

Ubiquis Reporting

**BBC Royal Charter Review
Green Paper Public Consultation
An Analysis of Responses**

September 2005

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Introduction

The BBC has an enormous impact on British life and culture. Its services reach 23 million households. Every day millions of people tune in to one or more of its analogue or digital radio or TV channels, while others access its online services or watch a DVD, browse through a magazine or read a book. Across the world, further millions are informed, educated and entertained through one or more satellite TV channels, and the World Service is accessible to people in 139 countries, in 42 languages¹.

The BBC is established by Royal Charter, and has been so since the very early days of its existence. Charters usually last for approximately 10 years; the current Charter expires on 31 December 2006. Towards the end of each Charter there is a review process which gives the Government an opportunity to look again at the BBC's role, structure and functions. What differentiates the current Charter review from those of previous years is the importance of the role that public consultation now plays. The first phase of this consultation was launched in December 2003; 5,500 responses were received. A report summarising the public's views was produced by Ubiquis in June 2004, and is available at www.bbccharterreview.org.uk.

Ubiquis's report helped to inform the Government Green Paper '*A strong BBC, independent of Government*', published on 2 March 2005. A second major public consultation followed its publication. This consultation was advertised in the national press throughout March and people were invited to respond by completing a structured questionnaire on the website; e-mailing or writing to the BBC Charter review team directly; or by phoning to offer comments. This resulted in 4,300 responses from the public; this report is a summary of those responses.

1. The Responses

The nature of these 4,300 responses varied greatly. Approximately 60% or 2,580 of the responses came via a 12-part questionnaire on the DCMS website which corresponded with nine key proposal areas set out in the Green Paper. This questionnaire also asked for some basic demographic data, such as age bracket, respondent's region, and whether or not the respondent had digital access.

The remainder of the responses were sent in the form of emails, letters (both handwritten and typed), poems, published articles and special reports – even a university essay was recycled. Some were two or three lines long; others ran to 20 pages. While some of these 'free-format' responses gave careful consideration to at least some of the specific proposals and answered some of the questions posed by the Green Paper, many others took the opportunity to express their appreciation, to request information, to campaign on particular issues or simply to complain about their 'personal bugbears,' as one said. These responses tended not to provide demographical data and have not been included in any statistical analysis. All responses, from the articulate to the atypical, were considered in the compiling of this report.

¹ Source: *A strong BBC, independent of government*. A Government Green Paper, published by the DCMS, March 2005

2. The Consultation

While a handful of people praised the consultation process and commended the Government for the opportunity to comment, there was some concern about the structure of the web questionnaire. A small but vocal minority of respondents charged that it had been designed in a 'biased' way that sought agreement with the Green Paper proposals. Some felt 'manipulated by ambiguously worded questions'. A few also noted that whereas a negative response to most of the questions allowed the respondent to expand on or qualify that answer, a positive response did not. In order to add detail, some respondents answered No when otherwise they would have answered Yes. A small number of people experienced technical difficulties with the website and questionnaire, and in some cases also submitted a hard-copy response to ensure that it was received.

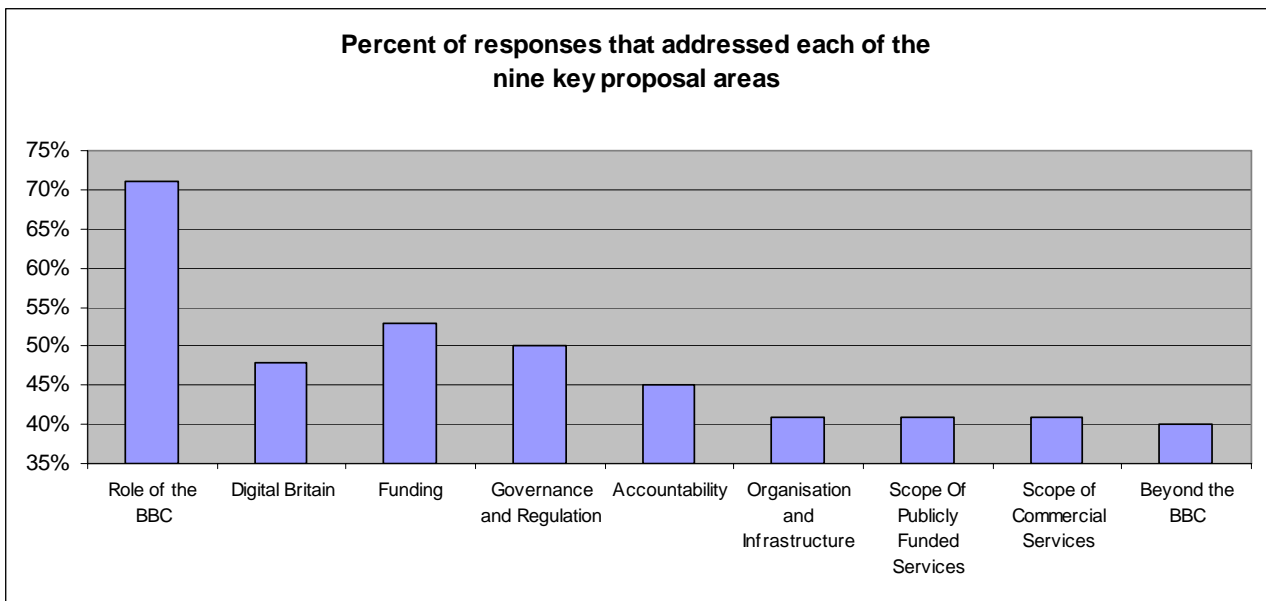
In a few instances the Government's Green Paper proposals were simplified for the web questionnaire, and some of the questions are phrased slightly differently in the web form compared to the Green Paper. While none of the respondents mentioned this, responses that were clearly based directly on the Green Paper were always more comprehensive than those from respondents who had read only the web questionnaire.

3. The Results

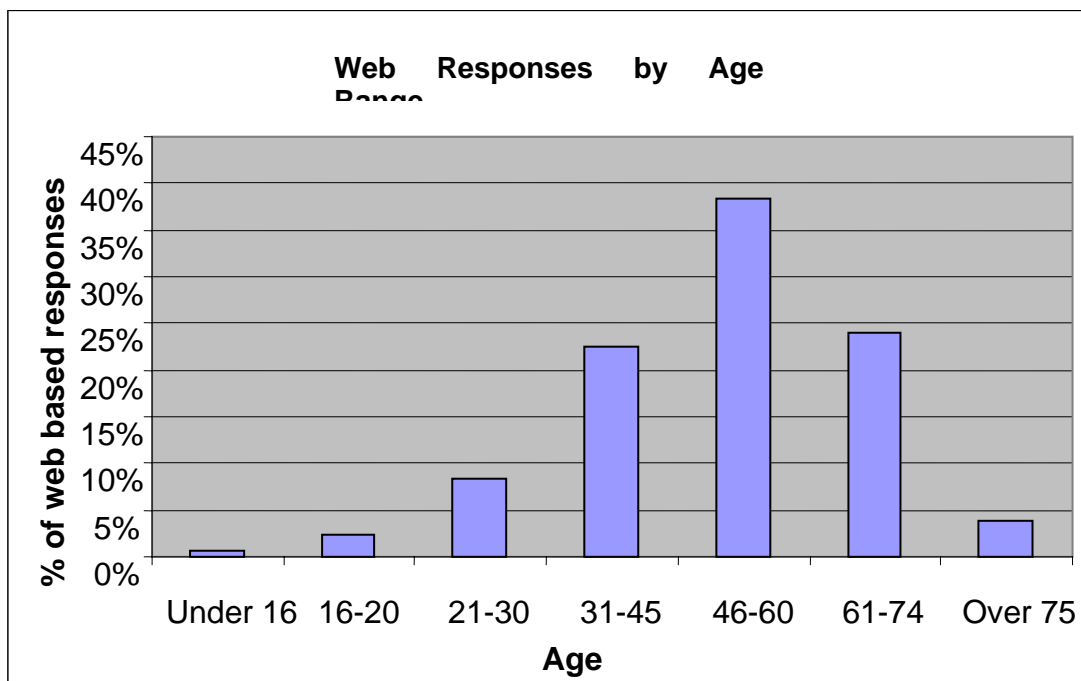
The responses to the web questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive in their direct answers to the questions. For all the questions asked in the web survey, the majority of responses agreed with the Green Paper proposals. This ranged from 90% for some questions (*Do you think it is helpful to create a set of specific purposes for the BBC?*) to just over 50% for others (*Do you think that a review [of public funding for commercial channels] should take place?*).

However, among the qualitative comments, there were more negative than positive responses. As discussed above, this was at least partly because of the structure of the questionnaire, which invited explanation of 'No' responses: most qualitative web responses were concerns or criticisms about the Green Paper proposals. However, as the quantitative data illustrates, a significant majority of respondents were in favour of the proposals. Therefore, every effort has been made to ensure an appropriate balance in this document between positive and negative views.

Of the nine key proposal areas, some engaged the respondents' attention more than others. For example, more than 70% of all responses gave comments on the role of the BBC, a category which included a section on programme characteristics. Other popular categories were funding and governance. On the other hand, proposal areas such as the BBC's organisation and infrastructure and the scope of commercial services attracted less interest – only 40% of responses addressed these. Even in the less popular areas, however, enough people responded to provide an interesting cross-section of views in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Finally, there was a great deal more attention paid to BBC television than to BBC radio. The length of each section or sub-section in this report roughly reflects the amount of consideration the responses gave to a given proposal or theme.

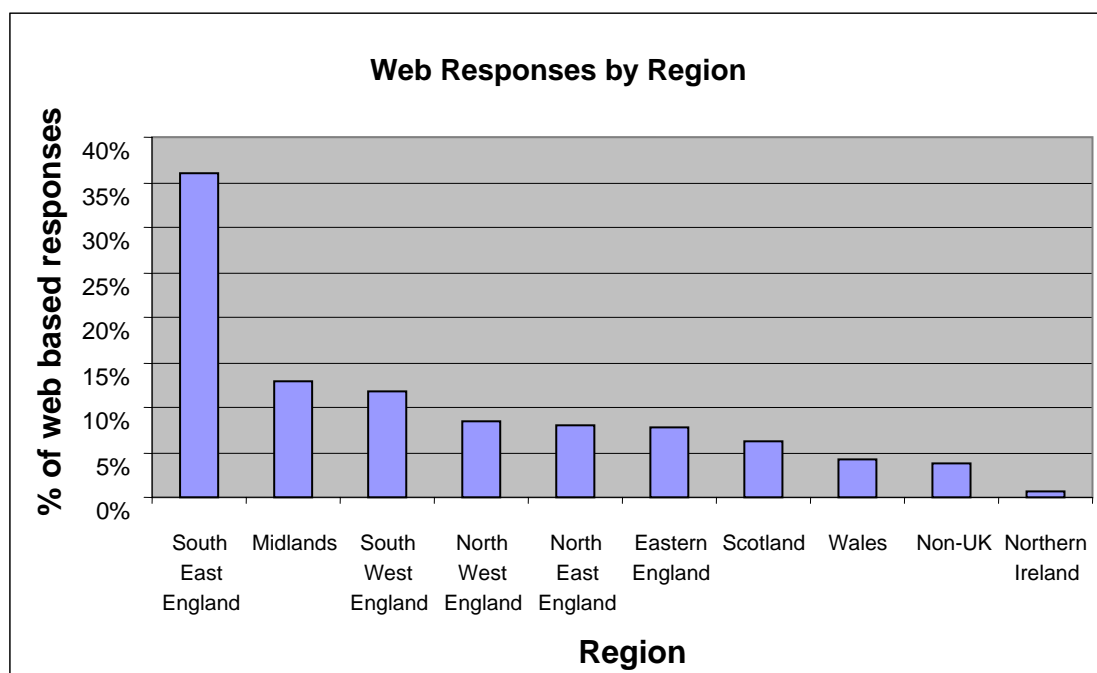


Demographic data was provided in almost all of the web responses, and in almost none of the free-format responses. As shown in the graphs below, among the 2,580 web responses in which demographic data was provided, there were a significantly larger number of responses from the 46-60 age range than from any other age range, with 38% of responses from that group. Web responses from the 31-45 and 61-74 age groups represented 22% and 24% of the total, respectively. Only 11% of the web responses came from respondents aged 30 or under.



In geographical terms, almost three times as many web responses came from South East England as from any other single region; the Midlands was the second-most represented, with 13% of the total

number of web responses. Only about 15% of the responses came from outside England, with 6% from Scotland, 4% from Wales, 4% from outside the UK, and less than 1% from Northern Ireland.



In general, responses varied only slightly from region to region or age group to age group – where they varied at all. When demographic data are referred to in this document, those data are derived exclusively from the web responses.

4. This Document

This document is an objective summary of the 4,300 responses to the DCMS consultation on the Charter Review. It does not draw conclusions or prejudge the outcome of the consultation; rather, it provides a view of the responses in order to contribute to the decision-making process that will inform the Government's White Paper.

At the start of each section of this document, a quantitative overview of the responses to the proposals is provided. This includes the number of responses as a percentage of the total number received; the number that agreed with the Green Paper proposals and/or answered the questions positively; and the number that opposed the Green Paper proposals and/or answered the questions negatively. These data include information from both web responses and free-format responses.

The statistics are accompanied by an analysis of the qualitative responses, reflecting the wide range of views provided in the responses. All positions are covered, from both extremes to the middle-of-the-road. Quotes illustrate both majority and minority opinions.

The contents, views and opinion contained in this document represent neither those of Ubiquis nor of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. **As respondents were self-selecting, this report is not statistically representative of public opinion.** Instead, it aims to provide a valuable overview of the views of more than 4,000 people who took the time to reply to the consultation.

The Role of the BBC

What purpose does the BBC serve?

The public takes the role of the BBC seriously. Almost 3,000 respondents voiced an opinion on the role of the BBC, on its public purposes, or on the characteristics of its programming – a far greater response than to any other area. There were twice as many responses to this topic than there were to the question of ‘Digital Britain,’ and three times as many as there were to ‘Scope of Commercial Services’. A significant majority of the email and letter responses – 82% – dealt with this issue, and often went into considerable detail and examined it with both thoughtfulness and strength of feeling.

The importance that respondents attached to the BBC’s place in British society and, increasingly, to its role beyond the UK’s borders, became clear through these responses. In a more general sense, many respondents took the opportunity to commend the BBC for what they thought it was doing right, or to castigate it for what they thought it was doing wrong. Opinion was fairly evenly divided between those who thought the BBC was a ‘national treasure’, in the words of one respondent, and those who viewed the organisation – or at least some aspect of its operation – as a ‘national disgrace’, as expressed by another.

I. Defining the BBC

The **Green Paper** defines five core purposes for the BBC: sustaining citizenship and civil society; promoting education and learning through programmes and services; stimulating creativity and cultural excellence; reflecting the UK, its nations, regions, and communities; and bringing the world to the UK and the UK to the world.

- In total, 71% of all responses addressed the role of the BBC.
- Of those who filled in the web questionnaire, more responses (79%) dealt with the question ‘Do you think it is helpful to create a set of specific purposes for the BBC?’ than any other question. The vast majority of people who answered this question – 91% – thought that it was helpful to create a set of specific purposes for the BBC. Only 7% of responses were negative.
- When asked to consider ‘Are these the right purposes?’ a reduced majority of the website responses (73%) answered positively. 24% of responses said No.
- To the question, ‘Is there anything you think is missing?’ more than half of website responses said Yes, while only a third said No.
- Of the free-format responses, 82% dealt with the issue of the role of the BBC. While many of these comments expressed general approval or disapproval, a sizeable number directed comments to one or more of the core purposes, either directly or indirectly. The fourth and fifth purposes were given the most attention – at least a fifth of responses pertained to each. The importance of entertainment was addressed in at least a third of responses.

