

Ubiquis Reporting

**BBC Royal Charter Review:
An Analysis of Responses to
the DCMS Consultation**

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Foreword

This report was compiled from around 5,000 pieces of correspondence from the general public, mostly responses to an eight-question consultation issued by the DCMS. The range and variation of these responses was breathtaking. From single line e-mails, to 50-page detailed reports, from carefully sculpted question-by-question responses, to single-issue campaigns, from poems of appreciation, to vitriolic venting of spleen, the entire gamut of public opinion flooded in. Respondents were self-selecting and ranged from across the UK to North America and beyond.

With such a diversity of responses, contradictions of both opinion and fact were commonplace. This report aims to balance contrary opinions – though always with an awareness that, as one respondent said, ‘taking two extreme views and throwing them together does not constitute balanced reporting’. An effort has been made through the qualitative summary to represent all the views and opinions given. The amount of space dedicated to each section in the qualitative analysis is in direct proportion to the weight of responses on that subject. In terms of structure, the qualitative summary is divided according to the eight themes of the main consultation issued by the DCMS.

The report is divided into three sections: a qualitative summary of all the questionnaires, letters and other responses, a quantitative analysis of particular topics emerging from the responses, and an analysis of six cross-cutting themes. This third section draws upon material from the other two to function as both a refinement and a distillation of their findings and addresses specific themes within the responses.

It is important to state that this document is purely a summary or distillation of the responses. In no sense is the document an analytical answer or riposte to those responses; it is a summation of a discourse rather than the final word in an argument. Furthermore, the contents, views and opinions contained within neither represent those of Ubiquis nor the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Due to the volume and variety of the responses, a considerable number of questions and issues are only addressed by a minority of the overall respondents. On these frequent occasions, it has made more sense to refer to minorities or majorities within the sub-group of respondents who actually addressed these issues. Throughout the document, the use of the word minority or majority will be qualified to clarify whether it relates to either the overall number of responses or merely the number of responses pertaining to a particular issue. Any unqualified usage of the word minority or majority should be interpreted as referring to only the sub-group of respondents addressing that particular issue.

Although the report is representative of the perceptions and sentiments of the respondents, it is not a comprehensive summary of public opinion of the BBC. The words of one respondent might serve as an illuminating commentary on the report: ‘It is no good relying on self-selecting groups – and always factor in the quiet majority who do not take part because they think that everything is fine’.

Public Opinions of the BBC: A Summary of Responses

The BBC Today

'What Do You Value About the BBC?'

I. The BBC as National Treasure

A strong majority of the respondents heaped praise upon the BBC; it is unarguably a public institution of considerable value. As a broadcaster, it is considered to offer an unrivalled and wholly unique range of services: 'No media organisation I have witnessed in the world can compete with the BBC for its range of services and quality'. As a public body, the Corporation is seen by many, though not all, as a politically and commercially independent organisation that champions democracy, debate and enlightenment through its educational programming and impartial news reporting. Many respondents appear concerned that the Charter review will implement unnecessary and potentially harmful changes to the set-up of the BBC; consequently a large proportion of the respondents used the phrase 'it ain't broke, don't fix it'. Even respondents who perceived a decline in standards in recent years expressed considerable confidence in the Corporation's ability to return to the levels of excellence enjoyed in the past.

There is a considerable sense of pride in the BBC as an institution and 'the envy of other broadcasters across the world'. The phrases 'envy of the world' and 'national treasure' appeared frequently in the responses. These sentiments are inspired by various qualities. The BBC is clearly perceived by many respondents to epitomise the very best qualities of the UK and to form a core component of the national identity. Many respondents value the BBC for representing all that is good about the UK, with broadcasting being potentially the last remaining area in which the UK is a world leader. Various respondents explicitly cited the BBC as the best reason for residing in the UK. The importance of the Corporation as a publicly owned organisation of the highest quality cannot be over-emphasised. Positive opinions of the BBC seemed to be fanned by the current national climate in which, after the considerable deterioration and loss of many public bodies, the public sector is once again in vogue. One respondent felt that after the NHS and education service, 'the BBC is the most important public service organisation in the country'. Other respondents expressed similar views, and frequently in these views the BBC seemed to have primacy over the health and education services.

The Corporation functions as a distinct global ambassador for the UK, 'defines British culture overseas' and 'enhances the reputation of Britain'. The intensity of this affection and the weight of value attached to the BBC brings a complementary and commensurate responsibility and obligation. The BBC is not solely the medium through which a wealth of UK culture is transmitted; it also serves to mould, shape and clarify UK culture itself.

Without a doubt, the BBC was considered by the vast majority of respondents to be superior to the other national broadcasters. Quite frequently when respondents are critical of the BBC they suggest that its superiority over rival services has diminished. Such criticisms carry the implicit recognition that the BBC is a world leader in many areas of broadcasting. Respondents were often emotional and effusive in their praise for the BBC in comparison to its international counterparts: 'Whenever I get back from abroad, I want to get down on my knees and thank God we don't have the media other countries have'.

II. The BBC as National Burden

While the majority of respondents were positive about the BBC as an institution and appreciated its contribution to the cultural and democratic life of the UK and to the dissemination of news and the image of the UK worldwide, a large minority of respondents were as vehement in their expression of the opposite view. As opposed to considering the BBC to be a national treasure, these respondents interpret it as a burden, a bane and an embarrassment: 'The BBC is no longer a national asset. I believe its impact on our national life is negative, its journalism characterised by cynicism, intellectual laziness and the selective use of information to support favoured "themes"'.

'The decline in the BBC's standards means that it is no longer unique'. Some respondents argued that the BBC should be dismantled or radically reformed due to the decline in programme quality perceived to have occurred over the past decade and commonly referred to as 'dumbing down'. Although it was suggested by some respondents that the changes in programme content and style, particularly the output of BBC1, are representative only of an attempt to broaden the appeal of BBC programming so that licence fee payers' interests are adequately catered for, many respondents perceived the core motivation to have been a desire to win ratings. Some respondents suggested that there is no logical reason why the BBC should choose to jeopardise programme quality to ensure high viewing figures when neither its income nor its reputation rely upon these ratings.

The 'dumbing down' of programming and the pitching of output to a lowest common denominator are seen by some respondents as representative of a complete disregard for the virtues and ideals essential to the BBC: 'BBC television has betrayed its Charter and its function as a public service organisation; it has virtually abandoned its duty to inform and educate audiences and turned increasingly to low-level entertainment'.

Although some respondents do believe that 'dumbing down' has damaged the overall quality of BBC programming, there is a sense that the quality remains higher than that of commercial broadcasters. Yet some respondents suggest that, despite the Corporation's outperforming of other broadcasters, the BBC should be closed down as it has failed to maintain the high standards of quality set for it by both the Corporation itself and by the general public. Therefore for these respondents, the implicit higher-quality yardstick for the BBC has therefore become a stick to beat the BBC with. Ultimately, more is expected from the BBC than from other broadcasters. Respondents' answers imply that expectations are so high due to a combination of the BBC's reputation and the fact that it is funded through a universal and compulsory fee.

III. The World Service

Many respondents identified the World Service as something they valued about the BBC. The overwhelming majority of respondents who referred to the World Service praised it. The World

Service is clearly perceived to promote understanding, awareness and democracy across the world. Even those respondents who were disparaging about the quality of BBC news and programming as a whole felt that the World Service avoids replicating in microcosm the major flaws of the BBC macrocosm; the World Service was not accused of reporting bias, factual inaccuracy, misrepresentation, or 'dumbing down'.

Respondents considered the World Service to be impartial and global in its perspective, while also radiating the very best qualities of both the BBC and the UK. It was seen by many to be a key organisation promoting world democracy and embodying the one-time motto of the BBC: 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation.' The force of positive feeling among respondents should not be underplayed; as one respondent noted, 'The World Service does more for diplomacy than probably most of the diplomatic service'.

The World Service was seen by respondents to be part of a two-way process. As well as disseminating information worldwide, the BBC also provides the highest-quality coverage of the developing world. The World Service therefore has a dual role of taking the BBC to the world and of bringing the world to the UK.

IV. The BBC as a Public Service Broadcaster

Many respondents remarked that the BBC sets the standard for broadcasting – both public service broadcasting and broadcasting generally – within the UK and internationally. The funding arrangements and the freedom from commercial imperatives allow BBC programmers to take risks with their commissioning and developing of programmes in a way that appears to many respondents to be unique. Respondents made specific references to those areas traditionally seen as strengths of the Corporation, including period dramas, documentaries, educational and children's programming. Although many respondents also cited comedy as a traditional BBC strength, the majority of those who addressed this expressed the view that there had been a tangible decline in programme quality and a palpable absence of a strong era-defining sitcom in the mould of *Only Fools and Horses*, *Fawlty Towers* and other past successes. A noticeable minority of respondents made a very specific call for a greater prevalence of television plays, another past strength of the Corporation.

V. The Issue of Commercialisation

Of those respondents who provided an answer on the qualities that make the BBC a unique broadcaster and differentiate it from commercial rivals, the majority focussed on the absence of advertisements. There is a very, very strong body of opposition to any commercial advertising being introduced into BBC programming. On a very simple level, the public do not like advertisements and many respondents stated that they detract from the viewing or listening experience considerably. Viewers find advertisements offensive, intrusive and upsetting. Respondents noted that commercial breaks serve to detract from the quality of the programme, be it a drama, documentary, sitcom or film.

The wider implications of permitting advertisements on the BBC were also referred to by some respondents. There was a sense that opening the service to advertising would damage the highly praised and highly valued impartiality of the BBC. Once advertisements are solicited, the reflection of programme content upon potential advertisers becomes a significant editorial concern. Respondents fear that when an institution becomes reliant upon external advertisers for its income

it ceases to be truly independent; many expressed concern that this would be the fate of the BBC. A number of respondents articulated this concern in greater detail, noting that at present the customer of the BBC is the audience and the general public, and the product is the programming. Conversely, for non-subscription commercial broadcasters the customer is the advertiser and the audience is the actual product.

Furthermore, as revenue is not linked to advertising the BBC should not feel pressured to win high viewer ratings for its programming, according to many respondents. The programme viewing figures determine the premiums charged for advertising slots; respondents expressed concern that advertising on the BBC would make audience share a greater priority for programming than quality. Respondents noted that the lack of advertisements allows the BBC to be focussed purely upon programming quality, though some respondents did also note that the Corporation does not always choose quality over winning audience share, particularly with regards to the perceived decline in programming quality on BBC1 and BBC Radio 1.

Some respondents argued that there is a virtue in forcing the BBC to compete on an even commercial footing with other broadcasters. This minority believe that, regardless of the recognised superior quality of programming output, it is in some sense fundamentally unfair that the BBC should be funded through a licence fee. The successes of the BBC are, for this group of respondents, somehow worthless, as they are born out of public funding as opposed to the hard graft of commercial entrepreneurship. In this view, the BBC's freedom from commercial pressures generates an institutionalised arrogance as the BBC is not answerable to nor subject to the will of the people, as expressed through either ratings figures or subscription uptake. Though a minority of respondents believed that commercialisation would be a means, through consumer empowerment, to drive BBC accountability to the public, the majority felt that accountability would shift to the advertisers if the Corporation were commercialised.

Some respondents were emphatic that the BBC should not attempt to emulate commercial broadcasters; other respondents felt that the BBC ought to emulate commercial broadcasters more. It was even felt by some respondents that there already was very little to differentiate between the programming of the BBC and that of commercial broadcasters. 'For the last few years the BBC has been acting more and more like a commercial broadcaster – reducing standards, chasing ratings, putting more emphasis on trivia.'

Many respondents felt that, as a public service broadcaster funded directly by the public, the BBC has a clear responsibility to provide programming that fills the gaps in commercial broadcasting provision. The BBC is perceived as being free and able to develop programming of a high quality for minority audiences in a way that is impossible for the commercial sector.

VI. The BBC and Self-promotion

A recurrent gripe was over the heavy use of self-advertisements, programme trailers and brand-establishing images. This was considered to be a particular problem on BBC1 and BBC Radio 1, though common to all BBC television and radio channels to a greater or lesser extent.

Respondents' reasons for disliking these promotional items varied. Generally, respondents believed these pieces to represent a squandering of BBC resources, in terms of both finance and time. Many respondents found it objectionable that licence fee money, which they view as their own personal investment in the BBC, is spent on 'selling' the BBC to the viewer. The amount of

time and money dedicated to these self-promoting pieces was seen by nearly all the respondents who raised this issue as a serious waste. This problem is exacerbated by the polished and 'glossy' appearance of the pieces.

Advertising programmes has become problematic because two parallel BBC services are being offered at present, the analogue and the digital. Cross-channel advertising serves to frustrate and upset viewers who are either unable or unwilling to access the digital channels. A number of respondents remarked that they were annoyed by advertisements for interesting programmes on BBC4 that they were unable to access. This problem raised the additional criticism of the Corporation's decision to premier certain programmes, such as the *Alan Clark Diaries*, on BBC4 rather than on one of the analogue channels. This complaint was not raised regarding the programming of BBC3.

Furthermore, a significant number of respondents complained about the advance advertising of programmes. It was felt by many who addressed this issue that certain key programmes are advertised too frequently and too far in advance. Rather than creating the desired anticipation for the programme, these advertisements create a sense of programme fatigue. These repeated and intrusive advertisements also serve to blur one of the key distinctions between the BBC's broadcasting output and the output of commercial broadcasters: the absence of advertisements. Some responses were very vehement. One respondent provided calculations estimating the loss in airtime and funds because of these self-promotional pieces. Other respondents provided constructive criticism, suggesting that the airtime dedicated to advertisements and trailers could be freed for short public service broadcasting pieces. As well as helping to fulfil the BBC's commitment to representing the UK populace, these public service broadcasting 'shorts' could also help to establish a brand identity while still providing entertainment and programming value.

Although some respondents accepted that there might be a need, within the contemporary broadcasting climate, to develop and strengthen a channel's brand through self-promoting pieces of footage, many of these same viewers felt that at present the BBC is suffering from overkill in the area of self-promotion. However, these criticisms must be viewed in the context of the considerably smaller number of respondents who felt that the BBC needed to champion itself more and develop public awareness of the great range of services it provides. For many, however, the loss of the 'continuity globe' as part of the BBC's brand image was lamented.

VII. The BBC's Service to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

There were various criticisms of the BBC Wales service. Respondents often felt that they are receiving a second-class BBC for various reasons. The majority of respondents who identified themselves as Welsh or Wales-resident suggested that the BBC Wales service is in fact too Welsh. The extent of Welsh-language programming was considered disproportionate to the population percentage able to speak and understand Welsh. Many of these respondents also felt that certain stereotypes were being reinforced through the BBC's programming, most particularly the stereotype of the rugby obsessive. Respondents often articulated the fact that rugby should not dominate the programming output to the degree to which it does currently.

However, some Welsh respondents held the opposite viewpoint and believed that the BBC continues to discriminate against the Welsh people, language and culture. These respondents asked for a greater representation of Welsh indigenous arts and history on BBC Wales. A very small number of respondents suggested that the exclusion of Welsh culture from the programming mainstream constituted an act of racism.

Respondents also identified problems with BBC Scotland. As with the response to programming on BBC Wales, the majority of respondents referring to BBC Scotland expressed a desire for more English output. This was not solely a request for more English-language output. As with the Welsh programming, some respondents felt that there was an unnecessary exclusion of non-Scottish-orientated programming from BBC Scotland's output. Yet, as was also the case with BBC Wales, some respondents complained that BBC Scotland's output needs to be more Scottish, both in terms of language and cultural content. There were noticeably fewer responses pertaining to BBC Scotland than to BBC Wales, and it would be problematic to take these responses as broadly representative of mainstream Scottish sentiment towards the BBC, should such a sentiment indeed exist.

A very small number of respondents made reference to the services tailored for Northern Ireland listeners and viewers. The BBC Radio Ulster Irish-language programme *Blas* was praised. Conversely, the BBC Northern Ireland News was criticised. It is not possible to state whether the very small number of responses referring to the BBC Northern Ireland services is due to a low involvement in the consultation process by Northern Ireland residents or due to general levels of satisfaction with the service provided.

VIII. The BBC and the Representation of Regions and Communities

Overall, respondents had praise for the BBC's representation of regions and communities. As one respondent remarked, 'the BBC should be congratulated for ensuring that BBC regions are made available [digitally], showing an understanding of the diverse needs of the nation as a whole'. There was a widely shared perception that the BBC makes a considerable effort to ensure that all social and geographical groupings are captured and reflected in the Corporation's programming. Certainly the quality and range of regional and community representation is not seen to be flawless, but the majority of respondents felt that the BBC was outperforming commercial television broadcasters in this area, although some respondents did suggest that commercial radio stations were sometimes better-positioned to deliver regional programming than the BBC.

