

Cragg Ross Dawson

BBC CHARTER REVIEW

**Qualitative research on key
issues**

REPORT

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APPENDICES

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The BBC has been established by Royal Charter from the early days of its existence. The first Charter ran from 1 January 1927 to 31 December 1936. The eighth Charter period ends on 31 December 2006. The review of the Charter provides the Government with an opportunity, every ten years or so, to look carefully at the BBC's role, functions and structure.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is currently conducting the ten-yearly review of the BBC. In 2004 DCMS carried out an extensive programme of consultation and research to look at what the public wanted from the BBC of the future. These findings helped to form many of the options in the Green Paper "Review of the BBC's Royal Charter, *A strong BBC, independent of government*".

Research on public perceptions of the BBC was conducted in 2004, by Cragg Ross Dawson and others. Prior to the publication of the Green Paper DCMS wanted to examine public attitudes to the key recommendations and questions in that paper and gauge any changes in attitudes since last year.

Qualitative research was commissioned to explore these public attitudes. The topics covered in the research were:

- the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster and the criteria used to assess its performance
- the BBC's role in digital broadcasting
- the licence fee
- the use of a Charter as the means of establishing the BBC and defining its role, and the possible alternative of establishing the BBC as a statutory body, under an Act of Parliament
- governance of the BBC, the dual role of the Governors in helping to direct and assess the BBC's performance, and the possible role of an independent body
- the BBC's responsiveness to public opinion

- the requirement for approval by the Secretary of State of new channels and services
- the BBC's presence in and provision for the regions and devolved nations
- the BBC's involvement in commercial services, particularly its role in producing magazines

B. SAMPLE AND METHOD

Ten focus group discussions were conducted with members of the public who watched television and listened to the radio.

The sample was structured as follows:

- G1 16-25 single/partnered with no children BC1 South East
- G2 16-25 single/partnered with no children C2DE Midlands
- G3 26-45 partnered, children under 16 at home BC1 Midlands
- G4 26-45 partnered, children under 16 at home C2DE Scotland
- G5 46-60 partnered without children at home BC1 Wales
- G6 46-60 partnered without children at home C2DE North
- G7 61-75 empty nesters BC1 Scotland
- G8 61-75 empty nesters C2DE North
- G9 12-13 female C1C2 Wales
- G10 14-15 male C1C2 South East

Notes on the sample and discussion format:

- all the adult groups (16+) were mixed sex
- groups 1, 2, 3 and 10 included people from ethnic minorities
- all respondents watched television for at least one hour a day and listened to the radio at least once a day
- in each group there was a spread of weight of BBC viewing, from half an hour a week to more than three hours a week
- in each group half the respondents had multi channel access (Sky, cable or Freeview) and half had access only to the five main terrestrial channels
- the adult groups were 2 hours in length; those with 12-15 year olds were 90 minutes long

Discussions followed a topic guide agreed with DCMS, and involved the use of statements outlining the main facts for each topic. These are appended to this document. It was clear that some respondents, particularly younger teenagers but also some adults, had difficulty grasping some of the issues under discussion, and/or were far more

interested and concerned about programmes than they were about matters of principle in relation to, say, governance or accountability. Even among those who were informed and engaged enough to debate the issues, discussion did not take place without prompting and was not always fully considered. Nevertheless our feeling was that enough people had a good enough understanding and degree of interest for us to obtain a sound steer on all the issues.

Fieldwork was conducted from 20th to 24th January 2005 by Sarah Calver, Arnold Cragg and Tim Porter. A presentation of findings was given at DCMS on 27th January 2005.

C. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. **The context**

There is a strong sense that the broadcasting world is changing fast, especially television: there are new channels, digital technology and, in some viewers' eyes, the beginnings of a different approach to broadcasting.

Many people judge the BBC in the context of these developments. Because they know it is funded by the licence fee, consequently they believe it needs to be more responsive to public demands than other broadcasters. Related to this, given that it is not dependent for its continued existence on commercial success, measured by ratings, in the same way that other broadcasters are, they feel it has a greater responsibility to uphold certain standards and meet agreed quality criteria.

Some see the BBC as responding effectively to the dynamics of the broadcasting world: those, typically BC1 social class and moderate television viewers, who feel positive towards the BBC. They believe the BBC is changing quickly through its introduction of digital channels and stations, and its interactive facility. In their view, these are signs of the BBC keeping pace with changes in the market and providing licence fee payers with what they want.

Against this there are those who believe the BBC is failing to provide the breadth of choice they want; these people tend to be C2 and D social classes, relatively heavy TV viewers and say they do not like the BBC. They feel particularly critical of the BBC given that they have no choice but to pay the licence fee. There are also those, mainly older viewers, who think the BBC is not upholding standards of taste and decency, in spite of the lack of commercial pressures it faces.

This variance in viewers' degree of satisfaction with the BBC is reflected in views of some of the substantive issues covered in this study, particularly governance of the BBC and its response to public feedback. It is also invariably informed and influenced by views of the licence fee; most of the major aspects of the BBC's current existence

are linked to this, or at least, views on them are made with reference to the licence fee.

2. **The role of the BBC**

The five core public purposes of the BBC (*keeping people informed through news and current affairs; promoting education and learning; enriching the country's culture through exceptional, distinctive and original programming; reflecting regional and cultural diversity; informing the UK about the world and the world about the UK*) are generally accepted. Even among those who are critical of the BBC they are seen, with some qualifications, as largely sound. Supporters of the BBC see them as focusing on BBC strengths and as laudable intentions. Inevitably they invite comment on whether or not the BBC is fulfilling its stated purposes; as might be expected, feelings are mixed.

The five criteria suggested by DCMS as standards for BBC programming (*high quality, original, innovative, challenging and engaging/entertaining*) are unexceptionable but are seen as well chosen. Some who are supportive of the BBC overall but express some dissatisfactions with it feel two other criteria should be added: taste and decency, to ensure that basic standards are met; and value for money, with an eye to keeping control of expenditure and limiting licence fee increases.

3. **Digital services**

There is a widespread belief that the BBC should be at the forefront of developments in digital broadcasting, in relation both to technological advances and to new services. The rationale for this view is that the BBC has the resources, and as the broadcaster funded directly by the public, it should aim to offer its consumers the most up to date broadcasting technology.

This position is qualified by concerns about the costs involved. The feeling is that the BBC should not commit too much of its funding to digital expansion if this means less for the main channels, in particular BBC1 and BBC2. This is particularly the case among those without digital access, some of whom are resentful that they do not have it,

either because it is not available where they live or because they feel they cannot afford it.

4. **The licence fee**

Attitudes to the licence fee seem little different from those expressed in last year's research. At one end of the spectrum a minority feels strongly in favour of the licence fee; at the other extreme another minority is strongly rejecting of the licence fee. In between these extremes, a large number feel ambivalent about it but cannot suggest any obviously better alternatives. As noted, attitudes towards it tend to permeate perceptions of other aspects of the BBC.

5. **The Royal Charter**

There appears to be a broad consensus that the Royal Charter is the appropriate basis for establishing the BBC: there is a widespread belief that this is better than the alternative of establishing the BBC through legislation.