1. Praise for the BBC

Respondents from the four corners of the globe paid homage to the BBC. Some were emotional and effusive in their praise for the BBC: a resident of Brazil wrote that the BBC is ‘the only remaining instrument of true democracy that we have left!’ Many people remarked that the BBC sets the standard for broadcasting – both public service broadcasting and broadcasting generally – within the UK and internationally. Even those respondents who felt the BBC is no longer the exemplar it was in its heyday in the 50s and 60s still thought that it compared favourably not only to other terrestrial channels like Channel 4 and satellite broadcasters like Sky, but also to its overseas counterparts like PBS in the United States. Indeed, so esteemed is the organisation for its positive influence on the political, cultural and social health of the nation that many implored the Government to abandon its Charter Review and ‘leave the BBC alone,’ fearing that the Review was a precursor to changes that would damage the organisation. ‘It’s doing an excellent job as it is,’ said one respondent.

2. Criticism of the BBC

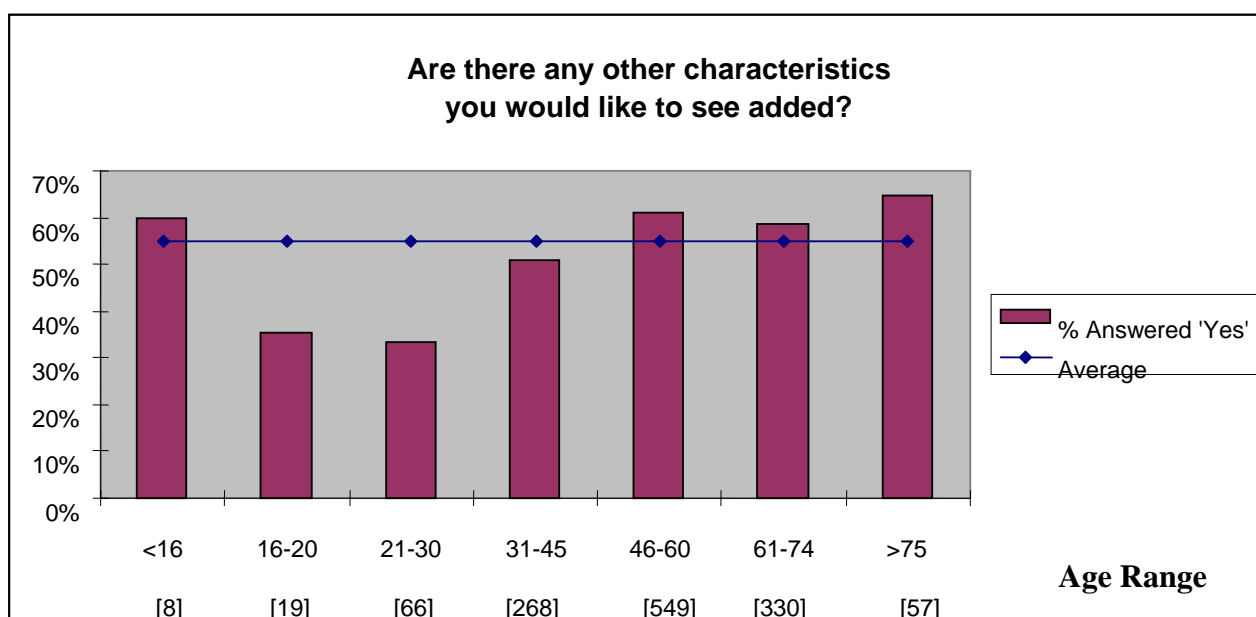
On the other hand, the BBC’s detractors expressed equally strong feelings, charging the BBC with declining standards in programming content and style. Many felt that the BBC has lost touch with what its viewers want. Frequent charges of chasing ratings, ‘dumbing down’ and ‘pitching to the lowest common denominator’ were levelled at the organisation. ‘Watching the BBC used to be like reading a good book; now it resembles a cheap comic,’ said one respondent. In general, across all topics, people whose ages ranged from 31-64 tended to censure the BBC more frequently and more vociferously than those who were younger or older.

On either religious or aesthetic grounds, some took issue with the perceived lack of morality of the programming. There were also a smaller number of accusations of bias, incompetence, greed and corruption. In many cases, although not all, these and other criticisms came from the same respondents who voiced anger at having to pay ‘a compulsory and unfair tax’ – the licence fee – for services they do not use.

II. The Five Purposes

The vast majority of respondents – nine out of 10 – agreed with the idea of a set of purposes for the BBC. Nearly three out of four responses, a very substantial majority, agreed with the five purposes proposed by the Green Paper. From the web responses approval of the five purposes was higher among younger (under 30) and older (over 75) web responses than among those aged 31 to 74 – though in every age bracket, more than 72% of the web responses said they agreed with the list of purposes.

There was slightly greater variation when it came to suggesting whether further characteristics should be added to the list. As in the chart below, only about a third of web responses between 16-30 answered Yes to the question, ‘Are there any other characteristics you would like to see added?’ Older respondents were almost twice as likely to suggest further characteristics.



Those who disagreed with the set of purposes were more likely to comment and to explain their views, both in the web questionnaire – where No answers were followed by space for clarification – and in the free-format responses. Many of the positive responses expressed a broad sense of satisfaction, briefly declaring the ideas to be sound and sensible. However, more in-depth positive comments were rare. This one from Northern Ireland was a notable exception: ‘[I] fully support the five purposes listed in the Green Paper, particularly [the one] calling for a greater emphasis on the arts... The BBC’s creative impact in Northern Ireland over the past 80 years has been remarkable. Balanced news coverage on local radio has served us particularly well through the ‘Troubles’.’

Negative comments were more pointed. While some respondents thought the list was too short, others thought it too long. Some criticised it as too narrow; others countered that it was too broad. For a number, the list of purposes was too vague and too open to interpretation, allowing ‘anything and everything.’ Others felt that the purposes were cloaked in management-speak and New Age jargon. ‘It means whatever the BBC wants it to mean,’ said one respondent.

A significant number of respondents saw no reason to revise the old mission statement coined by Lord Reith: to inform, educate and entertain. To many this was not only simpler and more succinct, but was also a more accurate reflection of what the BBC should aspire to. Interestingly, this was a sentiment expressed not only by older viewers and listeners, but also by respondents aged between 16 and 30. There was also a body of opposition to the existence of any list of purposes: it was felt that as a public service broadcaster, funded by the general public, the BBC should automatically embrace such ideals as part of its ethos.

The majority of the responses pertaining to the role of the BBC addressed broad, perennial issues such as programme quality, moral standards, objectivity, political bias and fair representation of minorities. However, a sizeable number specifically addressed one or more of the five named public purposes, many at some length.

1. Sustaining Citizenship and Civil Society

Some respondents felt that the list of purposes in general, and this purpose in particular, showed that the BBC had grown too self-important and too ambitious in extending its influence. A few charged that a broadcaster that believed it could ‘sustain citizenship and civil society’ was only patronising its viewers and listeners. Others feared that it was ‘Orwellian’ and ‘smacked of social engineering’.

Some respondents felt that developing citizenship was the job of the Government, not the BBC. A significant number connected the two, commenting that, by taking on this formal purpose, the BBC would lay itself open to being used for Government propaganda. In fact, at least a quarter of responses addressing the role of the BBC thought they detected the heavy hand of the Government in the running of the organisation. ‘The Government continues to meddle disgracefully in the affairs of the BBC,’ said one respondent.

A parallel concern was that the BBC, and particularly its news broadcasting, was politically biased toward the present party of Government. One respondent accused the BBC of ‘institutionalised leftism’, echoing the views of a large number of people who thought that ‘the BBC is and always will be biased towards the Labour Party whatever “cosmetic” exercises you may carry out.’ In contrast, a lone voice accused the BBC of being predisposed to the Conservative Party.

As this second phase of the public consultation coincided with the run-up to the May 2005 general election, a relatively large number of respondents discussed the coverage. There was a charge that the coverage was biased, not only in the party political broadcasts but also in news, current affairs and discussion programmes like *Question Time*. None of the responses praised the BBC’s election coverage. There were a number of complaints that air time was given to the three major political parties at the expense of smaller parties. A common argument was that a public service broadcaster has a particular duty to give time to smaller parties ‘who have the UK’s interests at heart’.

Depending on individual political affiliations, respondents variously cited the Green Party, the BNP, the English Democrats and Veritas among the smaller parties slighted by the BBC. However, it was UKIP that was most frequently named as being ‘woefully underrepresented’; some respondents who referred to UKIP also accused the BBC of an entrenched pro-EU stance. One respondent charged that the Government ‘wants us to be citizens of the EU and not the UK’, and believed that this Government priority was reflected at the BBC.

On a more reflective level, a few people noted that ‘civil’ means not only ‘pertaining to citizens’ but also ‘polite, obliging, not rude’. This observation was then tied to a concern about the nature of programming. In the words of one respondent, ‘How can you talk of a “civil” society when there is so much swearing and yobbish behaviour on your programmes?’

2. Promoting Education and Learning through Programmes and Services

Most respondents accepted that the BBC clearly plays a role in the education of the nation, albeit an ancillary one. While many of those who commented on this purpose felt that education is chiefly the responsibility of schools and universities, a number praised the BBC’s educational resources, such as its free-to-access online services.

However, there was criticism of the depth and quality of the BBC’s educational provision. The lack of prominence of educational programmes in the schedules belies the emphasis placed on

learning in the list of purposes, it was felt. Important educational programmes like the *Learning Zone* occupy the early morning 'graveyard shift', when no children and few adults are likely to be watching TV. A few questioned the decision to close the *Get Writing* website, 'when this does so much to promote education and learning.'

A few respondents felt that there was too much emphasis on arts and humanities-style 'creativity' and not enough on science and engineering. *The Sky at Night* was singled out for particular praise as being both educational and entertaining. On the other hand, stalwarts like *Horizon* and *Panorama* were seen as being less intellectually rigorous than in the past.

There were a number of appeals for more emphasis to be placed on educating the younger generations of Britons on UK history and geography before moving on to world issues. 'You only have to watch a TV quiz show to realise they lack basic knowledge of their own country,' said one respondent.

There were requests for more practical educational or vocational programmes, covering topics such as car mechanics, driving skills, basic DIY or household maintenance, and basic cooking for teenagers.

As a tangential issue, several respondents criticised the BBC for supposedly failing to maintain high standards of spoken and written English. In this view, promoting education and learning also means 'being responsible as regards the correct use of grammar and spelling, especially on children's programmes,' as one respondent said.

3. Stimulating Creativity and Cultural Excellence

Arts sponsorship and youth programming sprang to mind for those who addressed how the BBC can 'stimulate creativity and cultural excellence.' While fewer than 3% of those responses that gave their age were under 20, many people across the age spectrum noted that the BBC is in a unique position to foster creativity and nurture talent among young people. The BBC youth orchestras and bands attracted particular praise as showcases for young British musicians. However, there was a sense that more could and should be done. Some people were disappointed at the cancelling of *Fame Academy*, claiming that the talent show 'genuinely trained young people, raised money for bursaries and attracted young people to BBC output.' Others looked away from the arts and wanted to see more sports that would appeal to British teenagers, such as skateboarding, BMX biking, and football.

A very small number complained that very little original drama seems to be commissioned by the BBC nowadays. There was also a perception that fewer and fewer ballets and operas were being televised. A small number questioned the BBC's commitment to encouraging UK creativity when so many of its programmes seem to be 'foreign and inferior' imports, particularly from the US.

There was an opposing camp who specifically did not want their licence fee to be spent on the fostering of creativity and nurturing of talent, their attitude being that this would favour an elite few at the expense of the many. This is 'a great way for the BBC to spread largesse to people it approves of,' said one respondent.

4. Reflecting the UK, its Nations, Regions and Communities

Of the five purposes, that of ‘reflecting the UK, its nations, regions and communities’ proved by far the most controversial and generated the most comment, with about a quarter of those who disagreed with the list of purposes focusing on this issue.

a. Nations and regions

A number of people took issue with the concept of nations within the UK at its most fundamental level. As one respondent proclaimed, the UK is ‘ONE nation, with different regions.’ Taking a slightly different angle, some respondents felt the concept of UK regions was divisive. ‘We should be fostering a national identity and international relationships, nothing more,’ said one.

On the other hand, many respondents were enthusiastic about the national slant of their programming; indeed, some requested even more nationally-based programming. There was a strong contingent among viewers from each of the nations who implored the BBC to avoid the pitfall of pandering to national stereotypes. For example, one Welsh respondent bemoaned ‘an interesting national programme being dumped for a minority football match.’

In terms of territory-specific complaints, a number of Scottish viewers felt aggrieved over a perceived anti-Scottish bias at the BBC, particularly in news reporting. Several respondents complained about the dearth of Scottish items on the national news. A few pushed for a full news programme produced by BBC Scotland to encompass local, national, and international news. Other criticisms included the BBC’s adjusting its daytime scheduling to take account of English school holidays, while no similar consideration was given to Scottish children.

Several English listeners and viewers deplored the fact that there was a BBC Wales and a BBC Scotland, but no BBC England, despite the fact that a large majority of licence fee payers live in England. Some respondents among this group felt that the licence fee should cover UK-wide programmes only, and that regional services should be provided and paid for separately.

An organised campaign by Irish-language speakers criticised a perceived lack of Irish-language programming and called for Ofcom’s recommendations that the BBC expand its commitment to the Irish language to be recognised and implemented. However, there was praise for the very high standard of Irish-language programming on the BBC. ‘As the saying goes in Irish, “A lucht a laghad” – its only downfall is its quantity,’ said one respondent.

b. Communities

There was a sharp divide between those who supported the idea of the BBC ‘reflecting communities’ and those who criticised it. The majority supported this goal; a small but vociferous minority opposed it. Interestingly, there was a fundamental shared assumption on both sides that programming for and about ‘communities’ meant programming for and about minority groups: non-white, non-Christian, lower income or unemployed, lesbian and gay.

Furthermore, particularly among those who opposed ‘reflecting communities’, there was often an assumption that to be non-white, non-Christian, poor, or non-heterosexual is somehow not British, or at least not English – and it was assumed that being British and being English are much the same. A small group of respondents complained vigorously about what they saw as the BBC ‘pushing multiculturalism down our throats’. A number of people who specifically identified themselves variously as white, Christian, conservative, middle-class, heterosexual and tax-payers,

felt that the BBC no longer catered for them. ‘The British Broadcasting Company should do just that, broadcast to Britain for the British. Stop forcing “diversity” on us because we do not like it. There is not enough programming celebrating English heritage and English culture,’ said one respondent. Some expressed the view that the representation of Black and Asian communities is disproportionately large in relation to the size of these communities within the UK population.

At the other end of the spectrum, there were still complaints among the majority who supported the idea that the BBC should reflect the UK’s communities. Some respondents felt that while the BBC catered adequately or even excessively for some communities, others were woefully underrepresented. A few people felt that Britain’s Asian Muslims were better represented than Sikhs and Hindus.

Several viewers and listeners who identified themselves as housebound, elderly or disabled, felt that daytime programming was of particularly poor quality. Members of the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities asked for greater recognition, calling for at least 5% of programming to reflect non-heterosexual characters and issues.