Broadly, the BBC is considered to be a London-centric organisation. Respondents identified this trait of the Corporation in many different areas of its programming and services. Though some respondents appreciated the fact that many a national organisation both private and public is London-centric in terms of where it locates its head offices, it is important to note the effect that this characteristic of the BBC has on regional representation. Significantly, the areas that appear, from the responses, to have the poorest regional representation are those closest to the capital, such as the towns and counties immediately beyond the M25. These areas are included within the London region in terms of broadcasting but are not included, in any meaningful sense, in terms of representation. Some respondents were generally disparaging about regional programming, suggesting that it did not exist in any noticeable form beyond the amateurish provision of local news.

A small but vocal number of respondents expressed the view that the representation of black and minority ethnic communities is disproportionately large in comparison to the size of these communities within the UK population. It is beyond the remit of this report to assess the veracity or otherwise of this comment; however this criticism might be connected to the perceived London-centric nature of the BBC. The capital enjoys greater and more integrated ethnic diversity than much of the UK and consequently an accurate and proportional representation of London's diverse community would not reflect the less culturally diverse regions of the UK. Certainly, respondents seemed concerned that the UK's indigenous culture, history, arts and even people were

being sidelined in BBC programming. A small number of respondents also suggested that traditional 'English' folk music was being ignored by the BBC.

Respondents made specific references to the lack of programmes focussed on Anglican Christianity or reflecting broad Christian values. Moreover, some Christian denominations, specifically evangelical and Roman Catholic, were perceived to be sidelined in favour of Anglicanism. Furthermore, while some respondents were worried by the lack of Christian influence and representation in BBC programming, others remarked that programming was too Christian. There were a particularly large number of responses calling for greater humanist representation in BBC programming and a broader recognition of secular philosophies and moral systems.¹

The BBC was seen by some respondents as having the potential to promote a new and modern definition of 'Britishness' and to provide exemplary models of the new British identity in the light of the increased cultural and ethnic diversification of the UK population. The BBC, as a shared and publicly owned organisation accountable to the public, has the ability to conjoin cultural elements to create a unified and progressive national identity.

It was suggested by some respondents that the BBC could do more to explain local government. In a more general sense, some respondents felt that more could be done by the BBC to promote local democracy and regional identity. Respondents suggested that digital technology ought to be used to present viewers with a choice of regional programming, providing every viewer, regardless of geography, with access to the output of all BBC regions. It was noted that local radio could be heard through the Freeview digital box. Local radio stations were identified as having the potential to cater for the many diverse minority interests and multi-cultural needs of regional audiences.

Some respondents criticised the lack of programming aimed at older audiences. It was suggested that there could be digital channels dedicated to broadcasting for the senior citizen demographic. Certainly, some respondents felt that programming was targeted at younger viewers and listeners. However, this programming bias is, to an extent, based on the creation of CBeebies and CBBC to fulfil the BBC's mandate to educate. A small but noticeable number of respondents remarked upon the need for a greater recognition of gay and lesbian communities, with some specific programming aimed at this minority group. Similarly, while praising the BBC's efforts to provide a platform to under-represented ethnicities, it was felt by some respondents that the BBC (accidentally or not) ignored other ethnic groups, especially the Chinese.

IX. BBC America

A considerable number of respondents complained about the quality of BBC America. As well as illustrating the high number of responses originating from North America, these responses were unequivocally negative in their appraisal of BBC America. The network was presented as delivering programmes of the lowest possible quality and feeding users a diet of repeats. According to respondents, BBC America continually loses out on screening popular and high-demand BBC programmes such as *Absolutely Fabulous* and *The Office* to other commercial broadcasters. However, the single most frequent criticism in the entire consultation, not just of

¹ It is worth noting that the British Humanist Association is running a campaign to lobby for a reform of the *Today* programme's 'Thought for the Day' and the BBC's attitude towards religion as a whole. Their website offers a 'model' letter of complaint for submission to the corporation.

BBC America but of all of BBC programming, focussed on the cancellation of *EastEnders* on BBC America. This move appears to have upset a considerable proportion of BBC America viewers, who strongly felt that the programme should return to the schedules.

Many of the respondents who criticised the BBC America service suggested that the simplest solution would be to close down the network and make BBC1 and BBC2 available through subscription. North American respondents made it clear that they would willingly pay a licence fee for even this basic and reduced BBC service of two television channels; this is a potent endorsement by overseas viewers of the perceived value and quality of mainstream BBC programming.

X. The BBC's Role in Fostering Talent

Respondents noted the role that the BBC plays in nurturing and developing new talent in various fields through its extensive programme of competitions, training and apprenticeships. Respondents remarked that the BBC dedicates airtime and resources to emerging talents with an aim to ensuring a healthy future for culture and entertainment in the UK. It was suggested by some that such schemes and initiatives would never be run by commercial broadcasters as they carry no financial reward. As one respondent noted, 'Radio 1 has two great redeeming features over commercial radio: no annoying advertising, and an evening schedule that brings us many new bands that we would not otherwise hear. It would be a shame if no one were prepared to take a risk on playing new music, just because it did not pass the mass appeal test of a commercial "audience insight manager"'.

Ideas praised by respondents included the *Awards for World Music*, the *Young Musician of the Year* awards and the *New Generation Artists* programme. These programmes and the support they provide to young and developing artists, along with the contribution they make to the healthy future of artistic life in the UK, could only be delivered by a publicly funded organisation with a well-defined non-commercial broadcasting remit.

XI. The News

1. A Partisan Service

Almost certainly, the most frequently given answer to the question of what respondents valued about the BBC was the BBC's news service. On balance, the BBC has retained its reputation for reliable, accurate and impartial news reporting. However, it is clearly the case that the question marks hanging over both the reporting of the Iraq war and the present *intifada* in the Palestinian territories have harmed this strong reputation in the eyes of some respondents. It ought to be noted, however, that many of the complaints about the BBC news service were submitted as part of organised campaigns, and the majority of replies levelling accusations of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel bias originated in North America. These respondents were often vitriolic in their condemnation of the BBC or the 'Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation', as some named it: 'The BBC is beyond repair and much like Yoseph Goebbles' [*sic*] propaganda machine'.

Not only was BBC reporting condemned for its perceived poor quality and inaccuracies, but it was also accused of positively contributing to the problems facing the world at present as its 'ultra-left, anti-war, anti-American, anti-Semitic agenda has created this crisis'. There was a sense among critics that the BBC generates or 'makes' news rather than impartially reporting it. As one

respondent suggested, 'the BBC is now not only reporting news but continually attempts to "create" news arising from several sources (commissioned reports or surveys) and reporters investigating current interests.' Although a sizable minority of respondents did state this belief, there are no supporting examples provided.² The *Today* programme was identified as a leading culprit for 'making' news and also for conducting aggressive interviews and presenting partisan editorials.

The issue of aggressive interviews – and more particularly aggressive interviewers – was raised by a significant number of respondents. Respondents frequently stated that they believed interrogative and self-aggrandising interviewing techniques hampered the ability of news and current affairs programming to appear impartial and balanced. On many occasions, and with specific reference to some of the leading names of BBC interview-based journalism, respondents remarked that the personal agendas and opinions of the interviewers overwhelmed the process and coverage. There was a sense among respondents that such programming was tending towards gruesome spectacle and entertainment, rather than informed analysis and democratic discussion.

These criticisms ought to be placed in a broader context of praise for the BBC's attempts to hold figures of national and international governance and business to account. For many, the BBC's approach provides an antidote to political 'spin-doctoring', disinformation and ineffectual transparency. Respondents believed that BBC interviews offer a public forum for debate, and that the figures criticised by others for aggressive and abrasive techniques actually drive informed democratic discussion.

It certainly is the case that many of the complaints levelled against the BBC's news reporting in recent years portray the BBC as having a clear, politicised agenda – one which is left-wing and liberal. On a number of occasions, respondents suggest some editorial collusion with the *Guardian* newspaper. For many of these respondents, past controversies surrounding BBC news confirm their long-held convictions about the unsuitability and bias of the BBC as a media outlet.

There is a small contingent of generally satisfied and generally pro-BBC viewers and listeners who feel that the BBC has recently made some serious errors of editorial judgement: 'Throughout my lifetime the BBC has seemed to me to be one of Britain's most admirable organisations, along with the pre-Thatcher health service. Its fall from that position since the terrorists began their war is tragic. Its motivation is incomprehensible'.

2. An Impartial Service

Although there was palpable North American hostility to BBC news coverage during the last year, there were quieter, less frequent but significant expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the BBC's news service from that same part of the world. Respondents contrasted the BBC favourably with the Fox News Network, levelling criticisms of bias, inaccuracy and partisanship against the

² There is one considerable exception to this. A representative of *BBCWATCH* submitted a series of reports on the BBC's use of language. By using a wealth of detailed references to news coverage during delineated periods, he illustrated how the BBC uses language and rhetoric to create an unfavourable impression of the conduct of Israel throughout the present *intifada*. His reports do not suggest that the BBC's reporting is any less impartial than other broadcasters, merely that the BBC has a perceived responsibility to the provision of balanced reporting outstripping that which is incumbent upon commercial broadcasters. Additionally, the reports make clear that this apparent bias against Israel stands in stark contrast to a pro-coalition bias throughout the Iraq campaign.

latter rather than the former. Another respondent noted that ‘during the recent war [with Iraq] many US friends found the BBC upright and independent compared with their own media’.

On balance, the majority of respondents exhibited a willingness to continue to invest faith and trust in the accuracy and impartiality of the BBC news coverage. This trust has been demonstrably hard-won over the course of the BBC’s lifetime and the recent perceived shortcomings have given many respondents cause to carefully re-examine and reappraise the news reporting and editorial policies of the Corporation. Overwhelmingly, these respondents’ reassessments have translated into reaffirmations of the general quality of the BBC’s service and a renewed faith in the global standing and currency of the BBC brand. Hence many respondents felt comfortable in asserting that despite recent controversies the BBC remains ‘the only broadcaster whose news the rest of the world trusts’.

There were requests from some respondents for greater breadth of news coverage. International reporting was considered to have too narrow a focus. Too frequently international events are filtered through two considerations: their relation to UK interests and their ‘television-friendly’ qualities. As a consequence, a noticeable minority of respondents felt that certain areas of international news are being overlooked entirely, particularly the politics and legislation of the European Parliament and the current affairs of developing countries, outside the routine AIDS and starvation stories.

XII. The BBC and Value for Money

Many respondents stated that the BBC offered considerable value for money in view of the breadth and quality of the services it provides: ‘The more I think of it, the more remarkable I recognise the organisation to be. The country gets all this for a lot less than a third of what one pays for Sky’. Rather than being resentful of the licence fee many appreciate the BBC as ‘the greatest bargain in the world’.

A significant minority of respondents do hold the opposite opinion, regarding the licence fee as a punitive ‘poll tax’ and fiercely anti-democratic and anachronistic because of its compulsory nature. It was a common suggestion, among the minority of respondents who felt that the BBC did not provide value for money, that there ought to be some service consolidation. Indeed, this was also suggested, though with a different ideological motivation, by many people broadly supportive of the BBC. There was an argument made that by focusing on a restricted range of core programming objectives and broadcasting channels, the BBC will raise the overall quality of its programming either to meet or even to exceed the standards of yesteryear. However, these respondents did not clearly indicate how reducing the number of services offered by the BBC for the same price – or at a proportionately higher cost – constitutes improved value for money in comparison to the present offer.

XIII. The BBC and the Quality of Spoken English

A very small number of respondents lamented the demise of what is colloquially termed ‘BBC English’. Though most of these criticisms were nostalgic in tone, respondents did suggest that, as well as having a responsibility to promote a high quality of spoken English, the BBC also ought to enforce a policy of non-dialect, ‘non-accented’ English in recognition of the considerable number of speakers of English as a second language who rely on and enjoy BBC programmes.

A Changing Landscape

'How Should the BBC Adapt to Cope with Changes in Technology and Culture?'

I. Current Response to Technological Advances

1. The BBC as a Leader

The BBC was widely praised for its response to advances in media technology, most significantly the Internet and digital television. As a few respondents observed, it is an oft-forgotten stipulation of the BBC's founding principles that it should be involved in the pioneering and development of new broadcasting technologies. Whilst some members of the public are keen to maintain the tradition of a BBC that leads the technological field, others see the focus on new forms of media as an unwelcome distraction from the Corporation's core objective of providing quality programming.

The vast majority of respondents who addressed this issue did affirm that the BBC's place should be at the very forefront of technological developments in broadcasting. Additionally, some respondents observed that unless the BBC continued to keep pace with technological advancements, it might easily become redundant. Further to this, respondents also identified a moral imperative not to allow the provision of digital television and radio to become the sole preserve of one commercial broadcaster, Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB: 'As a public service the BBC should lead the way in delivering new technologies to all of the general public'.

2. Digital Services

Two key complaints recurred throughout responses that dealt with the issue of access to digital television: affordability and availability. Digital reception coverage is not universal across the UK, nor do areas with access to reception enjoy 100% parity of reception quality. A number of respondents made particular reference to the unavailability of digital services in the Humberside area and more rural sections of the UK. Respondents voiced concern about the possibility of universal provision of digital television failing to be practically realised before the cessation of analogue transmissions. Viewers lacking access to digital services requested that programming on the digital channels be repeated on analogue channels.

On the issue of affordability, there was a broad consensus of thought, among the respondents who touched upon this problem, that there ought to be some form of subsidy available for the elderly, disabled and those on benefit support to enable them to acquire digital television and radio after the cessation of analogue transmissions. The present amount of hostility among respondents who feel they are paying for digital services that they are unable to use should not be underestimated, yet universal provision may well cause the vast majority of these criticisms to evaporate.

The affordability of digital services was an area of slight controversy. A minority of respondents expressed clear resentment at having to purchase a Freeview box. Others who had chosen not to

access digital services expressed annoyance that their licence fee contribution was being used to finance programming that they were not using.

In terms of programming, respondents questioned whether or not space could be made on the bandwidth to allow BBC3 and BBC4 to operate longer and potentially 24-hour schedules. Additionally, respondents had concerns that certain radio programmes and schedules might vanish in the transition to digital radio and that transmission quality might be sacrificed to drive transmission quantity.

Referring to some specific technical points, some respondents remarked on the displacing of the BBC overseas satellite channels to Astra 2D: 'by doing so you have denied English-language TV to a very large population of people in Europe'. It was felt by many that the service ought to be transmitted via Astra 2B as it was previously. The failure to incorporate HDTV or Dolby Surround on BBC digital provision was noted. Respondents also raised concerns about the audio quality of the digital radio stations, suggesting that 193kbps should be the minimum level acceptable. DAB transmissions' error compensation rate is set too low; although the quality is good for stationary listeners, there are problems when the receiver is mobile.

3. BBC Online Services

There was strong support for the BBC's online services from many respondents: 'BBCi³ is, simply put, the best and highest quality content provider in the world'. These services were praised for disseminating information on both an extremely local level and on a global basis. As a tool for promoting worldwide mutual understanding and information-sharing, the online services seem to rival the World Service in the estimation of many. Respondents firmly value the positive global effect of the BBC's online services; as one noted, 'The magnificent quality of the material available on BBC websites is simply beyond comparison and the goodwill it generates in the youth of Indochina can only bode well for the future of UK foreign relations, as well as toward the BBC'. Undeniably the online services, as with many of the services performed by the BBC, fulfil a purpose that transcends both national boundaries and the conventional ambitions of broadcasters. The educational services available online through the BBC were praised as a useful teaching tool. Some respondents suggested that the Open University could be linked more comprehensively to the BBC's online services.

There was ideological opposition to the BBC's online services from a small but vocal number of respondents. The creation of a subsidised, publicly funded website providing programming content, news and current affairs information as well as forums for discussion and interactive materials was considered to be fundamentally anti-competitive and unfair: 'The system creates unfair competition, using exhorted [*sic*] money to finance ventures that compete with those that must rely on private finance'. Other respondents countered such arguments by noting that excellence should not be penalised through slavish and dogmatic adherence to commercial competitive principles. The suggestion that the BBC online is essentially anti-competitive and is stealing the field in online provision does not reconcile with the other minority view expressed that the commercial sector is the natural environment for innovation and experimentation.

³ The respondent in this instance uses 'BBCi' to refer to BBC online services as a whole. The re-branding of the online services as bbc.co.uk took place after the public consultation.

4. Technology and Value for Money

A minority of respondents did not believe that investments in digital and Internet technology and service development represented a sensible and justifiable use of licence fee revenue. Among these respondents there was a sense that the BBC's focus ought to be upon what is broadcast rather than the actual media through which the broadcasting is done. Despite the historical role the BBC has played in developing broadcast media, respondents felt that this no longer formed a practical or useful part of the Corporation's remit. Furthermore, many of those respondents who disagreed with the BBC's attempts to operate at the forefront of technological advances in media and communication expressed the belief that regardless of the investment made by the BBC, commercial stations will also close the provision gap and be able to replicate BBC services on a technological level.

