



**Voice of the
Listener & Viewer**

Bulletin

Working for Quality and Diversity in Broadcasting

Spring 2005

Issue 81

Editorial Comment

Broadcasting and the General Election *Questions to ask your MP*

The future of the BBC and British broadcasting has become an election issue since the different political parties have different views on how the Corporation should be governed, how it should be funded and what services it should provide.

The BBC Royal Charter expires in 2006 and the Government review and Green Paper consultation on the BBC's future, launched in March, ends on 31st May – after the General Election.

If the Labour Party wins a third term in office, the consultation and policies will continue as announced. However, if a new Secretary of State is appointed they may wish to make changes in policy.

If there is a change of Government, the Green Paper will be abandoned and the whole process will start anew.

The Shadow Secretary of State, John Whittingdale MP (Conservative) and the Lib Dem Spokesman, Don Foster MP, outlined some of their Parties' policies at a seminar held by VLV in the Palace of Westminster just before Easter. It was sponsored by John Grogan MP, (Labour) Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the BBC, who elaborated on points in the Green Paper.

Each man claimed he and his Party supported a strong, adequately-funded BBC, independent of Government. Otherwise their views were very different.

John Whittingdale felt the licence fee was a regressive tax and unsustainable in the longer term. He also felt that some of the BBC's current services could be provided by commercial companies and if he had his way he would privatise Radio 2.

Don Foster said the Lib Dems supported the BBC and the licence fee. They wanted a strong and independent Corporation but the BBC's Governance needed reform and they favoured a broadcasting council to set and allocate the licence fee income.

There was no time to discuss the future of ITV or Channel 4. At the last election, however, the Conservative Party Manifesto included the privatisation of Channel 4.

We believe that the future of the BBC, and public service broadcasting, is a crucially important election issue. Television is now the main source of news, information and entertainment for most people in Britain, and thus a most powerful influence on British culture and democracy. Moreover, most people put more trust in the broadcasters than they do in either the press or, sadly, politicians, as was shown by a poll last year.

All Parties agree that the BBC is, and should continue to be, the cornerstone of British

broadcasting, that it should also be independent, impartial, universally available and the general standard setter. We believe that MPs of all Parties should be made to realise just how important an issue the future of the BBC and public service broadcasting is.

Please therefore ask your MP the following questions and let us know their answers:

1. What are your views on the future of the BBC?
Do you agree that the BBC should be independently governed and responsible to Parliament?
2. Do you agree that the BBC should continue to be funded by a universal licence fee? Do you agree that the licence fee should be used only to fund the BBC, and not 'top-sliced' or shared with other broadcasters? Should those on low incomes receive help to pay the licence as well as those over 75?
3. What are your views on the future of Channel 4?
4. How much of ITV's current remit to provide a universally available public service should it retain? Do you agree with Ofcom that ITV should be allowed to shed most of its public service programme obligations – including many of its regional, religious and children's programmes – as digital switch-over approaches?
5. What are your views on digital switch over?
Do you agree with the proposal contained in the Green Paper that the BBC should bear the major responsibility for managing digital switch-over, including the launch of an information campaign and both helping 'vulnerable consumers' to make the change and paying for them to do so out of licence fee income?

Lucy King

VLV's Spring Conference

Building Public Value in Broadcasting

Monday, 25 April, 10 – 4.45pm
Hamilton House, London WC1

Michael Grade, Chairman of the BBC Governors will give the keynote morning address Building Public Value – renewing the BBC for a digital world at VLV's 22nd Spring Conference in London on 25 April, starting at 11.00am. We are delighted that Mr Grade has said he wants to devote the major part of his time to an open discussion and questions from the floor. Gillian Reynolds, Media Commentator and Radio Critic at the Daily Telegraph will be in the chair.

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Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Working for Quality and Diversity in British Broadcasting

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which supports VLV's educational work

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9.00am - 5.00pm Mon-Thurs

Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd (VLV) represents the citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service in broadcasting.
VLV does not handle complaints.

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—Changes to the Board—

Dr Brinley Morgan has resigned from the VLV Board of Management. Dr Morgan was VLV's representative in Wales and we are most grateful for the help he has given with VLV's work in the Principality and educational policies.



Professor Bob Franklin, PhD, Professor of Journalism Studies at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff has been co-opted on to the VLV Board. He was previously Professor of Media

Communications at the Department of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield. Professor Franklin's interest in the media has had a

particular focus on news media, especially local news media and social policy involving children and young people.



Professor Máire Messenger Davies, PhD, FRSA, Professor of Media Studies and Director, Centre for Media Research, School of Media & Performing Arts, University of Ulster, has also been co-opted onto the VLV Board. She was

previously Professor of Journalism at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wales. Professor Messenger Davies has a long-standing interest in children and the media and has contributed to many publications on the subject.