The distinction between the two is not always understood. Among those who are less easily able to understand the concepts of a Royal Charter and parliamentary control, their preference for the former is as much to do with misunderstanding of 'Parliament' and negative feelings towards politicians as it is to do with a need to maintain the BBC's independence. They believe, at a very basic level, that Parliamentary control will mean there are more politics and more politicians on BBC television and radio.

For the majority who can distinguish between the two alternatives, the Royal Charter route is a means of maintaining the BBC's independence from government. They feel this is a precious asset and needs to be guarded; they do not want the BBC to be in danger of becoming 'state controlled'.

6. **Governance and the idea of a separate independent body**

Understanding of the Governors' role is very limited. There is virtually no awareness that the Governors are involved in both setting standards and assessing how well they have been met. Until members of the public are told that the Governors both set and assess achievement of

the BBC's aims, they assume only that the Governors have two broad responsibilities: ensuring that the licence fee is well spent; and maintaining a broadcast output that is appropriate given the source of the BBC's funding.

When told that the Governors have a dual role, few people consider the principle at stake: most express a view that reflects their degree of satisfaction with the BBC's output and the standards it sets. Most supporters of the BBC are happy with the status quo: they see the BBC's long track record as evidence of its effectiveness. And most critics of the BBC believe it could do better and (with prompting) say there should be a separate independent monitoring body to make the BBC give them more of what they want.

This demand for independent monitoring is rarely fully considered. Few people are able to follow it up with ideas on how it might be done: even among those keenest to see a watchdog established, views on how best to assess BBC performance are vague. At best they believe a combination of ratings and subjective judgement of programmes against agreed criteria is the right general approach, but have little idea how this would function.

Given what appears to be low involvement in and understanding of governance issues, it seems unlikely that many viewers will register strong objections if the current system, or something close to it, is maintained. It is also probable that if their demand for a separate independent body is met, they will expect a quick change in the BBC's output and the introduction of far more programmes they want to watch. If this does not follow, there is a risk that they will be seriously disappointed.

Among those who feel most strongly on this point, the issue that really concerns them is the BBC's programming: if they were happy with this they would have little interest in governance.

7. Accountability and responsiveness to public opinion

There is a widespread belief that it is not easy to register concerns or complaints with the BBC, and that even if it is possible to do this, the BBC tends not to take much notice. The more critical viewers tend to

feel that BBC decision-making should be more transparent, and that there should be more opportunity for public input to programmes, and greater responsiveness to this input.

There is some claimed interest in a range of possible means of giving feedback on programmes, and suggestions for making this more high tech than current options, such as using BBCi, email or texting. There is also some interest in getting access to BBC decision-making. In reality any new means of making complaint or comment will have to be well publicised and incentivised to work effectively.

Those who are more critical of the current system of accountability, imagined that a body charged with monitoring programming would have largely the same role as mechanisms for making the BBC more responsive to viewers' and listeners' demands and preferences.

8. Control over new services

The general feeling is that the government should have involvement in and some control over what services the BBC launches. When asked, most of the public believe that the BBC should not have a free hand to introduce new channels and stations, given the large sums of licence fee payers' money involved.

This is not a unanimous view, and there are reservations about both the government in general and a named minister having a say in decisions; but there appears to be a belief that someone should keep a check on big decisions at the BBC, given the large sums of licence payers' money involved.

9. The BBC in the regions

The fact that the BBC's resources are concentrated in London is not applauded, but there does not appear to be a strong, unqualified demand for a substantial shift of resources and staffing out of London.

In principle people outside London feel it makes sense to spread expenditure and programme production more evenly around the country; and those in the devolved nations believe it is only right that they have their own BBC representation and function.

Nevertheless there is little appetite for this being done for its own sake if it means additional expenditure. The consensus appears to be that it is a laudable aim, but should not be pursued without reference to the costs involved. Most people believe that the guiding principle should be efficiency and value for money in making programmes.

10. **BBC magazines**

The BBC's production of magazines is not a contentious issue and generates little in the way of debate or strong opinion. The great majority seem to feel that provided there is financial transparency and as long as licence fee funds are not involved, there is no concern about the BBC's activities in this area.

D. FINDINGS

1. **The context**

1.1 Perceptions of TV and radio

As was evident in last year's research, the broadcasting world was regarded as dynamic and fast changing. There was a general belief that things have moved quickly in the last ten years: there are new channels and stations, new means of access to TV and radio and different approaches to programmes. Developing technology was seen as part of this dynamism; new commercial and BBC TV digital channels were known to be available, and some people knew that new radio stations were broadcast in digital.

There was some awareness of digital radio but digital technology was clearly more salient in relation to TV. About half the sample had access to digital TV channels (as specified in our recruitment criteria). Few people had digital radios and there appeared to be much less interest in digital radio, though a few listened via their televisions. The incidence of people accessing radio and TV via computers also appeared to be low.

Responses to the perceived changes in the broadcast environment were largely positive. Many people welcomed these developments if they meant increased choice and improvements in technical quality, and a more innovative, daring approach to programmes.

However, there were some detractors. Older people in particular were likely to express less interest in having a wider choice and also to lament what they saw as a decline in standards. They were more concerned about the quality of existing programming than increased choice offered by new channels.

The drop in standards that they detected was manifested in both the types of programmes being broadcast, and, more generally, in on-screen behaviour and attitudes. Specifically they complained about 'me-too' programming, particularly 'reality TV' and 'fly on the wall' documentaries; and what they felt was an increased incidence of swearing, sexual innuendo, sex and violence.

Some younger heavy TV viewers felt that greater choice had not led to an increase in the number of programmes they wanted to watch. Alongside this, they also felt that terrestrial-based broadcasters had not responded effectively to the technological changes: digital channels offered by mainstream broadcasters had not provided them with any more of what they wanted.

1.2 Attitudes to the BBC

There was a spectrum of attitudes towards the BBC. This encompassed, at one extreme, those who were very supportive of the BBC and identified strongly with it. At the opposite extreme were people who were much more critical. Most of the remainder fell somewhere in the middle: they did not have strong views on the BBC and were broadly accepting of its output, with some reservations. As in previous research, views were broadly delineated by class and age, with a greater prevalence of supporters among BC1s, particularly those over 30. Critics of the BBC were more likely to be found among C2DE groups and younger ages, particularly teenagers.

Among those whose views were more positive about the BBC its strengths and appeals typically focused on its longevity and public service remit (though they did not express them in this way). For them the BBC was the original broadcaster and had a venerable history and heritage. They regarded it as a broadcaster for the whole viewing public but felt its output was slightly higher in quality than that of other broadcasters'; even its poorest programmes were not bad, and certainly not as bad as those of its competitors. They considered it trustworthy for news and coverage of major national events. They were aware of its expertise in producing educational programming, and this reinforced their impression that the BBC was not only a broadcaster of quality programmes, including entertainment, but that it had some role as a supporter of the public good.

"They're the pioneers of broadcasting. They kind of invented TV broadcasting in this country."

BC1 16-25 London

"They do a damn good job. It's well worth what we're paying."

C2DE 61-75 North

“They came first. You think of them as the main channel.”

BC1 16-25 London

“You don’t get any programmes that I think ‘That’s just rubbish.’ There are programmes that are not to my taste but none that are just rubbish.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

“The BBC is second to none. It’s got rock solid family values.”