II. Future Technological and Cultural Changes

1. The Future of Digital

Many responses provided suggestions for further digital developments. The majority of these were essentially suggestions for new digital channels focussing on one particular demographic or region. It has already been mentioned in this report that respondents requested the digital provision of a dedicated channel for senior citizen programming. It was also hypothesised that digital technology could allow for the nationwide broadcasting of all regional programming, giving the public the choice of tailored regional schedules. A significant minority of respondents suggested that a BBC sports channel should be inaugurated. This suggestion came both from sports fans, as might be easily predicted, as well as from those who do not enjoy sports programmes and hence wish to see them removed from the mainstream programming schedules. It was also suggested that BBC1 and BBC2 could have digital channels that 'shadow' their schedules, running an hour behind and thereby improving viewers' chances of catching the programme they want to watch.

Although the provision of dedicated, specialist radio and television channels facilitated by digital technology could ostensibly serve to improve programming for minority cultural groups, some respondents were concerned about exacerbating cultural fragmentation. One solution posited was to rotate specialist programming from designated channels through the mainstream radio and television channels, thereby encouraging a diverse yet cohesive and unified UK culture, while also ensuring the depth of provision for those with specialist interests.

2. Internet and Interactive Services

Respondents expressed even greater hopes for the BBC's use of the Internet. Many suggested that BBC programming – either selected programmes or the entire range – ought to be made available globally over the web. This would serve to solve numerous problems that currently exist, including expatriates' access to BBC services, dissatisfaction with the BBC America network and fears in the UK about the general accessibility of television programming in a post-analogue broadcasting environment. As well as making contemporary programming schedules available, the website could offer downloadable archives of BBC material. Alternatively, some respondents suggested that digital transmissions could make the BBC television and radio channels available to potential customers outside the UK who could pay a subscription fee comparable to the licence fee levied on UK residents.

Some respondents noted the potential that interactive services have for promoting democracy. Local online debates and electronic voting were only two of the innovations suggested by respondents that could be facilitated through the BBC's online and interactive service provision. It was suggested that after the cessation of analogue transmissions the BBC ought to become a fully-fledged ISP.

3. Technology and the Quality of Content

Technology and change provoke gnostic statements, and responses to this question proved no exception. The importance of making provision for those who are neither IT- nor digital-literate was highlighted by respondents. There was an intangible fear expressed by some respondents that technological advances might come to dictate the nature of programming and provision, rather than always remaining the malleable means for delivering programming. An even broader and less specific hostility towards digital television and radio as an unfamiliar entity could be discerned from some responses; a number of respondents expressed a refusal, unconnected to issues of access or affordability, to use digital provision. Responses were diverse; some respondents called for a broadening of the Freeview range of channels; others insisted on the indefinite continuance of analogue transmissions. Respondents also felt that online and digital services could be integrated to create one holistic service provision, although no details were offered.

Ultimately, impressive advances in technology professionally handled by an experienced BBC will be worthless achievements if the programming quality 'continues to decline'. This point was expressed by respondents who held a variety of opinions on the present state of and potential for the future of digital and online services. In the face of the rapid growth of broadcast media, the BBC is exhorted by respondents to retain as its mantra the belief that quality is always of greater value than quantity. As one respondent noted, 'I would rather have a choice of five good channels than 25 mediocre channels'.

Publicly Funded Services and Functions

*'What Do You Think of the Television, Radio and
Online Services the BBC Provides?'*

I. The Holistic Assessment of BBC Programming

Certain key criticisms and compliments arose continually in otherwise varying responses. On the negative side, the BBC was attacked for chasing ratings and 'dumbing down', for neglecting its remit to educate and provide programming of a non-commercial nature and for relying too heavily on repeats and its strong reputation. The Corporation was accused of being politically biased either in favour of the Government or against the Government. A number of other respondents expressed the opinion that 'the BBC is generally biased', without identifying anything it was biased for or against.

On the positive side, the BBC was consistently praised for producing programming that was unique and unlikely to be developed by any other broadcaster. The Corporation, although allegedly suffering a decline in standards, was still seen as setting the benchmark by which all potential rivals are to be judged. The educational role of the BBC was considered by many to be fulfilled through programming and online materials. Furthermore, in key areas of news reporting, online services, drama and risk-taking programming, the BBC was still perceived to be a world leader. As one respondent noted, 'the range and quality of BBC programming and its services are at their highest point for many years. The BBC should continue to expand its delivery of services across all media. By doing so, the BBC, at a very reasonable cost, brings constraint to the commercial market in terms of pricing etc., that acts in the interests of the consumer'.

II. Television Service

1. Praise for the BBC's Television Service

A significant minority of respondents suggested that the extent to which the BBC is 'dumbing-down' has been exaggerated. Inevitable favourites, most obviously *EastEnders* and *Only Fools and Horses*, were referenced by respondents as top-quality elements of BBC television. The BBC's television news was reasonably consistently praised. Although many felt that there should be an overhaul of BBC News 24, with a movement from headline-focussed programming toward analysis-based output, there were generally high levels of satisfaction with BBC television news programming. BBC News 24 was favourably compared by respondents to both CNN and Sky News, the two other 'rolling' news stations available in the UK.

The recent digital channels, particularly CBeebies and BBC4, provoked positive responses. The latter was perceived to be a sincere attempt at fulfilling the BBC's obligation to screen arts and cultural programming. However, many respondents feared that challenging arts programming will only be presented on BBC4, allowing BBC2 to drift towards ratings-obsessed populism.

The question of sports programming on BBC television served to polarise responses considerably. While some respondents were full of admiration for the BBC's commitment to minority sports, other respondents considered this programming to be a risible attempt to conceal the Corporation's failure to afford and secure more premium sporting events. Similarly, roughly equal numbers of respondents requested considerable increases or decreases in the quantity of sports coverage. As noted earlier in this report, advocates for both extremes of opinion felt they could be satisfied by the provision of a dedicated sports channel on Freeview.

Almost all respondents who made reference to the BBC's educational programming praised the Corporation for the quality and quantity of programming. Respondents perceived the BBC as producing far more educational and informative programming than any other broadcaster. However, there were concerns expressed about the timing of educational broadcasts. Respondents felt that scheduling educational programmes either late at night or early in the morning was problematic and that the programmes, especially in light of their inherent worth, were deserving of more accessible timeslots. CBeebies, and to a lesser extent, CBBC, were seen by respondents to be contributing to education and fulfilling the BBC's ambition for programming: to educate, inform and entertain.

Documentaries, wildlife programming and dramas (both period and contemporary) were all identified as strengths of the BBC. In these areas the Corporation was considered by many to be

setting the standard for all broadcasters. Some respondents had praise for BBC comedy programmes, although there were a number of dissenting voices as well.

2. Criticisms of the BBC's Television Service

a. Repeats

The most common criticism levelled at the BBC's television service is that there are too many repeats. Some respondents observed that this has been a 'traditional' accusation levelled at the Corporation over the years. Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that repeats were swamping the schedules and lowering the quality and value for money of BBC television. Although criticism of the large numbers of repeated programmes was widespread, there were also requests for access to the BBC back catalogue and for favourite programmes to be revived or re-shown. The success of 'nostalgia' channels available through satellite and digital suggested to respondents that there is an audience and a place for repeated BBC programmes, yet this place is neither BBC1 nor BBC2.

b. Commercialisation

The accusation of 'dumbing down' was made by several respondents. There is a widespread opinion that the BBC during the past decade has intentionally designed programmes to cater to the lowest common denominator in audience tastes. The BBC's overarching objective in pursuing this policy was held to be an aim to win audience share and thereby weaken the Corporation's main television rival, ITV. Many accepted that this is a coherent BBC programming policy, but only a small number made the observation that the BBC has come under pressure from elements in the commercial media to justify its level of funding, and that by delivering programmes with mass appeal that serve to meet audience expectations and reflect audience interests the Corporation illustrates its relevance to the general public. Some respondents criticised the BBC's perceived participation in a 'ratings war' as 'commercially aggressive', though others were keen to point out that it is precisely this sort of behaviour that the licence fee funding arrangement – generally – tends to prevent.

The 'commercialisation' of programming on BBC television – most frequently respondents' comments were aimed particularly at BBC1 – undermined the justification for licence fee funding. Some respondents felt that commercial output must be matched by a commercial means of gathering revenue. As a respondent noted, 'the absence of advertisements was a good reason for the licence fee. At present we have the disadvantages of commercial television and still have to pay'.

There were particularly complaints from respondents about the predominance of lifestyle and 'reality' television programmes. The excessive production of inexpensive programmes focussing on home purchase, improvement and DIY or of equally inexpensive 'docu-soaps' about traffic wardens, unusual pets or one-time celebrities was seen by the majority of respondents who alluded to it as a way of filling the schedules with 'empty calories' instead of sincerely attempting to produce sufficient quantities of quality programming. These programmes were perceived by many to be emblematic of all that is misplaced in the prevailing BBC programming ethos. Alleged declines in standards should be placed in the context of repeated affirmations by respondents of BBC television's reputation for producing programming of a higher quality than its rival broadcasters. Furthermore, many of the programmes criticised, such as soap operas, quiz games and lifestyle programming, were equally praised by other respondents.

Some respondents criticised the heavy reliance on celebrities to drive certain programmes and certain formats. Respondents had negative comments about the perceived wages and self-importance of celebrities, and expressed a greater interest in programmes that rely upon qualities other than the star rating of their presenter or main performer.

The use of self-promoting pieces was commented on and resented by a considerable number of respondents. Of particular annoyance is the effect these trailers and advertisements have on the timing of programmes. Various respondents complained that they experience difficulty recording programmes onto video because of the schism between the advertised programme schedule and the reality of the timing.

c. Arts, Science, and International Programming

Respondents requested more visual arts and literature within BBC television programming. Some also expressed a desire that the greatly appreciated arts and culture programmes should be mainstreamed into the BBC's flagship provision – BBC1 and BBC2 – rather than relegated to the less accessible digital channels. In this view, the BBC ought to make more rigorous and specific commitments to broadcasting operas and classical music, although this should be placed in the context of comments by other respondents applauding the BBC's unmatched commitment to the broadcasting of performances of classical music and opera. There was concern that the perceived tendency towards less intellectually rigorous programming, particularly on the mainstream channels BBC1 and BBC2, was extending to documentaries, history programmes and other items of factual output. Respondents felt that these programmes were being over-dramatised and 'sexed up' to create 'infotainment' programmes of reduced educational merit.

A specific programming gap identified by many was the area of science, both fiction and fact. It was felt by a visible minority that there ought to be a renewed commitment to producing a greater quantity of more sophisticated educational science programmes. Similarly, respondents also felt that there could be more science fiction programming in the mould of *Doctor Who*. Respondents also highlighted the absence of successful and popular sitcoms, an area in which the BBC enjoys a proud tradition. Some criticised recent comedies for being indecent and smutty; others levelled the more damning criticism that they are straightforwardly unfunny. Dance and figure-skating are other genres seen by respondents to be neglected in the BBC schedules.

A strong minority of respondents called for greater levels of European programming in the BBC television schedules. It was felt that while US programmes were reasonably commonplace on UK television channels, high-quality European programmes were conspicuous by their absence. A similar, though less pronounced, disparity exists regarding the broadcasting of US films in contrast to the broadcasting of European films. Respondents suggested that the BBC could take a more active role in cultivating and developing British films, through increased investment and commissioning. BBC4 was seen by some respondents to be a natural home for European and world cinema and programmes.

d. Moral Standards

A frequent criticism of the television programming was that there is a glut of unsuitable content. Programmes are often considered to contain material that is blasphemous, sexually explicit, generally profane or an incitement to and glorification of violence and anti-social behaviour. Some respondents objected to this quality of programming on what appears to be a purely aesthetic basis; others objected on either sociological or religious grounds. Respondents posited links between

certain discernable deteriorations in the moral fibre and safety of society and the unwholesome content of television programming. The BBC, as a publicly accountable broadcaster, was considered by many of the respondents to have a responsibility to uphold standards of moral and social decency in a way that is palpably not expected of commercial broadcasters. Regardless of the justification or otherwise for the laying of this obligation upon the Corporation, the BBC has strengthened both its reputation and popularity and gained considerable currency worldwide by being a bastion of morality. Hence these respondents consider it prudent that the BBC continue to maintain these virtues. A different argument was proffered by respondents who do not wish to see the BBC assuming the role of moral custodian of the people of the UK.

III. Radio Service

1. Praise for the BBC's Radio Service

In broad terms, the radio service was seen by the majority of respondents to be of a high quality. While sharing many of the positive programming aspects exhibited by the BBC's television service, BBC radio appears to have avoided many of the pitfalls suffered by its televisual counterpart. Both 'dumbing down' and self-promotion, although present, are not considered to be so ubiquitous on radio stations that they might compromise the quality of the service. Respondents considered the BBC radio service to be of a clearly higher standard than its commercial rivals, whereas the distinctions in television broadcasting were becoming less obvious.

The World Service was highly and almost uniformly praised by respondents who mentioned it. Similarly, BBC Radio 4 was unequivocally complimented by a significant number of respondents. The channel was seen by many to encapsulate many of the key qualities and virtues of BBC programming, from commissioning new drama to presenting uncompromising and intelligent news and current affairs analysis. One respondent remarked, 'the radio, especially BBC Radio 4, is the backdrop to my life, my constant companion and my connection to the world beyond my immediate community'.

A number of respondents felt that BBC Radio 3 is the only high-quality outlet for classical music and opera, far outstripping the provision by commercial rival Classic FM. They noted that Classic FM broadcasts individual movements as opposed to entire works. Non-mainstream music and talk radio were presented as strengths of the BBC's radio output. Significantly, the BBC radio service was perceived as having a role in supporting and delivering new music. Although respondents' views on the success and commitment of the BBC in this endeavour varied, the Corporation remained the best hope for young musical talent.

2. Criticisms of the BBC's Radio Service

Some respondents felt that there was a lack of easy listening music available. Others felt that the BBC ought to broadcast more music from the earlier decades of the 20th century. These requests might be seen in the broader context of a consultation-wide request for greater programming provision for the senior citizen demographic.

In contrast to the national and international radio programming, local radio was perceived by some respondents to be weak, with 'patronising and amateurish' programming. As with regional representation as a whole, there were issues with the definitions of radio regions.

BBC Radio 1 was accused, perhaps paradoxically, of both ‘dumbing down’ and of adhering too dogmatically to its playlist policy, which respondents felt excludes much popular music. Some respondents suggested that the radio station had become so overtly commercial in appearance, format and content that it ought to become independently commercial rather than remain funded by the licence fee.

IV. Online Service

The online service offered by the BBC was perceived by many to be a world-class leader in Internet information provision. Respondents considered the service to be excellent, particularly as a means of disseminating information and as an educational resource. As with all elements of BBC service provision, the online service was praised for being free from commercial influence, most particularly for being free from the ‘pop-up’ advertisements widespread on the Internet.

The ‘Listen Again’ service available on the Internet was mentioned by a number of respondents as being a convenient way of accessing programmes. Listen-on-demand services are a popular part of the BBC online provision.

The online service was praised by respondents for its contribution to education and in particular its GCSE study guides. It was suggested that comparable services for A-Level and other educational courses be made available through the website.

V. The Noise Problem

There was a recurrent criticism across a sizeable minority of the responses that background noise in all forms of BBC programming is too loud and detracts from the quality of the programme. This was considered especially pertinent in respect to news programmes and documentaries, and appeared to be a problem shared equally between television and radio broadcasts. This was no trivial complaint; respondents strongly felt that their viewing and listening enjoyment was being greatly compromised. Some remarked that this problem, with growing frequency, compelled them to cease accessing BBC services.

Commercial Services

‘Should the BBC Run Commercial Services?’

I. What are Commercial Services?

There was a broad misunderstanding of this question, resulting from a widespread lack of awareness of the BBC’s commercial services. Predominantly, respondents understood this question as a reference to the commercial selling of advertising space between and during

broadcasts. Attitudes to the introduction of a BBC revenue stream based on advertising are detailed elsewhere in this report.⁴

Even those respondents who understood the nature of this question demonstrated a lack of awareness of the range of commercial services performed by the BBC. The majority of respondents correctly addressing this question restricted their answer only to the Corporation's most immediately apparent commercial services, mainly the publication and sale of programming-related paraphernalia.

II. Using Commercial Services to Benefit Licence Payers

Respondents presented an almost unequivocal view of the sale of programming-related books, VHS video cassettes, audio cassettes, DVDs, and magazines: this service ought to be continued on the essential proviso that all revenue generated through sales be re-invested in the BBC – specifically, programme development – whereby the ‘profits top up the funding at no extra cost to the licence fee payer’. Respondents used this opportunity to request greater availability of the BBC back catalogue. One suggestion was to offer downloadable archive footage over the website for a price competitively comparable to purchasing material on DVD, VHS or audio cassette.