Shop online and make more money for VLV

VLV has set up an online shop which allows you, your family and friends to buy a wide range of goods and services from leading retailers including Marks & Spencer, Amazon and Comet. VLV's online shop can be found at www.buy.at/vlv

Every time you use the shop, VLV benefits from a generous commission paid by the online retailers which goes into our fundraising account. It's as simple as that! Any money raised by VLV in this way will be used to help to fund our advocacy and campaigning work, so crucially important this year when the BBC is going through the process of Charter Renewal.

A large number of charities and school fundraising appeals have set up similar online shops over the past three years. In 2003, this online shopping fundraising idea, run by Perfiliate Technologies, won the New Statesman New Media Award and the Regional Commerce Awards.

VLV does not have any say in the retailers and other providers of goods and services featured in the shop. As with all online shopping, it is important to make sure that your computer is free of viruses or spyware which might compromise your personal or financial details. We hope that you will start using the VLV online shop, and that you will also recommend it to people you know. Why not make it your preferred online shop, and help fundraise for VLV at the same time?

Join VLV Listeners' and Viewers' Panel

VLV is setting up a Listeners' and Viewers' Panel to help find out the views of its members on a range of broadcasting issues. The information will be used to help inform our work in responding to consultations on broadcasting issues and in formulating VLV policy.

For example, if you have digital television, we want to know what you think about its quality and value for money. If you listen to the radio, we want to know what you think of existing and new services. If you have children, we would also like to know about their viewing habits.

We would like to hear from as many VLV members as possible who would be prepared to answer a series of questionnaires and also occasionally take part in more detailed discussions and focus groups. Please contact us by phone on 01474 352835, by letter to 101 King's Drive, Gravesend, Kent DA12 5BQ or by e-mail to info@vlv.org.uk

Members' Survey

The last year has seen VLV continuing to grow, with over 300 new members joining, and the organisation reaching out to new audiences with campaigns such as 'Broadcasting Matters' and the launch of our Student Essay Competition.

In order to make our services to you as relevant to your concerns as possible, we need to know more about how you use television, radio and the internet. And to know what you think of the range of services we provide to you, including the VLV Bulletin, our website and our conferences.

We'd be very grateful if all members and subscribers could take the time to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the envelope provided (it does need a stamp!). If you return the survey by 1 June, your name will be entered in a free prize draw for a £20 shopping voucher and the two runners up will have their next year's membership free of charge.

3rd AGM of VLV Ltd

The 3rd annual general meeting of VLV Ltd will be held in London on Wednesday, 30 November. The formal notice and call for nominations to the Board will be published in the summer Bulletin.

VLV's Spring Conference – 25th April

Building Public Value in Broadcasting

continued from front cover

Roly Keating, Controller of BBC 2 and Mark Damazer, Controller of BBC Radio 4, will be the speakers in the afternoon session, Implementing Public Value in Programme Content, starting at 3.15pm.

Extra Discussion Groups on the Green Paper
We are arranging a number of optional discussion groups prior to the conference at 10.00am to provide an opportunity for VLV members to discuss some of the issues raised in the Green Paper. They will be led by members of the VLV Board and we shall use the findings to inform our response to the consultation.



Roly Keating



Mark Damazer

Coffee will be available as normal, from 10.30am.

VLV's 2004 Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting

Ken Bruce, the popular Radio 2 Presenter, will present VLV's 2004 Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting at 1.45pm during the conference. We expect a range of well-known personalities to receive their inscribed crystal trophies which are kindly donated by Dartington Crystal.

Special Post-election Briefing on the Green Paper and other Urgent Issues

Thursday, 19 May 6.30 – 8.30pm
One Whitehall Place, London SW1

With the BBC Charter due for renewal, increasing competition for audiences posing a threat to the advertising revenue on which ITV and Channel 4 depend and the proposed switch-off of analogue television by 2012, British broadcasting will see more change in next five years than ever before.

What impact will the election have on current and future Government policy?

Be the first to find out at this special VLV evening meeting – the last before VLV finalises its submission to the Green Paper consultation.

Tickets £10 include light refreshments.

Cambridge, Norwich and Oxford to host VLV seminars on the BBC Green Paper

NORWICH

Tim Bishop, Head of Regional & Local Programmes, BBC East and Graham Creelman, Managing Director of ITV Anglia, are the speakers at VLV's evening seminar at the Assembly House in Norwich on Tuesday, 12 April. (7– 8.30pm).

The seminar will be chaired by Rosemary McCulloch, former VLV committee member, a Governor of Peterborough Foundation Hospital Trust and former National Vice Chairman of the University of the Third Age. The seminar is supported by Charter 88.

CAMBRIDGE

Tim Bishop, BBC East and Dr Georgina Born, Director of Studies in Social and Political Science at Emmanuel College, Cambridge will be among the speakers at VLV's evening seminar at Emmanuel College, Cambridge on Tuesday, 3 May. (6 – 8pm). Rosemary McCulloch will be in the chair.

