

CHILDREN 2000

.... *it's their future*

3 Western Esplanade Brighton East Sussex BN41 1WE
T/Fax: 44[0]1273 422999

The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith MP
Secretary of State
DCMS
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

27th February 2001

Your Ref: C00/20497/08974/DC

Dear Secretary of State,

Children's Radio

We enclose our response to your official invitation to comment on the BBC's digital proposals. We have included the results of a MORI poll, commissioned by us, to provide an independent assessment of the popularity of the BBC's five proposed new digital radio services compared with a national network for children.

This representative survey shows a massive demand for a national children's radio network and proves the BBC to be mistaken in advising the Government and the general public otherwise. The BBC has been unwilling or unable to produce radio that is sufficiently attractive to this sector but that does not prove a lack of demand.

The BBC's press release on it's Annual Report 1999/2000 states:

- Sales from children's brands and properties up to over £70 million. Before the launch of major children's brands in 1997, BBC Worldwide's children's business generated less than £10 million per annum

It can therefore be seen that the BBC's policy of broadcasting to children only via the medium of television has opened great commercial opportunities to BBC Worldwide. But the primary role of the BBC is not money-making. It exists to provide high quality programmes for all its audiences throughout all its broadcasting services.

12

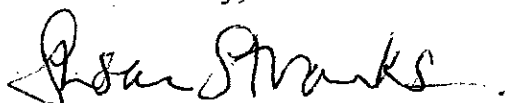
In accordance with your own expressed wish to allocate available digital audio spectrum for children and education, and the support of the Secretary of State for Education & Employment for such radio usage, we suggest that the way is now open for the DCMS to reserve one of these five new national radio networks, and the requisite proportion of new licence revenue, pending an independent enquiry into how these resources might be best used to benefit this potentially large and long neglected audience.

Given the size of public demand for a children's service and the fact that widespread take-up of digital radio will be many years in coming, there is also a very strong case for developing an interim analogue network for them.

There are a number of possibilities. For instance, sharing BBC 198kHz Long Wave or using local and regional frequencies, starting in the areas of most need, just as this spectrum is now deployed to broadcast specialist channels to Asian audiences. There also remains the unused 225kHz Long Wave band which could be further investigated.

We would be pleased to come and discuss these proposals further if you so wished.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Stranks".

Susan Stranks - Director

CHILDREN 2000

.... *it's their future*

3 Western Esplanade Brighton East Sussex BN41 1WE
T/Fax: 44[0]1273 422999

Ms Vanessa Brand
Head of the Public Service Broadcasting Branch
DCMS
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

25 June 2001

Dear Ms Brand,

BBC Digital Broadcasting Proposals

In response to Mr Andrew Ramsay's letters, June 7 and 8, we write to comment on the BBC's second document about its proposals for digital broadcasting. In doing so, may we refer you back to our original response?.

Our concern continues to focus on the lack of radio for children and the BBC's continuing disregard of its responsibility to serve this sector of the community.

Content:

The BBC's follow-up response to the DCMS contains a wealth of rhetoric in support of its five pre-selected radio formats and expands its opinions on what they may offer and how the target audiences may benefit from them. No adequate independent research is submitted to justify the BBC's assumptions. Only tailored questionnaires, returned by a few thousand respondents, and selective soundings, from within the target markets, have been offered by way of back-up.

The DCMS will be aware of the MORI survey, taken 8 - 14 February 2001, which shows 57% of the public choosing a children's radio network as most important against 39% down to only 8% for the BBC's formats.

More thorough investigation is needed, particularly into the wisdom of launching, nationally, Network X [16%] and an Asian network. [8%]. This is a critical time for race relations in Britain and there are underlying sensitivities which need to be addressed, quite apart from the apparent disinterest shown for these two options in the independent MORI research.

/ 2

Network X - Urban Black Music: Arguably, the majority of modern jazz and pop music has roots in the blues and soul but the 'Urban Black' genre - hip-hop, reggae, rap, etc., could be a passing trend and an unsuitably narrow focus for a national network, run by the BBC. It may also send an untimely message of segregation and aggression to the young target audience, aged 15 - 24.