C2DE 46-60 North

“I would think the BBC is in the forefront of all broadcasting. They’re very good with their educational service.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

The BBC was also valued for its apparent intent to appeal to the spectrum of the population, manifested in the number and breadth of its channels and stations, and its regional coverage. Some people acknowledged that the sheer breadth of the BBC’s remit meant that it was difficult to fulfil to everyone’s satisfaction, but accepted that this was the price of mass-appeal broadcasting.

“How on earth could you make programmes to be in everyone’s interest... You can’t please everybody.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

“The BBC has to cover every aspect.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

On the whole, its supporters were inclined to praise the BBC’s output for its sense of quality. They felt that its programmes were at least good, occasionally excellent and rarely very poor. However, it was pointed out that the occasional lapse of taste could occur. There was some resistance among supporters to the BBC ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ with genres such as reality TV; these people questioned the value or quality of reality TV shows and felt that they were beneath the BBC.

“They are always classed as original, but they copied Pop Idol with Fame Academy, which was rubbish.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

The recent broadcasting of *Jerry Springer – The Opera* had upset some, particularly among the older age groups; they saw this as an example of the BBC dropping its standards, and failing to take account of public opinion. Another issue which troubled them was the apparent

downgrading of the BBC's educational output: they felt this was being relegated in the schedules and becoming less of a priority.

"They shouldn't have shown it (Jerry Springer). You expect a better standard from the BBC."

C2DE 61-75 North

"Because the BBC is funded by the licence fee, they should be more careful. We fund the BBC...they should take notice."

C2DE 61-75 North

"I think they should have high standards. Not copying the way that commercial TV goes and not jumping on the bandwagon with all the reality TV programmes."

BC1 46-60 Scotland

"I think that it is all on so late at night, on BBC2 they have educational programmes like Open University but who is going to be watching at that late time."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"I think the quality of the educational programmes has slipped badly, it is not like it used to be."

BC1 46-60 Wales

The absence of advertising was an important part of the BBC's identity and its appeal for its supporters. In principle it was important to them that one of the major broadcasters was free from the commercial interests and pressures that they felt dominated broadcasting (and many other aspects of life). At the more specific level they felt that it resulted in a superior viewing or listening experience over commercial channels. Some made positive comparisons with commercial television in other countries.

"It's different because it's the only one that doesn't have adverts on."

BC1 26-45 Midlands

"You don't get the interruptions, people shouting at you to buy things, like you do with, say, American TV."

BC1 26-45 Midlands

"I'd rather pay the licence fee than go to adverts."

C2DE 61-75 North

Those at the more critical end of the spectrum recognised many of the same attributes (longevity, history etc) as supporters, but tended to express them in different ways, and they inspired different emotions. While among supporters the BBC's heritage was a basis for affection

and respect, critics were unmoved and did not see this as a ground for loyalty in its own right. They were also inclined to claim the BBC lagged behind other broadcasters; they saw it as inherently conservative in terms of both personality and output: less lively, older, not cutting edge, not daring or distinctive.

"The BBC is outdated."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"They are in a time warp."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"I don't think many people watch BBC1 nowadays, it's just for Eastenders or something like that."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

"It's crap. There's nothing on. I watch Sky mostly."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

"The BBC... is really old fashioned. I don't think they've really upgraded much. Like you said, they've been going since the 1920s and they don't look like they've upgraded it that much, it still looks old."

14-15 C1C2 South East

"As other things are moving forward it don't seem like the BBC are. Like they're staying where they are, not adding new programmes. Like everything else, like Sky, they're adding new programmes, like every day a new thing will be advertised. But that don't happen on the BBC."

14-15 C1C2 South East

There was also evidence of a 'them and us' mentality with regard to the BBC. Supporters were far more likely to identify with the BBC, to sympathise with its aims and feel that it resonated with their own values. This gave them a sense of ownership of the BBC which could also inspire strong negative emotions if they felt its character or values were being compromised – a feeling of being 'let down' when expectations were not met, or esteem appeared undeserved.

"I always put the BBC above all the others... I would hate it to go down the tubes."

C2DE 61-75 North

Among those who were more critical, the opposite picture emerged. These people felt much less close to the BBC, they were inclined to see it as run by a particular sort of person who made and broadcast programmes for and to similar types. They were much less interested in the programming and felt suspicious of those producing it. In many

cases this view was expressed more as a sense of irrelevance than outright hostility. They regarded the BBC as an anachronism, almost a white elephant, emotionally and culturally remote from themselves. At its most extreme, this view of the BBC depicted it as a bygone from another era.

"I think in some ways the BBC is still the BBC of the sixties, number one and they can be slap happy, they haven't realised how great the competition could be or maybe they have now and that is why we are all here. Twenty years ago we only had three channels so the competition wasn't that fierce."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

2. **The role of the BBC**

Members of the public found it difficult to identify criteria for assessing the appeal of the BBC without help: they struggled to understand how this might be done except by reference to ratings.

The five core public purposes of the BBC, *keeping people informed through news and current affairs; promoting education and learning; enriching the country's culture through exceptional, distinctive and original programming; reflecting regional and cultural diversity; informing the UK about the world and the world about the UK*) were generally accepted with some qualifications. Of these, news and current affairs was acknowledged to be unquestionably important, especially given the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster, and its perceived strengths in this area. Education and learning was accepted in principle, and seen as true of some general BBC programming among the more discerning. Its intention to be exceptional, distinctive and innovative was accepted and sometimes applauded, but this prompted some complaints that these aims are not being met.

Regional and cultural diversity were thought important, and seen as appropriate considerations in a set of BBC aims and intentions. The role of informing the UK about the world was seen as an important part of BBC news gathering and reporting, and a function that the BBC performs well.

"It really does have the best news."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"It's not like other countries and their news on TV. American news is all censored."

BC1 61-75 Scotland

Informing the world about the UK puzzled many respondents. They assumed this was a function for other countries' news media, and were not aware of ways in which the BBC did this, apart from selling programmes overseas. However, many believed that the BBC was admired in other parts of the world, and that BBC TV programmes sold and seen abroad implicitly informed those overseas about the UK. Some also knew or believed that the World Service was trusted as a reliable and accurate source of news by people in many countries.

"It is important for the rest of the world to know about the UK as well. The World Service informs the world about us. You can get it all over the world."

BC1 61-75 Scotland

When they saw the list of five criteria suggested by DCMS as standards for BBC programming (*high quality, original, innovative, challenging and engaging/entertaining*) these were accepted as reasonable: they seemed sensible as basic aims. People did, however, prioritise these criteria differently according to their personal preferences. Quality, entertainment and originality were variously regarded as the top priority depending on what sort of programmes people liked.

Some of those who were more critical of the BBC's recent performance added two other criteria. These were, first, that output be in good taste and not offensive, in relation to language, sex, sexual innuendo and violence. Second, they wanted to see value for money or cost effectiveness: a commitment to avoid waste in programme making and not innovate regardless of cost.

"We pay the licence fee...we want good, wholesome programmes."

C2DE 46-60 North

3. **Digital broadcasting**

Views on digital broadcasting in principle depended very much on access, or lack of access, to digital services. Those with access to digital TV channels welcomed the proliferation of channels and growth of choice, and some perceived enhanced technical quality. Access to

and interest in digital radio channels seemed low, though there were isolated enthusiasts.