A number of female respondents felt that the BBC should do more to represent women fairly. ‘Your sports coverage, especially at the end of the news, is dominated by the activities of men. Coverage of women’s sporting activities is rarely featured and when it is, it is tokenistic rather than equal,’ said one.

c. *Religious groups*

The BBC’s ‘nod to political correctness’ is causing Christian groups across the UK to feel both culturally threatened and excluded, a significant number of respondents said. Many pointed out that around 72% of UK residents considered themselves Christians, according to the 2001 Census. ‘There is a serious lack of good religious programmes on BBC television. Not one religious programme appeared on either BBC [television] channel during Easter weekend; it was left to Channel 4 to broadcast a programme touching on religious issues,’ said one respondent.

Some went so far as to accuse the BBC of lampooning the Christian faith, citing the showing of controversial ‘anti-Christian’ programmes like *Jerry Springer – The Opera*. It was suggested that the BBC would never dare ridicule the Muslim, Hindu or Jewish faiths. ‘The BBC are hypocrites, showing bias against Christianity under the mask of tolerance, freedom of speech and diversity,’ charged one respondent.

Conversely, a small but vocal group who described themselves as humanists, atheists or secularists felt that religion is no longer the centre of people’s lives in the UK and should not play a part in the BBC’s programming. A common complaint was the linking of morals and religion, with a priest ‘in evidence’, as one said, whenever an ethical issue is debated. There were requests for more programmes with a humanist theme – one respondent claimed the last humanist programme was broadcast in 1965. There were also calls to remove ‘Thought for the Day’ from Radio 4’s *Today* programme.

5. **Bringing the World to the UK and the UK to the World**

A significant number of people commented either directly or indirectly on this purpose, with most raising concerns about both the quantity and the quality of news reporting. Alongside many respondents who praised the BBC’s international news were those who felt that news reporting

should be given greater prominence. 'Put the last [point] first: world news is the most important': this statement echoed the views of a large group of respondents who were concerned that amidst frequent mentions of 'culture' and 'creativity,' an explicit commitment to impartial news reporting was missing.

'The BBC should strive to return to being a bastion of independent, balanced and reliable news reporting and analysis,' was a sentiment shared by many. A number felt that the news had become too 'frivolous' – *BBC Breakfast* was cited as a case in point – 'sensationalist', 'opinionated' and 'inaccurate'. A small but vocal group, some of whom were part of an organised campaign, criticised the BBC's coverage of the situation in the Middle East, detecting an anti-Israel bias. There was a concern that, given the high regard in which the BBC is generally held, biased 'opinion' would be passed off as fact. The BBC's coverage of the war in Iraq was also singled out as being unsatisfactory.

A number of people felt that American news dominated the agenda to the detriment of European news. 'The USA is well covered, but how often do we get the thoughts and opinions of our neighbours in Europe, or further afield?' asked one respondent, while another said, 'News coverage of the EU is very disappointing.' Both sides of the argument for and against Britain in Europe were requested. There was also a call for more news coverage of other countries and regions which are growing in international importance – such as China, North and South Korea, and Latin America.

In a small but passionate campaign, employees and supporters of development agencies such as ActionAid and CAFOD welcomed the recent perceived 'breakthrough' on coverage of international issues, believing that the wider public need to be exposed to global matters. 'The UK is in danger of becoming even more self-preoccupied, introverted and globally ignorant, which will have dangerous consequences for the international community in future years.' A number of people singled out BBC4 as doing 'a wonderful job,' but it was the World Service that most respondents regarded as beyond reproach. '[It] is simply outstanding and reflects well not only on world views but takes views on itself from the worldwide audience,' said one enthusiast.

Nevertheless, a few rejected the specific purpose of bringing the UK to the world, believing that to be the remit of organisations like the British Council and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Many of these respondents seemed unaware that the World Service is, in fact, funded directly by the Government rather than via the licence fee.

6. Nominating a Further Purpose: Entertaining the Nation

A significant number – more than a third of all those who responded to the proposals – wanted to see another purpose added to the list: that of 'entertaining the nation'. 'I switch on the TV to be entertained,' said one respondent, while another entreated, 'Just make me laugh!'

Presented with a list of purposes that some regarded as 'preachy' and pedantic, several respondents commented on the palpable absence of any reference to entertainment. One remarked, 'It reads like a charter for Radio 4, not the whole BBC.' The consensus among respondents who addressed this topic was that there should be room for more of a 'fun factor.' 'God forbid that we should turn a national treasure into a dull proselytiser,' said a respondent.

Many respondents felt that there is currently a dearth of good, 'clean' comedy on the BBC, and several waxed nostalgic for the days of 'classic' comedies like *Dad's Army* and *The Good Life*. While *Little Britain* received praise from many quarters, it was also denounced by several people as

‘puerile, juvenile rubbish’. The ‘innocuous sounding’ *Billy Connelly’s World Tour* series turned out to be ‘vulgar’ and ‘in poor taste.’ A few nominated *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Comic Relief does Fame Academy* as praiseworthy entertainment shows. Another proponent of light entertainment summed up by saying: ‘By no means would the new *Dr Who* series be covered by any of the purposes, but my whole family, male and female, ages 5 to 60, enjoyed and appreciated it hugely.’

III. Programme Characteristics

1. Should BBC Programmes and Services have Specific Characteristics?

Is the BBC a world leader in high-quality programming, or has it allowed its programming to lapse into laziness and poor taste? For the large number of respondents on both sides of the debate, the quality (or not) of the BBC’s programmes and services was a highly charged subject, and responses to this subject were more passionate than to any other area of the consultation. A large number of the web questionnaire responses, and a significant majority of the ‘free-format’ responses sent in by email or letter, addressed this area. While many addressed the Green Paper’s proposal for five additional programme characteristics in ‘exceptional circumstances’, even more responded by example, commending or criticising specific programmes.

The **Green Paper** proposes that not all BBC programmes and services should have to demonstrate the five purposes. In exceptional circumstances, it is enough for some programmes and services to be produced because they are: high quality, challenging, original, innovative, and engaging.

- Over 70% of web questionnaire respondents answered the question ‘*Are these the right characteristics?*’ 83% agreed with this list of five programme characteristics.
- However, when asked *Are there any other characteristics you would like to see added?* 49% of those who answered said Yes, while only 37% said No.

2. Criticisms of the List

A very significant majority agreed that in some cases, programmes and services should be produced simply because they are high quality, challenging, original, innovative, and engaging. But almost half of those who responded – including many who agreed in principle – offered amendments and criticisms.

A number of respondents felt that this list would negate the value of the five public purposes already proposed by the Green Paper. ‘If the [five public purposes] are appropriate, a ‘get out’ clause is unnecessary,’ commented one respondent. Others took issue with words like ‘challenging’ – ‘politically-correct speak for offensive rubbish’ – and ‘engaging’ – ‘an excuse for the promotion of an anti-social political issue’. A few feared that the list created a potential loophole for morally offensive material. ‘It will [help] the BBC to justify programming that comes close to pornography or blasphemy,’ wrote one respondent.

Many respondents added characteristics that corresponded with their suggestions for public purposes. Those who felt the BBC had lost some of its moral fibre added characteristics like 'traditional', 'responsible', 'decent' and 'respectful'. Some respondents who were concerned about the bias in political coverage suggested 'independent', 'truthful', 'objective', 'even-handed' and 'fair', while those who were looking for some light entertainment wanted to see 'amusing' and even 'trivial' on the list.

3. Criticisms of Current Programming

In this consultation process, the BBC's critics were more vocal than its supporters, partly due to the fact that a negative response to the question allowed the respondent to expand on or qualify that answer, while a positive response did not. However, in all the main areas of debate – including the questions of what is funny and what is offensive, what is compelling viewing and what is irresponsible, what is entertaining and what is 'dumbing down' – there were equally strong feelings on both sides.

a. *A drop in moral standards*

A frequent criticism of BBC TV programming, and of television programming in general, was that there has been a discernible decline in moral and aesthetic standards. The BBC, accountable to the public, was seen as having a responsibility to uphold standards of moral decency in a way not expected of commercial broadcasters. A respondent who identified herself as a mother and a grandmother wrote: 'The BBC used to be a pillar of morals but has chosen the Channel 4 route to decline.'

Many programmes were cited as containing material that is blasphemous, sexually explicit, profane, or an incitement to and glorification of violence and anti-social behaviour. Some of the more prominent included: comedies like *Little Britain* and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* (for offensive treatment of the elderly and the disabled); *Jerry Springer – The Opera* (for blasphemy and religious offence); *Match of the Day* (for swearing and aggressive behaviour by footballers); *The Weakest Link* and *Newsnight* (for rude, aggressive behaviour on the part of Anne Robinson and Jeremy Paxman, respectively); and *Dick and Dom's Ask the Family* (for encouraging bad manners and uncouth behaviour among children). Interestingly, several people complained about the extent of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's swearing on *Jamie's School Dinners* – a Channel 4 programme.

However, many of these programmes were seen in a very different light by a number of respondents who rejected the idea that the BBC should act as 'moral custodian to the nation'. These respondents called *Little Britain* 'cutting edge'; *JSTO* was described as 'artistic and intelligent'. Jeremy Paxman and Radio 4's James Naughtie were praised for their 'tough' interviewing style.

There were calls for a stricter adherence to the 9pm watershed; some felt it should be moved to 10pm or even 11pm as many young people are still awake at the earlier hour. A number of people cited *Britain's Streets of Vice*, a series about prostitution which was shown on daytime TV, as a show that was intrinsically 'worthy' but was unsuitable viewing for children, requesting that in future such programmes should be scheduled well after the watershed.

b. Copycats and repeats

There were complaints about ratings wars with commercial TV channels, which many felt had led to a 'dumbing down' of programme quality and a plethora of copycat shows, some of which were deemed to be less interesting than their ITV or Channel 4 rivals. There were requests for more dramas, documentaries, and wildlife programmes to replace the perceived 'explosion' of makeover shows, docu-soaps and reality TV shows with 'minor talents' and 'so-called celebrities'. Said one, 'I don't want to learn any more about cooking, gardening, DIY or antiques.' However, *Ground Force* remained a perennial favourite for many.

A significant number of respondents complained about the number of repeats – or 'repeats of repeats', as one person wrote. Many commented that a large number of programmes are repeated only a few days after first being shown. One respondent claimed that there were 2,000 hours of repeats on all BBC channels during 2004, a 10% increase on the previous year. 'The BBC collects about £4 billion a year in licence fees. Where the hell is all this money going as they are putting so many repeats on?' commented another. However, there were requests for repeats of 'classic' programmes like *Civilisation* and *I, Claudius*. A few people said the BBC back catalogue should be available for free, possibly via the Internet.

c. The environmental question

There was an organised campaign by Transport 2000, a campaign group supporting alternatives to car travel, to have *Top Gear* taken off the air. Many other viewers joined in the charge that the programme is environmentally and socially irresponsible. 'Car culture is socially divisive and undermines citizenship and social cohesion,' wrote one critic. It was also accused of promoting dangerous driving and 'playing into the hands of the oil industry'.

An equally spirited campaign in favour of *Top Gear* countered these claims, pointing out that it enjoys very high ratings and has a large following among both men and women. Advocates of the programme claimed that there is no scientific evidence that the cars it tests are environmentally unfriendly. One fan wrote: 'It's like saying cooking programmes promote obesity.'

d. Quantity and type of sports coverage

Responses pertaining to the level of sports coverage fell into two extremes. Some people felt that there was a glut of sport on the main BBC television channels; others complained that coverage was inadequate. Among those who were tired of so much sports programming, there was some support for a separate sports channel that could free up BBC1 and BBC2 for other types of programmes. The detrimental impact of sports programmes on normal schedules was also highlighted: sports broadcasts that overrun and cause subsequent programmes to be delayed or postponed were a cause of aggravation.

On the other hand, sports fans requested more – more big-ticket matches and more diverse types of sport. A small number suggested that the BBC should attempt to secure rights to some of the key sport broadcasts, such as Test Match cricket. One respondent felt that the BBC, as a public service provider, should automatically have first refusal of the major events. A few people felt that a number of minority sports such as table tennis, lacrosse, angling and ice-dancing were overlooked, and that other sports such as World Cup skiing were broadcast at inconvenient times. Women's sports, especially women's football, were seen as unfairly neglected.

A number of respondents wanted to see fewer highly-paid commentators and pundits before and after the broadcasting of a sports event. Commentators could be replaced by 'ordinary supporters who pay to watch the game,' said one.

e. The case of radio

In contrast to the often virulent accusations levelled against BBC television, BBC Radio was not subject to the same degree of criticism. In particular, Radio 4 was singled out as 'a shining example of where BBC TV needs to be heading'. Reviews of Radio 3 were mixed, however. While one fan called it 'the last bastion of civilisation in the grotesque and banal state of modern British society,' others expressed concern about the station's recent direction. 'Get rid of the populist rubbish, Andy Kershaw, Night Waves, so-called World Music, and trim the jazz coverage down to pre-Roger Wright levels,' requested one respondent.

4. Other Criticisms

a. Trailers and fillers

There was deep irritation among the small number who commented on the heavy use of self-promotional items and programme trailers. These seemed a waste of resources, in terms of both time and money. 'How much did the dancing men in red cost me?' asked one viewer. There were also complaints that certain programmes were advertised too often and too far in advance, creating a sense of 'programme fatigue'. This was seen as a particular problem on BBC1 and BBC Radio 1. And to a few respondents, this is an ominous trend: these repeated and intrusive advertisements are, they believe, the first step on the slippery slope to commercialisation of the BBC. The same respondents were, by and large, unhappy with the idea of a public service broadcaster such as the BBC being allowed to generate income by any means other than the licence fee; see the section on Scope and Regulation of Commercial Services for more on this area.

b. Technical issues

Several respondents, particularly those who identified themselves as elderly and hearing impaired, commented that there was too much background noise and 'intrusive' music which masks the speaker's voice. 'Music is meant to complement conversation, not put it out of fashion,' wrote one. A few commented on the tendency of presenters to talk over closing credits and music. Some respondents were also distracted by the 'constantly moving, jerky camerawork,' which made them feel dizzy. The poor quality of subtitles on Ceefax was also criticised, as was the lack of Teletext services on the digital channels.

Building Digital Britain

What role should the BBC play in the emergence of new technologies?

Following on from the technological revolution that is the Internet, the move to digital broadcasting is now underway. But as with any new technology, the advent of digital television will not be welcomed unanimously. The Green Paper's proposal that the BBC should be a leader in this area met with general approval in this consultation. However, a number of respondents, including many who already have digital access, offered some significant caveats about cost, quality and availability.

I. The BBC as a Technological Pioneer

The BBC has an important role to play in maintaining universal access to quality broadcasting. The Government and industry want all UK households to benefit from the digital future and in order for this to happen, television broadcasting must all be switched to digital signals. This could start as early as 2008 and be completed by 2012. The **Green Paper** proposes that the BBC should be a responsible leader in helping the public adopt new technologies, including digital television.

- In total, 48% of responses addressed this proposal.
- More than two-thirds of web questionnaire responses answered the question *Do you agree that the BBC should be at the forefront of developments in technology, including digital television?* Of these, 68% answered Yes and 27%, No.
- 15% of the free-format responses dealt with this issue. Around 50% of these agreed that the BBC should be a responsible leader in helping the public adopt new technologies, while approximately 20% complained about the quality of reception and another 20% complained about the quality of programming, respectively.
- 68% of all respondents had access to digital services. This compares to 60% of all households in the UK.