A smaller number of respondents recognised the BBC's commercial licensing of programming copyright to international networks. Respondents advocated the subscription broadcasting of BBC programming abroad via satellite, in order to use the existing archival wealth to generate fresh revenue streams for the Corporation.

BBC Worldwide was perceived as improving the brand recognition and reputation of the BBC globally. However, it was felt that commercial services must not be prioritised at the expense – in terms of both financial and human resources – of the core duties of public service broadcasting: ‘The BBC should continue to run commercial services to capitalise on its growing catalogue of content, without impacting on the free-to-air services’. Educational aims ought to be kept in mind when exploring commercial service provision, according to a minority of respondents.

It was suggested by many that revenue from commercial services ought to offset reductions in the licence fee.

III. Concerns and Criticisms

Respondents referred also to the BBC's *Radio Times*. The publication was perceived as being afflicted by the broader ‘dumbing down’ syndrome, with too great a focus on personal information and interviews with a narrow selection of celebrities. There were requests from radio users for a separate publication that supplies only fully comprehensive radio listings; one respondent requested that this be published in black and white.

Respondents were concerned about the quality of programme-related toys sold and also about the premium rate telephone numbers connected to certain items of children's programming.

⁴ Respondents' views on this issue are captured in two other sections of this report: The BBC Today: V The Issue of Commercialisation (pp.7-8) and Paying for the BBC: III Replacing the Fee (pp.28-29).

There were ideological problems expressed by some respondents concerning the subsidised provision of services via the BBC's commercial wings. A palpable minority of respondents believed that doing so could be construed as anti-competitive. This charge was also levelled at the BBC's online services, which were considered anti-competitive because they were not commercial and drew on public funds rather than on market forces to drive content excellence and site usability. These accusations seemed to some respondents to be irreconcilable with assertions that wholesale privatisation of the Corporation would drive cost efficiencies and programme quality. An extremely small minority of respondents suggested that the BBC, infused with public sector beliefs and expertise, is not capable of running commercial services to their maximum potential: 'The only time I found the BBC totally at sea was when I had dealings with its commercial departments. Publicly funded organisations tend to attract employees enthused [*sic*] with a public service ethos'.

Additionally, too-extensive forays into commercial activities could be perceived as jeopardising the licence fee. This point was made by both supporters and detractors of the fee. Supporters wished to avoid seeing the Corporation compromise its integrity and offer a means for opportunistic anti-licence-fee campaigners to legitimately challenge the right of the BBC to levy public funds. Some respondents suggested that commercial activities ought to be regulated externally, perhaps by Ofcom, to provide validity.

Paying for the BBC

'How Should We Pay for the BBC?'

I. An Overview of the Funding Debate

The licence fee was consistently praised by the majority as the 'greatest bargain in the world', but severely pilloried by a vocal minority as a punitive 'poll tax'. Responses were polarised and often highly emotionally charged. Generally, respondents compared the cost of the BBC services very favourably with the comparable costs of a subscription to Sky; very rarely, respondents made the contrary assertion that the Sky packages represented better value. One respondent made the observation that 'when the cost per head in the average UK household is approximately 8p a day, for 10 television channels, 50 radio stations and a top-notch website, you have to wonder where the argument against the licence fee can be made'.

Some responses suggested that there is a need to improve the general public's understanding of the mechanics of the licence fee system and its direct relationship to the production and delivery of BBC services and programming. There were comments from some members of the public saying that they either objected to or could see no need to pay the licence fee as they were able to access the BBC programmes through either the Internet or their subscription to a Sky package. Lack of awareness of how licence fees are used prompted frequent iteration of the opinion that funds are being wasted. Indeed, a fear of business inefficiencies, excessive wage packets and general squandering of funds was discernable in a minority of respondents on both sides of the argument over the retention of the licence fee. No explicit references or examples were provided, except for the purchasing of major sporting event broadcasting rights, the salaries of celebrity sports

presenters and the cost of the BBC's coverage of the ITV programme *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* Despite assertions that privatisation could drive efficiency, the only section of the BBC singled out for criticism about financial waste was BBC Worldwide.

II. Retaining the Fee

1. Creating Stakeholders

The majority of overall respondents argued for the retention of the fee, described by one respondent capturing the sentiments of many, as 'the price we pay for the single most important organisation in Britain today'. Many saw the licence fee as the only means of maintaining the BBC in any meaningful and recognisable form. One of the strongest and most commonly given reasons for the continuation of the fee was that by this funding method, all members of the public are stakeholders in the BBC, as the fee 'gives every household in the country an equal stake in the BBC's future and an equal pride in its success'. The autonomy and integrity of the Corporation were considered to be wholly contingent on the licence fee revenue stream. Many respondents felt that the BBC served their needs and was often answerable to their concerns; it was felt that this sense of ownership and responsibility could not be replicated with a commercial broadcaster.

More than anything, respondents wished to avoid a scenario in which the BBC is forced to open itself up to commercial advertising in order to gather revenue. Such a situation is anathema to the majority of respondents: 'The BBC is the only escape we have from the constant pressure by advertisers to consume. If any form of advertising is allowed on the BBC I shall dispose of my TV'. Respondents firmly placed the commercial independence of the organisation among its most prized qualities, an independence that would be irreparably hamstrung by the introduction of commercial advertising on the BBC's television, radio and online services. Many respondents expressed concern about the potential damage to editorial and programming independence and risk-taking that would be caused by a commercialisation of the BBC.

The licence fee was also perceived by a number of respondents to be a reasonable method of securing political independence for the BBC. Respondents argued that as the licence fee was levied directly from the public, BBC funding was not subject to the whims and caprices of Government. Due accountability to the public through its elected representatives was considered by those who mentioned it to be more than adequately served by the Charter renewal process.

By its very nature, the licence fee was seen by a considerable number to be a fair and equitable means of funding the BBC. Refinements included a suggestion that increases in the licence fee levied ought to be pegged to inflation. Additionally, many respondents felt that there needed to be a system of subsidised service provision for various social groups, most particularly the elderly, the disabled and those on welfare payment and income support. As one respondent who served as a JP noted, 'currently the only legal option for those unable to afford the licence is not to have a television – do you believe that the poorest in society should be without?' It was especially felt that although it was correct for those above a certain age to be exempt from the licence fee, the present age of 75 years was inappropriate as it is considerably older than the average age of retirement in the UK.

2. Guaranteeing High Quality

The licence fee was seen by many as a guarantor of high-quality public service broadcasting. A number noted that only through such a funding method could certain types of cultural and educational programming ever survive. However, respondents believed that the continuance of the licence fee confers a clear obligation on the BBC to pursue and even expand its agenda of non-commercial programming. Many respondents felt that the licence fee was the public's side in a compact with the Corporation and that the latter had a responsibility to honour its side by providing programming content that could not be produced through the commercial sector. Respondents had no difficulty in articulating the duty they believed to be incumbent upon the Corporation in exchange for the licence fee revenue: 'If the BBC wishes to continue to impose its licence fee upon us then it must establish itself as a provider of something qualitatively different from its competitors.' Satisfaction with the BBC services often translated into support for the licence fee; the greater the satisfaction, the stronger the respondent support for the fee. Many of those respondents who believed in the potential of the BBC, yet believed that potential is being untapped or even squandered, were broadly supportive of the fee, as long as improvements in service quality were forthcoming.

Among some respondents there were broader divisions over what constitutes public service broadcasting and thereby qualifies for publicly raised revenue through a licence fee. A few respondents felt that all the television services were overtly commercial and that perhaps only radio ought to be publicly funded.

A small number of respondents noted the importance of the licence fee as a guaranteed annual income for the Corporation, unaffected by commercial factors and economic fluctuations. The stability of the revenue stream was identified as a vital contributing factor to the production of programming of a higher quality and value than that developed through the commercial sector and, arguably more importantly, the main means through which the BBC is able to invest so heavily in the discovery and cultivation of new talent. The licence fee revenue, according to respondents, allows the BBC to plan future spending and investment and ensures that the Corporation and hence UK broadcasting as an industry remains forward-looking and world-class.

3. Amending the Fee

Some respondents did suggest that the licence fee, potentially in a reduced form, should fund only the public service broadcasting elements of the BBC's output. The commercially orientated stations – the reference here was often explicitly to BBC1 and BBC Radio 1 – were seen by some respondents as having the potential and therefore the obligation to function as commercially competitive operations. The residual core service, according to respondents, ought then to focus upon producing the highest-quality broadcasting possible, avoiding any duplication of programming available from other broadcasters. Some respondents suggested that rather than commercialising particular channels, certain programmes, such as important sporting events, could have their costs subsidised through sponsorship and advertising revenue. Additionally, it was suggested that the BBC could augment funds by investing on the money market.

A small number of respondents not only heartily supported the licence fee but also argued for an increase in the amount levied; 'I would be quite happy to see higher licence fees (even on the order of 30% higher) and I bet most other people would too'. This increase was contingent on the proviso that there be a matching rise in the quality of programming, and particularly that the BBC should become able to secure the broadcasting rights to more major sporting events. A few

respondents also suggested extending the licence fee system so that it could support other non-BBC non-commercial current affairs and news outlets. Respondents suggested that the fee could be collected through the Ofcom regulator and distributed across all broadcasters on a basis proportionate to their public service broadcasting output.

Many members of the public responded emotionally to the possibility of a termination of the licence fee and the potential repercussions for the BBC and public service broadcasting in the UK. As one respondent noted, 'the future is bleak if the fee is abolished'. A considerable number of other respondents expressed similar sentiments. The licence fee is viewed by many as a necessary evil, justified by the benefits it funds, considered by the majority to be the only viable means of ensuring that BBC provision continues at a high standard.

III. Replacing the Fee

1. Mixed Options and an Avoidance of Absolute Privatisation

Of the large minority of respondents arguing for the discontinuation of the licence fee, a considerable proportion suggested that the BBC be funded through a different form of taxation. The two types of taxation suggested were an income-based annual contribution or a VAT-style taxation levied on the purchase of television and radio sets. Both forms of taxation were also suggested by some respondents as means of augmenting rather than replacing the licence fee. Other taxation suggestions included either raising the revenue through local council tax or funding the BBC through the UK's Arts Councils. There clearly exists a wealth of sentiment that the BBC should remain under public ownership and should be financed by the public as a public sector organisation. Even among the anti-fee lobby, the call for outright privatisation or wholesale commercialisation of the BBC was slight. A significant proportion of respondents advocating for the replacement of the licence fee presented proposals based on combinations of various options, with very few identifying one clear single method of alternative funding for the BBC.

2. Potential New Funding Structures

Of those respondents who opposed retention of the licence fee, some still believed that the BBC ought to continue as a not-for-profit organisation. Among alternative non-licence fee revenue sources, subscription and pay-per-view revenue routes were the most frequently suggested. Programme sponsorship was suggested by a number of respondents. Some made reference to the BBC's self-advertisements and remarked that the floodgates had already been opened to commercialisation of the service and that the inclusion of revenue-generating external advertisements could not harm the programming and service any more than these internal advertisements do already.

Some respondents advocated systems for running and funding the BBC based on either the rail privatisation model or the Government pensions model. A large number of North American respondents advocated that the service be either privatised or run on the model of US public service broadcasting, with donations from individuals and corporations. Other respondents suggested that the licence fee was simply not a cost-effective means of generating revenue.

Many respondents suggested methods that may not be economically viable. These included the abolition of the licence fee and the survival of the organisation as a whole by the profit from the sale and licensing of archive material to other broadcasters. Furthermore, many respondents who

suggested sponsorship or the introduction of commercial advertising then added a coda that these means of revenue acquisition should not compromise the Corporation's editorial independence. These suggestions stand in strong contrast to the more broadly held views by respondents about the negative effects of commercialisation on independence. A very small number of respondents suggested that the BBC would become more independent if privatised, as it would be free from Government interference. Many of those on both sides of the fee debate stridently asserted the need for revenue to be independent of Government.

Some respondents did plainly state that the fee should be revoked and the entire BBC organisation dismantled. 'Can't the BBC stand (or fall) on its own? I ask you to consider ending the subsidy for this biased organisation'. Frequently these views appeared to be combined with the allegations of biased and inaccurate news reporting by the BBC, mostly from North America. Just as frequently, however, they appeared to be a product of a simple antipathy towards the Corporation. A number of respondents expressed what might fairly be described as a moral abhorrence to the continued existence into the 21st century of something resembling a public sector service. Such responses arguably form part of a larger and different debate. Many respondents who expressed anti-licence fee opinions did so in highly emotional terms. The licence fee was variously described as 'unjust', 'anticompetitive' and 'immoral'. Additionally, some respondents argued against the licence fee on the basis of its age, suggesting that it was an 'anachronism' and 'an outdated form of revenue collection'.

There was tangible resentment of the compulsory nature of the licence fee. One respondent remarked, 'I find it incongruous that with the vast choice of television, journalism, entertainment and IT now available ... we should be taxed to support one of its segments'. Many of the respondents who argued against the fee were purely expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of ability to choose. Often the alternatives suggested, such as subscription or pay-per-view, were alternative, perhaps more expensive, means of securing the same programming. Moreover, many respondents who opposed the fee did so on the grounds that they were funding services they did not necessarily access, either because they chose not to or, as in the case of digital broadcasts in certain parts of the UK, because they were unable to do so.

Respondents in favour of both the BBC and the licence fee drew comparisons with the NHS and education sector in the UK. They suggested that the repercussions of implementing pay-per-use revenue streams for those services could illustrate the shortcomings of such an approach to BBC funding. As a respondent noted, 'those who say, "get rid of the licence fee and go for subscription" are the same people who will oversee the failure of the NHS, the "me first and me only" people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing'.

IV. Comments on Licence Fee Collection and Enforcement

There was a small but vocal minority whose responses consisted entirely of complaints about the collection and enforcement of the licence fee. These responses rarely pertained directly, or even indirectly, to the BBC. Most frequently respondents were criticising the methods employed by Envision, the company licensed to collect the revenue on the behalf of the BBC. Respondents raised serious questions about the integrity of the company, accusing it of harassment. In particular the company was presented as being unreceptive to the idea that people may choose not to own television sets, and often seem to expend time and energy searching for television licence violations where none exist. Respondents objected to the intrusive and aggressive ways in which Envision conduct their investigations, and some remarked that they believed their privacy rights to have been fundamentally violated by the company.

Additional issues arose, such as the repercussions of Government and local authority policies to create more multi-generational sheltered accommodation. By doing so, residential homes are forced into jeopardising their right to an exemption from the licence fee. A number of respondents remarked that the threat of imprisonment was an unfair and disproportionately harsh response to non-payment of the fee.

V. Funding the World Service

Very few respondents addressed this question. On the whole, the feeling was that whatever the method of funding, the objective should be to ensure a secure revenue stream free from Government and commercial vested interests in order to maintain a service that can be relied upon to provide impartial coverage on a global basis.

Organisation and Infrastructure

‘Is the BBC Organised in the Most Effective and Efficient Way?’

I. A Lack of Knowledge

The overwhelming majority of respondents did not comment on this question. Some responded by stating that they had no knowledge of the BBC’s organisational structures and were therefore unable to comment. The majority of people who responded to this question suggested that continued existence and running of the BBC implied that the organisational structures were, at worst, adequate. Respondents felt they could only judge the management efficiency by the output quality; as the majority were satisfied with the programming, they were also satisfied with management. The general opinion of respondents could best be summarised by the words of one respondent: ‘Don’t know structure. Just keep politicians away from it’.

II. BBC Management Efficiency

There was a widely held impression that the BBC suffers from a surfeit of red tape and bureaucracy. Many respondents repeated the supposition that subjection to market forces drives efficiency. Accusations frequently levelled at public sector organisations were raised here by a minority of respondents who asserted that by its very nature any publicly run organisation will not exhibit the same management efficiencies, business innovations and general entrepreneurial dynamism of the private sector. No specific examples were provided by these respondents and no comparative assessment of the successes of ITV Digital and the BBC digital provision was made in support of this conviction.

There was a sense among some respondents that the BBC’s present management do little to develop economies of scale and overlook vital opportunities to make savings, such as harmonising and rationalising news services. Respondents also expressed vague mistrust of the ‘monolithic’ nature of the Corporation. There were criticisms of ‘fat cat’ salaries and financial abuses on the part of Governors and top-level management within the Corporation. No specific examples were

provided in support of this view, although these assertions were on occasion complemented by either a cutting of or reference to a newspaper article. Many respondents seemed aware of a particular slant in media reporting about the BBC: 'My only information about the Corporation is that it is a bureaucratic nightmare. However, that information comes purely from the press and not from personal experience'.