Those without digital TV were either uninterested or resentful at their lack of access. This was particularly the case among those with unfavourable views of the BBC, especially if their access was limited by their location. Views were also inevitably coloured by beliefs about the licence fee: some of those without digital access expressed concern that they were paying for something they could not receive. They wanted to see broadcasters increasing access to digital viewing by making the hardware cheaper.

“They should give us a digibox because we can’t afford to buy cable... We’re penalised because we don’t have a digibox. We’re paying £125 a year.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

“They could sell them for a fiver. If the BBC is spending money on interactive TV, it should be available to everyone. It must be costing them 25% of my £125 to develop it.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

Personal access also affected people’s views of their expectations of the BBC with regard to digital TV. Those who had access were more inclined to claim that, if it represented the future of TV, it was important for the BBC as the most longstanding and established broadcaster to be at the forefront of digital developments. This appetite for development of digital services was qualified by concerns about maintaining the quality of existing services: they did not want investment in digital to have a negative effect on terrestrial channels.

“The BBC have made a start. They’ve gone onto the internet and they’re doing all these things, so they might as well carry on if they’re improving their technology and everything.”

BC1 16-25 South East

“They should be leaders in the field rather than just following the others. It’s of benefit to them if people do take it up.”

BC1 16-25 South East

“As long as they’re not just making more cheap programmes. I’d rather fewer, more expensive, better programmes.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

Others who did not have access to digital were more likely to claim that they would like to see the heavy investment in innovation shouldered by commercial companies. This perspective was inevitably linked to

anxieties about paying for services they were unable to benefit from accessing. There appeared to be no awareness of provision in the licence fee for the additional costs of digital services.

“Leave all the heavy investments to the other channels.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

Among those with digital access, perceptions of existing BBC digital services partially echoed views of BBC output generally. Those who were supportive of the BBC thought it was using digital TV channels effectively to innovate and to appeal to segmented audiences. They also appreciated the interactive element of digital TV programming, which added another dimension to viewing.

“It’s got more designated channels for different audiences, like Asian Network...”

BC1 16-25 South East

“Yeah it’s like more specific channels. Like each channel can be quite clearly defined.”

BC1 16-25 South East

“With more channels you can put more programmes on.”

“The minor channels do provide opportunities for creative people to start out. A lot of the stuff, like comedies on BB2 and BBC 1 start off on BBC 3.”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

“You’ve also got these features if you’re on a BBC channel that says “Press red now for more information about this”, or all these updates. I mean it is quite useful if you want to check up the news at any time or something. It’s like the internet on the TV.”

BC1 16-25 South East

In terms of specific BBC digital channels and programmes which attracted comment, CBeebies and CBBC were well regarded by many parents, including some who were less well disposed to the BBC as a whole. BBC3 was appreciated by BBC supporters for specific items (eg *Little Britain*) and repeats of programmes shown on the terrestrial BBC channels. A handful appreciated arts coverage on BBC4. Awareness and use of other digital channels was negligible.

“CBeebies compared to other children’s channels is like a godsend, a lot of the programmes are really educational.”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

“There are good educational programmes for children in the morning.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

"BBC4 is really quite funky now...And BBC3. Most of what I watch is on BBC3."

BC1 16-25 South East

Some younger BBC critics felt BBC digital TV offered them nothing. They had watched some of the digital channels, particularly BBC3 and BBC4, but had not found anything that appealed. One exception was *Little Britain*, but they knew this was now on BBC1, which undermined the perceived distinctiveness of BBC3.

"You never watch BBC if you've got Sky."

C1C2 14-15 South East

"They've got these other digital channels but they just use them for repeating stuff. Or it's things you'd never want to watch. Same with ITV2."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

Use of BBC digital radio stations was too low to gauge opinions of its output. There was vague awareness of BBC digital stations but none of this sample had listened to them.

"I've got it on my TV. I can't imagine there would be something so great on it that I would want to get it."

BC1 16-25 South East

4. **The licence fee**

Attitudes towards the licence fee seemed little different from those expressed in last year's research (Cragg Ross Dawson April 2004). As we found in that study, people fell into three camps according to their views on the licence fee.

A significant minority were strongly in favour of the licence fee. There were several factors underpinning this position. People who favoured the licence fee attached value to the absence of advertising during programming. They felt that this absence significantly enhanced their viewing/listening experience.

"The good thing about the BBC is that if you want to watch a film there are no adverts."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"On Channel 3 I think the average time for an advert is about three minutes, so it's quite a long time if you think about it, in a day. And we're paying them to watch adverts that we don't even need. So it's good that the BBC doesn't have adverts."

C1C2 14-15 South East

They also felt that because the BBC was funded via the licence fee it was aloof from the commercial pressures that influenced not only other broadcasters but much of modern life. This was seen as having a strongly favourable influence on the BBC in that it conferred greater artistic freedom than could be enjoyed by other broadcasters. There was a sense that for these people there was a generally higher level of affection for and attachment to the BBC than other broadcasters, based on the qualities it derived from being exempted from generating revenues via advertising. They feared the consequences if the BBC began to take advertising.

"I think they do try to cater for everyone, they do achieve it quite well. They have to be funded somehow, so if the public want to watch it the public have to pay for it. This seems to be the best way."

BC1 16-25 South East

"If you leave it to commercial interests it'll end up like America."

C2DE 61-75 North

Against this, an equally significant and vocal minority who were critical of the BBC felt strongly that the licence fee was unfair and should be discontinued. They resented having no choice about having to pay it when (they said) they did not want to watch BBC TV. They were also likely to claim that they would not object to the BBC carrying advertising, if this meant that there would be no licence fee to pay.

"It is not value for money."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"I would scrap the licence fee."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"Why can't they just go in for advertising? It is almost saying the licence fee isn't enough to put good programmes on."

C2DE 46-60 North

"If not renewing the Charter means they'd have to go to commercial television funded by advertisements, I don't think it would be a great detriment to the viewing of the programming."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

It was apparent that for some people, including supporters of the BBC and of the licence fee, the fact of having to pay it generated higher expectations of BBC programming than the standards they would set for other channels. Paying the licence fee gave them a sense of

ownership with regard to the BBC; this meant the standards they set for it were higher than those which would be used to judge other channels. In particular, the BBC was expected to justify the existence of the licence fee by producing original and high quality programmes.

"It is like we own the BBC really isn't it."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"We are paying our licence though so we should get a high standard of programme in return."

BC1 26-45 Midlands

"The standard of programming on BBC is very similar to STV. You get good programmes and rubbish programmes on both. But for BBC you're paying £10 a month for that same standard. You should get something extra for your £10."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

Among the complaints made by those who were most critical of the BBC an issue that came up often was the belief that the BBC broadcasts too many repeats. This was irritating in itself, but their resentment was exacerbated by a feeling that airing repeats was somehow unreasonable given the income derived from the licence fee: it seemed unreasonable to pay to watch something they had paid to watch in the past.

"Only Fools and Horses is repeated so many times. I don't mind watching it but everybody has seen it over the years and it is now just going on and on and getting to be very boring now."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"Because you are paying for it you expect to see something you haven't seen before, not the repeats."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

Apart from these polarised minorities, there was a larger number who felt ambivalent about the licence fee but did not embrace any of the possible alternatives. They tended not to accept the prospect of advertising on the BBC. In some instances they regarded other means of raising money, such as sponsorship or product placement, as better alternatives if the licence fee were dropped.

