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Andrew Ramsay Esq
Director
Creative Industries, Media and Broadcasting Directorate
DCMS
2-4 Cockspur Street
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22nd February 2001

Dear Sir

NUJ Submission to DCMS concerning the proposed new services from the BBC

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Union of Journalists in response to the consultation exercise concerning the new proposed services from the BBC. The NUJ has over 30,000 members working in the print and broadcasting industry and as such, comments are presented on behalf not only of the thousands of journalist members who work for the BBC but also in respect of the NUJ's wider remit to protect and improve the freedom of speech and encourage vibrant public service broadcasting.

The union supports the proposal for an extension of the BBC's digital services. Our comments in regard to the proposal fall into these two main areas, implications for journalist working at the BBC and the Protection and improvement of public service broadcasting.

The NUJ would welcome the BBC's involvement in the digital future and we believe there are real benefits for all concerned providing a robust and healthy platform for the BBC to continue and extend its public service duties into the digital age. Clearly digital broadcasting is expanding at an exponential rate at present. We have reservations about how widespread the proliferation of digital access will be. We are concerned that there will be a 'digital divide' resulting from the fact that many members of the public will not wish to pay for television services beyond the current license fee settlement.

We have welcomed the commitment as outlined in the White Paper on the Communications Industry, to extend universality into the digital arena and the commitment not to switch the analogue signal off until such time as there is universal take-up of digital services. The BBC's proposals for new digital services allow for an expansion of current production and increased opportunities for journalists both to explain, inform and educate.

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The proposals regarding television services would allow a portfolio of services which would be of benefit to the community provided that sufficient funding was made available to resource these initiatives. The new national digital radio services would enable the full diversity of the population to be reflected in an output that is offered free to air and free of advertising.

The NUJ is concerned that the BBC commercial activities could blur the distinction between these activities and its duties as a public service broadcaster. The NUJ does not believe that the BBC should be subjected to commercial market orientated tests for the provision of these services. Clearly the remit of the BBC is different to that of the commercial world. It is ironic that at a time when the commercial world is arguing for fewer regulatory responsibilities in the provision of its own services, they should argue for the BBC to be more strictly governed. The NUJ does not believe the BBC's services should be judged for their impact on the commercial market place.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul McLaughlin', written in a cursive style.

Paul McLaughlin
National Broadcasting Organiser
On behalf of the NUJ