Respondents believed that management has a responsibility for consolidating the brand and the direction of the Corporation, although individual responses varied in their opinion of how successful or otherwise the present management have been in these endeavours.

There was a widely held perception, though often placed in the context of self-confessed ignorance, that management structures and efficiencies had greatly improved under Greg Dyke. A typical respondent's comments were, 'from what I've gathered Greg Dyke has optimised many of the management structures and put creative people where they should be, which is one of the reasons why people were so sad to see him resign'.

Many respondents felt broadly satisfied with the management and organisation of the BBC. The organisational structure presently enjoyed by the Corporation was considered by a large number of respondents to be efficient and responsible for one of the better-managed and least flawed broadcasters in the world. Additionally, many respondents noted that managerial efficiency in financial terms should not be as significant a consideration as the management's ability to foster and cultivate talent and programming of a high standard.

It was suggested that the board level position for a chief engineer with a brief covering technical quality of broadcasts ought to be reinstated, particularly in the light of broadcasting innovations of recent years. It was also mentioned by a number of respondents that due to advances in technology both transparency of and public involvement in managerial processes were possible and should be developed. Specific suggestions ranged from publishing detailed material through the website to actively involving members of the public in decision-making. Although most respondents expressed an interest in only a degree of public involvement or input into management, others wrote more strongly about the public 'right' to control public bodies. One respondent complained that 'the public has virtually no say in how it is run, who runs it, or how the money is spent'. It was unclear whether these dissatisfied respondents believed the BBC to be noticeably less directly answerable to the public than other public sector bodies such as the NHS or Metropolitan Police, or whether they felt that it had a duty to be more accountable than such organisations.

III. Balancing In-house and Independent Production

The vast majority of respondents who addressed this issue cited the value of BBC in-house production. Respondents often stated a preference for in-house productions over the too-prevalent US imports. The requirement, placed upon the BBC by a previous Government, that 25% of television programming must be provided by outside production companies has worked to the severe detriment of the Corporation, it was argued by several respondents. As a consequence of this policy BBC facilities lie fallow while the Corporation is obliged to pay greater costs for independently produced programmes. Many respondents argued that the quota ought to be abandoned and replaced by a focus on cost-efficiency. However, some respondents requested that

the cap on independently produced radio programmes should be raised from 10% to 25% to bring the service in line with BBC television.⁵

Some respondents argued for an increase in in-house production. Suggestions included taking the choice away from producers and insisting on the utilisation of BBC facilities, with the reintegration of the limited companies such as BBC Resources and BBC Broadcast.

The BBC was seen by some respondents as a potential outlet for small-scale, independent, semi-professional productions. It was thought that available space in digital channel schedules could be used to showcase developing talent. The BBC was considered by a number of respondents to be the primary training ground for new entertainment and programme-making talent in the UK, and many felt it was doing a very good job of cultivating new talent. BBC sponsorship and apprenticeships have created unique opportunities in a way that no commercial broadcaster either would or could have done. Sponsoring orchestras, ballets and other cultural performances was perceived as a core priority for the BBC.

The BBC's responsibility to new talent, both in production and management, was considered to be twofold. Firstly, the BBC, as the main UK broadcasting house, ought to be attracting the best people as employees to ensure a high quality of service. Secondly, as a publicly funded body the BBC has a broader remit to invest public funds in the development of talent and quality for the amelioration of UK and global broadcasting as a whole. As one respondent commented, 'The BBC is generous with its expertise and a number of its training modules are available free of charge online, which is much appreciated by the SME sector'.

A number of respondents felt that the BBC was missing an opportunity to become more intimately involved in the UK film industry. Support – both financial and experiential – could be offered to new talent and developing production companies. Some respondents posited that the BBC should attempt a wholehearted diversification into filmmaking.

Suggestions from some that the BBC would function best with a publicly owned programme-commissioning core, while the lion's share of programming was independently produced but internally managed and monitored, were countered by others who suggested that exactly such a model would prove a costly disaster. In-house productions were perceived by respondents to be less mainstream, of a higher quality and far more risk-taking and educational than independent productions. Ultimately, respondents discern a set of BBC programme characteristics and more frequently than not these characteristics correspond to the type of programming they would wish to see more of.

IV. The Break-up of the BBC

On balance, the majority of respondents who addressed this issue felt that a unified BBC would guarantee a future of strong programming. However, a very significant minority exhibiting a wide range of motives advocated that the Corporation be broken down into smaller production houses. In particular it was suggested that BBC Worldwide should be privatised, although this suggestion potentially conflicts with the stronger body of respondents who approved the commercial

⁵ It is helpful to note that these respondents appeared to be part of an organised campaign by the producers of independent radio programmes.

operations of the BBC with the proviso that they serve to generate revenue to support programme development.

Among those positing a break-up of the BBC, many respondents suggested that the Corporation be separated by department, creating, for example, a separate news and current affairs production house. A number of respondents seemed to believe that fragmenting the organisation might lead to greater programming variety.

Some respondents suggested that the service might benefit from greater regional and national devolution. While some respondents suggested there was a financial benefit to displacing more operations from the London area, others suggested that there was a financial benefit to greater centralisation of BBC production. There was a concern voiced by many respondents about the size of the BBC. It was felt that the Corporation must surely be unwieldy from a management perspective and that maintaining unity, although a theoretical ambition, could become a practical impossibility were the organisation to grow much larger.

A number of respondents praised the nature of the BBC's unifying structure as it not only provides brand consistency but also facilitates cross-genre and multimedia productions. Respondents felt that some inter-departmental divisions could be further eroded to ensure higher levels of cross-fertilisation, talent- and information-sharing throughout the Corporation. Respondents were sensitive to the fact that the BBC would probably be far more cost-effective as one single organisation.

V. The Effect of Lord Hutton's Report on Public Opinion

As a whole, respondents were largely ambivalent to the findings of Lord Hutton. In most instances of a respondent referring to the report it appears that the process only served to confirm prejudices held by those at either extreme of the argument. Those who believed that the BBC was producing subversive and partisan propaganda and displaying a lack of journalistic integrity felt vindicated by the report. Equally, those respondents who hold the BBC's investigative reporting in high esteem took the report as a political whitewash and confirmation of the inherent truthfulness and accuracy of BBC news. Those of the former persuasion see the report as a springboard for action by the Government to curtail the BBC's autonomy, while those of the opposite opinion see the report as clear evidence that the public cannot trust the Government to refrain from placing political pressure upon the Corporation, and therefore greater managerial independence is required for the BBC.

The responses suggest that the Hutton report has done little to highlight managerial failings within the BBC structure. The majority of respondents regard the incident as, at most, the result of individual personal failings, most obviously a failing of one individual's journalistic integrity, and at least, little more than a political sideshow that steered public debate away from more significant matters. Only the extreme minority of respondents suggested that the Hutton report exposed a Corporation-wide culture of managerial arrogance and maladministration; though this minority were remarkably aggressive and eloquent in expressing this opinion.

Ultimately, the fallout from Hutton was perceived by respondents to have been negative. Respondents who addressed the issue feared that the Corporation 'seems to have lost its nerve' and that 'since the departure of Gavyn Davies and Greg Dyke there has been a noticeable decline in the substance of reports and the confidence of reporters'. Even many of the respondents who were critical of the BBC's new reporting felt that the 'excessive humiliation' of the Corporation and the

removal of a popular Director General have only served to weaken the managerial and organisational strength of the BBC.

Governance, Regulation and Constitution

'How Should the BBC Be Governed and Regulated?'

I. A Lack of Knowledge

This question was unanswered by the majority of respondents. Predominantly, the issue of governance was more likely to be addressed by those dissatisfied with the system. In the main, responses demonstrated an overwhelming lack of knowledge about the organisational structure of the BBC and the role of the Board of Governors, the Chairman and the Director General. A minority of respondents asked for greater dissemination of information pertaining to the Board of Governors not only in terms of its role and responsibilities but also regarding the individuals who make up the board. That said, respondents appeared generally familiar with the titles themselves, and clearly have at least a superficial awareness of the governing structures of the BBC, in a way they might not about, for example, Network Rail.

Outside the fact that the Governors have a duty to regulate the BBC, respondents demonstrated little awareness of the systems for regulation and accountability. Although many respondents argued the pros and cons of delegating all or part of the responsibility for regulating the BBC to Ofcom, no mention was made of the Communications Act 2003 that goes some way to defining the relationship between these two bodies.

II. Governance

1. Greater Public Influence

The majority of respondents answering this question wanted the Governors to be more directly accountable to and representative of the general public. This was the key recommendation from the public, and was often coupled to a reduction in Government influence and authority over the Governors and the BBC. Nevertheless, a minority did express the contrary view, arguing that the Government ought to tighten the reins on the Corporation.

A number of respondents argued that the Board of Governors ought to be made up of elected representatives of the general public, rather than appointed: 'the governing body of the BBC must be far more robust, independent and reflect our whole society and either have or wield more power and control of the BBC's content and operation'. Alternatively, many respondents suggested that greater transparency could generate public trust in the Governors. This could be achieved through online webcasts of meetings, with 'cyber-seats' available for licence fee payers online. Respondents requested an element of devolution and regionalising of BBC governance, with a local and national governance board operating within the UK-wide governance framework. A high proportion of the respondents addressing this issue felt that the Board of Governors was obliged to

be far more representative of the licence-fee-paying public. There was no broad consensus on how this representation could be achieved. Suggestions included democratic elections, restrictions and guidance on who can and cannot be appointed – including the frequently suggested exclusion of political figures – or a combination of methods.⁶

2. Who Ought to Be on the Board?

Some respondents felt that the BBC ought to be governed by people with proven experience of the mechanics of broadcasting. Media professionals and established broadcasting figures were considered by a number of respondents to be ideal potential Governors. Certainly, there was a body of thought among respondents that the board needs to contain within it a greater wealth of practical working knowledge and experience of the broadcasting industry. A panel of experts could be developed to replace the present board.

Additionally, it was suggested that board members could be drawn not only from the broadcasting industry but from academia and the arts.

3. Other Views

A small minority suggested the removal of the Board of Governors, yet presented no alternative governing system. Sometimes these suggestions implied the discontinuation of the role of a Board of Governors, on other occasions respondents implied only the removal of the present Governors. In certain responses the distinction was unclear.

It was also suggested that the board could be reduced in size and made answerable to the Director General.

4. Retention of the Present System

Many respondents seemed satisfied with the present dual role of the Governors and the current methods for selecting and organising those wielding ultimate authority within the BBC: ‘The Governors and the operational management as currently constituted have delivered effectively and efficiently’.

Ultimately, the majority of respondents who answered this question felt that the purposes of the BBC and the public would be best served by a strong Board of Governors that was politically and commercially independent.

⁶ This aspect of respondents’ opinions on governance provides some illumination of the public’s feelings about the extent to which they can hold the BBC to account. It would be useful to augment any reading of this section with a reading of *Accountability: I Accountable to the Public* (pp.37-39).

III. Regulation

1. External Regulation

A minority of the respondents expressed concern at the contradictions in the Governors' dual role of strategic oversight and as police of the BBC. Nearly all respondents who raised this concern suggested that it ought to be resolved by external regulation.

Respondents suggested that whatever regulatory body develops, it ought to be broadly and proportionately representative of the public. All classes, ethnicities and ontological philosophies and faiths should be represented and have their concerns and views aired. As with the Governors, some respondents suggested that the regulator should have some or all of its membership elected by the public.

A significant group of respondents did remark that Ofcom should not be the regulator of the BBC as it is essentially an economic regulator for broadcasters with a commercial interest and therefore would not be suited to regulating a publicly owned organisation. Though many felt that the BBC ought to have the same regulator as the commercial broadcasters, others believed that Ofcom, made up of industry professionals, might have a vested interest in enforcing regulations to limit the competitiveness of the BBC. However, some respondents felt that the swift response to the findings in Lord Hutton's report eliminated the need for any reform of the BBC's self-regulatory practices. It ought to be noted that a similar proportion of the respondents felt the opposite.

The regulatory body should be free from political interference either through Parliament or directly through the Government. Many respondents believed that any regulator ought to licence BBC autonomy and independence rather than restrict it. The National Audit Office (NAO) was suggested as an alternative regulator to Ofcom.

2. Internal Regulation

Respondents suggested that the Governors could continue to regulate the BBC, with Ofcom operating as a regulatory 'court of appeal'. Many believed that the present system would facilitate stricter and more efficient and accountable regulation of the BBC. A number of respondents suggested that the Board of Governors be split in two, with one board focussing on managerial elements and the other on regulation.

3. Conclusions on Regulation

Many respondents stressed the need for regulation to improve the morality of programming, with a view to excluding profanity, blasphemy and carnality.

Despite the wide variance in suggestions and opinions, it was apparent that the majority of respondents addressing the issue of regulation in no way wanted a politicised regulatory body. It was broadly felt across the range of respondents that regulation ought to be driven by the concerns of the public, rather than the vested interests of Government. As one said, 'I just wanted to add my small voice to thousands... of like-minded individuals who will demand that the politicians in Whitehall leave the BBC well alone'. A small number of respondents referred to Tessa Jowell's speech at the Edinburgh Festival 2003, which they perceived as guaranteeing an unpoliticised Charter renewal consultation, regardless of any findings by Lord Hutton.

4. The Suitability of the Royal Charter as a Basis for the Establishment of the BBC

Responses to this question most frequently took the form of asserting that the Charter either ought or ought not to be renewed, sometimes with explanatory references. However, these do not directly answer the question. It seems possible from the responses that there is widespread unfamiliarity with the actual substance of the Charter. One respondent remarked, ‘The nonsense of a “Royal” Charter should be scrapped; the government is quite capable of setting up a public corporation.’ Another respondent felt that, ‘The Royal Charter will become obsolete in the near future as digital TV expands.’ Various respondents did express a concern that the BBC’s existence could be so fundamentally threatened, as a revocation of the Charter would force an unprecedented reorganisation of the Corporation. However, other respondents did express the desire that the BBC be held publicly accountable on occasions for its actions and programming, and a Charter renewal process might seem an opportunity to do just that.

Some respondents suggested that there ought to be more explicit clarification of the role, duties and boundaries of the BBC within the Charter. Additionally, some respondents felt that the period of time between renewals could be greater: 50-year and 100-year periods were suggested. It was apparent that some respondents were not fully aware that the Charter renewal was due regardless of the recent disharmonious relationship between the Government and the BBC; some believed that it was prompted by the Government in order to rein in the BBC. They voiced concerns that the renewal process would be used as an opportunity to damage the Corporation.

Overall, respondents’ views suggest that a Royal Charter with reviews – though on a basis less frequent than the present decennial renewals – might be the best basis for the establishment of the BBC, but that the review process itself is too sensitive to be conducted by a governmental department and ought to form one of the duties of an enhanced, independent regulator.

Accountability

‘How Do We Ensure that the BBC is Properly Accountable to the Public and Parliament?’

I. Accountable to the Public

1. Greater Public Accountability

It was a priority for the majority of respondents who dealt with the issue of accountability that the Corporation improve the means by which it can be held accountable to and by the public. However, there was also a palpable sense of concern that the BBC should not allow public accountability processes to become politicised by excessively vocal minority groups with vested interests, such as independent radio producers.

Re-constituting the BBC along the lines of a private company, with licence fee payers assuming the rights of shareholders, was suggested. There was a perception that the public ought to have

improved mechanisms for delivering advice and feedback on broader strategic and policy issues; at present licence fee payers are largely restricted to programme-specific complaints. Therefore, public input into the BBC is both narrow and retrospective. Of particular interest to some respondents was the concept of an AGM for BBC stakeholders, at which questions could be posed to the Governors and managerial teams. Advances in broadcasting technology could facilitate broad inclusion, perhaps through an interactive webcast.

Some respondents noted that the BBC was already sufficiently accountable to the public through ratings figures, consultations, and the Parliamentary Charter renewal process. Respondents presented various suggestions as to how an ongoing dialogue could be established between the BBC and the public. Regular opinion polls were a common suggestion, as was the establishment of regional and/or national talking shops and viewer forums. It was suggested that the onus perhaps ought to be on the BBC to enter communities, localities and workplaces and engage the public in the feedback process. Any public consultations should be thoroughly documented and minuted with details published unexpurgated on the website. There was particular criticism of the low profile and lack of publicity for the Charter renewal consultation; this criticism was reasonably widespread. One respondent noted that Local and Regional Advisory Councils already exist and part of their remit is to collate responses and feedback on BBC programming.

Alternatively, suggestions were made for the establishment of external regulatory bodies and independent commissions to provide guidance and discipline. Respondents felt that complaints committees similar to the Press Complaints Commission could be established, potentially with panels comprised by members of the general public. However, some respondents pre-empted such a suggestion by noting that the PCC is viewed by the industry as a paper tiger. Other respondents reacted negatively to the idea of making the BBC accountable to the public via an unelected quango. Respondents noted that the creation of any such body would raise the obvious question of what validated its mandate to hold the BBC to account. Furthermore, respondents queried how any intermediary body would be accountable to the public, other than through political representation, which they felt to be an inappropriate method. A wealth of responses requested vastly reduced political involvement in the BBC.