5. The Royal Charter

Few respondents knew that the BBC was established by Royal Charter, or were aware that it is due for renewal. Correspondingly,

there was also low understanding of the issues involved in drawing up the Charter. People did not know what the Charter contained, nor did they know about the government's role in determining its content.

When it was briefly outlined to them, the Royal Charter seemed to be understood in broad terms by adults in the sample, though not by the younger teenagers. Some people thought that it meant the government had a strong degree of control over the BBC, both in terms of programming and staff. They had the impression that the government was bypassing both the BBC and the public.

The general feeling was that 2006 was an appropriate juncture for reviewing the Charter's renewal, given the current changes in the broadcasting landscape. There was so much going on that now seemed the right time to take stock; some saw it as a chance to check on the BBC's performance in light of current developments.

"I think now's a good time to do it, with all these new channels coming out.

BC1 26-45 South East

"It will keep them on their toes."

BC1 46-60 Wales

There was also some concern that given how fast-moving the broadcasting world was, in terms of both structure and nature, ten years was too long a period in between renewals of the Charter. These people thought five years would be more appropriate so that the Charter could be re-drafted to take account of changes in technology and programme tastes.

"If they are choosing to renew the charter on behalf of the public – why so long? Surely we decide."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"It should be every 12 months or 2 years."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"Maybe they should change it so it shouldn't be every ten years, maybe it should be a bit sooner. Ten years is a long time."

C1C2 14-15 South East

When the alternative arrangement of an Act of Parliament creating a formal relationship between Parliament and the BBC was described, it was rarely fully understood at first, but most people were able to come

to a considered view on it when it was explained to them. It was invariably considered unacceptable in comparison with a Royal Charter. It was perceived as largely handing over control of the BBC to Parliament, and therefore compromising the BBC's apparent independence. The assumption was that in effect Parliament would run the BBC and determine its output.

"It's a form of dictatorship."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"Like it's run by the state? No way."

BC1 16-25 South East

"It's like democracy versus communism. With democracy you have the choice but with communism it's what the government decide. It would be what they wanted us to watch (an act of Parliament)."

BC1 16-25 South East

"It's like the Parliament are choosing, they're making the choices, so the people don't really have the right to choose do they? It's taking away my right of choice."

C2DE 61-75 North

"That would be a disaster."

C2DE 61-75 North

Many people were unable to draw any distinction between Parliament and the government, and this mental blurring meant that they equated Parliament with Government ministers and politicians. At a basic and simplistic level this was sometimes assumed to mean 'more politics' on the BBC: more programmes about politics and a higher presence of politicians; this was not welcomed. More generally there was some feeling that a BBC established by act of Parliament would mean less entertaining and involving output, especially for younger people.

*"It just sounds stuffy. If you think of parliament they're probably not going to put on things like Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps. They'd try and make it educational."
"There would have to be political correctness."*

BC1 16-25 South East

"It would be like boring old people's things."

C1C2 14-15 South East

"It would be news all the time."

C1C2 14-15 South East

"Politics."

C1C2 14-15 South East

It also immediately prompted fears of the BBC being somehow emasculated and reduced to a political tool of the government in power; people feared that the BBC would become infected by propaganda and be used by the government in power to ‘brainwash’ viewers. This prospect aroused strong feelings that politicians should not be able to control what the BBC broadcasts.

“The politicians would use it to try and brainwash us.”

C2DE 16-25 Midlands

“It would just have stuff to make them look good.”

C1C2 14-15 South East

6. Governance and the idea of an independent separate body

6.1 Knowledge and understanding of governance of the BBC

Members of the public did not, unprompted, have opinions about the governance of the BBC. The BBC as an entity was of less interest and concern to them than its output. Many believed there was room for improvement at the BBC but their attention was focused almost entirely on its programming, and this strongly dictated their views about aspects of governance. Their demands typically followed the same lines: they wanted more and better sport; better comedy; fewer repeats and more costume dramas. .

“More sport. More live sport.”

C2DE 16-25 Midlands

“More comedy. More new comedy, not the same old stuff they keep repeating.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

“There isn’t the same level of quality drama you used to get on the BBC. They need more of that.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

“I think they should just have all the sports on one channel...It could be a BBC sports channel and then people who like sports would know where to go to get the sport.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

Respondents did not tend to unpick the means by which these sorts of improvements in programming might be achieved. They did not, unprompted, translate the improvements they would like to see in programming into changes they would recommend in how the BBC is structured or governed. The strong impression was that if these

programming demands were met, these people would have few concerns about governance

6.2 Perceptions of the Governors

Across the sample, there was virtually no familiarity with how the BBC was governed or organised, but prompted reactions to the Board of Governors were frequently cynical. None of these members of the public knew who the BBC Governors were, how they had achieved this position (whether elected, appointed or arrived there by some other means), what their function and powers were, nor that their role was part time.

Despite not knowing who the Governors were, when the subject came up, many of those who were critical of the BBC's output made assumptions about who they might be. Their beliefs were not based on informed understanding: they were largely supposition and speculation coloured by prejudice. Nevertheless they were expressed with confidence and strength of feeling.

They made complaints that the Governors were cronies of the BBC (and government) establishment, effectively a self elected oligarchy. They expected them to be privileged and unrepresentative of ordinary people: already successful, well paid or wealthy and inward-looking and out of touch with typical TV viewers.

"You would expect a Board of Governors would be elected like they are for a school. If they have got a Board of Governors they have elected themselves what is the point?"

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"There ain't gonna be no 15, 16, 17 year old governor... Like they ain't gonna think 'I want to go home and watch the Fresh Prince of Bel Air'."

C1C2 14-15 South East

"Very rich people."

C2DE 16-25 Birmingham

"Fat cats."

C2DE 16-25 Birmingham

They also thought that the Governors were likely to indulge the preferences and whims of programme makers. They disputed the

credentials of such people to make decisions about programming content in any case.

“None of us are interested in the same TV programmes as these guys who are strolling around a golf course, it is a bit of a joke. You do need more of our input.”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

Those who were supportive or accepting of the BBC were rarely better informed and had little more to say about the Governors. They were far less critical but appeared to regard the governors in the same way they would regard the directors of any (successful) large company: effective but low profile, working quietly behind the scenes.

“It is self regulation isn’t it? Lots of companies do it.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

There was one exception to this acceptance of the status quo: a few people felt that an independent body was needed to ensure that the BBC was able to operate independently of government influence.

“Maybe that charter should be more about what the public think, and cut out the government. Maybe it should be an independent body giving the charter on behalf of the public, so the public have got more say. Maybe the BBC would feel it had more freedom to talk about what programmes they want to broadcast.”

BC1 16-25 South East

6.3 The principle of Governors setting and assessing the BBC’s achievement of its aims

As a result of their focus on the BBC’s output, when people were presented with possible changes to the current system of governance, their reactions tended not to be constructive but instead to reflect their existing views or prejudices with regard to the BBC. They were receptive to ideas for making the BBC better, including possible changes to how it is governed and the Governors’ responsibilities, but their receptiveness was based largely on a hope that changes would result in more programmes they wanted to watch, not on the principle involved. Those who were more critical and most cynical wanted to discipline or even punish the BBC, for example by reducing the licence fee, for what they saw as its failure to give them the programmes they wanted (and charging them for it).