OXFORD

The sixth of VLV's Broadcasting Matters seminars to raise awareness of the importance of the current consultation on the Review of the BBC Charter, and to consider the



future remit of ITV and digital switch over, will be held in Oxford in the middle of May, in association with Green College, Oxford. Date and venue to be confirmed.

Three seminars have already been held – in Birmingham and Manchester on 3 and 12 March, in association with CSV Media, and in Edinburgh on 15 March in association with Napier University.

BIRMINGHAM

The speakers in Birmingham were: David Holdsworth, Head of Regional and Local Programmes, West Midlands, Duncan Rycroft, Controller, Regional Programmes, ITV Central and Michael Darlow, broadcaster and author. David Harte, University of Central England, was in the chair.

Discussion focused on changes at the BBC and concern at the proposed cutbacks in ITV's non-news regional programming.

MANCHESTER

The speakers in Manchester were: Martin Brooks, Head of BBC North West, Sue Woodward, Managing Director, ITV Granada and Michael Darlow, broadcaster and author. Louise Sethi, University of Manchester Business Careers and Community Division, was in the chair.

Discussion focused on the advantages of the proposed move of BBC Departments to Manchester, including Children's BBC (CBBC), and concern at the proposed lightening of ITV's public service remit, especially its regional output. Much of ITV's children's department has already been concentrated at Granada, and the broadcasters felt that both the region and the industry would benefit from the creation of a stronger creative centre in the North.

EDINBURGH

Robert Beveridge of Napier University's School of Communication Arts, led the discussion in Edinburgh. Discussion focused on the future of the BBC in Scotland and concern at the proposed lightening of the public service remit of Scottish Television, including the company's desire to drop its programmes in Gaelic.

The seminars and VLV's Broadcasting Matters campaign, are supported by the Andrew Wainwright Social Reform Trust. The findings will be used to inform VLV policy and response to the Green Paper.



Lords Select Committee on the Future of the BBC.

The House of Lords has appointed a Select Committee to consider and report on the Government Review of the BBC's Royal Charter and to examine the proposals set out in the current Green Paper.

Most crucially, you can contribute to the Committee's findings.

Chaired by Lord Fowler, the committee will take comments and submissions until 2 May and publish its report before the publication of a White Paper in the autumn.

The key areas it will discuss are the role, duties and responsibilities of the BBC - regionally, nationally and globally; are the organisation's purposes, as defined by the Green Paper, correct? Should the BBC bear responsibility for digital switch-over? How should the BBC be run? Should the Governors be replaced by a Trust and an executive board as the Green Paper proposes? How will accountability and consumer interests be guaranteed? Will the Corporation's independence and impartiality be sufficiently safeguarded?

Lord Fowler says: "We will want to be satisfied that measures proposed by Ministers are adequate to protect the independence of the BBC from outside pressure. We will examine whether proposals to replace the BBC Governors with a BBC Trust and Executive Board are sensible".

The members of the Committee are: Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, Lord Fowler (Chairman), Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen, Lord Holme of Cheltenham, Baroness Howe of Idlicote, Lord Kalms, Lord King of Bridgwater, The Lord Bishop of Manchester, Lord Maxton, Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve, Lord Peston.

Send submissions or comments by 2 May to: Chloe Mawson, Select Committee on the BBC Review, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW. and preferably also as an email attachment to: mawsonc@parliament.uk
Tel 020 7219 5765 Fax 020 7219 4931

The Green Paper is available at:
www.bbccharterreview.org.uk/pdf_documents/bbc_cr_greenpaper.pdf
The select committee home page is www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/bbccharter.cfm

Meetings attended by VLV

Since the beginning of 2005, VLV representatives have attended or spoken at meetings of the following organisations: BBC, BBC Africa 2015; Ofcom Content Board and other departments; Nottingham Conservative Lunch; Social Market Foundation; Westminster Media Forum; Bath Literary & Scientific Society; Sandford St Martin Trust; Commonwealth Broadcasting Association; European Commission Focus Group in Brussels on Revisions to the TV Without Frontiers Directive; Council of Europe NGO Forum on the Mass Media in Kiev.

The Green Paper Review



'The BBC is as much a part of British life as the NHS. There for everyone, free at the point of use, striving for the highest standards. And like the NHS it faces the need to change so that it can be as effective in the future as it has been in the past.'

Said the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell, at VLV's Seminar on the Green Paper in Westminster, 22 March, and again in her foreword to the Green Paper that she presented to Parliament in March.

Containing more than 100 pages, the Green Paper sets out some firm aspects of Government policy on the future of the BBC and consults on others, posing 20 specific questions on aspects of the Charter, licence fee funding and Governance. The goal is to ensure the survival of a strong BBC, independent of Government, setting world-class standards across the board and acting as a creative powerhouse.

VLV is preparing its submission but before finalising it, wishes to hear its members' views and complete further research. We set out below some major points and the consultation questions to which the DCMS is requesting responses, together with some initial observations.