Other respondents suggested that a cross-party House of Lords committee or a similar all-party organisation could serve as an independent accountability intermediary. There were also suggestions that a fully independent watchdog could be formed, perhaps drawing on members of Mediawatch UK or volunteers from the education sector, such as the National Association of Head Teachers or the universities. It was suggested by some that the BBC be held accountable through the NAO. Respondents felt that potentially any external watchdog could utilise members of the public; a number of respondents suggested that local accountability task forces might be formed or that 'lay' people and their opinions should be formally incorporated into the existing accountability mechanisms, with focus groups and public review panels as two key suggestions. Some respondents mooted the idea of a Royal Commission to hold the BBC to account. Some suggestions hinted at an even more draconian reigning in of the Corporation: 'Mrs Whitehouse did a good job in her time.'

As well as managerial transparency and accountability, respondents requested that the BBC be held accountable over expenditure and general use of the licence fee revenue. It was suggested that reports be published over the Internet. In broader terms, the Internet and online services were seen as carrying considerable potential for driving public accountability, by improving transparency, facilitating regular public consultation and providing a swift complaints procedure.

A minority of respondents expressed the view that allowing the public to choose whether or not they receive BBC services would persuade the Corporation to be more attentive and responsive to the needs and wishes of the consuming public.

2. Less Public Involvement

At the other extreme, a minority said that the public already enjoyed too great a say in the running of the BBC. Questions were raised about the practicality and value of regularly consulting the public on managerial and editorial decisions and policies. Many respondents doubted the validity and usefulness of regular consultations and viewer forums. They suggested that if the BBC maintained or returned to high standards and won the unequivocal trust and support of the public, then the public would feel no need to call the Corporation to account.

Additionally, there were worries about the susceptibility of the BBC to pressure groups whose well-organised campaigns may not be truly representative of public sentiment and are certainly not transparently accountable to the public.⁷ BBC policy should never succumb to a dictatorship of popularised, rather than public, opinion in the way that tabloid editorial stances have: 'On the whole things run by the public end up run by the voluble Murdochian masses'. Absolute public accountability in terms of programming would logically conflict with the BBC's mandate to provide non-mainstream and minority output, as some respondents observed. For some respondents there was not so much an issue of improving accountability as improving awareness of existing systems of accountability.⁸

II. Accountable to Parliament

There was an overwhelming strength of feeling that the BBC ought not to be accountable to Parliament: 'The question should be, "how do we ensure that Parliament is properly accountable to the public and the BBC?" and the answer is the BBC'. Many of the respondents demonstrated that they held Parliament to be, in this context at least, roughly synonymous with Government. Whether this was due to confusion, assumption, wilful cynicism or political nous depended on the individual response.

Respondents demonstrating a range of varying political allegiances (or lack thereof) and opinions of the Corporation were united in opposition to any mechanisms whereby the BBC's accountability to Parliament would be increased. Many considered the present Select Committee to be sufficient. Indeed most expressed a desire to see less Parliamentary influence upon the BBC. Again, the shadow of the Hutton report fell across answers to this section and again, the BBC was predominantly viewed as a wronged and wounded beast: 'I trust the BBC much more than I trust anyone in Parliament'.

Of the very few respondents who advocated accountability to Parliament, suggestions included an annual review of the BBC's ability to meet clearly defined and unambiguous provision requirements and standards, or a quarterly report from the Corporation to Parliament or to the

⁷ Arguably this comment is supported by the number of campaigns observed during the compilation of this report.

⁸ This section would benefit from being read in conjunction with Governance, Regulation and Constitution: II Governance, 1. Greater Public Influence (pp.34-35).

general public. Certainly, it was felt that any potential accountability to Parliament must be through non-partisan all-party committees if it is to be of any value.

III. Conclusions on Accountability

There was a clear minority of respondents who believed that the BBC 'is not and should not be accountable to anyone'. It was felt by these respondents that the BBC, by its very nature, could be allowed to operate freely. These respondents demonstrated a potent faith and trust in the integrity of both the programming and regulatory elements of the Corporation. This confidence in the BBC contrasted with the implied or explicit sense of scepticism directed towards the intentions of Parliament, the commercial sector or the general public and the worth that enhanced accountability to any of these external agents could bring to BBC services.

Overall a very clear majority view can be discerned calling for a reduction in accountability to Parliament and clearer routes and methods of public accountability. Driving awareness and involvement in existing routes of feeding back to the BBC were considered to be of key importance. Respondents overwhelmingly feel that the BBC has an obligation to be accountable to the public but not to Parliament: 'I find that the BBC is accountable to the public. I do not think it should be accountable to Parliament'.

Quantitative Analysis of Responses

An Overview

I. Source Material

The remit of the quantitative analysis was to capture data pertaining to respondents' attitudes towards the funding, governance and accountability of the BBC. The source material ranged from detailed responses based on specific Charter documents to letters of complaint. There was also a range of petitions, co-ordinated responses from action groups with focussed agendas, and BBC-related correspondence between constituents and their local MPs.

II. Methodology

We devised a series of value judgements that allowed categorisation of each response. During this process several quantifiable trends in the responses became apparent. These appear to have value as both a statistical supplement to the qualitative summary of the responses and also as an indication of respondents' perception of the BBC. Recurring themes, similar viewpoints and consistent values are apparent throughout the thousands of responses to this consultation. The level of like-minded opinions on certain key issues often made it possible to polarise respondents into 'for' and 'against' camps. In other areas, a level of ambiguity in the responses made it necessary for us to create a list of pointers from which we could extrapolate to categorise each response.

This quantitative analysis looks at the responses to this consultation under the following categories:

- The different elements of the BBC referred to by respondents.
- Access to digital services.
- Satisfaction with service and content quality from the BBC.
- Attitudes towards funding.
- Governance and regulation of the BBC.
- Accountability, both to the public and to the Government.
- Attitudes to the BBC's news coverage, reporting and editorial stance.

III. Key Findings

The respondents, on the whole, considered the BBC to be a staunch representative of British values and a source of national pride. Most respondents saw the BBC mainly as a television broadcaster, disregarding or sidelining the other BBC services. They approved of the licence fee and are mostly satisfied with the quality of service and content.

However, it appears some lifelong supporters fear being left behind as the BBC moves to keep up with modern times. The advent of BBC Digital has alienated some viewers, while delighting

others. The spotless reputation of the BBC as an objective source of news and information appears to have been tainted somewhat, with the perception that the BBC is no longer a bastion of unbiased reporting. Efforts to entertain a multicultural society are resisted by some as being un-British, and criticised by others as being too little, too late. As diversity grows among the general public, so grow the demands on the only public service broadcaster.

Access to Digital Services

I. Introduction

At 9% of the overall responses, the number of respondents who mentioned BBC Digital was far outstripped by 52% referring to BBC television. The eventual cessation of analogue service does not yet appear to be a key issue among respondents.

Responses in the table below are presented as percentages of that 9%.

Table 1: Access to digital services

Assessment of service	Percentage of respondents
<i>Dissatisfied with the service</i>	43%
<i>Unable to receive:</i>	33%
<i>Unable to afford:</i>	10%
Satisfied with the service	57%

II. Methodology

After analysing the section of responses that referred to digital services it became clear that people treated the subject from a highly personal point of view, either “I can’t afford to pay for it”, or “I can’t get digital reception” or “I have digital and it’s great”. It appears that either respondents who have feelings on digital services have very strong feelings, with little ambiguity. As a result, the responses were divided into ‘Satisfied’ and ‘Dissatisfied’, then categorised according to the two reasons for dissatisfaction, which were accessibility and expense.

III. Analysis

1. Those Who Expressed Dissatisfaction

The respondents' main concern regarding digital access is the lack of reception coverage. Fear that the issue of digital reception will not be satisfactorily resolved by the cessation of analogue service, adds to that concern. Those who cannot get digital reception feel that the advertising of digital services on analogue channels adds insult to injury.

A point made repeatedly by the 33% of respondents who referred to their inability to receive digital coverage was a sense of exclusion. This arises from an inability to participate in the activities dependent on digital access, such as after-show discussion forums or voting opportunities.

2. Those Who Expressed Satisfaction

Those able to access the BBC's digital services expressed a high level of satisfaction, with over half the respondents on this issue giving positive feedback on both their ability to access digital services and the difference this access makes to their overall satisfaction with the BBC.

Satisfaction with Service Quality

I. Introduction

67% of the total respondents made an explicit or very clearly implicit generalisation of their level of satisfaction with the BBC's overall service provision, including programming content, scheduling, access to different media and broadcast quality. The responses are expressed in the table below as a percentage of that 67%.

Table 2: Satisfaction with service quality

Assessment of service	Percentage of Respondents
Satisfied with the service	37%
Dissatisfied with the service	16%
Satisfied but feel that there is room for improvement	47%

II. Methodology

In order to qualify whether or not a respondent was satisfied with the service from the BBC, we set up a series of value judgements based on positive comments, negative comments, and on ambiguous answers, comparing the response to the curve of total responses. Respondents who

praised or criticised BBC services were registered as perceiving the service to be of a high or low quality respectively. Mixed responses were analysed for positive or negative content and subsequently rated under the “room for improvement” category.

III. Those Who Expressed Satisfaction

Overall, respondents feel that the BBC provides a good service. There is a persistent central core of supporters for the BBC who based their responses on their historical relationship with both television and radio services. These respondents frequently compared the BBC favourably to commercial and international service providers. These supporters made up the bulk of the 37% of respondents to this question who felt that the BBC provides an unquestionably high quality service, representing almost one quarter of overall respondents to the consultation.

IV. Those Who Expressed Dissatisfaction

Those who were categorised as being dissatisfied often submitted short responses, highlighting a single issue that they felt falls below an acceptable standard. This could include the repetitive nature of programming on a specific channel, or a feeling that the standard of news coverage has dropped. A response of this kind, with absolutely nothing positive to say about the BBC, was counted as dissatisfied. If the negativity was tempered by a constructive suggestion on how to remedy the problem, or a positive comment on another element of the service, it was counted under the “room for improvement” category.

V. Those Who Feel There Is Room For Improvement

The 47% of respondents who feel that BBC’s service is good, but open to improvement, fall into two main camps. On one side there are respondents who assess the BBC’s service provision exclusively on current content, on the other there are those who view the BBC’s services on a historical quality curve. The group of respondents who assessed current content felt overwhelmingly that, while programmes of high quality are produced, they are neither as prominent nor as prevalent as they might be. Those who assessed the BBC using historical comparison felt that there are very specific programming areas where the BBC shone in the past and is now struggling to reach that peak again. These areas include BBC Television comedy entertainment and BBC Radio drama.

Attitudes towards Funding

I. Introduction

62% of overall respondents to the consultation made reference to the licence fee. Some used it as a vehicle to lend perspective to their opinions: “I don’t pay my licence fee to watch that sort of thing”. Others directly commented on the fee in response to the question on how the BBC is funded.

All applicable responses are expressed in the table below as percentages of that 62%.

Table 3.0: Attitudes towards funding

Feelings on Funding	Percentage of Respondents
Pro-Fee	63%
Anti-Fee	37%

II. Methodology

To represent accurately all of the varying opinions on the licence fee we set up a series of value judgements and pointers for each response to be compared to. The ambiguous responses that sidestepped around the issue of how the BBC is funded, but referenced the licence fee, were analysed as follows:

- A reference to the licence fee in the context of “I don’t pay my licence fee to watch that”, was considered to be an anti-fee response, because the respondent is unhappy with the value the fee provides.
- A reference to the licence fee in the context of “An excellent series, well worth the licence fee!” was considered to be a pro-fee response, because the respondent considers the service to be value for money.

The subsections under pro-fee and anti-fee were established based on the content of the responses themselves. There are more options under the pro-fee response table because respondents tended to be very specific about how they felt the fee should be supplemented. The anti-fee respondents were less specific, often listing either a variety of options or no alternative at all.

III. Pro Licence Fee

The table below illustrates the breakdown of the responses in favour of the licence fee as a funding method.

Those results are expressed as percentages of the 63% who favoured the licence fee.

Table 3.1: Pro licence fee

Feelings on Funding	Percentage of Respondents
Fee only	78%
Reduced fee	5%
Subsidised fee for certain people	7%
Fee with advertising	1%
Fee with subscription	2%
<i>Fee with sponsorship</i>	<i>Less than 1%</i>
Fee with multiple other options	7%

1. Fee Only

The single most popular option for funding the BBC was retention of the licence fee in its present state. Almost half of all respondents who addressed the issue of funding supported the continuance of the present situation. This represents over 30% of total respondents.

2. Reduced Fee

The 5% of pro-fee respondents who wanted a reduced fee generally made a value comparison to the cost of the fee and the service they feel they receive from the BBC.

3. Subsidised for Certain People

The 7% of respondents who felt that the fee should be retained, but reduced for certain people, mainly wanted to see adjustments made to the licence fee structure for pensioners and the disabled. Respondents wanted various changes made to the age-based staggering of the fee structure for OAPs. A large number of the subsidy supporters qualified their suggestion of a subsidised fee for OAPs with the alternative option of completely scrapping the licence fee for pensioners.

4. Fee with Advertising

Those who supported the licence fee but suggested it be supplemented with advertising, tended to suggest something less intrusive than the advertising schedule of commercial channels. Examples would include: advertising outside prime time, advertising only at weekends or advertising that could be avoided by paying a subscription fee. Very few respondents who were pro-fee want to see a BBC that even remotely resembles its commercial rivals.

5. Fee with Subscription

The 2% of pro-fee respondents who want to see the fee supplemented by subscription suggested different levels of service for different subscription fees. This includes access to different channels. Many of these respondents identified themselves as digital viewers.

6. Fee with Sponsorship

Less than 1% of respondents wanted to see the fee supplemented with sponsorship. Those who did tended to nominate the Government to foot the sponsorship bill. The other suggestion was to screen a sponsor message at the beginning and end of each programme.

7. Fee with Multiple Other Options

Of the 7% of respondents who felt that the fee should stay, but be supplemented with a number of other options, some chose multiples of the options listed above. Others were unable to specify what they would like to see in place to supplement the licence fee, but felt that it should be possible for a public service broadcaster to find other non-intrusive means of funding than levying a charge on its viewers.

IV. Anti Licence Fee

The table below illustrates the breakdown of the responses in opposition to the licence fee as a funding method.⁹

Those results are expressed as percentages of the 37% who opposed the licence fee.

Table 3.2: Anti licence fee

Feelings on Funding	Percentage of Respondents
Advertising instead	13%
Subscription instead	12%
Taxation instead	10%
Multiple options as an alternative	9%
Other	56%

1. Advertising Instead

The 13% of respondents who felt the fee should be scrapped and replaced with advertising represent 3% of the total respondents. These responses displayed a similar trend to the pro-fee advertising category, in that very few suggested that the BBC should operate in a fashion identical to that of the commercial channels.

2. Subscription Instead

The 12% of anti-fee respondents who opted for a subscription solution suggested a range of subscription options, from the idea of making the entire BBC subscription-only to that of using a set-top box with a decoder to access certain BBC channels.

3. Taxation Instead

Those who believed that the BBC should be funded by tax were primarily referring to existing income tax revenue as opposed to new taxes introduced on entertainment-related purchases.

4. Multiple Options as an Alternative

Of the total respondents who are anti-fee, 9% suggested multiple options as an alternative, especially advertising linked to subscription.

⁹ It might be useful to note that 112 respondents who requested the abolition of the licence fee did so as part of an online petition organised through www.tvlicensing.biz.

5. Other Options

Some 13% of total respondents had other suggestions for how the BBC should be funded. The idea of the BBC increasing its commercial services to offset the licence fee was strongly represented. Many respondents among this 13% advocated the wholesale dismantling of the Corporation, essentially as a punitive measure for a perceived bias in news coverage. A significant proportion of these responses came from North America.

Governance and Regulation

I. Introduction

Most of the respondents who answered the question on governance and regulation of the BBC viewed this subject very much in the context of the BBC's accountability. The four issues of governance, regulation, accountability to the public and accountability to the Government merged extensively in responses where they were addressed at all.

Of the overall total of respondents, 26% addressed the issue of governance and 23% addressed the issue of regulation.

Responses in the table are expressed as percentages of those 26% and 23% respectively.