The principle of BBC Governors having the dual role of setting and monitoring standards did not often stand out as a cause for concern without prompting. Typically this aspect of governance was not examined and considered until a minority alighted on it and queried it or objected. Given that the BBC is a publicly-funded service, they felt that the fact that the same people set the standards and judged whether they had been met seemed to present a conflict of interest. When this point was raised, other respondents would agree, though it seemed unlikely that they would have raised any objections if the issue had not been put to them directly.

"If they are going to make decisions about what their aims are going to be then they're obviously going to support it and be biased towards their decisions. They should have an independent board assessing how successful they've been. If they've chosen it in the first place they obviously liked it."

BC1 16-25 South East

*"If you audit yourself you become complacent."
"If you have got someone who is governing something it has to be independent."*

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

Most supporters of the BBC, who were happy with BBC programming, had no objection to the status quo. They saw the BBC's long track record as evidence of the current arrangement working well, and because they felt the BBC was meeting their needs adequately they did not see the principle as being important, feeling that the 'proof was in the pudding'.

"I think if it ain't broke don't fix it... There is no need to fix something that isn't broken and they have got it right really sometimes it just needs tweaking."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"If they said it was brilliant and no one was watching it they're not going to keep their jobs. There's going to be people there who say 'you're talking rubbish'."

C2DE 26-25 Scotland

"It's in their interest to make sure that the public are entertained by their channel, otherwise they're not going to get many viewers. So they're not going to be biased for their particular tastes, they're going to want to please the public, to keep people watching the BBC."

BC1 16-25 South East

However, it was clear that more critical viewers focused very much on their own needs. They paid little attention to the BBC's role as a public

service broadcaster, but were interested in a narrow range of programmes. They were not inclined to assess the BBC with reference to its wider remit, nor to acknowledge that the BBC had a duty to cater for the broadest cross section of the population. They did not display an understanding of how the BBC's position differed from commercial channels or, if they did understand this, they did not allow it to affect the way they judged its output.

6.4 Interest in the idea of a separate independent body

The idea of an independent body to monitor the BBC's output had some appeal. This was particularly in light of dissatisfaction with its BBC's output among some of the sample, and the information that the governors had the dual role described above. These two factors together made the dissatisfied feel that there should be formalised external checks on what the BBC broadcasted and how it spent licence fee funds. In essence, the key function here was perceived as the need to monitor and regulate its output, particularly on television, on the public's behalf.

"I think that would be a good idea having a special body...I think that the public should be brought in as we are paying for it."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"If there was someone outside the BBC then they'd be honest, tell them what it's really like."

C1C2 14-15 South East

However, even among those keenest to see an independent body (often termed a watchdog by respondents), established ideas on how best to assess BBC performance were inevitably vague: none were in a position to put forward an informed plan. At best people envisaged a combination of ratings and subjective judgement of programmes against agreed criteria.

Ratings were valued because they made it possible to gauge numbers of viewers and popularity at a simple level. However, they were recognised as a blunt instrument; people could see that it would be helpful also to make some qualification to or addition to ratings measurements to give a basic reading on response to programmes.

“Ask people if it was value for money, or informative, instead of just whether or not they watched it.”

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

People could also understand that it would be beneficial to have an assessment of programmes using a judgement of performance against agreed criteria. They tended to refer back to the list of programming criteria and regarded these as a good starting point for evaluation of programmes.

There was some belief that a monitoring and feedback system on these lines could work, but few were able to think it through and none had considered the relevant details. In general terms few people considered who should be members of, or represented by, the watchdog; many assumed it should include members of the public, but were unsure who else would be relevant.

“I don’t think they could just have anybody. You could have the board the specialists and then the advisors who would give their opinions.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

A major concern here was that regulation by a panel of ‘experts’ would perpetuate the problems people already perceived with the BBC’s output, because they would be out of touch in the same way as the governors. Also the more cynical feared that selection of experts would be dominated by ‘cronyism’.

More specifically people did not consider the need for or value of including opinion from those with expertise in TV – in making programmes and budgeting for them. There was some understanding of the value of getting input from a range of demographic variables, minorities and regions, and from people with specific minority interests. Otherwise, many simply had a vague sense that opinion should be driven by the public, who paid for the BBC via the licence fee.

“It would be good to have different people to account for everyone’s tastes.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

“You would have to have male and female on the jury. A mixture of all demographics and ages and where people are from and that kind of thing.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

“Different age groups. Maybe different cultural groups. A variety of people from different age and cultural groups.

BC1 16-25 South East

It was apparent also that there was a lack of any real understanding of how subjective assessments of chosen criteria would or could be made, for example, how would factors such as innovative, entertaining, original and others be gauged? People were also unable to imagine how variations in judgements of taste and offensiveness might be accounted for. There was no conception of how it would be possible to judge value for money in programme making, and how individual interests and prejudices could be overcome.

“Everyone has their own interests really so I think it would just be chaotic.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

It was also pointed out that responsibility for assessing the BBC should be divided between the regions of the UK, allowing everyone to have their say.

“They should probably have one in Wales, one in Scotland and one in England.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

7. **Accountability and responsiveness to public opinion**

Many respondents felt, when asked, that the BBC was not sufficiently accountable or responsive to public opinion about its output. For most, the only means of redress were *Points of View* (though few were sure that it was currently on air) and calling the switchboard to make complaints. Neither of these was considered likely to be effective, primarily because there was no sense that the BBC responded to complaints by making changes: it would air and discuss complaints, but no more. There was a feeling of impotence and frustration at the difficulty of making contact with the BBC to register views, let alone having any influence on programmes and programming.

“You should be able to go somewhere to say something is good or bad.”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

“They used to have a Points of View, didn’t they?”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

“At the moment if I wanted to complain I wouldn’t know where to go.”

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

“I don’t know. Write to the BBC? Write to your MP?”

BC1 16-25 South East

The controversy surrounding the BBC’s screening of *Jerry Springer - The Opera* was well known. This confirmed the views of some that the BBC paid too little attention to public opinion. Others pointed out that a broadcaster at the cutting edge would inevitably end up producing programmes that offended some viewers: it was impossible to please all of the people all of the time.

“I think that it should be showing a more variety of programme even if people do find it offensive as everyone is paying for it and some people want to watch things like that.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

“They have to please everyone... If I find it disgusting, I can switch it off.”

C2DE 46-60 North

The idea of greater public accountability was well received in principle. Many people felt that BBC decision-making should be more transparent so they could understand how programmes are informed and planned, and that there should be more opportunity for public feedback on programmes. They also wanted a more willing response to this input: their experience was that the typical BBC response to complaints was a consultation with the programme maker with the emphasis on justification for decisions, rather than explanation or apology.

“They should put feedback from public meetings on the select channel, like Points of View.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

“We live in a democracy so we should have a right to demand what’s on our TV screens.”

BC1 16-25 South East

“I think more public influence would be good. You could voice your opinion more.”

BC1 61-75 Scotland

Of the options suggested by DCMS, those which attracted most interest were: surveys and panels; e-discussion boards; publication of minutes from meetings and reasoning behind decisions; and a complaints system, with the right of appeal to an independent body.

