then do further work on those specific themes, and I am being advised in this process by somebody called Terry Burns who some time ago was the Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, he sits in the House of Lords, and he will put together a series of expert panels to help develop those themes further. They will then provide advice and recommendations to me, and as I said at the beginning, we will probably about this time next year, maybe a little bit earlier, publish a Green Paper which will set out some of the conclusions. And I think that what will be very important is that we use the website to give you that feedback, because I think it is terribly important if you have taken part in this kind of process to know what happens as a result of the contribution that you have made. So that is what will happen. A number of you this evening have also mentioned Ofcom, and Ofcom are also conducting a public service television review at the moment, and they have also been talking to people about what they want from public service television, and Charter Review is obviously in parallel to that, but there are quite important areas of read-across about the relationship between the BBC and the other public service television broadcasters. So this is a very big national debate and it is a national debate that I am absolutely determined that your voices influence, and I think that that concluding summary was actually very illuminating.

So by way of closure I just want to say thank you so much for having given up an evening to take part in this. I hope you feel that it has been worthwhile and that you have got something from it, and I and all my colleagues who are here this evening will do our very best to repay your effort by making sure that we come up with some very good proposals and I hope proposals that reflect the discussion that we have had here this evening. So thank you.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)