Table 4: Governance and regulation

Feedback on governance	Percentage of Total Respondents: 26%
Mentioned and satisfied	55%
Mentioned and dissatisfied	45%
Feedback on regulation	Percentage of Total Respondents: 23%
Mentioned and satisfied	52%
Mentioned and dissatisfied	48%

II. Methodology and Analysis

The respondents to the questions of both governance and regulation exhibited two main responses. On one hand, respondents admitted a lack of understanding of how the BBC is governed and regulated but maintained that since they have seen no evidence of mismanagement, they were satisfied with how things are being done. The other main group of respondents either exhibited a mid- to high-level awareness of governance and regulation, and commented knowledgeably, or cited their lack of understanding as evidence that the BBC is badly governed and regulated.

Attitudes to alternative methods of governance and regulation varied greatly. Many respondents who were dissatisfied with internal regulation wished to see the present system improved rather than replaced, with regulation remaining inside the Corporation. Among those respondents who advocated some form of external regulation, there was uncertainty over the suitability of Ofcom to fulfil this role. Ofcom was perceived to be a commercial regulator and not necessarily appropriate or disinterested as a regulator of the BBC. However, the dispute over Ofcom must be placed in the context of general ignorance of the implications the Communications Act 2003 has for the regulation of the BBC and the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom.

Accountability

I. Introduction

As with the question on governance and regulation, the question on accountability blurred into the other sections. The act of splitting the Charter question into ‘accountability to the public’ and ‘accountability to the Government’ helped clarify the issue.

42% of the overall respondents made reference to accountability. Within that number, 58% referred to accountability to the public, while 42% referred to accountability to the Government.

Responses in the table are expressed as percentages of that 58% and 42% respectively.

Table 5: Accountability

Accountability to the Public	Percentage of Respondents
Mentioned & satisfied	31%
Mentioned & dissatisfied – want more	65%
Mentioned & dissatisfied – want less	4%
Accountability to the Government	Percentage of Respondents
Mentioned & satisfied	26%
Mentioned & dissatisfied – want more	11%
Mentioned & dissatisfied – want less	63%

II. Methodology

This issue of account produced the most clearly quantifiable result. Respondents who directly addressed the issue of accountability, as opposed to using the term when they intended to discuss governance, were very direct with their opinions. Responses such as “The BBC should be accountable to the Board of Governors, who should be responsible for regulating the BBC”, were counted under the governance and regulation section, unless they separately addressed the specific issues relating to public and Government accountability.

III. Analysis

The vast majority of respondents addressing the issue of accountability wanted greater public accountability and considerably reduced Government accountability. The qualitative section of the document illustrates the strength and clarity of respondents’ aversion to Government influence and involvement in the running of the BBC.

Attitudes to the BBC’s News Coverage, Reporting and Editorial Stance

I. Introduction

As the analysis progressed it became apparent that the issue of the BBC’s news coverage was of paramount importance to a large portion of the respondents. As a renowned champion of impartial, democratic, national and international news coverage, any shift in the perception of the BBC in that role is worthy of note. One third of the overall respondents made reference to BBC news coverage.

The results below are expressed as percentages of that 33%.

Table 7: Attitudes to the BBC’s news coverage, reporting and editorial stance

Opinion on BBC reporting	Percentage of Respondents
Satisfied with the BBC’s news coverage	33%
Dissatisfied with coverage of the Middle East, feel the BBC is biased towards Israel	1%
Dissatisfied with coverage of the Middle East, feel the BBC is biased towards the Palestinians	21%
Feel the BBC’s news coverage is racist	4%
Feel that BBC news has a high level of biased reporting	39%
<i>Feel that BBC news has a high level of inaccuracy</i>	2%

II. Methodology

The subsections for data collation were constructed in response to the content of responses. Respondents who commented positively on the news coverage made a clear, satisfied statement, usually supported with complimentary comparisons of the BBC to commercial and international news. Respondents who commented negatively on BBC news fell into three groups:

- Those who made a historical comparison of current news coverage to the BBC's coverage of major world events such as WWII, the fall of the Berlin Wall etc. and found the BBC's modern coverage wanting in some way.
- Those who made a general criticism of the BBC news reporting with no evidence of an underlying agenda.
- Those who formed part of an organised campaign to lobby against the BBC's reporting, especially of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Specific reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is categorised as such. The sections relating to perceived BBC bias and inaccuracy are additional responses referring to less specific instances.

Analysis of Cross-cutting Themes

The Cultural Impact of the BBC

I. The Educational Role of the BBC

The BBC, as a provider of educational programming, learning materials and skills training, clearly plays a role in the education of the nation. There was a sense among the respondents that the BBC touches the educational life of everyone in the UK. With the development of the BBC's free-to-access online services, the Corporation was perceived as broadening its educational net globally. There were high levels of satisfaction with the BBC's fulfilment of its educational role. Respondents remarked that the BBC's provision of educational programming is currently unrivalled and exhibits a quantity and quality that could not be delivered by commercial broadcasters.

The BBC was considered, particularly in light of the new digital channels, CBeebies and CBBC, to cover more than adequately the full range of educational needs from pre-school through to the well-regarded Open University service. The online services were perceived to supplement the educational programming provision successfully. There was praise for the educational tools available through the BBC website.

There were some slight criticisms of the educational provision. The position of educational programmes in the schedules was not considered to reflect their worth or importance. Valuable educational programmes are often hidden in the late night and early morning 'graveyard shift' regions of the schedules. This limits the accessibility of these programmes, lessens the viewing opportunities and therefore reduces the potential benefits for learners.

On a broader theme, many respondents criticised the BBC for failing to maintain high standards of spoken English in general programming. Respondents were critical of diction, grammar, idiom and accent. Some respondents displayed an antipathy to northern accents or commonly accepted Americanisms simply as a matter of personal taste; many others presented reasoned arguments for an improved quality of English in all BBC programming. It was thought that diction and accent should either be standardised or at least restricted out of respect and consideration for those for whom English is not a first language. This comment was made in particular reference to people across the world who access BBC materials for educational and English language needs.

II. 'From Pingu to Purcell' – The BBC and the Promotion of the Arts

'I'm totally skint and living in a small village in North Yorkshire, but through regular use of the BBC's radio, TV and Internet, just about all the riches of the world are available to me and my family. From Pingu to Purcell.' The promotion of the arts was seen by the majority of respondents

to be a leading and undisputed strength of BBC provision, with the Corporation providing a depth and range of cultural programming that no commercial broadcaster could hope to deliver.

However, the criticisms of the BBC's educational service provision were almost universally applicable to the arts and culture output. There was a fear among many respondents that high-quality and demanding cultural items are being sidelined. Although on rare occasions respondents suggested that certain genres, media or specific events were being wilfully ignored by the Corporation – such as the insufficient number of ballets and operas televised per year – this was not reflective of the average response. Generally, when respondents remarked that they felt the arts were being sidelined, they referred to the 'ghettoising' of programming to less accessible regions such as the digital channel BBC4. By contrast, viewers who could access BBC4 were extremely positive about the channel, with the caveat that it should not turn into a dumping ground for all of the Corporation's demanding and risk-taking programming, thereby rendering the mainstream television provision of BBC1 and BBC2 barren and bereft of cultural gems.

In effect, this debate represents a single argument within the broader discussion over whether the BBC is 'dumbing down' or not. The displacing of arts programming from the mainstream services was occasionally seen as a means of fulfilling the Corporation's mandate to provide cultural and informative programming, in accordance with the letter but not the spirit of that mandate.

A considerable number of respondents identified the BBC as a benevolent force serving to cultivate developing talent. The various talent, sponsorship and apprenticeship schemes, in addition to work placements and training programmes run by the Corporation, were seen as vital to the maintenance of broadcasting and programming professionalism in the UK. As well as sponsoring cultural events that without its aid might well have proved impossible, the Corporation makes a major contribution to the skills base of the industry in all areas, from programme content to top-level management. Furthermore, the BBC was not considered selfish or self-serving but sincere and altruistic in these endeavours; the Corporation fosters talent and expertise not purely for its own ends but for the amelioration of UK and global broadcasting.

III. The BBC and Sports Coverage

Respondents are polarised in their attitude to sports coverage. While some consider the extent of coverage woefully inadequate, others believe it to be tediously expansive. It might be thought that if, as is the case, roughly equal numbers of individuals at the polar extremes of opinion are dissatisfied, then provision is at approximately the correct level for the average viewer. Respondents at either end of the debate advocated the creation of a BBC channel dedicated entirely to sports programming, as this would satisfy both parties.

The BBC was praised for its coverage of minority sports. As with all areas of programming, the BBC was perceived as the sole provider of any content that falls outside mainstream demand and interests. However, some respondents felt that the extensive provision of minority sports programming was an economic decision, reflecting more the minute-for-minute cost comparison between kabaddi and Premiership football rather than any genuine desire to represent the broader sporting interests of the licence-fee-paying public. A number of respondents did suggest, in light of perceived sports saturation on the BBC, that expensive bidding for the broadcasting rights to major sporting events was an extravagance best left to the commercial sector.

It was felt that, as a public service broadcaster, the BBC had both a right and an obligation to provide the free-to-air screening of international and national sporting events. Most respondents

felt that the Corporation was being relatively successful in fulfilling this commitment, but that more could be done to include major mainstream sporting events.

Representation of Nations, Regions and Communities

I. ‘Even Now Presenters Will Equate England with Britain’ – The Representation of the Nations

The majority of respondents criticised the BBC for being too London-centric in both the structure and the tone of its service provision; the Corporation was perceived by some to be run by and for an oligarchy of ‘small-minded West London plebs.’ Though generally many positive remarks were made about the provision of tailored services for the non-English constituent nations of the UK, there were some key criticisms of the service provision within all three political entities.

A criticism of all three tailored services was that alternative schedules deny viewers access to programmes enjoyed by English licence fee payers. It was suggested that digital technology could serve to eliminate this by allowing viewers to select which national schedule they wish to watch. Similarly, while some respondents were enthusiastic about the national slant of their programming, and indeed some requested even more nationally-based programming, there was a strong contingent among viewers from each territory who wanted the BBC to avoid important pitfalls. When tailoring programming, it was felt that the BBC had pandered both to national stereotypes – hence the glut of rugby-orientated programming on BBC Wales services – while also allowing cultural sensitivities to blind the Corporation to illogical decisions, an example being the bias towards Welsh-language programmes despite the smaller proportion of the population fluent in the language.

In terms of territory-specific complaints, respondents in the Welsh regions felt that they were still subject to racial discrimination. For example, they believed that there were not enough programming regions within Wales, in contrast to the English regional structure. Welsh respondents also remarked on a discernable absence of programmes dedicated to the country’s indigenous arts and culture.

Respondents from Scotland, though broadly pleased – and in general more pleased than Welsh viewers – resented the fact that UK news broadcasts are often truncated abruptly because of the transition to BBC Scotland schedules. Additionally, there were complaints about the regional divisions as southern Scottish areas are lumped into north-of-England regions with no consideration for national cultural identity.

There were very few comments about Northern Ireland services. It is possible that Northern Ireland respondents felt there was little of any import to note about the services, either positively or negatively. Perhaps very few responses were received from Northern Ireland.

II. ‘A Poor Relation’ – The Representation of the English Regions

The accusation of an undue London-centric attitude was made regarding the representation of the regions. A significant minority felt that the BBC exports metropolitan values and opinions throughout England, and that this should be countered by providing the regions with strong, coherent and genuinely representative identities. That was overwhelmingly felt not to be the case at present. As one respondent argued, ‘regional broadcasting can give the impression of being a poor relation to its London-based senior relatives’.

There is a perception that regional programming is not held in high regard by the central authorities of the BBC. Respondents often found the programme quality to be satisfactory, yet felt regional programming output never receives the funding, the resources or the profile it on occasion merits. Digital television was suggested as a means of providing viewers across the country with the option of watching the regional programming of other areas.

The delineation of the regions was considered problematic. Often regions exhibited no homogeneous qualities in terms of culture, demographics or even geography, with regions on occasions welding together quite disparate areas. For example both Brighton and Oxford are included within the BBC South region. As a consequence, regional programming can often be of less local relevance than national items.

III. Representation of Communities

1. ‘The BBC Sometimes Takes Political Correctness to Farcical Extremes’

The London-centricity of the BBC’s programming output was nowhere more denounced than in the Corporation’s representation of minority ethnic communities. The cultural and ethnic diversity of London is not replicated throughout all cities, towns and villages in the UK; many respondents who raised this issue felt that the BBC’s commitment to diversity and representation was symptomatic of its London-centricity. A small but visible number of respondents, identifying themselves as resident outside the capital, asserted that London was unrepresentative of the nation as a whole, both in terms of ethnic diversity and the level of appreciation of that diversity. As a consequence, a vocal minority suggested that particular communities were over-represented in BBC programming, often expressing what might easily be perceived as racist and nationalist opinions.

There is representative evidence that white Protestant communities across the UK feel both culturally threatened and excluded by the BBC’s dedication to representing all communities and groupings within the UK. Numerous respondents requested a reassertion of ‘traditional’ British art, culture and religion. There was a severe backlash against allegedly excessive political correctness clouding the editorial and managerial decision-making processes at the Corporation. As one respondent noted, ‘I feel the BBC sometimes takes political correctness to farcical extremes. Racism is, of course, abhorrent, and must not be tolerated. This should not mean that we cannot have sensible discussions about important issues such as asylum and integration’.

2. ‘A Curious Hybrid of National Sub-cultures’

At the opposite end of the spectrum, an equal number of respondents praised the BBC for its inclusiveness and commitment to representing minority communities. There was a broad sense that multi-cultural and multi-ethnic representation, although some distance from achieving proportional

parity, had improved steadily. The BBC was seen as being a world leader among broadcasters for ensuring the representation of minority cultures. Criticisms over the BBC's representation of community diversity, although often more detailed and vehemently expressed, did not outweigh the praise heaped upon the Corporation for brave and effective attempts to create a national broadcasting environment that is fully representative of the UK's multi-community nature.

The majority view was that the BBC is correct in its ambition to improve representation of minority cultures and ethnicities. However, certain social groups still expressed a sense of exclusion. The Chinese and other oriental nationalities were considered to be significantly under-represented. The gay and lesbian community felt overlooked. Respondents with non-monotheistic or atheistic belief systems and moral philosophies felt that they were less represented than those with monotheistic codes of faith.¹⁰

Contribution to Informed Democracy

I. The Quality of BBC News

1. 'Cynicism, Laziness and the Selective Use of Information'

This subject spawned the single fiercest debate in the consultation. For some, BBC news is a disseminator of lies, a perpetrator of wilful misreporting and a dangerously subversive political animal comparable only to Comintern. Other respondents praised the service as the most reliable, the most commercially independent and the most politically independent news source available.

Invariably, respondents acknowledged the BBC's proud history of impartial news coverage. It was recognised that internationally the Corporation has enjoyed a reputation as the provider of perhaps the most reliable news and current affairs programming in the world. However, over the past year the currency of the BBC's news reporting has been considerably devalued, predominantly because of allegations of biased reporting of both the *intifada* in Israel and the war in Iraq.

A considerable number of respondents took umbrage with the BBC's news reporting, quite often to the extent that they questioned the continued existence of the Corporation. Even when responses were more tempered, respondents often suggested that fundamental changes to editorial, managerial and regulatory processes were urgently required. Quite often these suggestions involved a curtailment of the BBC's autonomy, supported with threatened cessation of the licence fee and non-renewal of the Charter. Almost all the responses expressing these views emanated from outside the UK and almost exclusively from North America.

¹⁰ There is, for example, a campaign by the British Humanist Association calling for a reform of the 'Thought for the Day' segment of the *Today* programme, mentioned in more detail in *The BBC Today: VIII The BBC and Representation of Regions and Communities* (pp.10-11).

That is not to assert that there was no indigenous criticism of the BBC; many UK respondents noted a decline in the service quality. However, these comments focussed less on accusations of bias, inaccuracy or the pursuit of a partisan political agenda, and more on changes to the format, content and intent of BBC news. For many, the BBC has ceased to report the news and now focuses on making the news, through sensationalised reporting, overly dramatic presentation and aggressive journalism.

2. ‘Enquiring, Investigative and Impartial’

Despite the extensive criticism of a few particularly vocal groups, many respondents were essentially positive about the BBC news service and its contribution to informed democracy. Its global coverage is peerless according to the majority, although some respondents requested enhanced coverage of the European Parliament and African current affairs aside from the well-publicised items about AIDS and famine.

The BBC was seen by many to be maintaining its tradition as world leader in the dissemination of news and information. Indeed the attacks endured over the past year, perhaps culminating in the findings of the Hutton report, were considered by some respondents to be a badge of honour, symbolising the integrity and independence of the news coverage. For many, BBC news fills a vital role in presenting professional, world-class political analysis essential for any democratic nation.

Although some respondents dispute the editorial value and impartiality of the BBC’s news service, the majority recognised both the past history and current reputation of the Corporation, for delivering news nationally and internationally. Additionally, respondents remarked that the sheer range of media employed by the BBC, enables it to disseminate information to people across the globe, via the Internet, BBC News 24 and the World Service, while enjoying a wide newsgathering network of offices and correspondents.

