



From The Chairman

18<sup>th</sup> July 2003

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP  
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

*Dear Tessa*

#### **REVIEW OF THE BBC'S ONLINE SERVICES**

In your letter to me of 8 January, giving approval for the Digital Curriculum, you asked the BBC to prepare a full statement of the BBC online approval and the BBC's own detailed assessment of performance against that approval so that this report could be made available to your independent reviewer.

I now attach this report, along with a detailed independent assessment of the service's market impact by KPMG and, since I understand that the terms of reference for the review may go beyond the assessment of past performance, an overview paper which places the BBC's online service in the context of the BBC's broader vision and public purposes. I do hope you and your reviewer will find these papers useful. We are of course content that they should all be published. All have been approved by the Executive Committee of the BBC and by the Board of Governors.

We are proud of what has been achieved with our online service. It has made an outstanding contribution to the quality, range and depth of our service to the public. The BBC was one of the first organisations in any country to understand the full potential of online as a third great broadcasting medium, alongside radio and television. In the years since consent was granted our online service has become a valuable resource for the nation, transforming our relationship with our audiences, and – through the international reach of the medium – bringing credit to the UK. We have also, as with radio and television in the past, actively promoted the take-up of online as a mass medium.

The Governors' thorough assessment of the online service in preparation for your review, including a public seminar in March this year (reported on in the BBC's Annual Report and Accounts 2002/3), have raised a range of issues which your reviewer may wish to focus on. For example, the public expressed a range of opinions about the public value and distinctiveness of the BBC's search engine and its community sites. Interestingly those people who had actually used these services had strongly positive views of them. A further issue on which we would appreciate a dialogue with your reviewer is the use of our online service for the purposes of public accountability. We recognise the need to balance the convenience and immediacy of online accountability with the fact that active, online users are unlikely to be representative of the whole population. Last but not least, we would value your reviewer's opinion on the degree of detail the BBC should provide in explaining its future online plans through Statements of Programme Policy and elsewhere. We believe a balance needs to be struck between providing some certainty for commercial online providers and enabling the BBC to respond flexibly to changing public expectations about its services.

To reiterate, we hope that you and your reviewer will find these papers useful and that you will conclude, as we have, that the BBC's online service has fully met the terms of its approval. Ultimately we hope you and your reviewer will conclude that the public value on the BBC online service far outweighs its impact upon other players in the market. I hope that you will also support our vision of the future role of our online service as we approach the review of the Charter and beyond. We look forward to discussing these and other issues with your reviewer.

With very best wishes

Gavyn  
Gavyn Davies