

BPD - White Paper.

- log to Chris.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport	
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27th April, 2006.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Comments on the Government's White Paper & the Draft BBC Charter

I wish to comment on two specific areas of concern I have about the above proposals. They are -----

- 1) The implication that the costs of digital switchover will have to be borne by the BBC in practice, means that the licence fee will either need to be increased by an amount the general public will be increasingly reluctant to pay, or, the BBC will need to cut back on some of its services & reduce its staff still further to make ends meet.

If the Government and the general public wish the BBC to remain 'a beacon of excellence' (and I believe both do), neither of these two solutions is satisfactory or acceptable. The most equitable way for the funding of the BBC would appear to be the universal licence fee, and the Government White Paper seems to have accepted its continuance for the next 10 years. The BBC is unique in the sense that its independence, impartiality and excellence is underpinned by the licence fee. However, if the licence fee were raised very - particularly in the press - then its image would be irreparably damaged in the eyes of the public, and its long-term demise would become a reality in time.

Equally, if the only other way to meet the costs of digital switchover is to make yet more BBC staff redundant, then this is also unacceptable because it would weaken the creative base of the BBC and undermine staff morale which is already at a low ebb.

Digital switchover is a Government-inspired plan which will free up the analogue spectrum and allow the Government to sell it off to the highest bidder. Digital switchover will equally benefit commercial broadcasters as well as the BBC, and it is only fair that neither the BBC nor the licence fee payers should be penalised for taking on a Government initiative. In my view, digital switchover should be funded out of general taxation because it can be considered for the 'public good'.

2) I am concerned about the proposal that 50% of BBC programmes should be made by the independent sector. The BBC is the major public service broadcaster in this country, and is recognised throughout the world as a 'beacon of excellence' in this respect.

For many years, it has invested a great deal of money and effort in the training of its staff to a high standard, & the good reputation of British broadcasting owes much to this investment.

Like any other public body, it has an ethos that has evolved over many years, and it is essential that it is allowed (with public accountability) to evolve further in the future, & serve the interests of the citizens and culture of this country. Every licence payer over the years has invested in its future & in its development. To suggest that 50% of its programme making should be contracted out to independent companies flies in the face of the fact that we, as licence payers, own the BBC, & its future cannot be increasingly handed over to unaccountable private companies who are only accountable to their shareholders and owners. Such a proposal, if it were implemented, would have a very detrimental effect on British broadcasting, its enviable reputation & its long-term health. As we have seen in other areas of public service recently, the contracting out of these services has led to a more fragmented, less effective, far more expensive and less dedicated public service.

If more & more of BBC work is contracted out to independent companies, who will do the important training of creative staff in the future? I doubt that the independent sector as a whole will take it as seriously as the BBC has always done. How will staff in the independent sector be treated? From first-hand knowledge of this subject, some independent companies exploit their staff & treat staff welfare, training & development of staff with scant regard.

The BBC, in a recent poll, was voted as the No. 1 employer recent graduates most wanted to work for - because they have high standards, they promote creative talent & they are dedicated to maintaining and enhancing those high standards. They are unique in this respect and should be protected from malign commercial predators who are itching to break up the BBC & take control of the broadcasting media in this country. One only has to look to the United States of America to see how standards of impartiality, excellence & public service have been undermined by purely commercial considerations.

I trust that you will take my considered thoughts into account before the final bill is presented before Parliament.

Yours faithfully,

David A. Eggrington.