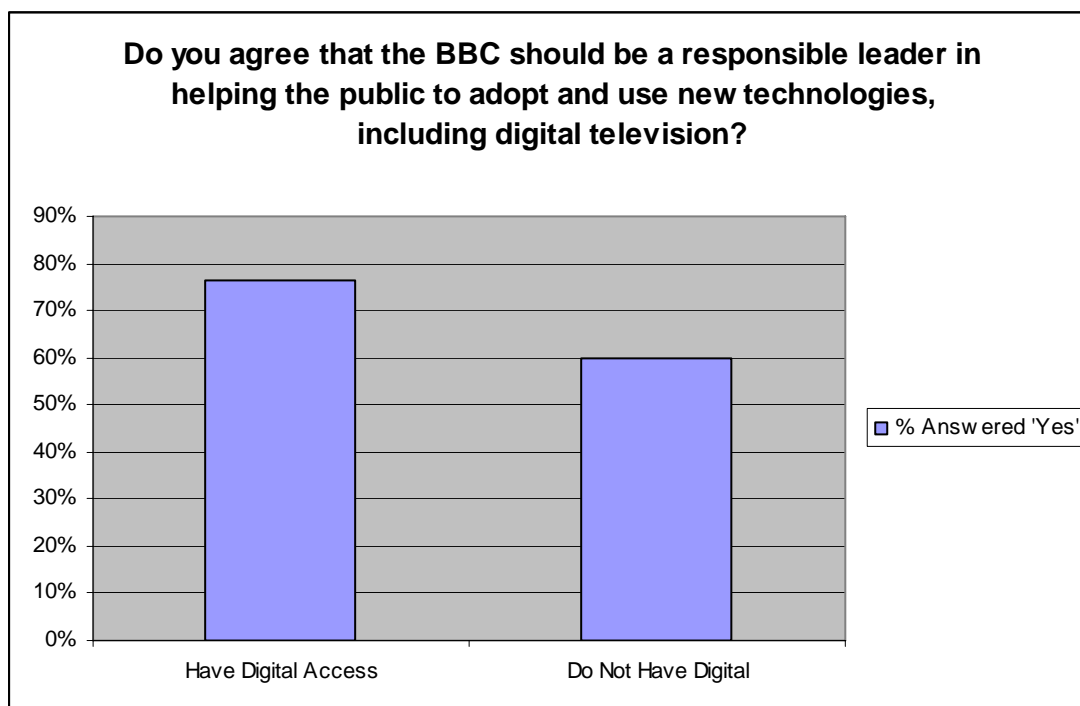
1. Support for the BBC as a Leader

A majority of respondents wanted the BBC to assume a leading role in the pioneering and development of new broadcasting technologies – and this was the majority viewpoint of both those who already have digital and those who do not. Indeed, some felt that the BBC had an obligation to do so as the country's major public service broadcaster. Others feared that the BBC risked being marginalised if commercial channels were allowed to leapfrog ahead. 'It is axiomatic that the BBC should continue its long-standing policy of being in the forefront of innovation in all matters of broadcasting,' said one respondent.

Some supported the proposal for more personal and practical reasons. Among the benefits mentioned: the possibility of quickly downloading an evening's viewing as digital files; having immediate access to everything in the TV archives; and having organised, numbered catalogues so that viewers can easily locate the programmes they want. A few respondents welcomed the proposal for a dedicated Gaelic digital channel which will support and complement the expected requirements that the Gaelic language bill will impose when it becomes law.

It may come as no surprise that respondents under the age of 21 embraced the concept of digital Britain with enthusiasm, with nine out of 10 agreeing that the BBC should be a responsible leader in helping the public to adopt and use new technologies. Interestingly, a similar proportion of the over-75s – whom many other respondents assumed would not want to or be able to adapt to the proposed changes – concurred.

There was also a strong correlation between those web respondents who already have digital and those who look to the BBC for leadership in adopting digital technologies. More than 76% of those who already have digital access agreed that the BBC should be a leader in this area, compared to 60% of those who do not have digital.



2. Concerns about the BBC as a Leader

Among those who did not support the BBC taking a leading role in technological advances, it was a commonly held view that the move to digital services should be market-driven and not dictated by the BBC or anyone else. For some this was more a matter of principle than practicality. Several respondents suspected the hand of the Government behind the BBC's aim to build digital Britain as soon as possible. 'It's a cynical ploy by the Government to raise revenue by selling off existing analogue bandwidth,' said one. Those who held this viewpoint often also rejected the licence fee.

There was concern that the focus on new media would distract from the organisation's core function of making and transmitting high-quality programming. 'The BBC should concentrate on

providing content and not on the mechanism for delivering [it],’ said one respondent. A number felt that the BBC should leave the development and promotion of new technologies to commercial services like Sky, who are perceived as having more money and more expertise.

II. Preparing for the Switchover

1. Cost and Affordability

A key objection to the BBC’s attempts to operate at the forefront of technological advances in media and communications was the cost implication to the public. Several voices were raised against licence fee money being used in this regard: of those who disagreed that the BBC should play a leading role in the field of technology, around 20% specifically felt that it would be a waste of public money. Some respondents felt that the Government should be entirely responsible for funding the switchover to digital services; others thought that the cost should be shared with other satellite and cable channels. A number made the point that equipment manufacturers stood to ‘make a fortune’ and therefore should be obliged to contribute to the cost.

The affordability of digital services was an area of some controversy. Many respondents expressed concern that the elderly, the disabled and those on low incomes might find the cost of the switchover prohibitive, and suggested that there should be some form of subsidy available to these groups to enable them to acquire digital radio and television after the cessation of analogue transmissions. A few respondents made the point that households with multiple TVs would be required to buy a converter box for each TV.

Among those who did not have access to digital services, many expressed annoyance that their licence fee contribution was being used to finance programming that they were not using. A few suggested that free licences should be given to those who do not use digital services.

A very small minority of respondents pointed out that the cost of switching to digital services was not just financial. ‘The state broadcaster should not be adding to the huge problem of the landfill disposal of toxic electronic waste,’ said one of those concerned about the environmental cost of the millions of televisions that would have to be discarded in a few years’ time.

2. Quality of Reception

Around one in five of those with access to digital TV complained about the reception of the service, which ranged from non-existent to poor quality in the view of those who addressed this issue, and who lived in areas as geographically widespread as Devon, eastern Cornwall, South Yorkshire, Shropshire, Sussex and Dumfries & Galloway. Many others complained about the frequency with which the picture broke up or froze: one viewer complained that his TV set flickers ‘every time my boiler fires up or a motorcycle goes by.’

Some respondents expressed concern about whether digital television would be universally available before analogue transmissions are cut off. One respondent from Wales wrote: ‘My digital set only works a quarter of the time... come 2008, will I be paying a licence fee for no TV?’ Many respondents expressed anger at having to pay for digital services that they have difficulty tuning into. A viewer from Teesside said: ‘I cannot receive BBC4 but I do get 24-hour news and the shopping channel, neither of which I want.’

A number of people mentioned the comparatively low quality of digital radio broadcasts. 'For listeners who invested in digital radio for better sound quality, this is bitterly disappointing,' said one respondent. 'DAB is now inferior to FM,' wrote another, comparing the BBC's service unfavourably to services in countries such as France, Hungary, Portugal, Sweden and Canada. 'Since the BBC has loaded more channels onto one multiplex, the quality of the DAB service has dropped dramatically.'

Some thought that the BBC would be better off spending money updating analogue systems. Some thought that digital TV was also a worse platform for developing HDTV (high-definition television) than analogue. Respondents who noted this were concerned that the UK is trailing the world in the adoption of new technologies like HDTV, which is being introduced in several European states and in the UK by Sky.

A few felt that almost certainly by 2012 (and possibly 2008) the vast majority of television programming will be available over the Internet, and that digital television could become redundant by the time it is introduced.

3. Quality of Programmes

There was a wide range of views about the quality of programmes on digital television, and the compliments and criticisms were approximately balanced. Some singled out BBC3 and BBC4 for praise – 'good and worth watching' – others complained about the 'low-brow, low-ambition programmes' on these channels. A few called News 24 'excellent'; to others it is not only 'no better than Sky or ITV News', it is also 'futile and expensive.' One respondent called Radio 6 and Radio 7 'a revelation', while another said that 'coverage of music on digital channels has been a disappointment.'

There were many complaints about the number of repeats on digital TV channels; in addition, a significant number of digital customers were unhappy that BBC3 and BBC4 programmes were repeated on BBC1 and BBC2. It was suggested that specific types of programmes be shown on each channel to make it more distinctive. For example, 'alternative' comedy could be shown on BBC3, while BBC4 could specialise in world and art-house cinema. Others expressed concern that in the long term, excessive choice would be detrimental to programme quality, citing American TV as a case in point.

Some respondents were irritated by the under-use of digital channels such as BBC3 and BBC4, which stand empty from 3am to 7pm. There was a feeling that if viewers were paying for these channels, they should be available 24 hours a day. Many respondents appeared to be unaware that some of this 'spare capacity' is used to broadcast the children's channels CBeebies and CBBC.

4. Lack of Information

The eventual cessation of analogue service was a concern for a number of respondents. Even those generally in favour of digital provision expressed concern that within a few years the switchover would be mandatory and feared that many of the UK's residents would not be ready for it. Cost was not the only factor. One respondent pointed out that some people 'do not readily take on new technologies.'

There were a number of requests for more information about the switchover. Some wanted practical information, like the publication of a timetable of availability of digital services in

specific areas. A small number voiced concerns that the move from analogue to digital could give rise to deeper, more sinister problems. One respondent expressed the need for reassurance that viewing and listening habits will remain private in the digital age, while another wanted to know whether any health concerns were likely to emerge, as had happened in the case of mobile phones.

5. The BBC's Online Service

There was widespread support for the quality of the BBC's Internet site. It is easy to navigate and contains a wealth of information that cannot be found elsewhere on one site, respondents said. Many welcomed the universal availability of news via the website, which respondents used in order to keep in touch with events in the UK when they were temporarily or permanently abroad. There were expressions of appreciation for the absence of advertising and 'annoying pop-ups and banners'.

However, to a number of people, the website's strengths are also its weaknesses. Many felt that the website is too large and therefore expensive to maintain and run. A few suggested that such a huge repository of UK knowledge and information should be funded by the Government and not by licence fee payers. Others felt that it should be available free of charge only to people who live in the UK, and by subscription to those elsewhere.

A small lobby was concerned about the restrictions placed on the BBC from the creating of website services that are in direct competition with commercial providers, believing this to be in contravention of all the rules of competition.

Funding

Should the licence fee be reviewed?

The subject of funding, like the question of the role of the BBC, was an area to which many responded fervently. Responses were polarised and often highly emotionally charged. Of those who addressed the specific question of whether funding methods should be reviewed in the next decade, a significant majority expressed support of the Green Paper's proposals.

However, among those who answered No to the proposed review of funding, fewer than 10% explicitly addressed the timing of the review. Most respondents appeared to be more interested in a different question: should the licence fee be retained or scrapped? There were almost twice as many who voted to retain the licence fee as those who voted for its demise. Opinions were expressed fiercely and firmly. On one side, the licence fee is 'THE most user-friendly way to ensure independence for the BBC.' On the other, it is 'undemocratic, unfair and violates my human rights to choose what I watch or listen to.'

I. Timing of a Review

The Government has determined that the BBC should be funded by the licence fee for the next 10 years. During this period they propose that there will be a review as to whether there may be a case for other funding methods to be introduced after 2016, such as subscription, in the light of the digital switchover. Licence fee concessions will also be examined, as will collection and enforcement.

- In total, 53% of respondents addressed the **Green Paper** proposals.
- Two-thirds of those who filled out the web questionnaire answered the question *Do you agree that a review of funding methods should take place before the end of the next Charter period, in 2016?* 71% said Yes, and 24% said No.
- One in four free-format responses considered the issue of funding. Most of these responses were general comments in support of or in opposition to the licence fee.
- A third wanted to retain the licence fee, while 17% wanted to see it scrapped.
- 17% proposed alternative methods of funding. More than a quarter wanted to see further concessions introduced.
- Those for and against advertising were approximately evenly divided.

1. A Review before 2016

There seemed to be at least a modest correlation between respondents who supported a review of funding methods before 2016 and those who opposed the licence fee. In general, many appeared to

assume that a review would automatically lead to change – perhaps quite significant change – in the BBC’s funding methods.

It is difficult to gain more clarity about why 71% of the web questionnaire responses supported a review of funding methods before 2016. Unlike those who opposed the review before 2016, those who chose Yes were not invited to qualify their answer. Of the free-format responses which addressed the issue of funding, many said that they would welcome a review before 2016 because they felt that the licence fee was poor value for money: almost five times as many responses said that the licence fee did not provide value for money as said it did. Although the majority of respondents supported the licence fee, many wanted to see more for their money. The reasons given were many and varied, and addressed a number of ongoing accusations against the BBC: the number of repeats on TV, a lowering of standards, poor quality programming, political bias, lack of governance, inefficiency, excessive executive salaries and a general squandering of funds.

Approximately one-fifth of responses who addressed the issue of funding called for the licence fee to be scrapped immediately. ‘It’s an anachronism... it has no place in modern Britain,’ said one respondent. Many of those calling for an immediate review also vented their frustration at the compulsory nature of a licence fee which is ‘totally unacceptable in the 21st century in a country claiming to be a democracy,’ in the words of one respondent. ‘Kill the licence fee now!’ wrote another. Others were more circumspect, suggesting that the BBC should be given a maximum of five years to propose an alternative.

A significant number of respondents argued against the fee on the grounds that they were funding services they did not necessarily access because either they were unable to or chose not to, such as the digital channels or the website. Others felt that they should not be obligated to pay for a service that they saw as ‘below par.’ There was also a contingent who thought that as the BBC is increasingly competing with commercial channels for ratings, it may as well go ‘the whole hog’ and compete for advertisers’ money.

A few thought that any review should be on-going to take account of the fast-changing world of media and technology.

There was very little variation across regions or age groups in the web responses – none of the regional averages varied by more than a few percentage points from the overall average, and the same was true of most of the age groups. However, there was one exception: 86% of web respondents over age 75 supported a review before 2016.

2. Retention of the Licence Fee to 2016 and Beyond

Those respondents who answered No to the Green Paper proposals did so for differing and strongly stated reasons. Approximately half of these responses were in favour of retaining the current system – funding through a licence fee, to 2016 and beyond. ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,’ was a common mantra. For a significant number of respondents, their strong support for the licence fee was secured by the belief that the current system is tried and tested. ‘[This method] has worked well for 60+ years and does not need changing,’ said one, while another said, ‘I have yet to hear a convincing argument for an alternative to the licence fee, and cannot conceive of one emerging before or after 2016.’

Others examined and eliminated alternative funding methods. Many expressed a dislike of adverts, as one of the great appeals of watching BBC programmes is the fact that there are no commercial

breaks that interrupt programmes. Others were concerned about the ‘dumbing-down’ that they felt would result from ‘an open market approach’, which some believed would reduce quality and choice. Several commented that while not perfect, the current method is the fairest. It was seen as a means of supporting minority interests: a number of responses said that the licence fee was the only way to ensure that all tastes are catered for.

The licence fee was also perceived by a number of respondents to be a reasonable method of securing political independence for the BBC. Some argued that as the licence fee was levied directly on the public, the BBC was not subject to the whims of the Government as it might be if it were funded through general taxation.

A minority of responses to this topic asserted that the licence fee provides value for money, especially when compared with the digital subscription channels. ‘I have always enjoyed enough BBC programmes to think it worthwhile for less than the cost of a daily newspaper,’ said one. A few suggested that the licence fee should be increased. In an organised campaign, a contingent of National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members lobbied for the income from the licence fee to increase over the next 10 years to allow the BBC to maintain its services, and they were unenthusiastic about the prospect of a review of alternative funding methods. Others felt that licence fee increases should be linked to inflation, cutting out the need for what they saw as ‘continuous and unnecessary’ reviews.

