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NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION
FOR ADULT LEARNING

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Dear Vanessa Brand

BBC's proposals to launch new digital services

We are writing to comment on the additional information supplied by the BBC on their proposed new digital services, of which we have received a copy of from Jocelyn Hay, as our two organisations work closely together in relation to educational broadcasting.

NIACE, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education is the leading non-governmental organisation for adult learning in England and Wales. NIACE believes that if the Government's policies for lifelong learning are to be achieved, then active partnership with broadcasters will continue to be necessary, that educational programming will continue to require space on the mass channels and this will need to be protected by regulation. We have argued this in our evidence on the Communications White Paper, a copy of which is enclosed.

We have further argued that the removal of the educational obligation on ITC through the 1991 Act has encouraged the BBC in turn to reduce its reaching mass audiences with explicitly educational programming by shifting its adult education programming from BBC1 to BBC2 and to slots very early in the morning or late at night and increasingly to use The Learning Zone in the middle of the night for transmission of much educational material. At the same time, we have recognised the value of the BBC's periodic educational campaigns, like Second Chance and Computers Don't Bite.

Nevertheless, the contribution that the BBC has continued to make on its current channels, BBC1 and BBC2, is vital, and it is important that this is not further reduced in the run-up to analogue switch-off. At the time of the 1996 Act, representations were also made to place educational requirements on digital channels, particularly since the interactive possibilities offered by digital television would have been particularly valuable for some areas of lifelong learning. While no such requirements were placed on the commercial contractor selected, an important point was agreed in the Act: that the public service requirements made of analogue broadcasters would be transferred to digital when analogue was withdrawn. It is for this reason that we note with great concern the current reduction in the BBC's educational analogue activity, and with similar concern the ITC's premature move to an increase in self-regulation.

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales)

President: Richard G. Smethurst
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Director: Alan Tuckett



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The transition to the newer technologies will take some time and it is not yet clear that they will ever replace the unique power of broadcasting to stimulate and motivate people of all ages and backgrounds, freely and universally in their own homes. Reaching adults and encouraging them to learn requires rather different arrangements and strategies than that for children and young people. There is no laid down curriculum, for example.

It is therefore necessary to look at the total contribution to be made by the BBC through both analogue and digital broadcasting as the transition takes place. Statements of the BBC's current plans for broadcast educational programming on BBC1 and BBC2 are of a general nature and focus more on moves to the use of follow-up opportunities on the newer technologies than on the content of broadcast educational programming and its educational goals. However, purposes for which on-line can be used are still limited, and its use for learning is still the subject of study and research, as is, separately, the demand, cost and value of digital interactivity.

We are concerned that the additional information supplied by the BBC for its new digital services still lacks any clear reference or commitment to adult and lifelong learning despite the fact that implicit in its proposals is the withdrawal of the Knowledge Channel. The suggestion appears to be that factual programming will include educational and educative programming, but factual programming is itself being cut back and the extra time available on BBC4 is limited to the evening and is mainly described as being filled by arts and culture.

In our view, it is vital for the BBC to maintain broadcast educational and educative programming both on BBC1 and BBC2 and the BBC should also be required, as we were led to expect, to make additional educational contributions on its two new channels. Education programming and services for adults require to be universally available, and not be limited to the still small proportion who have access to the internet. This is against the spirit of public-service broadcasting and risks the principles of the proper use of licence-fee money and is likely to exacerbate the 'information divide'.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Tuckett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end of the name.

Alan Tuckett
Director

Enc:

The Broadcasting White Paper and Lifelong Learning - evidence submitted by NIACE

The Broadcasting White Paper and Lifelong Learning: Evidence submitted by NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

1. This evidence is submitted by NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the leading non-governmental organisation for adult learning in England and Wales. NIACE believes that if the Government's policies for lifelong learning are to be achieved, then active partnership with broadcasters will be necessary, and that educational programming will require space on the mass channels protected by regulation.
2. NIACE enjoys good working relationships with all the major terrestrial broadcasters, and co-ordinates Adult Learners' Week, an annual festival of lifelong learning, which engages the BBC, Channel 4 and independent television companies each year.
3. NIACE welcomes many of the proposals in the Government Broadcasting White Paper. We agree strongly with the paper's argument that 'the democratic importance of public sector broadcasting is just as great as the economic justification', and that the function of public sector broadcasting is the creation of public goods. We agree, too, that mixed schedule networks, free at the point of use, 'funding through advertising or the licence fee, continue to be the best way of funding the production of mass audience, high quality, varied, UK-originated programmes.'
4. Our major concern lies with the White Paper's lack of specific proposals for the protection of educational and educative programming. The evidence is that relying on self-regulation has not been adequate to protect a wide range and volume of such programming in the past.
5. NIACE believes that the experience of the last ten years since the 1990 Broadcasting Act demonstrates the risks that dedicated educational programming will be squeezed to the margins of the schedules, and will migrate from mass to minority channels, and to dedicated digital channels. This may well meet the needs of schools, and of adults already clear that they want to learn, but would weaken seriously broadcasting's capacity to contribute to the Government's lifelong learning policies, by stimulating new learners to join in.
6. Broadcasting in the UK is a single ecology. The mass channels share a similar menu, just as Channel 4 and BBC2 compete across broadly similar terrain. Until the beginning of the 1990's ITV and BBC shared an obligation to educate, as well as to entertain, and inform. For ITV this obligation was backed by quotas of national prime time programming and a total numbers of hours of educational programming for each ITV company. During the debates preceding that legislation, independent companies persuaded the government that the competitive forces unleashed by the new cable and satellite technologies required a lighter regulatory touch. Those arguments prevailed and ITV's obligation to show prime time educational programmes was removed. Since the BBC was committed to competing for market share with ITV, there was a rapid shift of adult education