Some also felt that the BBC interactive service should be enlisted as one of the mechanisms for seeking public feedback.

"I think viewers' and listeners' panels sound quite good. You could get a good idea of what the public are likely to watch."

BC1 26-45 Birmingham

"I think the minutes and stuff should all be on the internet, so if you are interested you will have time to look at it."

BC1 61-75 Scotland

"I think with the red button you should be able to press it, if it says 'Tell us what you think of this programme'. Then there should be a sort of email thing or a button for good or bad. Or a text thing on your remote so you could say what you wanted there and then."

BC1 16-25 South East

For the more critical, increased responsiveness to public opinion went hand-in-hand with having an independent body to monitor performance: the aims and likely outcomes were broadly the same. They imagined that a body charged with monitoring programming would have largely the same role as mechanisms for making the BBC more responsive to viewers' and listeners' demands and preferences.

8. **Control over changes to BBC services**

The issue of control over and approval for new services from the BBC generated relatively little comment, though some members of the public felt there was an important point of principle here.

When asked for their views on whether the BBC should be able to launch new services, including new channels, or should have to secure government approval for this, respondents' opinions were divided, but the prevailing view was in favour of government control or involvement. Some felt it was only right that the relevant minister/Secretary of State for Culture (or if not the minister, an independent body) should have control over such decisions because they would probably involve large sums of (licence payers') money.

A few also imagined that certain decisions, such as the launch of a new channel, could have a significant impact on other broadcasters, and that decisions were not taken in isolation but with reference to the bigger picture of broadcasting.

With reference to the licence fee, there was also a belief that it was not right in principle for the BBC to have carte blanche to do what it wants: if its funding is raised from the general (viewing) public, the BBC should be made to take account of public views before making important decisions and committing large sums.

"I think it should be thrown open to Joe Public to make a decision."

BC1 26-45 Midlands

"I wonder how much we pay for her [the Secretary of State for Culture] to say we can't have something."

BC1 26-45 Midlands

"If she's fair about it then it's all right. If she [the Secretary of State for Culture] thinks about what people want to watch and finds out what people want to watch then that's all right. But if she's just going to put on what she thinks is right then that's not."

C1C2 14-15 South East

For others, including some who were not supportive of the BBC, there was no reason for the BBC not to take its own decisions on new services and channels. They felt that the BBC is (or should be) allowed to operate independently of the government, and that government involvement in its decisions was unwarranted interference. In part this view was based on suspicion of political interference: if a named minister had responsibility for decisions, they imagined that this could mean the minister's personal preferences affecting decisions.

"If it is just her [the Secretary of State for Culture] then it is her choices, her opinion and if she doesn't like something then she won't want it but to other people it might be good."

BC1 46-60 Wales

"The BBC should be free to do whatever it wants as long it fits with the charter."

BC1 61-75 Scotland

(Ministerial control over decisions) takes away from the whole idea of the charter. If you can have someone who can say 'I don't want that', it takes away from the point."

BC1 16-25 South East

A few respondents also believed that these were primarily broadcasting issues, and so were best addressed by the people who understood the territory: the BBC itself.

9. **The BBC in the regions**

The subject of where the BBC was based, where it made its programmes and where it employed its staff did not come up without prompting; it was clearly not top of mind. Though there was some resentment outside London at the proportion of its budget spent by the BBC in London, the overall view was that devolving more production of programmes to the regions and devolved nations was only worth doing if it was cost effective.

The information that the BBC spends most of its budget in London (and by implication where most of its staff are based) did not generate surprise: this was what the public assumed.

Among those outside London this was not an aspect of the BBC that they applauded, though it did not necessarily prompt negative feelings. It reinforced beliefs that the media and the establishment in a more general sense are 'Londoncentric' and not interested in or concerned about what happens elsewhere in the country. They felt that if the BBC is to be seen as a genuinely national broadcaster, and represents the cultural and geographical diversity of the country, its presence should be more widely dispersed.

A few respondents had heard that the BBC was planning to shift staff and production of some programmes to Manchester; they welcomed this. Some of those in the Birmingham sample said that the BBC Pebble Mill studios had been closed or relocated to smaller premises and that few programmes were being made in Birmingham; they regretted this.

Most of those in the regions and Scotland and Wales felt there should be more BBC programme production outside London, and preferably in their areas. There were two aspects of this: they felt that in principle programme making should be spread round the country; and those in Wales and Scotland thought that the devolved nations should have their own BBC centres of production.

There were several perceived benefits to devolution of this type. The expectation was that it would mean better representation of other parts of the country in programming, explicitly and implicitly: more people

from outside London would feature in BBC programmes; and there would be more programmes based in other areas. It was assumed that there would be employment and economic gains for these areas: the BBC would be an important employer, with knock-on effects for local economies. Related to this there would be less drain of creative and media talent to London.

The general feeling was that greater devolvement of BBC expenditure and production would result in a greater and fairer sense of inclusion of the whole country in the BBC as a broadcaster and institution.

This view was not expressed in isolation, and the issue was often not regarded as simple or straightforward. Typically members of the public outside London felt that while in principle devolvement was a good thing, it should not take place at the expense of efficiency and value for money. If it meant significant investment in new studios, premises and other facilities, the feeling was that this was not worth doing for the benefits outlined above.

*“Have they got the hardware in other parts of the country?”
“It’ll cost a lot of money to relocate. It’s public money. It’s probably more efficient keeping it in London.”*

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

“The infrastructure is all in London so it should stay in London.”

BC1 46-60 Wales

On consideration, the consensus appeared to be that devolving to other parts of the country is a laudable aim, but should not be pursued unless it can be done without increasing costs. Most people believed that the guiding principle should be efficiency and value for money in making programmes.

10. **BBC magazines**

The issue of the BBC producing magazines was not considered a major issue. It generated far less discussion and debate than other topics, and very few people had strong views.

Most of these members of the public knew that the BBC produces magazines; virtually all the adults know of *Radio Times*; many others were aware of other titles, particularly *Top Gear*, *Homes and Antiques*,

BBC Wildlife and Gardener's World. The general assumption was that BBC magazines would be linked directly or indirectly to BBC programmes.

The news that the BBC also publishes magazines which are not connected to any of its programmes was surprising but not a cause for concern. Provided this activity did not impinge on the licence fee, nor on programme making, there was no objection to it.

"If they can do it without affecting the licence fee I see no reason why not."

C2DE 26-45 Scotland

"I'm not interested in any of those (magazines) but it doesn't bother me (if the BBC produces them)."

BC1 16-25 South East

As in previous research there was some curiosity about what happened to the profits generated by magazines; given that some were relatively high profile and probably sold in large numbers, the sums involved were expected to be significant. The confident assumption was that the money made was re-invested in the magazines or diverted into programmes.