A. The mission of the BBC in the 21st century should be to inform, educate and entertain. All BBC activities should contribute to core public purposes which: sustain citizenship and civil society; promote education and learning; stimulate creativity and excellence; reflect the UK, its Nations, regions and communities; bring the world to the UK and the UK to the world. The BBC should do so by providing a wide range of content that aims to be high quality, challenging, original, innovative and engaging across every genre.

Questions 1, 2 & 3: Is it helpful to define the BBC's purposes in this way? Are these the right purposes and characteristics? Members could also comment here on whether the BBC World Service (which is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) should reduce its foreign language services and run television as well as radio services.

VLV comment: *BBC programmes and services should strive to meet these aims but a balance is needed between popularity and distinctiveness. An unduly prescriptive remit could lead to a lower audience share, excluding some licence fee payers and undermining the political and economic case for funding by a universal licence fee. The BBC World Service does a valuable job for Britain and should develop its television and its online services.*

B. The BBC should play a leading role in developing, promoting and building digital Britain, including developing new technology, maintaining universal access, informing the public and driving digital switchover whilst helping to establish and pay for schemes to assist vulnerable consumers both to make and pay for the switch to digital.

Question 4. Should the BBC be at the forefront of developments in technology including digital television and switch-over?

VLV comment. *The BBC should be at the forefront of developments in digital technology but licence fee payers - who fund the BBC - should not bear the full cost of building digital Britain. The Government should meet some of the costs since the nation as a whole will benefit from switch-over. Industry players should also be prepared to invest in the new technology since they will benefit from the new services and sales of equipment. The BBC, having been forced to sell its transmitter network, is now at a disadvantage as it cannot leverage the full value of its digital programming initiatives without the co-operation of commercial partners.*

An immediate joint initiative is needed to establish a genuinely independent, free to air satellite service for the transmission of BBC and other public service channels.

C. The BBC should be funded by the licence fee for the next 10 years. Before then there would be a review of other funding methods, including subscription. Meantime BBC funding from April 2007 will take account of value for money, taking account of the costs of the Green Paper proposals and potential efficiency savings.

Questions 5 & 6 Do you support the proposal for the review of alternative funding methods before the end of the next Charter period? Do you have a view on any aspect of the licence fee: concessions, its collection or its enforcement.

VLV comment: *VLV welcomes the proposal to give the BBC a new Charter and 10 year licence fee settlement. It does not support any changes to funding methods as these would jeopardise provision to licence fee payers of the full range of diversity and services which - as the government's own substantial research has shown - they expect from the BBC*

Review of the BBC's Royal Charter

D. The BBC's Board of Governors will be replaced by a new body called the 'BBC Trust'. (It will not operate as a conventional trust). The Trust will embody the public interest and take responsibility for the oversight of BBC strategy, performance and licence fee expenditure and for representing the views of licence fee payers. It will also approve detailed service licences and submit any proposed new service to a public value test, working to protocols written into the Charter and Agreement. It will have its own staff along the lines of the recently established Governance Unit.

An Executive Board will be responsible for delivering the BBC services. It will include non-executive directors, and be chaired by the Director General or a non-executive. The Board would oversee the day to day management of the BBC, including developing programme strategies and delivering the BBC's services.

Questions 7, 8, 9 & 10. Are the roles of the BBC Trust and the Executive Board sufficiently clear? Is the public interest remit of the Trust correctly defined? Are the protocols governing the behaviour of Trust members and the handling of complaints correct?

VLV comment. *VLV supports the thinking behind the proposals for a Trust but believes the proposals have not been thought through, VLV doubts whether a commercial model with non-executives is appropriate for the BBC. If the Trust is to be accountable to the public, it must be democratic and transparent in its working. How will the Trust represent the views of licence payers? VLV welcomes the definition of the Trust's public interest remit but believes the outcome will depend on the balance struck between the objectives. VLV sees the potential for conflict between the Trust and the regulator Ofcom, especially in regard to production quotas, programme standards and competition issues. The boundaries between the responsibilities of the Trust and Ofcom need to be made clearer.*

Questions 11, 12, 13. How many members should the BBC Trust have? What expertise do they need and should they represent particular groups?

VLV comment. *VLV believes between nine and twelve members to be ideal and sufficient to represent all interest groups. No particular groups should be guaranteed representation. The public would have more confidence in the independence and ability of the Trust members if the appointments were made by the Queen following advice independent of the Prime Minister or his Office.*

E. Organisation and Infrastructure – The BBC needs to have sufficient scale to sustain high quality services right across the UK, excellence in training and research, plus a critical mass of in-house production. It should also operate

a competitive commissioning system and the Government favours the BBC proposal to create a 'window of creative competition' between BBC in-house and external producers.

Questions 14 and 15. Can a window of creative competition be made to work? Should quotas for independent TV and radio production be introduced?