3. No Review until 2016

A significant number thought that a review in 2016 was appropriate, but that an earlier review was unnecessary. There was a sense that the current review period should be retained, and that the BBC’s funding should be secure for the next 10 years to allow for long-term planning and the realisation of the proposals in the Green Paper. Many expected the quality of programmes and services to suffer if there were any uncertainty about how the BBC will be funded.

A small minority expressed that, given the advent of the digital age, the BBC needs time to adjust and grow and invest in new technology. One respondent argued, ‘Forcing the BBC to find its income in other ways... before the market has settled down to multi-channel availability, would strangle the very innovation you seek to encourage.’

A minority of responses proposed that any review should be carried out by an independent panel, and not by the Government.

II. Alternative Funding Methods

1. Considering the Options

The Green Paper states that the licence fee will remain in place for the next 10 years, and no changes to the present system of funding are proposed therein. Nevertheless, respondents suggested a variety of alternatives to the current set fee. Some preferred to see the licence fee amended, rather than replaced. This, they felt, would be fairer to economically disadvantaged groups. Others wanted the licence fee to be augmented by, for example, funding through general taxation. A few thought that a mix of fee and subscription was fairer to those who use only a limited number of the BBC’s services. A very small but vocal group called for outright privatisation or wholesale commercialisation of the BBC.

2. Concessions and Lower Fees

A large number of responses expressed concern that a flat fee was unfair to pensioners, students, the disabled, the low-waged or those on income support, and that the fee should be means-tested. It was pointed out that a radio or television, often the sole means of company for many housebound people, can be purchased for a fraction of the licence fee. A number of people thought that the present age of 75 to qualify for exemption from payment should be lowered to 65 to coincide with the usual retirement age. A few respondents felt that single-person households should qualify for a discount, as they do with the council tax.

Some respondents said they would be happy to pay a reduced fee of, say, £50 for a smaller range of services. 'It is worth bearing in mind that the dilemma of funding only arises because the BBC has been allowed to grow into an organisation that needs £3 billion a year just to keep going. If the BBC withdrew from those activities where it adds no meaningful choice – such as pop music radio – it could reduce its funding burden,' said one respondent.

3. Funding through Taxation

Several respondents supported the funding of the BBC through general taxation. Of the alternatives to the licence fee that were proposed, this was the most popular. This system was seen as fairer than the current one for two reasons: it was felt that the public in general, and not just licence-holders, benefit from the BBC; and the proposed alternative would take income levels into account.

4. Funding through Subscription

A few wanted to see a mix of funding methods, including subscriptions and pay-per-view. Some suggested that core services such as TV and radio should remain publicly funded, and access via Internet or mobile phone should be subscription-based or pay-per-view.

5. Funding through Sponsorship and Advertising

A small number of people favoured either partial or full funding through advertising, with most of this group being more at ease with the former. Commercial sponsorship of certain programmes such as sports events or major concerts was mooted: many thought that if careful consideration was given to which programmes were suitable for this treatment, then editorial independence would still be assured. Others felt that as the BBC already ran internal trailers between programmes, it was a natural step to introduce revenue-generating external advertisements.

6. Funding through Privatisation

A very small group took a principled stand against the concept of publicly-funded broadcasting and called for a complete privatisation of the BBC – 'sell it off!' was an occasional refrain. A few suggested that the BBC should be run along the lines of US public service broadcasting, with donations from individuals and corporations. There were also a few suggestions for the sale and licensing of the BBC's archives to other broadcasters.

7. Collection and Enforcement

The high cost associated with collecting and enforcing the licence fee was an issue for several people. There were concerns over ‘menacing adverts’ concerning non-payment and the ‘offensive attitude’ of the TVLA. It was noted that many people prosecuted for not holding a licence are the least able to pay. Some suggested that inability – or unwillingness – to pay for a licence should be a civil debt rather than a criminal offence, as prison was a disproportionately harsh response to non-payment of the fine which is imposed when a licence holder does not pay the licence fee. A few complained that even though they did not own a radio or television set, and had informed the TVLA of their situation, they were still subject to ‘threats and intimidation’ by enforcement officials.

It was felt that, as the choice of what and how to view and listen increases, the licence fee will become harder to enforce and collect. There were calls to collect the fee in a cost-effective ways, such as via the Internet or direct debit.

Governance and Regulation

How should the BBC be governed?

Fewer than half of the responses addressed this question, but what those responses lacked in quantity they often made up in measured, considered quality. To address the issue of governance, like the question of organisation and infrastructure, respondents required a fair degree of understanding. Respondents were not asked to consider whether the new governance model – the ‘BBC Trust’ – should replace the current Board of Governors, but rather to offer opinions on its relationship to the Executive Board, its composition, and its role. There was no space provided for respondents to offer qualitative comments on this question in the web questionnaire, and it was not a popular topic among the ‘free-format’ respondents. However, the relatively small number of people who addressed this issue posited some considered solutions.

I. The Separation of Functions

The **Green Paper** proposes to replace the current Board of Governors with a new body, provisionally called the BBC Trust, which would keep a close eye on how the BBC was performing and take decisions on how the licence fee was divided between the different services. The day-to-day management of the BBC and the delivery of its services would be overseen by a separate Executive Board.

- In total, 50% of all responses addressed the issue of a governance model.
- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, 69% answered the question *Do you think the separation of functions between the proposed BBC Trust and the Executive Board is clear enough?* 52% said Yes, while 28% said No.
- Of the free-format responses, a very small number commented on whether the separation of functions between the Executive Board and the Trust was clear enough. Opinion was fairly evenly divided on whether or not the present system needed to be reformed.

1. Support for the Proposed Model

The question asked in the web questionnaire was very specific, but some respondents ignored the question in favour of a return to first principles; they wanted to examine whether the new model represented a change in the right direction. Most supporters of the new governance model proposed in the Green Paper primarily looked forward to getting away from a current model that they found unacceptable. They expressed their disillusion with the performance of the present Board of Governors: ‘[They] have failed miserably in their duty of care in looking after the public interest.’ For this group, the broadcasting of *Jerry Springer – The Opera* was top of the list of the shortcomings of the present Board. A number suggested that the proposed BBC Trust should be concerned more with upholding generally accepted standards than with innovative broadcasting.

However, there was concern that any reform of the present system be carefully thought out to make sure that the change was far-reaching and material rather than cosmetic. 'Call it Board of Governors or call it Trust, it will change nothing,' one said. The response from the NUJ was that the roles of the Board and Trust need 'defining in detail', and that the Executive Board must not be chaired by a non-executive figure, but rather by the Director General. One respondent wanted to see a wholly non-executive Trust and 'a chairman [who is] not the chairman of the BBC but someone charged with representing the interests of the licence fee payer.'

A number of respondents felt that the proposed five-year term for Trust members was too long, and that there should be no reappointments. 'New people with new ideas and views should be appointed at least every two years,' said one. Another suggested that at least two Trustees should be recommended by the public, as with the honours system, and should serve on a rotational basis. A few felt that Trust members should not be paid for their work. The suggested number of members ranged from six to 20, although most settled for between 12 and 16.

2. Support for the Present System

A small number of respondents commented that a separate Trust was 'not the best solution' for the BBC, preferring instead to keep the present Board of Governors. 'The existing structure has served the nation well. I do not consider that the case for tampering with it has been made,' one commented. Others wanted the Board to be retained, but suggested particular changes. For example, one proposed that the number of governors be increased, with a greater differentiation between their responsibilities and those of the day-to-day managers, while another suggested a smaller Board that strictly reflects the population proportions of the four countries that comprise the UK. A number wanted the Board to be 'more democratic and accountable': one respondent suggested that accountability would be improved if governors' terms were restricted to three years and if governors were subject to performance appraisals.

A few commented that a two-tier system was likely to usher in more bureaucracy, with its attendant costs. 'The Trust will make the BBC an even bigger quango than it already is,' said one respondent. Another felt that the Trust's remit to decide how the licence fee be divided between different services would be 'a restriction on the proper decision-making powers of those who run the Corporation.'

Some respondents were concerned that a 'reform of the system so that there can be more careful checking of whether the BBC is fulfilling its public purposes' might stifle creativity and discourage risk-taking. One respondent predicted that a separate Trust 'will curb the BBC rather than encourage it... Under these terms, *Jerry Springer – The Opera* may not have been broadcast, which would be a shame – alone in the world, perhaps, the BBC could, would and should broadcast *JSTO*, and that's something we should be proud of.'

II. Membership of the Proposed Trust

The **Green Paper** proposes that the members of the BBC Trust reflect the interests of a wide range of different UK communities, and have a range of experience in broadcasting and media industries; the financial, legal and corporate aspects of overseeing a large business that spends significant sums of public money; and organising public opinion research and consultation.

- In total, 50% of all respondents addressed the issue of membership of the proposed Trust.
- Of those who filled in the web questionnaire, 65% considered the question '*Do you agree that these are the correct skills and expertise needed by the members of the Trust?*' 63% said Yes and 25%, No.
- Around one-third responded to the question *Are there any communities or interest groups you feel should be represented on the BBC Trust?*
- Of the free-format responses, around 10% added their opinions about who should make up the Trust and what skills and expertise members should have.

1. A Wide Range of Skills and Experience

On the question of communities or interest groups that should be represented on the Trust, and the skills and experience they should bring to the table, there were almost as many different opinions as there were responses. However, there were important areas of agreement.

Several respondents expressed concern that the range of experience required of Trustees was too narrow. Although a number agreed that Trust members need to have a wealth of practical knowledge and working experience of the broadcasting industry and the public sector, it was felt that other skills and experience should not be neglected. As one respondent said, 'The definition would appear to limit the Trustees to broadcasting professionals, public sector appointees and pollsters. There is surely a need for the appointment of Trustees with experience in running large businesses not connected with the media/public sector.'

Some respondents felt that 'organising public opinion research' was not a good criterion. 'This is an insufficiently unique skill for an individual to be represented on the Trust,' said one. A few said that 'sensitivity' to public opinion was more important.

One respondent suggested human resources experience would be invaluable: 'Successful organisations are underpinned by the people who make them up and this is often overlooked.' Another requested people who are 'community-minded rather than business-minded.' Others pleaded for 'cultural understanding', 'independence of mind', 'impartiality' and 'commitment to the ideals of public service broadcasting'.

A significant number thought that Trust members need have no special skills at all. Some respondents merely wanted Trustees who had time to watch TV and listen to the radio; one journalist simply asked for 'evidence of enthusiasm for TV programming.' However, the quality that respondents wanted to see added to the list more than any other was 'good common sense'.

2. A Representative Trust

A broad consensus of opinion was that appointments should not be ‘jobs for the boys.’ Hence the need, said one respondent, for ‘openness about those being appointed, and those doing the appointing.’ Another thought that new Trust members should have been outside the BBC, or free from its influence, for at least five years.

A large number of respondents felt that politicians – past and present – should not be represented. Many argued that the Trust members ought to be elected by the licence fee-paying public, rather than appointed by the Government or the Queen. A few respondents suggested a ballot form should be sent along with the licence fee renewal letter.

It was suggested that Trust membership should be more broadly and proportionately representative of the public than has been set out in the Green Paper. Some respondents wanted to see approximately equal numbers of men and women. Others called for representation of all the UK’s ethnic communities, in proportion to their percentage of the population. A large number called for Christians to be members; others preferred ‘all religions or none.’ Some wanted to see ‘very old and very young’ members. Also mentioned were single parents, teenagers and students.

Among the professions suggested were: scientists, musicians, doctors, artists, writers, farmers, sportspeople, religious figures, trade unionists, gardeners, teachers, entrepreneurs, charity workers, and representatives from NGOs such as National Heritage. Others suggested that the Queen and the Prime Minister should be members.

A handful of suggestions were more unusual – people with ‘below-average mortgages’, those on benefits, shoppers, Americans and ‘right-of-centre journalists, to counter the BBC’s left-wing bias’. One respondent appeared to be putting himself forward for selection: ‘No one can beat me as regards my knowledge of Hindu scriptures. A person of my status could represent my community on your panel to invigilate and guide you regularly for Hindus.’

A couple of respondents mentioned and appreciated the role of the Regional Advisory Councils, which are made up of BBC viewers and listeners and should be ‘protected and retained’. Yet above all, most respondents wanted to see ‘ordinary, honest people’ representing their interests on the Trust.

III. Public Interest Duties for the BBC Trust

The **Green Paper** proposes that the BBC Trust must ensure that the BBC: fulfils its public purposes; sets standards for other broadcasters; is editorially independent of Government or any commercial company; doesn’t unfairly damage commercial media businesses; is efficient and provides value for money to licence fee payers; and communicates with licence fee payers and takes account of their opinions.

- In total, 50% of responses addressed the issue of public interest duties for the Trust.
- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, two-thirds answered the question ‘Do you think this list is helpful in defining what the BBC Trust should do?’ 86% said Yes, and 10% said No.
- Half of the web questionnaire respondents answered the question ‘Is anything missing?’ and half again said Yes.
- A quarter of all responses felt that the list was inadequate or incomplete.

1. A Need for Re-Prioritisation

A very large majority agreed with the list of the BBC Trust's duties in principle, and the percent in agreement was very constant across those respondents who gave their age ranges and regions. However, many felt that the Trust will have some way to go to realise these aims. A third of all people who considered the above list felt that the duty to ensure that the BBC is efficient and provides value for money to licence fee payers, should be higher on the list. The organisation was variously considered to be 'large and bureaucratic', 'top-heavy' and 'bloated'.

There were repeated criticisms of the level of remuneration for senior management. 'Can you make a documentary on how much BBC executives make and what they do?' requested one respondent. Also irksome to many respondents were the 'inflated salaries' paid to celebrity presenters; the number of reporters on international assignments; travel expenses; prize money; and commissioned art. For the latter, Tracey Emin's *Roman Standard* statue of the Liver Bird, which cost £60,000, was cited as a case in point. A small but vocal group were incensed at the payment of £4,500 to convicted burglar Brendan Fearon for his appearance in a documentary about Tony Martin.

A significant number of people focused their attention on the duty to ensure that the BBC is editorially independent of Government or any commercial company. This group felt strongly that the BBC's reputation around the world depends on its remaining free of political bias. 'Board, Trust, sub-committee for croquet lawns – no matter what you call the bunch at the top of the BBC, its job is to keep the corporation clear of Government interference and commercial dependence,' said one respondent. Again, and perhaps because the consultation coincided with the general election, many respondents accused the BBC of favouring the Labour Party over others in both the quantity and quality of its election coverage.

Two more of the public duties listed were felt by some to be beyond the remit of the BBC. These respondents questioned whether the BBC should set standards for other broadcasters: 'such condescending nannying is not what should occupy the BBC's time.' A large number also disagreed that the BBC should not unfairly damage commercial media business. It was felt that commercial TV channels are capable of standing on their own two feet. 'I don't think the BBC should be unduly concerned about the profits of private companies,' commented one respondent.

2. Suggestions for Additional Public Interest Duties

Respondents added a number of public interest duties that they felt should be included on the list:

- Maintains high standards of decency without resorting to censorship
- Adheres to the 'watershed' rule to protect children
- Represents the UK with care in its overseas transmissions
- Represents fairly the interests of minority groups
- Encourages greater cultural inclusiveness and political engagement

- Acts as a responsible employer
- Reports the news with accuracy and impartiality
- Is editorially independent of any special-interest pressure group such as religious organisations or charities
- Delivers on its promises
- Is able to justify its spending decisions against its objective

Such suggestions frequently correlated with individual respondents' views on other topics. For example, those who complained that the BBC's moral standards were in decline often wanted to see moral and ethical guardianship incorporated into the BBC Trust's formal duties; those who celebrated the BBC's high standards of news reporting and independence were likely to ask for that quality to be enshrined as a public interest duty.