programming from BBC1 to BBC2, and to slots very early in the morning, or late at night, culminating in the BBC's increasing use of The Learning Zone in the middle of the night for the transmission of much educational material, including Open University programming.

7. Whilst The Learning Zone showed that night-time delivery for video-recording was valued, and that there was a small night-time audience for learning, confirming the experience of the Open University which has two million 'eavesdroppers' for its programmes each week, it has meant that the unique capacity of broadcasting to capture the curiosity, and to stimulate people who have not previously taken part to engage in learning has been limited to short burst campaigns.
8. These campaigns have been one of the major innovative strengths of broadcasting over the last decade, and have made critical contributions to the creation of a learning society. The BBC's family literacy campaign, using motivational shorts led to more than 300,000 people asking for information on help with literacy over a single weekend, and to the now well established family literacy programmes offered by most post school educational institutions. Channel 4's Brookie Basics had a similar impact. Computers Don't Bite has led hundreds of thousands of adults to seek introductory courses in information and computer technology, directly as a result of programming. And Adult Learners' Week each year generates hundreds of thousands of calls to the free learning advice line, learndirect. This year, 34% of callers were unemployed, against a national background of low and falling unemployment. A third of callers find their way on to courses.
9. Such campaigns play a vital role in giving people the confidence to participate. The National Adult Learning Survey, and NIACE's own research show that between a quarter and a third of adults in the UK say they have done no learning since school, and 8 in 10 of those who have not previously participated see little or no prospect of doing so in the future. Yet a telling programme can change that expectation. There is strong evidence, too, that broadcasting can also deliver successful sequential, planned educational series (eg languages and adult numeracy). A menu of short life campaigns on the major channels, and narrative programming for the already convinced learner on digital channels will not be enough.
10. The White Paper has a welcome and impressive recognition of the cultural power and democratic responsibility of broadcasting, and for the next few years at least the mass channel terrestrial broadcasters will continue to shape public expectations and aspirations.
11. Given the Paper's analysis NIACE believes the proposed shift to self-regulation for education is misguided and unwelcome, particularly given the weakness of the sanctions available to the regulator.
12. NIACE recognises the BBC's public commitment to strengthen its educational remit, and is an enthusiastic partner in its plans to develop learning journeys, linking on-line learning to televised programmes. However, on-line learning and

the Internet are not available to the majority of the population and will not be for sometime. Meanwhile, the BBC will need to maintain a breadth of curriculum meeting the learning needs of the full age range, and in particular older people. Yet without such a commitment – expressed through educational as well as educative programming – we believe the contribution broadcasting can play in securing an informed and active democracy will be weakened.

13. NIACE was concerned at the lack of clear reference to adult and lifelong learning in the BBC's recent consultation document. We understand factual programming will include educational and educative programmes, but unless educational purpose is explicitly addressed, it is harder to evaluate the Corporation's success in meeting its own goals.
14. Broadcasting's great strength, as Bridget Plowden said, is that it is 'democratic, there are no reserved seats.' That gives it, in our view a unique role in the creation of a learning society.
15. NIACE recommends that Channel 3 and Channel 5 should have a requirement made of them to secure educational and educative programming and that the BBC and Channel 4 should have to publish coherent plans, and report annually on measures taken through their programming and support activities to widen participation in learning. These requirements are, in NIACE's view, necessary for the mass channels, and not just the new digital channels, in order to reduce the risk of an information divide which would reinforce the learning divide the National Adult Learning Survey has shown exists in the UK.
16. NIACE believes that all broadcasters should be subject to the same regulatory framework, and that quotas of prime time educational broadcasting should be identified for all broadcasters. We believe that broadcasters should demonstrate how these obligations have been met by accountability after the event. For this system to be effective, the regulatory regime would need a more finely graded suite of sanctions to enforce the public interest.
17. NIACE regrets the ending of a BBC educational broadcasting council. If our proposals are accepted, NIACE believes that an educational advisory panel should be established, informing a citizen's panel (rather than a consumer's panel), and OFCOM on educational matters.
18. The White Paper makes a welcome recognition of the role of television in informing the public about international issues. We believe it could strengthen the Government's chance of achieving its lifelong learning policies if it adopted a similar approach to educational programming for adults. Despite the technological changes, Reith was surely right in believing that the medium needed to educate as well as to inform and entertain.