VLV comment. *Competition may provide programme choice. But real choice depends on imaginative ideas and the broadcaster having the resources to commission and fulfil them; it is not dependent on quotas for independent production. The BBC Trust should have the power to use the new system of detailed service licences to encourage the Executive Board to improve choice and creative opportunity.*

F. The scope of publicly-funded services. The BBC's current range of services has broad support. However, there should be flexibility to add or remove services. Any significant change will be subject to a public value test by the BBC Trust which would recommend it to the Secretary of State. Ofcom will also carry out a market impact assessment for any new service. The BBC's proposal for a new 'creative archive' to make its programmes available more widely would be the first idea subject to these new tests. The BBC should be encouraged to generate income from commercial activity, for example by selling programmes overseas but there should be no cross-subsidy for its commercial services, all of which will be rigorously regulated. All activity should be linked to the BBC's public purposes and be subject to competition law and the BBC's Fair Trading Commitment involving Ofcom.

Questions 16, 17, 18 & 19. Should the BBC be able to make changes to its services; are the proposals for handling new services acceptable; should the BBC's commercial activities be restricted solely to its public purposes; is the fair trading commitment a useful addition to current arrangements for regulating the BBC's commercial activities?

VLV comment. *The BBC should be able to make changes to its services. VLV questions the proposals for handling new services because neither the success nor the impact can be accurately predicted before the service is launched, especially in an emerging market where social values must be weighed against*

economic criteria. VLV questions the wisdom of involving the Secretary of State at this stage, since in the case of a disagreement between the BBC Trust and Ofcom, an appeal may be made to the Secretary of State for a final decision. The present arrangements appear to be working well, why change them?

G. The wider system of public service broadcasting ITV, Channel 4 and Five also contribute to the plurality of public service television. Ofcom suggests that Channel 4 has no immediate need for extra funding but may do so in future. ITV is highly profitable at the moment but with the other terrestrial broadcasters faces increasing competition for audiences and a diminishing income from advertising as digital switch-over approaches. Ofcom has already given permission for ITV to reduce its non-news regional programming together with its religious and children's programmes. Ofcom has also suggested that a Publicly funded Service Publisher (PSP) might be created. The PSP would receive public funding from a range of sources, including a possible levy or 'top-slice' of the BBC licence fee. Any broadcaster would be able to bid for funding from it for 'public service' programmes. Lord Burns' Committee of inquiry recommended a Public Service Broadcasting Commission, which would set the level of the licence fee and have powers to award part of the licence-fee to other broadcasters than the BBC..

The Green Paper proposes two licence fee reviews before digital switch-over takes place. One to establish whether new types of funding may be needed to supplement or even replace the licence fee (for example subscription television) after 2016 when the next BBC Charter expires. The second to consider whether there is a case for making public money, including part of the licence fee, available to commercially funded broadcasters to sustain the plurality of public service broadcasters.

Question 20. Should the case for a plurality of public-funded broadcasters be kept under review?

VLV comment. *It is in the interests of viewers and listeners to have a plurality of PSBs and for the funding of the system to be kept under review. It is not in the interest of viewers or listeners for any of the licence fee income to be distributed to broadcasters other than the BBC.*

BBC

The Green Paper can be obtained online at
www.charterreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk
 by e-mailing enquiries@culture.gov.uk;
 telephoning: 020 7211 6200; faxing 020 7211 6330
 or writing to: BBC Charter Review, DCMS,
 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH

Responses should be sent to the same addresses by 31st May 2005



Who's Who in Broadcasting

Richard Hooper, Deputy Chairman of Ofcom, and chair of Ofcom's Content Board, will retire from the regulator at the end of the year.

Peter Fincham, who has been appointed Controller of BBC 1, left Talkback Thames in January after overseeing the smooth merger in 2003 of these two leading independent production companies. He has not worked at the BBC before but has been executive producer of a wide range of programmes shown on the BBC. They include *The Lost Prince*, *I'm Alan Partridge*, *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* and *The Apprentice*. He replaces Lorraine Heggessey who, coincidentally, replaces him at Talkback Thames.



Alison Sharman, has been appointed Controller of BBC Children's Programmes, replacing Dorothy Prior who, as the new Controller of Production Resources, will spearhead the Corporation's efficiency drive. Ms Sharman has already agreed to speak at VLV's 11th annual conference on Children and Television at the Royal Society on Wednesday, 2 November.



Book Reviews



CAN THE MARKET DELIVER? - FUNDING PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION IN THE DIGITAL AGE
 Edited by Dieter Helm, New College, Oxford, (p/b) £17.50, ISBN 0 86 196 662 7
 published by John Libbey Publishing, Box 276, Eastleigh, SO50 5YS, UK.