Accountability

How should the public 'own' the BBC?

The BBC exists because of licence fee payers. This fundamental fact was much on the minds of both those who supported that fact and those who deplored it, but the two sides came together over the issue of accountability. Respondents across the spectrum responded warmly to the Green Paper's suggestions on how to make the BBC more accountable to licence fee payers in particular, and to the public in general. More research, more publicly available information on the performance of the BBC, more open operation of the BBC's governing body – all these suggestions attracted support from a significant majority of those who addressed the issue of accountability.

I. A Call for Greater Public Accountability

According to the **Green Paper**, the BBC Trust should have a clear system in place to judge whether people's expectations for each BBC service have been met and should also have a strong system for handling complaints. The Government has put forward a list of ways in which the public could influence the BBC, and a list of ways to increase the accountability of the BBC to licence fee payers.

- In total, 45% of respondents addressed the issue of accountability.
- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, 61% considered a number of suggested ideas to increase public ownership and accountability, transparency and accountability.
- Of the free-format responses, 19% dealt with the issue of accountability.

Respondents were asked to select any of the ideas that they would like to see introduced to increase public ownership and influence over the BBC:

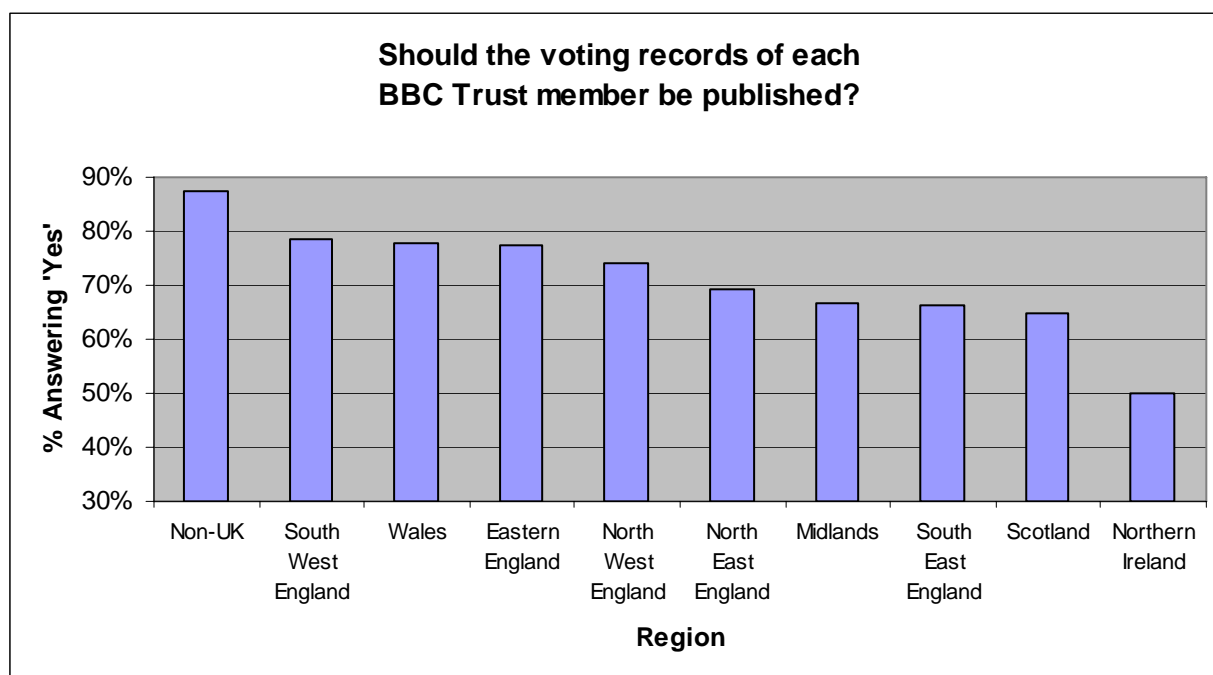
Idea	% total responses	% answered Yes	% answered No
<i>There should be a rolling programme of quantitative and qualitative research designed to track audience opinions about the BBC's performance, and to measure the impact of its programming</i>	59%	87%	13%
<i>Such research should be accompanied by open consultation of viewers and listeners through a number of different forums, including reconstituted Regional Councils, new e-forums, open meetings or an AGM</i>	58%	75%	25%
<i>When key decisions have to be taken by the BBC Trust, they should be informed by deliberative research among representative groups of viewers and listeners</i>	59%	83%	17%

Respondents were also asked to select any ideas that they would like to see introduced to increase transparency and accountability in behaviour and decision-making:

Idea	% total responses	% answered Yes	% answered No
<i>For the BBC Trust to meet in public</i>	61%	75%	25%
<i>To webcast its meetings and any open meetings or AGMs that it holds</i>	60%	76%	24%
<i>To publish the minutes of every meeting and the results of every piece of research</i>	61%	81%	19%
<i>To publish the voting records of each Trust member</i>	60%	70%	30%
<i>Trust members to be put through an external, independent appraisal process</i>	59%	73%	27%

A significant majority of respondents wanted to see greater public ownership and influence over the BBC as well as increased transparency and accountability in the BBC's behaviour and decision-making. As one respondent put it: 'At least politicians are accountable to parliament and their constituents – the BBC answers to nobody.' There was a corresponding desire to see a reduction in Government influence and authority.

Where there was variation in the web responses across regions – as there was to the question of whether publishing the voting records of each BBC Trust member would promote transparency and accountability – it is not possible to derive clear patterns or to determine why, for example, respondents from South East England and respondents from Wales should be equally enthusiastic about seeing the voting records of BBC Trust members. One constant was that responses from Northern Ireland toward the five suggested options for increasing the transparency of the BBC Trust tended to be the least positive among the regions.



1. The Public as Shareholders

It was strongly felt among advocates of increased transparency and accountability that the public, as licence fee payers, should be considered shareholders and have all the rights that they would have if they were shareholders of a private company. The concept of an AGM, at which questions could be posed to the Trust or the Executive Board, was a popular one. A few people also requested the publication of the BBC’s annual report and accounts; some did not seem aware that this is already available on the BBC’s website.

There was a high level of support for the ideas suggested in the Green Paper as to how an ongoing dialogue could be established between the BBC and the public. Respondents particularly welcomed the suggestion of regular opinion polls and the thorough documentation and publication of any public consultation. A number of people recommended broadcasting the meetings of the Trust on TV and radio as well as or instead of via the Internet, so that they would reach a majority of licence fee payers.

2. Representation in the Community

The establishment of representative bodies was a popular idea: many people felt that this would allow the views of special-interest groups such as the elderly and the disabled to be heard more effectively. Any willingness on the part of the BBC to enter communities, schools and workplaces

to engage the public in the feedback process was welcomed. One respondent singled out World Service and Global News director Richard Sambrook's speech at a secondary school as demonstrating 'a care and concern for the public which is inspiring'.

3. Use of the Internet

A minority of respondents singled out the Internet as an ideal medium through which to drive public accountability, with suggestions of open websites where listeners and viewers can make their opinions known. There is already a section on *www.bbc.co.uk* where complaints to the BBC's Editorial Complaints Unit are published and responded to, but some respondents did not seem to be aware that this exists.

As a counterbalance, some respondents expressed concern about the promotion of the Internet as a feedback mechanism. They felt that this would put certain groups that tend to have less access to the Internet, such as the elderly, the disabled and the low-waged or unemployed, at a disadvantage.

II. Limitations to Public Accountability

While the significant majority welcomed all sorts of proposals toward public accountability, a minority expressed a contrary view, arguing that there was a limit to the extent to which the BBC could – and should – be accountable to the public.

A small number of respondents felt that the BBC should not have to 'pander to every whim of public opinion' and that the Trust should be entitled to make strong decisions contrary to public opinion where they feel it is justified. 'There is a point beyond which the Trust members would be unable to function... A sensible balance of transparency needs to be struck,' said one respondent. Some people felt as a matter of principle that, while commercial stations may have to cater to the whims of their viewers, it is not the point of public service broadcasting that licence fee payers get to have a say in the running of the organisation they fund.

1. The Threat of Special-interest Groups

For others, of particular concern was the risk that the process would be subject to hijacking by well-organised pressure groups: if the Trust held regular meetings in public, or webcast proceedings, they could then be subject to unfair populist or tabloid attack.

A number of people pointed out that no one is compelled to watch a programme they may dislike, and some degree of offence is inevitable if programming covers a range of strong views. *Jerry Springer – The Opera* again became the test case. The BBC received 55,000 letters of protest before the programme was broadcast. A supporter wrote to say: 'The *Springer Opera* on BBC2 earlier this year was watched by many more people than usually watch the channel at that time on Saturday night, and more than normally watch an opera. The BBC had a large number of complaints, but they still showed the programme. This was an excellent choice and any Trust would need to follow that sort of pattern.'

2. Increased Bureaucracy

Several felt that the effort to increase public influence over the BBC would be complex, long-winded and expensive. 'It's a lovely idea, but bureaucracy costs money and I'd rather see as much

go on programming as possible.’ One respondent saw ‘a huge wage bill for a lot of ineffective talking.’

A number of people felt that the ideas suggested in the Green Paper were impractical, particularly the publication of the minutes of every single meeting and the results of every single piece of research. In addition, some disapproved of the publishing of the voting records of Trust members, calling it a breach of privacy.

III. Complaints Handling

According to the **Green Paper**, the BBC is reforming its complaints handling process. The aim is to give complainants fair and equal access to a transparent process. The BBC Trust would be responsible for final decisions in relation to any complaint. (Ofcom will still have the final decision on complaints about harm and offence, privacy and fair treatment.)

- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, 63% answered the question ‘Do you agree with this approach?’ 74% answered Yes, and 20% said No
- Approximately 10% of all free-format responses dealt with complaints handling.

While many people welcomed a reform of the complaints-handling process in principle, there was cynicism from a vocal minority about how this would work in practice. Several cited their own negative personal experiences of having complained, they felt, to no avail.

a. *The BBC should not police itself*

Among those who had qualms about the complaint handling process, a relatively large number of respondents felt that the BBC would be both judge and jury if the Trust were to handle complaints, regarding the Trust as insufficiently separate from the executive to be a reliable complaints handler. It was unclear whether these respondents regard the present system as better or worse than the proposed changes. However, several proposed that an independent body be set up as the final arbiter of any complaint; one respondent suggested that a panel of retired judges would be the ideal ‘sufficiently impartial’ solution.

At the opposite extreme from those who feared a megalithic, self-policing BBC, a few cynics doubted that the Trust would have any real authority at all in the complaints process, pointing out that ‘responsibility for final decisions’ was not the same as having the power to take action.

b. *The BBC should let Ofcom deal with all complaints*

Several respondents suggested that Ofcom should be given total responsibility for all complaints. Whether people were aware of the comprehensive nature of Ofcom’s role as a regulator of the broadcasting industry as a whole, was unclear; still, it appears that many viewed the body as a more suitable arbiter of complaints than the BBC Trust.

However, a smaller number of people – around half as many – pointed out that Ofcom, made up of industry professionals, might have a vested interest in making decisions that would limit the competitiveness of the BBC and would not therefore be suited to regulating a publicly-owned organisation. One respondent thought that Ofcom ‘seems to be less accountable than the Trust.’

c. *Suggestions for an easier and fairer process*

The handling of complaints could be made simpler, some said. There were suggestions that the BBC should be made to correct basic errors before any formal complaints and libel actions could occur. One respondent mentioned the Corrections and Clarifications column in the *Guardian* as a useful example. There was no indication of any awareness among respondents that letters of complaint and the BBC's replies are published on the BBC's website. Just as the Internet had its devotees and detractors on the topic of accountability, some suggested it was an easy, quick and cheap way of handling complaints, while others felt that 'fair and equal access' would be denied to those groups among whom availability and usage of the Internet is less frequent.

It was noted that the BBC's Duty Office was only contactable on an 'expensive' 0870 number which discouraged many potential callers from using it. The introduction of a local-rate number was suggested. Many respondents also wanted to see a clear timescale for resolution of complaints in place of what is perceived to be a long, drawn-out process.

The consideration of complaints only after a programme has been broadcast was a source of frustration for many. (Again, the large number of complaints about the broadcasting of *Jerry Springer – The Opera* was cited here.) Some proposed the issuing of a public apology or a similar form of redress for multiple complaints on issues such as *JSTO* and background noise.

d. *Personal stories*

Many of the responses about complaints handling were from people wanting to relate their own, often bitter experiences of the process. Referring to the Green Paper proposals, one wrote: 'Actually I don't care. I just want someone to respond and answer my complaint, or request for information when I make it.' This level of irritation was common among a small but vocal group of respondents who felt that their concerns, comments and feedback were often ignored. They said that letters and emails went unanswered or received only a standard reply. Phone calls, when answered, are 'dealt with dismissively'. Questions are 'sidestepped' and apologies are not issued. One person alleged that previous complaints have resulted in threats from the BBC.

On the other side, there was some positive feedback – and a challenge – from one respondent: 'We would like to be able to communicate with BBC TV in the way we now can with the excellent BBC Radio 4... I look forward to your comments.'

BBC Organisation & Infrastructure

Can competition ensure the best programming for the BBC?

A majority of respondents chose not to comment on either the broad question of organisation and infrastructure or the narrower question of competitive commissioning. Most people did not seem interested in whether the programmes they watch or listen to are made in-house or by an independent company, nor were they responsive to how the BBC chose to re-organise itself internally. Perhaps their attitude could be summed up in the words of one respondent: 'The latest decision to move large numbers of staff to different locations around the country is irrelevant to the general public. The public are more concerned with the quality of programmes than where they originated from.'

Of those who did address this issue, nearly two-thirds agreed with the idea of more competition. Again, because web questionnaire respondents were not asked to qualify a Yes answer, it is difficult to ascertain why they agreed – although, in the words of a free-format respondent, 'Who in their right minds is going to disagree with the idea of competition?' More than a quarter of respondents did disagree, however, and those who were unhappy with the idea of more competition – and indeed competition *per se* – had concerns that were articulate and detailed.

I. Attitudes to Competition

Of the range of programmes on its TV and radio stations, some are made by the BBC itself and some are made by other producers. According to the **Green Paper**, if the BBC is to broadcast the best programmes, it needs to operate a competitive commissioning system that puts the best ideas on screen, whether they are from BBC producers or independent companies. In television, the BBC proposes to make the commissioning process more competitive by establishing a 'window of creative competition' between BBC in-house production and external producers for 25% of hours that are commissioned, in addition to the existing 25% of commissions that are reserved for independent producers. In radio, the BBC is proposing to extend its existing voluntary 10% quota to cover sport, radio in the nations and the new digital stations.

- In total, 41% of responses considered these proposals.
- Of those who filled in the web questionnaire, 63% answered the question: '*Do you agree with the idea of more competition?*' 64% said Yes and 28% said No. It is worth noting that specific quotas were not mentioned in the questionnaire, although some respondents had clearly read the more detailed proposal set out in the Green Paper.
- Of the free-format responses, 10% commented on these issues, with the number in favour of more competition in single figures. The vast majority of free-format responses on the topic came from NUJ members, who were strongly against the idea of more competition.