II. The BBC as the Opposition Party

It was a reasonably common observation that the style of news interviewing has become increasingly gladiatorial and opinionated. There were a handful of ‘big name’ journalists cited as being primarily responsible for the change in emphasis. These journalists were described by respondents as ‘Rottweilers’ whose ‘gung-ho’ approach was representative of an aggressive policy developing across the BBC as a whole. It was suggested that although such an attitude can drive the audience figures, it does a disservice to journalism.

Most respondents wished to see a return to less confrontational and dramatic journalistic styles and a renewed commitment to core journalistic values of impartiality and honesty: ‘Objectivity needs to be paramount. The BBC is not a pseudo-opposition party’.

However, there was also broad support for both BBC journalism as an entity and these key figures as individuals. Respondents argued that voter apathy and a weak Opposition Party create a dangerous political climate and a need for a publicly representative body to call the Government to account. For a very large number of respondents, that body is the BBC.

III. ‘The BBC Has Played a Central Role in the Development of Democracy’

1. ‘The BBC and Our Democracy’

A number of respondents eulogised on the fact that the BBC is synonymous with British democracy. In many responses, the BBC and democracy were intrinsically linked at a conceptual level; in the collective consciousness of the British public there is a deep-rooted association between the concept of democracy and the function of the BBC. As one respondent noted, ‘I suspect we all care for the BBC and our democracy more than we ever will for this or any single Government.’ Democracy and the BBC are presented as inseparable entities. For a considerable number of respondents, the BBC supplants Parliament as the guarantor of democratic freedom in the UK.

The Corporation demonstrably has the trust of the majority of the UK public. The implication from respondents is that such trust is invested on the understanding that it will not be abused. As a consequence it is incumbent upon the BBC that it remain objective and independent.

2. ‘Integrity, Independence and Quality’

The unique nature of the BBC as a publicly funded yet autonomous broadcaster, with the ability to reach the majority of the world’s population means that the organisation has, in the eyes of the majority of respondents, a key role to play in the promotion of global democracy. As one respondent observed, ‘As we become more and more a global community, networks like the BBC become more important and more accessible.’ The perception is that the BBC ought even today to aim at the ambition enshrined in its motto that ‘nation shall speak peace unto nation’. While the BBC is perceived to be playing a key role in informed democracy, some respondents stressed that improved coverage of the European Parliament and the politics of Europe was essential. They felt this was essential to facilitate intelligent debate, the lubricant on the wheels of any democracy. Without impartial representation by organisations such as the Corporation that are not compromised by any commercial agenda, the democratic processes of the European Parliament would be reduced to a pan-European talking shop.

The BBC has a role to play, not simply in disseminating information that enhances informed democracy globally, but also to lead by example and to project itself as the embodiment of an independent organisation enacting the principles of informed democracy: ‘The BBC has played a central role in the development of democracy in the UK, is an immensely important means of communication in the wider world, and, through its reputation for integrity, independence and quality, contributes immeasurably to the influence and standing of the UK throughout the world’.

IV. ‘Uncomfortable Truths’ – The BBC Under Attack

There was a considerable degree of confusion about the nature of the Charter review process evident in responses of all different opinions and resonating through answers to all eight questions. A considerable number of respondents believe that the Charter review process is a trial of the Corporation. Some welcomed this as an opportunity to call the BBC to account or even as an occasion to dismantle the organisation entirely. Other respondents, displaying a commitment to and affection for the BBC, worried that those in Government could hijack the review process, as part of an agenda and grudge against the Corporation. Some respondents were unaware that the Charter review is a loosely decennial process enshrined in the Charter itself and perceived the

review as a cynical political act to neuter a media outlet that has proved reasonably critical of the Government's conduct during the war in Iraq: 'I wish to register my deep disappointment about your decision to review the BBC. You have no business trying to destroy an institution which provides impartial information because it has criticised Blair's policies on the war in Iraq and unearthed some uncomfortable truths'.

Despite the emotional nature of the extremely anti-BBC responses and the fears of the extremely pro-BBC lobby, these responses illustrate the depth of public perception that there is a serious rift between the Government and the BBC. Respondents felt that the two institutions have been placed in clear opposition, particularly over the Hutton Inquiry, and that the consultation process is a de facto referendum of public trust in these two bodies. It is a referendum that the BBC wins convincingly. Although the Hutton Inquiry has demonstrably dented the BBC's reputation for impartial news coverage, many who concurred with its findings believed the incident to be essentially an isolated and atypical one. A large body of respondents disregarded the findings as being politically motivated. Many of those respondents who accepted that the BBC has indulged in inaccurate and partisan reporting due to a culture of arrogance within the Corporation still maintained that such arrogance, though rife in the BBC, is positively endemic in the present Government.

The repercussions of the conflict between the Government and the BBC are illustrated by the statistics and responses to the question of whether the BBC ought to be accountable to Government. More than any other single question in the consultation, this one produced remarkably consistent answers: the public want the BBC to either remain, or become even more, independent of Government.

The International Role of the BBC

I. 'Proud of the World Service'

The World Service was almost universally praised by respondents and referred to as 'the most important portion of the BBC'. It was perceived as an invaluable aid to promoting informed democracy across the world. The service epitomises the very best qualities of the BBC and, by implication, the very best qualities of the UK. The enduring global popularity and appreciation for the service, both by British expatriates and citizens of other countries, is viewed by many respondents as a feather in the UK's broadcasting cap: 'I'm so proud of the World Service and the way it is held in esteem around the world'.

II. 'Britain Leads the World' – How Britain Views the BBC

At the BBC's inception, Britain was an industrial and manufacturing powerhouse and an embodiment of utilitarian socio-economic values. Britain enjoyed the international status, strength and influence of what today would be called a superpower. The world moved on, the Empire faded and now the public perception is that, in many business arenas, Britain's global presence amounts to little more than a combination of outsourced call centres and David Beckham.

For the majority of respondents the BBC is a golden exception to this rule. It is perceived as a cultural ambassador of unrivalled value and representative of the 'very best of British'. Although the days of ruling the waves are over, most respondents would argue that, thanks to the BBC, Britannia is still globally dominant on the airwaves.

It was strongly felt that although the BBC has shortcomings, particularly in contrast to its performance and standards over the years, the Corporation retains the kudos and superiority to international peers that once seemed to typify Britain. As one respondent remarked, 'the BBC largely defines quality on the most popular medium; all else is compared to it. It is one cultural area in which Britain leads the world.' Even many of those critical of the BBC recognised its unique position globally, as a publicly owned world leader in broadcasting. The responsibilities inherent in such a position should not be shirked. The BBC has to continue to live up to its historic reputation for impartial, accurate and balanced reporting. The development of a unified international voice is key.

III. 'The Biggest Brand that the UK Has Ever Had' – How the World Views the BBC

The BBC is respected and praised throughout most of the world. However, the majority of North American respondents took a different view. Many accusations of 'biased' reporting (anti-Israel, anti-America, anti-Bush, anti-Republican, anti-war and anti-democracy) came from North American respondents. Another issue, equally emphasised in many North American responses, was the perceived poor quality programming on BBC America and particularly the cancellation of *EastEnders*. These two separate factors appear to have tarnished the BBC brand in North America considerably.

Some overseas responses were broadly complimentary to the BBC. Despite the majority of North America responses depicting a negative image of the BBC, there were a number of positive remarks. BBC News 24 was, in particular, compared favourably to its three international rivals: Fox News Network, Sky News and CNN: 'The BBC is much respected as a contrast to the trashy CNN'. Some North American respondents found the BBC coverage a welcome antidote to US-based news reporting that they considered inaccurate, partisan and lacking in independence.

UK respondents perceived the BBC to be viewed internationally as a source of accurate, honest reporting and high-quality programming. This was not wishful thinking, but rather an empirical appraisal of overseas attitudes: 'We have travelled to many countries. Wherever we have gone, local people have spoken to us about their very, very high regard for the BBC'. The responses from BBC America suggest that the BBC's entertainment programme is valued across the world; certainly, BBC programming is widely licensed internationally. Expatriates and English-speakers across the world also demonstrated their reliance on and interest in the BBC's services. Many complained that the change in satellite service provision now means they cannot access services on which they previously relied.

Contribution to Media Standards

I. The Mire of Modern Morality

A general decline in moral standards was identified by a clear number of respondents, who alleged that codes of broadcasting decency and regulation, such as the 9pm watershed, are being consistently flouted. Some respondents argued that the excessive amount of television profanity, blasphemy and carnality, as well as acts of violence and aggression, translate into anti-social behaviour and crime.

The BBC is not considered to be the worst offender in this area. Indeed, the Corporation is understood as having a role in the drive to improve these standards and reverse the decline. However, the BBC is perceived as wilfully neglecting that duty.

II. ‘An Insult to Intelligence and Integrity’ – The ‘Dumbing Down’ Debate

There is a similar perception that industry programming standards have been in decline for some time. Though this trend is considered to have originated in the commercial sector, there is a feeling that rather than resisting the downward spiral, the BBC has actually contributed to it. The prevalence of lifestyle and reality programming over ‘life-enriching’ and real programming is key to this decline.

The BBC’s own programming standards are believed to have deteriorated. Recent programming choices and a perceived drift towards commercialism were described negatively in general and considered to be ‘an insult to the integrity and intelligence of the viewing public’. Respondents were often severely critical of the ‘dumbing down’ to the point of suggesting that programming integrity was so badly debased that the Charter should not be renewed. However, through almost all the criticisms there ran an implicit acknowledgement of the higher standards expected of the Corporation. Frequently, these criticisms were expressed as comparisons with commercial broadcasters or international media institutions. Respondents suggested that the BBC is ‘almost as bad as’ or ‘lowering itself to the level of’ these other broadcasters. Again respondents indicated that their expectations of the BBC are higher than those of other broadcasters.

The yardstick for programming and moral standards set for the BBC by the public is higher than that set for its commercial competitors. Often criticisms of the BBC have the interesting coda that it is becoming ‘almost as bad as Sky or ITV’. Furthermore, the BBC is considered to have a broad responsibility to raise moral and programming standards in broadcasting by leading through example. As one respondent noted of the programming standards of the BBC, ‘they are the standards against which I measure other broadcasters’.

The Quality of the BBC's Services

I. Different Elements of the BBC Referred to by Respondents

Few respondents demonstrated an awareness of the full range of BBC services and functions. For many, the Corporation is a broadcasting house comparable to ITV, with the addition of a clutch of radio stations. However, there were respondents who clearly appreciated the BBC's enormous and eclectic blend of products and programming, from the international commercial phenomenon of the Fimbles to the development of the world's first close-talking, noise-reducing ribbon microphone.

Table 7: Different elements of the BBC referred to by respondents.¹¹

Element Referred To	Percentage of Total Respondents
BBC Television	52%
BBC Radio	33%
BBC Online	16%
BBC World Service	7%
BBC Parliament	<i>Less than 1%</i>
All elements of the BBC	1%

Overwhelmingly the perception of the BBC is as a television broadcaster. The majority of responses did not acknowledge that the television licence fee serves to fund a myriad of non-television services, including radio stations and online services.

Among the 52% referring to BBC television, responses ranged from praise of programming and content to criticism of the high number of repeated programmes and poor quality content. The 33% of respondents who mentioned BBC Radio, by contrast, were almost entirely uniform in their high regard for the high-quality content and service of the BBC's radio services. Specifically, the quality of content on BBC Radio 4 was repeatedly touted as the standard to which all others should aspire.

Of the total number of respondents, 46% linked their mentions of different BBC services directly to the licence fee. These licence-related comments referred in the main to television, closely followed by radio. Very few respondents made the connection between licence fee and the BBC's online

¹¹ Many of the overall respondents mentioned more than one service element of the BBC in their responses. The responses that listed more than one service were counted as separate mentions for each element of the BBC. As a result, the percentages in this table will add up to more than 100% of respondents.

services. Most respondents regard the licence fee as payment for television and radio, as opposed to funding for an umbrella organisation with a range of services.

Some respondents used the licence fee as a yardstick against which to measure the value for money of the BBC services. More quantified their appreciation of the entertainment and information provided through the BBC, by comparing it to the relatively low payment for such a service. The ratio of respondents who mentioned the licence fee in a positive light to those who rated it negatively was 2:1.

II. ‘An Amorphous Mass of Mediocrity’ – Quality of Television Services

1. BBC1

This channel is perceived by many to be the main victim of the ‘dumbing down’ agenda and a ‘channel that has gone downhill rapidly’. It is no longer considered to be the flagship service of the Corporation: rather it is an outlet for populist programming that imitates and competes with the commercial sector provision. In particular, respondents remarked that BBC1 was rife with self-advertisements and promotional pieces that erode the viewing experience, drain resources and play havoc with the schedule timing.

2. BBC2

This channel is also perceived to be suffering from a decline in programming and moral standards. Once clearly a bastion of high-quality UK broadcasting, BBC2 has suffered by providing space in the schedules for commercially-minded programming while allegedly neglecting to deliver mainstream provision of arts and cultural content.

3. Digital Channels

BBC4 was strongly praised for content, although respondents were wary that it might prove a scheduling ghetto for risk-taking and cultural programming. By contrast, BBC3 was broadly criticised by respondents. It was suggested that it could not be accused of ‘dumbing down’ – having been ‘dumb’ from its inception.

CBeebies was commended for combining education and entertainment, as was CBBC, although questions were raised about the moral suitability of some of the latter’s programming. The BBC News 24 service, while filling the gap for publicly-owned rolling news provision, was perceived as requiring some reform, with a shift away from sensationalism, reliance on visual footage and maintaining a headline focus towards a system that encourages analysis and discussion. Almost no-one mentioned BBC Parliament.

III. ‘The Only Source of Intelligent, Innovative Radio in the UK’ – Quality of Radio Services

Respondents demonstrated a strong overall appreciation of BBC radio. It was considered to be closer than television to achieving the core objectives of the BBC service: national and regional representation; combining education and entertainment; delivering impartial and accurate news and promoting the arts and culture of the UK and the world.

Respondents emphasised that radio services are particularly important to those who are incapacitated, or socially excluded through disability, poverty or age. The following response was typical: 'I am an old age pensioner of nearly 80. May I say that the object I value most in my home is my radio, it is my constant companion... Please let me pay my licence fee again it is the only way of saving it'.

The playlist policy of BBC Radio 1 was considered by respondents to be its key failing. Despite the playlists the service was still perceived to be 'dumbing down'. BBC Radio 4 is seen as 'jewel in the crown', and was singled out repeatedly for especial praise. It is symbolic of all the best qualities of BBC broadcasting. For many respondents, Radio 4 is a lifeline and a broadcasting channel held in high regard.

IV. Online Services

Broadly, those who used online services liked them; those who did not resented what they perceived as a waste of licence fee revenue on a service that is external to the BBC's remit.

For the majority of respondents, the BBC's online services are of a significantly high standard and represent a viable use of licence fee revenue. Adding value to the public's experience of the Corporation as well as providing a high-quality resource for people the world over: 'The BBC has used and shaped the Internet into something of outstanding quality that gives its users real value for money'. In particular, it was felt that the online services played a key role in disseminating news and information impartially.

Criticism of the website took one of only two forms. Either respondents without access to the Internet felt that the online services should not be funded from their licence fee contributions, or they argued that the public subsidy for the online services were inherently anti-competitive. No statistics were provided to support this view.

Conclusion

The BBC is loved. The majority of respondents were satisfied with the service and wished to retain the licence fee. The public perceive themselves as stakeholders in the BBC, not purely because of their financial contribution through the licence fee but also through a recognition that the Corporation defines their cultural experience and identity. As a consequence of this investment, respondents were driven to examine shortcomings of the BBC, as well as to praise its successes.

Among the wealth and variety of responses, certain clear and common concerns were apparent. The impartiality and integrity of the news service was the most fiercely contested single issue, with many severe and vehement criticisms of recent reporting. The polarisation of opinions, and the emotional intensity of responses of either side of the debate cannot detract from the underlying message: it is a high public priority that the BBC delivers unbiased, accurate and wholly independent news coverage.

Independence was, for many of the respondents, a vital characteristic of the BBC. Respondents of all different political, ethnic and social contexts asserted that for the BBC to endure it must retain its absolute independence from business and from Government. Overwhelmingly, the public wanted a BBC with reduced accountability to Government and increased public accountability. The respondents demonstrated anxiety over the creeping commercialisation of content and the perceived fixation on viewing figures.

The BBC was perceived by many respondents to be an imperfect beauty. Satisfaction was underpinned by a sense that the Corporation must be supported and, in key areas, improved, through methods and reform that remain true to its core values and qualities – a sense that any alterations to the BBC must be of degree and not of kind. In the words of one respondent, ‘the BBC is either a miracle or a conjuring trick and either way I do not mind’.

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