

**Comments on The BBC's Submission for new digital TV & Radio services, 2000/1. In response to Chris Smith, Culture Secretary's public consultation**  
**To: Pablo Palao, Public Service Broadcasting Policy Branch, Room 410, DCMS, 2-4 Cockspur St. London SW1Y 5DH**

**Submission from:**

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I. Aronovsky, Secretary (correspondence to above address)

**NMP Anti Racist Trust** was set up in as a result of Newham Monitoring Project's 20 years of experience providing a casework service to victims of racial harassment and supporting community campaigns for justice and equality, against racism and racist violence, in East London.

**NMP Anti Racist Trust aims to :**

- ◆ promote good race relations and eliminate racial discrimination through education, training and documentation, in the diverse communities of East London, amongst many of those who are most socially disadvantaged and excluded.
- ◆ promote mutual understanding and encourage equal opportunities.
- ◆ develop education projects and learning resources for young people, and training for volunteers and professionals to assist in the elimination of racial harassment.

### **Comments**

We welcome the BBC's recognition that "Ethnic minorities are seriously underserved by the UK broadcasting market", and therefore the proposals for new digital radio channels - Network X -(black music, factual programmes & news and the nationwide Asian Network, with the proviso that the output of all TV & Radio channels should reflect the issues, concerns and interests of all sections of the UK's communities, as suggested by the objectives of the proposed BBC three.

We agree that all the new digital services should be free and available to all.

The proposals for new children's channels describe an interactive model of broadcasting integrated with the web, which could, if applied to Channels for adults potentially empower many people who are disenfranchised, and provide a means for local community action and pressure: for example young black people or asylum seekers experiencing discrimination, racial harassment or racist policing could make a fly on the wall documentary or broadcast live updates on local campaigns. The Digital TV & Radio Channels could be invaluable in developing opportunities for people to broadcast their own priorities in order to place them on the public agenda. In this way the BBC (& Channel 4) would be developing "community" partnerships which maintain and enhance the role of public service broadcasting in contrast to commercial TV providers and their focus on lifestyle and entertainment. It is worth recalling the enormous public response generated by the Media coverage of the Macpherson enquiry. In Newham alone some 800-900 people attended public meetings when there was the opportunity to hear Doreen and Neville Lawrence speak.

We welcome the proposals for new Digital Children's Channels though we have some concerns that the merging of BBC schools education into children's broadcasting could dissipate expertise. Thought the consultation document (From DMCS) does not

Go into detail about BBC's proposals to deliver the whole of the National Curriculum digitally, members of the Trust are informed of the pilot Science module. The BBC has said it wishes to work in partnership with commercial education providers, (though it appears these regard the BBC proposals as competition - but that does not concern us). We think it is far more important for BBC educational programming to develop multicultural and community partnerships. Channel 4's Black History Map project and the BBC's celebration of Windrush are excellent examples.

These examples show that there is experience, expertise, knowledge and people who are willing to develop resources (that commercial providers are not) that are invaluable to education.

Whilst the pilot module developed by the BBC on Science demonstrates ingenious pedagogy for engaging young people and provides ways to direct their own learning, the content is within specified parameters. That's why community partnerships described are crucial if the potential of digital broadcasting is to be realised. Taking History as an example, both BBC & Channel 4 have taken big steps forward in coverage of the history of British Black people and the African-Caribbean Diaspora, in comparison with what was on offer even ten years ago.

Yet there are still big gaps, partly as a result of the structure of the History Curriculum (with its lists of competing option topics of world history). The history of the world of Islam, pre-colonial India, and Africa (other than Ancient Egypt & Benin) have been poorly (or not at all) catered for by both BBC & Channel 4 Schools, and needless to say, commercial providers. It is not adequate to argue that unpopular topics don't justify programmes. Generations of teachers have not been educated about world history because it has been regarded as of minority interest. It should be the role of Public Service Broadcasters to stimulate demand by providing much needed resources otherwise teachers cannot be expected to teach these topics. A rounded coverage of world history is important for all children in developing historical understanding, as well as countering stereotypes and learning of the origins of modern racism, and Islamophobia.

Citizenship is another example of the exciting potential for active learning and empowerment through the digital curriculum, if community partnerships and the use of active media by young people are at the fore. NMP Trust believes in empowering all young people to challenge racism. An areas of particular concern is the influence of virulent racist ideas on white young people who are perpetrators of or see nothing wrong with racist attacks and harassment in areas like Newham. Informal education in a community setting can be more effective in challenging such thinking and the new media can be a medium for action research which can change lives; for example young people could use film to find out what life is like for young asylum seekers.