1. Competition is a Betrayal of the BBC

Of those who responded to this topic, many did so simply to vent their frustration at what they saw as the Government's abrogation of its responsibilities to public sector bodies, including the BBC: 'Here we go again – competition will solve all our problems!' Several people drew a link between increased competition at the BBC and what they saw as increased competition in a range of areas covered by Government policy. 'The deplorable state of school dinners and hospital cleanliness proved that competition is no guarantee of good quality', one respondent said. The consensus among these respondents was that the BBC is not a commercial organisation and should not be expected to behave like one. 'It is, or should be, a centre for excellence, able to hold its own, even excel, but not compete. To "win" demands a single-minded ruthlessness not compatible with a public body,' commented one respondent.

2. Competition is the Only Way

A small number took the opposite view: that the BBC should be subject to the full force of the free market. These tended to be the same people who believed that the BBC should be competing on a level playing field with other broadcasters, funded by advertising rather than by any Government or public support. One respondent put it bluntly: 'I do not give a monkeys [*sic*] about all this stuff. Just stop the licence fee.'

II. Balancing In-house and Independent Production

The majority of respondents took the middle ground on the question of whether programme production should be internal or external to the BBC. Most felt that the current level of competition was 'about right' and approached the idea of more outsourcing with trepidation. Even those who agreed with the general idea of more competition often added a qualification. 'The idea is fine in principle... if fairly implemented,' said one; another said it was fine 'as long as standards do not drop.' Most of these respondents opted for a mix of in-house and independent productions, with the scales tipping in favour of the former.

1. Quality and Variety of Programmes

At least half of all responses which expressed doubt over the advisability of increased competition feared that competition would damage quality. The assumption was that the purpose of competition is to drive down cost rather than to drive up quality. Competition would encourage a situation where 'cheapest wins', leading to, as one respondent put it, 'trivialisation, superficiality and mediocrity.' Independent producers would not feel obliged to adhere to the same high standards as the BBC, it was argued. Others felt that while the BBC has an established pool of expertise, independent companies do not always 'employ people of the highest standard for economic reasons'.

A small number were concerned that more competition would mean less creativity and an unwillingness to take risks. Many took the view that the BBC spends money where others may not dare. The general feeling was that independent producers are motivated primarily by a desire to make money, and this limits the range of programmes they produce. The plays of Dennis Potter were cited as an example of programmes that have great social or cultural importance but little box-office clout.

2. The True Cost of Outsourcing

The competitive process could use up precious resources that would otherwise be devoted to programme-making, a number of respondents feared. There was a common belief that outsourcing, far from bringing in outside talent at a reasonable price, is actually more expensive and less financially accountable. The BBC was charged with having ‘too many layers of unnecessary bureaucracy,’ which would only be multiplied by having more managers to deal with the outsourcing. A number of respondents disapproved of public money being spent by internal BBC units bidding for BBC contracts and on other BBC staff evaluating those bids.

3. Nurturing Talent Within

A significant number thought that the focus should be on the BBC producing its own programmes, setting an example and providing opportunities to talented individuals within its own structure. Several mentioned the desirability of maintaining a ‘critical mass’ of in-house productions to reduce any risk of eroding the skills base inside the BBC. To these respondents it seemed both commonsense and cost-effective for the BBC to utilise fully the expertise they are already paying for. There may be specialist areas in which it is necessary to go out of house, but these, it was felt, should be the exception rather than the rule. One respondent reasoned that ‘if you can argue that outside agencies are superior, then [the BBC] is employing the wrong people.’

A few respondents felt that too much competition might lead to the buying-in of more foreign programmes at the cost of ‘our home-grown productions’. One respondent was particularly concerned about the effect on the UK music business, of which the BBC has long been a champion: ‘The BBC has an obligation to support British-originated music and culture. The independent music sector risks dying completely as the media are swamped by international/commercial, rather than local/specialist, music.’

4. Access for All?

There were concerns about how fair and transparent the commissioning process would be. One respondent believed there are ‘legions of gatekeepers who control what gets through. Scripts, CD submissions, play lists etc, are in the hands of an elite who deal with a small group with whom they feel comfortable.’ Another put it more colourfully: ‘Cosy relations will be established between commissioning editors and these private producers and a feather-bedded gravy train created.’

A few respondents felt that the ‘system’ favours too many ex-BBC employees or BBC-trained producers and presenters who have formed their own production companies. Only one lone voice expressed the view that increased competition would give smaller producers a chance to ‘showcase their work.’

Others felt that if competition is to exist then it should in reality be a ‘two-way street’ and BBC departments should be allowed to compete in the commercial sector as well.

5. The Question of Quotas

On both sides of the fence, the setting of targets for independent radio and TV productions was unpopular with a majority, including many who were in favour of more competition. For this group, the whole idea of quotas was contrary to the principle that programmes should be selected

on merit. Respondents were concerned that a situation might arise where the BBC is obligated to outsource a certain percentage of its programmes, and that by setting quotas, the BBC is imposing a straitjacket on itself.

The proposals which would allow independent TV companies to bid for more commissions from the BBC drew particular ire from a vociferous group of journalists. In an organised campaign, the NUJ decried the 'background of savage job cuts announced by the BBC' against which this consultation was taking place. Nearly 100 members wrote that they were opposed to the whole idea of a 'window of creative competition.' This, they believed, would threaten the BBC's future creative production base, leading to job losses and cuts in production facilities. It would also risk losing in-house training programmes that are intrinsic to BBC production but absent from most independents.

Their views were supported by a number of perhaps less partial respondents, including one who said, 'I am an independent producer who could benefit from the BBC allowing more programmes to be made by people such as me. However, to increase the present 25% quota must result in the further "casualisation" of BBC programme-makers, which is bad for their morale and could reduce the effectiveness of the Corporation as a whole.'

III. Internal Organisation

While some respondents felt that the BBC might benefit from greater regional devolution and a reduction in size, there were equally strong counterarguments in favour of keeping production centralised and maintaining a well-trained and highly skilled workforce.

1. Location of Production Facilities

A small number of respondents welcomed the proposal that some production should move outside the capital and be dispersed around the U.K. 'It is the BBC, not the LBC,' proclaimed one respondent, echoing the views of those who think that the BBC is too London-centric.

However, many felt that as support functions such as make-up, wardrobe, engineering and training have been dispersed, the quality of output – for which the BBC 'used to have an enviable reputation' – has declined. One respondent wanted to see 'a strong BBC production hub consisting of creative, job-secure staff with a remit to experiment'. There was a concern that decentralisation could do an enormous amount of damage which will outweigh any short-term financial gain.

A small number of respondents focused specifically on R&D, expressing concern that this function's work should continue to be as innovative and 'programme-driven' as in the past. They felt that relocating the BBC's research and development function from the south-east of England would reduce accessibility to and for research staff. One respondent thought that the decision to include R&D with support services and to apply a blanket 47% cut in staff together with a move to Manchester will 'expose the BBC to a haemorrhage of vital knowledge. R&D's symbiotic relationship with production is vital in giving the BBC a strategic lead. High Definition, digital switchover, wireless production, 3D are all areas where R&D has a vital role in the future, not just for the BBC but the industry as a whole.' Another expressed concern that the proposed changes to the BBC's R&D activities will mark the end of pioneering developments such as the Radio Data System, which aims to preserve the quality of FM broadcasting.

2. Staffing Levels

A few thought that increased competition would reduce what they perceived to be overstaffing at a wasteful organisation, and would 'focus the minds of the staff on providing an alternative to commercial channels'. But others were dismayed at reports of large-scale redundancies. 'The news that you are to axe so many jobs fills me with alarm, especially in the areas of news, drama and sport. Three things you do so well,' said one respondent, while another added: 'The move to drastically reduce staff numbers at the BBC should be viewed with suspicion; it may seriously weaken the body corporate'.

To some, the founding ideals of the BBC as a public service broadcaster are gradually being chipped away. There was a sense that, in a very British way, it is seen as being too successful and mechanisms for hampering it are being built in. The phrase 'undermine the BBC' cropped up more than a few times. A few respondents thought they detected a hidden agenda of cost-cutting that would eventually lead to privatisation by the back door.

3. The BBC's Training Programme

The BBC's commitment to and high standard of training drew praise from a number of respondents – one of the few areas in which comments were almost uniformly positive. 'The BBC should be a training ground, and the benchmark, for programme makers.' Some lamented that training is a thing of the past in the industry at large, and there is nowhere other than the BBC where people can 'learn their craft'. However, a few expressed concern that BBC staff, trained at licence fee payers' expense, would simply move elsewhere should opportunities to excel within the organisation fail to present themselves.

The BBC was also lauded for using the licence fee to support the UK broadcasting industry more widely. 'I welcome the contribution the BBC makes to the development of training across the industry, in particular through Skillset, the sector skills council for the audiovisual industries. The training centre at Wood Norton, near Evesham, should be turned into a Broadcast Training Trust involving all of the UK's broadcasters plus other organisations with a stake in the broadcast industry,' wrote one respondent.

Scope of Publicly Funded Services

How will the BBC make changes to its services?

I. Attitudes to the Process of Change

The BBC's current range of services has broad support and the Government does not propose to shut down or privatise any of them. However, the system should be flexible enough for the BBC to add or remove services in response to changing market conditions or technologies. Currently the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport judges and approves any changes.

The **Green Paper** proposes that the Trust should be responsible for judging new services, or a change to an existing one, by: testing and taking account of potential market impact; testing and listening to public opinion about the change; and considering the proposal in public.

The Trust would then make a public recommendation to the Government, which could veto the decision only if the process of assessment was judged to be flawed in some way.

- In total, 41% of respondents addressed the subject of the scope of publicly funded services.
- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, 62% answered the question *Do you agree that the BBC should be able to propose changes to its range of services over the course of the next ten years?* 78% said Yes, while 17% said No.
- Of the free-format responses, only 10% addressed this issue.
- Some 75% of the free-format responses discussed the proposed process for making changes, while 25% related to the BBC's range of services.
- A small minority of total respondents discussed the BBC's range of services. Within this small group, however, 90% thought that the range of services was too large.

The substantial majority of those who filled out the web questionnaire agreed with the Green Paper proposals on how the BBC should manage changes to its services over time. Again, the questionnaire did not provide space for explanatory comments to accompany the Yes votes, so it is hard to extrapolate reasons for the overall positive response to this issue. Perhaps these respondents form part of the 'silent majority' who have confidence in the Government and the Trust's abilities to run the BBC in the way they see fit, as one respondent suggested; or it may be that this is an area that most respondents do not feel qualified to address in a more considered manner.

However, it is clear from an analysis of the No responses, in addition to a multitude of free-format responses, that a significant number of people were dissatisfied with key issues raised in this and other Green Paper proposals. These include Government involvement in the running of the BBC, the powers of the Trust, the consideration of market impact and deference to public opinion. Many of these respondents railed against what they perceived to be ‘an invitation to outside interference’ throughout the consultation process. ‘Why does anyone other than those running the business have to agree a change?!!’ exclaimed one, while others simply wrote: ‘See previous comments.’

1. The Role of the Government

A small number supported the greater involvement of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in the approval process. The view was that any final changes involving a change to the BBC’s services should be taken by someone accountable to the public. For those who regard the licence fee as a tax – fair or not – a comparison was made with the process for determining how other taxes are spent. ‘It is for the Government to decide what services the BBC should provide and for the Trust to decide how to provide them,’ said one respondent.

However, almost twice as many responses objected to any Government involvement in the process. Although the Green Paper proposal suggests that the Secretary of State will take a lesser role in the process than at present, some respondents were not convinced. ‘[The proposal’s] only flaw is having the Government be able to reject any decision – they’ll find a way,’ said one. Most people felt that if the BBC is editorially independent of Government, then it should also be organisationally independent.

A few suggested that where the BBC is concerned, the Secretary of State should have the power of veto only over the question of the licence fee.

2. The Role of the Trust

A small number of people commented on the role of the Trust in changing services, with the majority view being that the Trust should be entirely responsible for judging new services and changing existing ones, without any input from the Government or the public. However, a number felt that the Trust would not be sufficiently independent, either from the Government or the BBC Executive Board, to be able to make a valid decision.

There was a call for a ‘genuinely independent authority’ to judge and approve any changes, and a few nominated Ofcom for the role. Again, it was unclear whether these respondents were aware of Ofcom’s current regulatory role in the broadcasting industry as a whole.

3. The Role of the Public

A relatively small number felt strongly that licence fee payers should be more broadly consulted about changes to services. A few commented that public opinion should take precedence over the testing of market impact. Some even suggested particular mechanisms for canvassing public opinion, such as issuing of a questionnaire with the licence fee renewal notice, or posting an announcement on the Internet about the proposed change with an invitation for feedback.

Even those who believed in principle that there should be ‘no implementation without consultation’ were dubious about how effective the process would be. There was a sense that testing public

opinion would be a long and costly process and would put the BBC at a disadvantage compared to its competitors, who are not required to consult viewers and listeners when changes are made. And many were sceptical about the attention paid to public opinion by the BBC: '[They] only hear what they want to,' said one respondent.

Others disagreed that the public has any part to play in any major decision-making at the BBC. A number were concerned about the potential impact on minority interests – with a rough balance between those who feared that special interest groups would unduly sway any consultation process, and those who claimed that public consultation would jeopardise minority interests in the long run.

However, most of those who opposed any public consultation did so because they had little faith in the tastes of their fellow licence fee payers. Many were concerned that services like BBC Radio 3, which has a small but devoted following among classical music fans, would be at the mercy of 'the lowest common denominator'. One viewer put it thus: 'If listening to public opinion means 12 episodes a week of *EastEnders*, then no thank you!'

4. The Role of the Market

A very small lobby perturbed by the 'anti-competitive' nature of the BBC charged that it uses 'millions of pounds' of public funding to try to damage commercial organisations. One respondent went so far as to say that the BBC should not be allowed to bid for films or sports events which others wish to broadcast: 'Public money should not be used to force up the price to other companies unnecessarily.'

Most respondents, though, thought that the BBC should not concern itself with the impact of any changes on the market. This group took the view that, rather than having an unfair advantage, the BBC has been constrained by self-interested complaints from commercial rivals. There was a sense that the BBC should aim for excellence and that commercial competition should strive to match it. 'Let the BBC take the initiative and if the industry suffers, let it respond by doing better. If it can't hack it, tough,' said one respondent.

II. Attitudes to the Range of Services

1. Make the Range More Compact

The consultation did not specifically solicit views on the current range of services and a relatively small number of respondents commented on the BBC's range of services, either to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Of those who did comment, nine out of 10 people thought that the range was too extensive. It was felt by these respondents that, as a result of the number of services, resources were spread too thinly and quality suffered. While some wanted to see a reduction in services so that more money could be spent on improving programme quality and quantity, others preferred a concomitant reduction in the licence fee.

There was disagreement on which services should be obligatory and which are unnecessary. Few wanted to see the level of pruning suggested by the respondent who called for services to be cut back by 65% in three years, or by those who thought that the BBC's full range should extend only to BBC1, BBC2, six or seven radio stations and the World Service.

However, a number argued that BBC3 and BBC4 were dispensable, as many of the programmes were repeated sooner or later on BBC2. As discussed in the section on Digital Britain, many of those who expressed antagonism towards the digital channels also complained about not being able to receive them without buying new equipment. A few people commented that there was no need for two children's channels.

Some respondents felt that BBC News 24 merely duplicated services that were 'provided – and better – elsewhere'. Curiously, many of those who felt the news channel was a waste of money also requested that it be made available to terrestrial viewers. A very small number suggested that regional TV and local radio should be scrapped.