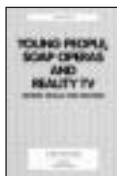
john.libbey@libertysurf.fr. website www.johnlibbey.com

The UK broadcasting market is changing rapidly as new digital channels and services proliferate. Some claim that television can now be left largely to the market, that the BBC licence fee should be replaced by subscription and that public funding should be limited to socially desirable programming. Others believe the need for public intervention will grow rather than diminish. These eight essays, commissioned by the BBC, contribute to the debate about the future of public service television in the digital age.

YOUNG PEOPLE, SOAP OPERAS AND REALITY TV

Edited by Cecilia von Feilitzen, Scientific Co-ordinator of Nordicom, the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, Goteborg University, Box 713, Se 405 30 Goteborg, Sweden. P/b ISBN 91 -89 471 28 8.

Clearinghousenews@nordicom.gu.se



The 7th Yearbook of the Nordicom Institute contains 20 essays by scholars from all over the world. It looks at how the transformation of traditional soaps into more extreme forms and the rise of 'global' reality TV formats has whipped up controversy and worries about their effect on young viewers - because children in all countries watch adult programming from an early age. The Yearbook provides some evidence and much food for further thought and research.

The Future for Public Service Broadcasting in Europe and the Commonwealth

VLV's International Conference 11 February 2005

More than 100 delegates from nearly 30 countries gathered at the Royal Society in London for VLV's 10th International Conference.

Representatives from five of the member countries of the European Alliance of Listeners' & Viewers' Associations, EURALVA were present and Jocelyn Hay read messages of good will from others in Portugal, Canada and Australia.

In the first session, chaired by Elizabeth Smith, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, the speakers were Adam Singer, Content Board Member of the UK regulator Ofcom, K. S. Sarma, Chief Executive, Prasar Bharati Broadcasting Corporation, India, Ken Clark, Chief Executive, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, and George Valarino, General Manager, Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation. They explained some of the problems broadcasters face in these highly diverse countries where new technology is bringing new opportunities but also a threat to indigenous cultures as increasing numbers of satellite channels broadcast largely American content.

Session two, chaired by Carole Tongue, former MEP spokesperson on public service broadcasting, considered the particular problems faced by European broadcasters. These include revisions to the European Directives on Services and on Trans-Frontier Television, and claims from commercial broadcasters that public funding

is anti-competitive. The speakers were Karol Jakubowicz, Chairman of the Council of Europe CDMM Committee and National Broadcasting Council, Poland, Nicola Frank, Deputy Director, European Affairs, Europe Broadcasting Union, and Dr Verena Wiedemann, Head of European Affairs, ARD, Germany.

Later, attention turned to the role played by broadcast news in democracy and the skills and courage required by journalists and news editors in the face of political and commercial pressure. Chaired by John Owen, Executive Producer, NewsXchange and visiting Professor of Journalism, City University, London, the speakers were Nigel Chapman, Director, BBC World Service, Paul Gibbs, Programme Director, Al Jazeera International and Nick Wrenn, Director of CNN's London Bureau.

The final session, chaired by VLV Board member, Professor Vincent Porter, examined ways in which citizens can help to ensure that the public service ethos, good governance and accountability prevail in broadcasting. The speakers were Jamie Cowling, Institute of Public Policy Research, London, Dr Manfred Kops, University of Cologne, speaking for EURALVA, and Paddy Coulter, Director of the Reuters Foundation, Green College, Oxford.

Audio cassettes and CDs of the proceedings cost £20. A report is also available on the VLV website: www.vlv.org.uk



Pictured from left, Elizabeth Smith, George Valarino, KS Sarma, Ken Clark, Adam Singer and Jocelyn Hay.

VLV Visit to the British Board of Film Classification

David Cook, Director of the BBFC welcomed a large party of VLV members to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in March. He introduced Chief Policy Assistant, Craig Lapper and Head of Information, Sue Clark, then explained the difference in the BBFC's varying categories of classification. They include: U, PG, 12, 12A, 15, 18 and R18. Since February, audiences have been able to see an explanation of the meaning of the categories U, PG and 12A on screen, immediately after the BBFC's 'black card'.

It was not the job of the BBFC to lead opinion, Mr Cook said, but to keep in close touch with it. A recent consultation conducted by the BBFC on its new guidelines had proved particularly beneficial,

as participants had been able to express their concerns about violence, obscene language, sex and drugs.

He then explained how sexual violence had become a serious issue, as was a tendency for certain films to include racist language, incitement to racial hatred and self-harm, especially in young adults. Directors in both the UK and the USA sometimes seek the BBFC's advice about scenes which might influence the classification of their films. After outlining the BBFC's policy on computer games, he and his colleagues took part in a lively discussion during which some members expressed concern about the 12A certificate and that obscene language seemed to be more acceptable than previously.

Pamela Birley

Letters to the Editor

Letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Association and may be shortened for publication.

Thank you for organising the Charles Wheeler lecture. I found it fascinating and most enjoyable. VLV has broadened my horizons and I shall keep coming to represent the lay membership

Dr T Vaughn-Williams, London E14

IN MEMORIAM

I cannot get to your meetings but I very much support your work.