Asian Network - targeted at specific sub-groups: This may be useful for areas with a high density of certain ethnic groups but, as recent reports show, the term Asian covers many sub-groups, a number of whom are increasingly unhappy with the label.

These two proposed formats could seem to patronise and segregate whereas a children's network could encourage integration and mutual respect from a young age. The BBC also appears to be set in the mould of ghettoising speech and music and is failing to learn its lessons from Radio 2 - the UK's favourite station - which offers mixed music and speech of differing genres - thus encouraging discovery.

BUDGETS.

The BBC fails to explain major discrepancies in its radio budgets. It must be accountable and transparent to the DCMS and to the licence paying public, on whom a levy has been placed to fund these new digital services.

Wrong and misleading financial projections have been submitted to the DCMS. Under pressure, the BBC admits to having rounded up figures for the first year of its five proposed national radio networks by £2 million, [more than 13%], which it describes as *a formality*. Clear accounting for the first and second years of the five radio services must be published, together with an explanation for previous discrepancies. Our concerns focus on radio but the same test must be applied to financial projections for the BBC's proposed digital television channels.

We remain convinced that the DCMS should consider reserving at least one of these scarce new national audio bands, pending an enquiry into the potential value of a children's radio network, as against the other formats on offer. The BBC vehemently argues its case for children to have TV channels appropriate to their age and free of advertising. The same applies to Radio.

Yours sincerely,



Susan Stranks - Director

.... *it's their future*

3 Western Esplanade Brighton East Sussex BN41 1WE
T/Fax: ++44 0 1273 422999

Ms Vanessa Brand
Head of the Public Service Broadcasting Branch
DCMS
2 - 4 Cockspur Street
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

9 July 2001

Dear Ms Brand,

BBC Digital Broadcasting Proposals

Thank you for your letter of the 6 July informing us of the extension period for this consultation. I confirm that our formal response and all subsequent correspondence on this matter is open and public.

We take the opportunity to make further brief comments, following the BBC Chairman and Governors' presentation, "A Year in View", 4 July, which I attended on behalf of the Campaign for Children's Radio.

I raised a question from the floor about the lack of a children's radio network among the five digital formats. Jenny Abramsky responded that, in effect, Network Z would be just that. She claimed that all material in daytime hours would be for children and family listening - much of which would be new work.

This new commitment has now been made in answer to our follow up questions at two separate BBC events. The official proposal states that some output will be for children. The BBC should be required to put this specific pledge in writing and, further, explain how, with only £6 million allocated for Network Z [far less than Network X and Network Y], this promised new work can be commissioned.

The BBC's own research shows that children were not attracted by Network Z, therefore this is not the best format within which to serve them.

As a supplementary question, I put it to Jenny Abramsky that children also need music.

In response, she said they tune to Radio 1 [which targets 15 - 24 year olds and is often unsuitable for children] and she also drew attention to the twenty minutes of music for children after school, on Radio 3. This series stopped in May and will only return in September - at a time yet to be published. Such meagre output, broadcast sporadically on a minority adult network, hardly addresses the musical needs of the nation's children.

The BBC's neglect and repeated public denial, by senior executives, that children need to share this valuable public resource might suggest that they are now being targeted, as lip service, to strengthen the BBC's digital proposals and to justify the increase in the licence fees. The BBC Charter does not require executives to offer children free-to-air radio so they serve them through whichever medium they deem fit. We have consistently argued for this to be changed.

Leaders in education and child development agree that a radio service would be more productive for younger children than extra all-day television and, although it may not swell Worldwide's coffers quite so fast as spin-offs from children's TV, the added value to the learning, general behaviour and well-being of our young people must be counted into the equation.

Lastly, given current sensitivities, we again urge the DCMS to review BBC plans to ring-fence two out of its five new national radio networks for specifically selected, minority ethnic groups, and to consider by comparison the potential value of an *inclusive* service for the nation's children and their families. Once more, we point to the MORI results to back up our argument.

Thank you for this important public consultation

Yours sincerely,

Susan Stranks - Director