2. Maintain the Current Range

A very small number of respondents expressed satisfaction with the current range of services. Many of these viewers and listeners appeared to be fans of the 'minority interest' services like BBC3, BBC4 and BBC Radio 3, who felt that any cutbacks could mean their needs might suffer.

It should be noted that previous DCMS research, reflected in the Green Paper, indicated that the general public support the current range of BBC services.

3. Expand the Range

Only one respondent felt that, in general, the BBC still does not provide enough TV and radio channels to cover the interests of the majority of licence fee payers. On the other hand, there were a few specific requests for extra specialist channels. A number wanted to see a dedicated sports channel – either because they wanted to watch more sport or because they wanted to banish sport from the channels they choose to watch. A few people called for a channel catering for the interests of elderly people, as they were believed to watch proportionally more TV than most other population groups.

Scope and Regulation of Commercial Services

How should the BBC's commercial activities relate to its other roles?

There appeared to be some confusion about the nature of the BBC's commercial services. Those who equated the word 'commercial' with advertising either condemned the proposal in the strongest terms or saw it as an opportunity for the BBC to decrease its reliance on the licence fee. Those who understood it in its intended sense to refer to the sale of programmes abroad and the sale of the by-products of programming – such as books, magazines, DVDs and toys – expressed approval in varying degrees and with a number of qualifications. Still others urged the BBC to look to the possibilities of new media such as the Internet for additional revenue streams. Despite some misunderstanding, the majority view was that the BBC should be encouraged to seek 'all responsible methods' of increasing its income.

I. Judging the Value of Commercial Services

The **Green Paper** proposes that the BBC should be encouraged to continue to generate income from commercial activity, such as selling programmes overseas and publishing books, DVDs and magazines. However, all commercial activity should be related in some way to the BBC's public purposes and should have a direct connection to publicly funded programmes or services. Magazines, for instance, should have sufficient links to BBC content. There should be no cross-subsidy for commercial services, and all commercial business should be rigorously and transparently regulated.

- In total, 41% addressed the issue of scope and regulation of commercial services.
- Of those who filled out the web questionnaire, 62% answered the question *Do you think that the BBC's commercial services should be closely related to its public purposes and its public services?* 74% said Yes, and 21% said No.
- Just under 10% of the free-format responses addressed this issue. Around three times as many responses were in favour of commercial activities as were opposed to them.

1. The Spectrum of Opinion

a. The BBC should pursue no commercial business

A small but committed group of people were ideologically opposed to the idea of a public service broadcaster such as the BBC being allowed to generate income by any means other than the licence fee. '[That] is what the private sector is all about,' insisted one respondent. Some of those who viewed the absence of adverts as a unique – and welcome – feature of the BBC predicted that the selling of advertising space between and during broadcasts would emerge as a natural consequence of increased commercial activity. This, they believed, would lead to a conflict of interest between the BBC's pursuit of its public purposes and the pursuit of profit. There was concern that the

organisation would 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.

A very small minority argued that the subsidised provision of services via the BBC's commercial wings could be construed as anti-competitive, as the commercial offerings drew on public funds rather than market forces to drive sales. The promotion of publications on a competition-free channel was seen to give the BBC an unfair advantage – 'a classic case of the BBC having its cake and eating it,' said one respondent.

b. The BBC should pursue commercial opportunities – within limits

The majority view on this topic was widespread support for 'all responsible methods' of increasing the BBC's income. While a large number of people saw this as a means to lowering and perhaps eventually eliminating the licence fee, others wanted to see the money reinvested in the BBC for programme development.

Most respondents believed emphatically 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. This group requested transparency in the accounting of public and private activities. There was also a question mark over responsibility for the financing of loss-making ventures. 'If new services involve risk, they ought to be self-financing so as not to jeopardise public money. This seems only fair,' said one respondent.

Some commented on the assertion that 'all commercial activity should be related in some way to the BBC's public purposes', suggesting that this was vague and ill-defined. However, there was general agreement that commercial activities should bear the same close scrutiny as the BBC's publicly funded services and should not bring the organisation into disrepute. The proposal that all commercial activity should have a direct connection to publicly funded programmes was sometimes seen as being too restrictive: a TV programme could come to an end, for example, while the associated book or magazine legitimately continued to be a bestseller. One respondent suggested a cap on the income that could be generated from commercial activities not related to existing BBC content.

c. The BBC should pursue commercial activities without exception

A very small number of people who supported wholesale privatisation of the BBC thought that the more money generated from commercial services the better – 'wherever it comes from,' said one respondent. These respondents tended to be among those who proclaimed their antipathy towards the licence fee throughout the consultation process. To them, the only criterion for success was the financial criterion.

This group was also unfazed by the prospect of commercial advertising on the BBC's radio and TV channels. This was seen as simply another opportunity to increase revenue. There were suggestions that the BBC should receive money for the promotional material it already carries, such as the 'saturation coverage' of Harry Potter books and films and the rotating advertising hoardings that can be seen on coverage of sports events.

There was also a small body of thought that commercial services could not only make the BBC financially stronger, but would also improve its brand recognition and reputation in the UK and abroad. One respondent commented that the BBC could produce a magazine that might prove a worthy competitor to *The Economist* and *The Spectator* if current restrictions were lifted.

II. Concerns and Criticisms

A number of people commented on the BBC's present and potential range of commercial offerings, with praise for some and suggestions for improvement for others.

1. Printed Materials

Reviews of the BBC's stable of magazines were mixed: some argued that they were of high quality, although expensive, while others felt that neither magazines nor books matched the high standards of the TV programmes. With a few exceptions, the range of publications was felt to be too extensive. A few people gave examples, with *The World of Cross Stitching* and *Girl Talk* singled out as being superfluous. One suggested that the BBC should license such titles and distance itself from the publications. The BBC's printed teaching resources, such as posters and packs, were also nominated for praise.

2. Recorded Materials and Online Services

A few people asked for more programmes to be made available on DVD, video or audiocassette, both to raise money for the BBC and to allow people to enjoy classic comedies, landmark cultural events and other perennial favourites.

A number of people felt that the BBC had 'undermined its ability to make money' by providing free online information, particularly to users outside the UK. A few respondents who requested greater availability of the BBC back catalogue suggested that downloadable archive footage could be offered over the website for a price comparable to buying material on DVD, video or audiocassette.

3. Sale of Programmes to International Networks

Several respondents advocated the subscription broadcasting of BBC programming abroad via satellite in order to generate fresh revenue streams for the organisation. A number of people opposed to any commercial activity in the UK were in favour of this proposal.

4. Adverts and Trailers

There were a number of complaints about the promotion of programme-related paraphernalia, such as DVDs and books, on publicly funded TV and radio. This was seen by some as anti-competitive and unfair to other broadcasters, while others found these 'plugs' more personally irritating and intrusive.

Beyond the BBC

What role do other public service broadcasters play?

The Green Paper proposes an interim review to look at allocating funding to public service broadcasters other than the BBC. Although about half of those who answered the web questionnaire supported the idea of such a review, very few respondents addressed the question of a review in any detail or with any passion. However, many more were interested in the broader issue: how does the BBC relate to other public service broadcasters? Does the presence of other such providers strengthen or weaken the BBC? And most important, how should public service broadcasting be funded?

I. Plurality and Public Service Broadcasting

In addition to the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 have public service broadcasting (PSB) responsibilities. This plurality in PSB is worth sustaining if possible. Ofcom has suggested that with the growth in the number of TV channels increasing competition for media users, there is risk that public service broadcasting on these channels might decline.

Ofcom has suggested that the Government considers diverting some public funding, possibly including the licence fee, to other channels. To allow for flexibility in funding decisions, the **Green Paper** suggests there is scope for an interim review, towards the end of the process of digital switchover, to consider whether additional funding might be given to broadcasters other than the BBC, and whether that should prompt any change in the level of the licence fee.

- In total, 40% of responses addressed this proposal.
- Of those who filled in the web questionnaire, 61% answered the question 'Do you agree that this review should take place?' 53% said Yes, and 24% said No.
- Only about 8% of the free-format responses addressed this proposal. A slight majority of these respondents – 59% – opposed public funding of other public service broadcasters.

1. Supporting Plurality

To many people, the term 'public service broadcasting' is synonymous with the BBC, and should remain so. There was strong resistance to the sharing of PSB responsibilities – and more importantly, to the sharing of the licence fee money – with other broadcasters. While many thought that this would lead to a lack of accountability and an accompanying decline in standards, some simply foresaw an increase in the licence fee.

Yet a large number of respondents favoured plurality, maintaining that for-profit media organisations are not separate from society, but have public service responsibilities and must be held to these as part of their licence to broadcast. In contrast to those opposed to plurality, many

felt that a bit of healthy competition would force the BBC to raise rather than lower standards, and that 'a reliable, intelligent, aim-high' BBC would then be able to resume its rightful place at the pinnacle of public service broadcasting.

2. Opposing Plurality

There was a body of thought that the BBC should be the only broadcaster with PSB requirements. Indeed, a few people said that they failed to see how other broadcasters could claim to have any such obligations: 'I had no idea that ITV or Channel 5 had any public service broadcasting responsibilities! It is so non-evident from the poor quality of their programming that they certainly don't deserve any public funding,' said one respondent. A strong link was made between the BBC's PSB obligations and the quality of its programmes. Generally it was felt that the BBC provided a benchmark by which others should be judged. 'My view is that so long as the BBC is there to set the standard, others will see it as worthwhile to try to match that standard at least some of the time.'

Some were concerned that, if the arena were filled with other public service broadcasters, the BBC would eventually find it impossible to differentiate itself sufficiently from the competition as to legitimate the collection of a licence fee. 'If the BBC becomes a near-monopoly PSB provider, then so much the better. In that way it better justifies its different funding method,' said one respondent. A few even advocated the BBC's taking on other channels' PSB requirements. 'This would ensure a clearly defined benefit of the public funding model for the BBC, free commercial operators from providing content which does not serve their shareholders, and provide further reason for the licence fee to continue in future years,' commented one respondent.

3. Plurality – But Not at Any Price

Some people thought that commercial channels, as successful businesses, should be responsible for meeting their PSB requirements through their own revenue. 'This is an overhead they can afford,' said one respondent. Others felt that if the Government wants to sustain plurality in PSB, it should allocate funds from sources other than licence fee money. However, there was a concern that Government funding would then benefit a few wealthy shareholders, rather than the public at large.

Distinctions were made between Channel 4, as a non-profit making organisation, and the other commercial channels. 'A more credible argument could be made for Channel 4 but there would need to be clear accountability on its use [of public money], and ideally the 'top sliced' portion should be collected separately so that the public are fully aware of who is getting what,' said one respondent.

4. Sharing Public Funds

A small number were in favour of diverting some licence fee money to commercial channels, and proposed various criteria and mechanisms for doing this. It was felt that if a public service obligation is put on independent broadcasters, then it is reasonable to fund that obligation with public money.

One argument was that PSB funding should be calibrated to quality of programming or to value for money. There was a sense that money should be diverted to other broadcasters if they are perceived to offer a better quality of programming. Indeed, the view expressed by an extremely

small minority was that the BBC did not deserve to be the sole recipient of public funding. 'The BBC is no better than commercial channels in its concept and delivery of public services, therefore it alone does not merit the licence fee,' said one respondent. There were a few references to BBC News 24, which is seen as inferior to Sky News and therefore less deserving of public money.

It was felt by a few that an 'open and public' debate would be a fair way of deciding if broadcasters have met their PSB requirements; funding could then be allocated accordingly. A few respondents suggested the establishment of a separate body, endowed through a mix of public and private money including revenue from sponsors and advertisers, to which broadcasters could apply for funding. This idea appealed especially to those respondents who believe that the licence fee should be scrapped immediately or at least phased out over time.

Have Your Say

Almost 1,000 of the web questionnaire responses – about 40% – took the DCMS up on the invitation to ‘Have Your Say’, and added further comments. Most of these were a reinforcement or expansion of their views on the proposals in the Green Paper, and these responses have been taken into account elsewhere in this report. However, many people chose this as the forum to relate their ‘personal bugbears’, in the words of one respondent. These ranged from the high-minded to the humorous.

Should the BBC come with a health warning? A few people thought so, citing research on the health hazards of TV viewing and its contribution to the obesity epidemic and sleep-related disorders, among other things. Some took issue with the number of fictional characters caught smoking on screen. There were also complaints that the BBC encourages gambling – ‘a major social problem’ – by giving so much air-time to the National Lottery and offering racing tips. One person commented that children had become noisier in response to the ‘loud-mouthed’ presenters on children’s TV.

The BBC also got short shrift for its ‘disrespectful’ attitude towards the monarchy in general and the Queen in particular. A number of people thought it was ‘regrettable’ that the Queen is less prominent on the BBC than she used to be. The ‘Queen’s English’ – or ‘BBC English’ – is also missed by a significant number of people who complained variously about Scottish, Geordie, estuary and ‘mockney’ accents, noting that these can be difficult to understand for some who are hard of hearing.

Respondents were miles (or kilometres) apart when it came to weights and measures and the BBC. A number of older people wanted the BBC to abandon ‘EU-speak’ and revert to the imperial system, which, one claimed, 80% of the country wished it to do. On the other hand, several parents pointed out that their children were taught metric units at school and it was confusing for them if BBC programmes used the imperial system. Others just wanted the BBC to make its mind up – ‘stop bouncing between one and the other,’ exhorted one viewer.

In the news arena, while some respondents concerned themselves with the accuracy and impartiality of reporting, others focused on matters more prosaic. One person took issue with the ‘friendly chit-chat’ between news-readers – ‘just get on with reading the news!’ Others complained that they felt dizzy when newsreaders got up and walked about instead of ‘staying put’ behind a desk. One respondent noted unfavourably the constant presence of the screen logos during the news. And one person felt compelled to ask, ‘Why are there so many pregnant newsreaders and weather girls?’

Conclusion

This report is not a comprehensive summary of public opinion of the BBC. It is a snapshot of the sentiments and perceptions of the several thousand people who were interested enough in the BBC and the Charter Review to complete the web questionnaire, write letters, and send emails on the topic. From these responses, it is clear that the vast majority of people do not want to see a fundamental reorganisation of the BBC. In the words of one: 'Keep the BBC as it is. It may not be perfect and to everyone's liking, but it is still the only voice I will listen to.' A very significant majority agreed with each of the specific Green Paper proposals.

Still, many viewed this consultation as an opportunity to examine in close detail both the successes and the shortcomings of a national institution. Certain compliments and key criticisms arose again and again in otherwise varying responses. On the positive side, the BBC was praised for producing programming that was unique and unlikely to be developed by any other broadcaster. It was considered to play an important role in education and was seen as a great ambassador for the UK. With its dramas, documentaries, and news and current affairs programmes, the BBC was perceived to be a world leader. Its online services were regarded as second to none.

On the negative side, the BBC was censured for chasing ratings and 'dumbing down', for neglecting its remit to entertain and for showing too many repeats. It was chided for a perceived decline in moral and aesthetic standards. Some alleged that it was politically biased in favour of the Government, which was seen as far too influential in the running of the organisation, and claimed that it was less than impartial in some of its news coverage. It was seen to be impervious to complaints and insensitive to the wishes of its licence fee-paying public.

The verdict from these members of the listening and viewing public is, overall, that there is room for improvement. Judging by the overwhelming support for the Green Paper proposals, most people felt that these were a very positive move in the right direction. One person commented that the proposals were 'first-class' and that the approach used should be the benchmark for future consultations on other topics. Where respondents did not agree with the proposals, many suggested well-thought out and reasoned alternatives. As one said, 'I hope that all comments are considered. Thank you for listening.'