My aunt, Marjorie Lawman of Braunton, North Devon, died recently at the age of 97. In her later years she was blind but she listened to, and enjoyed, Radio 3 every single day. So I am sending a donation in remembrance of her.

Mary Hollingworth, Trowbridge, Wilts

Editor's note: we are most grateful to Mrs Hollingworth for this kind memorial which will help us to continue our work on behalf of radio listeners.

BROADCASTING MATTERS & THE GREEN PAPER

I welcome the seminars that VLV is planning as part of its Broadcasting Matters campaign. The whole future of our broadcasting system hangs in the balance at the moment and the auguries for a healthy, high quality, public service future are far from good. It is vital that everyone who cares pitches in to help.

Michael Darlow, Bradford on Avon, Wilts

My wife and I greatly enjoyed the two Westminster seminars in March. You did well to corral four MPs at such a busy period.

We remember when there was only the BBC but although attitudes and technologies change, we believe that there should remain an independent, TV channel, not Government controlled, nor so under-funded that it slowly withers away.

It was particularly nice to meet other VLV members and non-members, and to hear their views. I shall be writing to our Member of Parliament with our views.

Peter and Sheila Seldon, Carterton, Oxon

Keep up the good works! There is still a need for public broadcasting. The BBC should not be subjected to the ratings game.

J Simpkins, Richmond, Surrey

I have spoken to several BBC supporters since the Green Paper was published and they seem to think that the main threat is past. Is this true? If not, could you explain why broadcasting and the BBC are currently under threat?

Alan Massam, Walton at Stone, Hertford

Editor's note: Although the Green Paper is reassuring in parts, the threats to the BBC and public service broadcasting are still real and great – and intentions could easily change between now and the White Paper and Charter renewal. It is absolutely essential for us and all who care to continue campaigning for the retention of a strong, independent, accountable BBC and for the principles of public service to be retained across all broadcasters.

I am concerned that there will be another review of BBC funding via the licence fee, before digital switch-over in 2012 and the next Charter review. We do not have a television but listen to BBC radio via digital broadcasts for many hours a day.

I do not think there is enough advertising to support the BBC radio networks even if it was decided to wreck the concept of public service radio by taking advertising. The Green Paper clearly indicates that subscription is technically a long way off even for TV.

I hope the Secretary of State will agree to a long-term commitment to licence fee funding if only to secure the comparatively small budget of the BBC radio networks.

Robert Clark, By e-mail

WORLD SERVICE BROADCASTING

Re the correspondence about the BBC World Service dropping its short wave broadcasts to North America. I gather these stopped four years ago. The BBC FM broadcasts are heard by urban audiences. Surely it is the rural areas we should be reaching?

Patrick Xavier, By e-mail

Editor's note: We are told that nearly 400 stations now carry BBC World Service programming in FM or MW. The WS has doubled its US Audience from 2.3 million to 4.7 million since stopping direct short wave broadcasts – in one of the world's most competitive markets. There are now more ways to access BBC World Service in the USA than ever before, including via the internet and 'on demand'. Also, while there are now no direct BBC short wave transmissions to North America, it is often possible to pick up short wave transmissions intended for other regions in parts of the USA and Canada. A full list of frequencies and the times of broadcasts can be obtained from the BBC or its website, www.bbcworldservice.com

I live in Shanghai. My radio listening is all on the internet – I watch very little television, and – then only CNN (unfortunately). When compared with the news provision of other countries, and other satellite feeds,

the BBC is far above them and should be maintained with direct funding – licence or tax.

David Wales, Shanghai, People's Republic of China

WAR TIME BROADCASTS TO GERMANY

Thank you for publishing my letter in the January Bulletin. May I make a few additions to the description of how we first came into contact with the BBC. Knowledge of English was not necessary when we began to listen to the BBC because the broadcasts were in German... After the war, Hugh Carleton Green was chosen to build up an independent, non-partisan, German radio service in the then British Zone of Occupation... It ultimately became Norddeutscher Rundfunk NDR centered at Hamburg and Westdeutscher Rundfunk WDR, at Cologne. Those structures still exist although they have been watered down since in so far as party politics have a greater influence now... this was my reason for joining VLV to see if something similar could be built up here... On the entertainment side we also listened to Nat Gonella, Carol Gibbons and his Savoy Hotel Orpheans and other famous orchestras.

Erwin H Kleine, Bad Salzuflen, Germany

Editor's note: several readers have written in response to Mr Kleine's original request for information about Hugh Carleton Greene Sefton Delmer and Lindley Fraser and how he can obtain recordings of early broadcasts, for which we are grateful.

TIMING OF VLV EVENTS

I enjoyed the autumn conference but I would like to point out that as you changed the starting time to 10.00am, some of us had to miss the beginning.

Non-season ticket holders are not allowed to catch a train before 9am or to park in the station car park. Could you please bear in mind that it is very disappointing to miss most of the first speaker?

Joy du Pre, Midhurst, West Sussex

Editor's note: We do understand the difficulty of members who live outside London but sometimes it is necessary. We started at 10.30am in November to suit the speaker. We are adding optional discussion groups before the main speaker at the Spring Conference in order to increase the value of the event.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Spring Concert kindly given by the BBC Elstree Concert Band. What a pleasure – and it was a great privilege to have it in the BBC's Maid Vale studios.

I hope there will an opportunity to come again.

Ted Bell, Bognor Regis, West Sussex

DIGITAL

I wonder how many viewers use indoor aerials? If they wish to use a digibox they will have to install an external aerial which will add to their costs for the switch over. If they chose instead to subscribe to cable or satellite services that will incur a TV reception cost beyond the current BBC licence fee. For many VLV members the true costs of switch over have been completely hidden and will come a shock.

Waaen Newman, Greenwich, London SE10s

Digital Update

Although the Government has yet to give its approval, Ofcom has issued a new set of digital broadcast licences which involve a staggered timetable of dates for switch-over in different regions of the UK. They start in Wales and the West in 2008 and end with the Channel Islands in 2012.

A new company Switchco, chaired by Barry Cox, currently chairman of the Digital Stakeholders' Group, is about to be set up to manage the transition. The Green Paper gives the BBC a major role in achieving a smooth switch-over, and requires the Corporation both to launch an information campaign to explain the changes, and to assist and help pay for

vulnerable consumers to make the switch. VLV is monitoring the impact these moves will have on licence-payers and the difficulties some viewers will face. Please let us know of your experiences.

Meantime – Buyers Beware!

Many retailers are still selling wide-screen analogue TV sets but after switch-over, analogue TV sets and video recorders will not work without special adaptation or a digital set top box. So be sure to check that any new equipment you buy has the digital logo tick clearly displayed on it.



**Deadline for next issue:
20 June, 2005**

Write, fax or e-mail your letters to the Editor at:
VLVbulletin@btinternet.com

Advertisements

Please refer to VLV when responding to advertisements. VLV Ltd cannot accept any liability or complaint in regard to the following offers. The charge for classified advertisements is 30p per word, 20p for members. Please send typed copy with a cheque made payable to VLV Ltd. For display space please contact Linda Forbes on 01474 352835.

Special Offer for VLV readers!

Voice of the Listener & Viewer has teamed up with Broadcast, the weekly newspaper for the TV and radio industry, to offer VLV readers a great offer. Subscribe to Broadcast by 31st August and save £20 on an annual subscription. As well as 50 weekly copies delivered to your door you'll also receive full access to all the premium services on Broadcastnow.

Simply visit www.subscription.co.uk/broadcast/vlv1 or call 01858 438847 and quote VLV.



Diary Dates

Tuesday, 19 April

VLV visit to Ofcom, Field Operations Division, Riverside House, London SE1
11am - 2pm

Monday, 25 April

VLV 22nd Spring Conference, Hamilton House, Off Euston Road, London, WC1
10.00am - 4.45pm

Tuesday, 3 May

VLV seminar on the BBC Green Paper, Emmanuel College, Regent Street, Cambridge
6 - 8pm

Mid May

VLV meeting on the BBC Green Paper, Oxford
Venue and date TBC

Thursday, 19 May

VLV meeting on the BBC Green Paper, One Whitehall Place, London SW1
6.30pm

Tuesday, 31st May

Close of Public Consultation on the BBC Green Paper

Wednesday, 8 June

VLV visit to British Forces Broadcasting Service, Gerrard's Cross, Bucks
2.30pm

Wednesday, 22 June

VLV Visit to the Mailbox, BBC Birmingham's new premises and studios
2.30 - 4pm

Friday, 16 September

VLV visit to Met Office, Exeter
1pm

Wednesday, 2 November

11th Annual conference of the VLV Forum for Children's Broadcasting. The Royal Society, Carlton House Terrace, London SW1
9.45 - 5pm

Wednesday, 30 November

VLV Autumn Conference
10.30-3.30pm
London WC1
VLV Ltd AGM
4pm
London WC1

Competition

AND FINALLY...?



The News From ITN

Richard Lindley

And Finally...? The news from ITN

For fifty years ITN has been at the heart of independent television news in Britain, but in today's profit driven environment there is no guarantee it will continue to supply the news to the UK's commercial broadcasters. You could win a copy of 'And Finally...?' by Richard Lindley, who reported for ITN in the 1960s, 70s and 90s, by answering the question below.

Question: What is the name of ITN's leading news anchorman who was born in Trinidad?

Replies on a postcard to:
ITN Competition, VLV, 101 Kings Drive,
Gravesend, DA12 5BQ

Or by email to: info@vlv.org.uk by 1 June 2005.
The editor's decision is final.

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