APPENDICES

Topic Guide

Stimulus boards

TOPIC GUIDE

Warm-up

Household composition
Occupation
Interests

Broadcast media

How often do they watch TV/listen to the radio/use the internet
Channels available in household
Thinking on getting access to new channels (as appropriate)
Awareness of/interest in digital radio
Viewing and listening habits generally; favourite programmes
What programmes most admired, examples of excellence on TV and radio
Are there programmes they believe to be excellent that they don't watch
What programmes least admired, examples of decline
Are there programmes they consider poor that they regularly watch
Opinions about trends: type of programmes, quality of programmes
In relation to quality, what accounts for trend: improvement or decline

BBC

THIS RESEARCH IS ABOUT THE BBC – SHOW BOARD 1 (AND 2 IF APPROPRIATE)
What do they feel about the BBC and its output
How do they feel it performs in offering this content, and what do they feel are its strengths and weaknesses in relation to different outputs (ie TV, radio, website)

BBC Charter

THIS RESEARCH IS ABOUT THE BBC CHARTER RUNNING OUT AND WHAT SHOULD FOLLOW
Awareness that the BBC has a charter that is due to run out in 2006
Understanding of where responsibility for making decision lies

SHOW BOARD 3

First reactions: what should happen – charter renewed, not renewed, other
What are the issues here, the 'ifs' and 'buts'?
Would they support a BBC (as it is or in a different form) assuming its existence were guaranteed for ten years

(IF RESPONDENTS ASK ABOUT ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS), SHOW BOARD 4

What do people feel about this alternative
Do they feel public opinion will be taken into account
What is their best guess about what will happen
Reactions to this possibility; advantages/disadvantages over charter
COME BACK TO THIS AT THE END OF THE DISCUSSION

The licence fee

SHOW BOARD 5

Assuming the licence fee stays, what does this mean for people individually
Does this change what people feel about the rights they have over the BBC

What would make the licence fee seem better/more acceptable
What about if there were: an improvement in programmes; a watchdog to review performance; a fairer system of collection and concessions

The role of the BBC

Is it right that the licence fee system means people have different expectations of BBC

What are these expectations

What words would they use to describe what the BBC should be doing

How should the BBC's programmes differ from what is offered by other broadcasters

What should its priorities be

Are we talking about types of programmes, quality of programmes, amount of programming, intention behind the programming

Should the BBC be trying to make, for example, the best comedies, the best quiz shows, the best 'reality' programmes

Or should *all* BBC programmes be somehow 'in the public interest'

What does the term public interest mean to them

SHOW BOARD 6

Should *all* BBC programmes strive for excellence and distinctiveness in a way that is not expected of other broadcasters

If they were drawing up a list of what the BBC was for, why we have a BBC, what would they put on the list

SHOW BOARD 7

What do they think of this as a list

What would they change: take away, add

What order of importance would they put the five points in

Is it helpful to create a list like this – for the general public, for the BBC, for the government

Digital expansion

What are their views on digital technology in radio and television
do they have questions, issues, hopes, fears

SHOW BOARD 8

Do respondents agree

What are the 'ifs' and 'buts' here

What do they feel is the BBC's role in developing and using new technology

Should the BBC, as the publicly funded broadcaster, take the lead in these developments

Or should it leave development of new technology to industry

Responsiveness of BBC to public opinion

Do they feel the BBC listens to them and gives them what they want?

How can/does the BBC get people's views?

What would they like the BBC to do to get people's views?

Would they take part in consultation/ research etc?
Do they feel the BBC is sufficiently responsive to what the people who pay for it want
What consultation would they like the BBC to be conducting that they don't think it is

SHOW BOARD 9

What do they make of this
Can they think of other possibilities or options

Governance

Do they know how the BBC is governed

SHOW BOARD 10

This is how the BBC is governed now. What do they feel about this
What do respondents think; how strongly do they feel?
should the same people being doing both of these things, or should there be a separate body to judge the BBC's performance

SHOW BOARD 11

Is there a problem here that needs fixing
Do they have their own recommendations to make
Would they like to see some sort of body to monitor the BBC's performance
should the same people be doing both of these things, or should there be a special body to do this
If there should be a special body, should this be a new part of the BBC, or should it be outside the BBC completely, like a watchdog
How might this body be constituted: would it include viewers/listeners
Would the body be able to assess the BBC's performance as a whole, not just deal with complaints
How effective do they think a watchdog would be
Might a watchdog create any problems

Regions

SHOW BOARD 12

What do they make of this
Have they ever given this specific subject any thought
What are the issues, arguments here
The BBC recently announced that it would move some of its offices to Manchester. How do people feel about the BBC moving some of its offices and programmes to areas outside London
Should the BBC be spread across the UK, or does it make sense for it to be based mainly in London

Scope of publicly funded services

SHOW BOARD 13

Who should make the decisions regarding new services
Has anyone ever thought about this
What do respondents see as the issues here

Are there dangers in giving the Secretary of State this control over BBC initiatives

Do you think this is right, or should the BBC be able to expand its services as it sees fit

Should there be some sort of public consultation before new services are started

Scope of commercial services (BBC's published magazines)

SHOW BOARD 14

What do you think about this?

Should the BBC be able to publish magazines?

What are the ifs and buts here?

Should the BBC publish magazines about whatever it wants, or should they only publish magazines that are directly related to their programmes and purposes?

Considered views on the Charter renewal

What are their feelings about this now

What has influenced these feelings

Is there anything else they would like to see from the BBC in the future

Board 1

Main areas of BBC output:

News and current affairs
Drama
Comedy
Entertainment
Sport
Education
Documentaries
Religious Programming

Delivered by:

TV
Radio
Commercial services
Publications
BBCi
BBC World Service

BOARD 2: BBC Broadcasting

National coverage

<u>Television</u>		<u>Radio</u>	
Terrestrial BBC1 BBC2	Digital only BBC3 BBC4 CBeebies CBBC BBC News 24 BBC Parliament	Terrestrial Radio 1 Radio 2 Radio 3 Radio 4 Radio Five Live BBC World Service	Digital only Five Live Sports Extra 1Xtra 6 Music BBC 7 BBC Asian Network

Regional coverage

<u>BBC Scotland</u>		<u>BBC Northern Ireland</u>		<u>BBC Wales</u>	
Television BBC1 Scotland BBC2 Scotland	Radio BBC Radio Scotland BBC Radio nan Gaidheal	Television BBC NI Digital	Radio BBC Radio Ulster BBC Radio Foyle	Television BBC2W (digital) S4C	Radio BBC Radio Wales BBC Radio Cymru

Other services

Interactive	Commercial
BBCi BBCi Scotland BBCi Northern Ireland BBCi Wales	BBC World

Board 3: Charter renewal

A ROYAL CHARTER HAS BEEN THE BASIS FOR THE BBC'S EXISTENCE SINCE IT WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE 1920s.

THIS IS A FORMAL DOCUMENT, ESTABLISHING THE BBC AND DEFINING WHAT IT IS FOR AND WHAT IT SHOULD DO.

THE GOVERNMENT GETS THE OPPORTUNITY TO RENEW OR CHANGE THE CHARTER ON BEHALF OF THE PUBLIC EVERY TEN YEARS OR SO.

Board 4

THE ALTERNATIVE TO A CHARTER WOULD BE AN ACT WHICH WOULD MEAN LEGISLATION THROUGH PARLIAMENT.

THIS WOULD ESTABLISH A FORMAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BBC AND PARLIAMENT. IT MIGHT INCREASE PARLIAMENTARY INFLUENCE OVER THE BBC

Board 5: The BBC is funded by the licence fee

THE BBC IS PAID FOR BY THE PUBLIC VIA THE LICENCE FEE.

OTHER BROADCASTERS ARE FUNDED PRIMARILY BY ADVERTISING AND/OR SUBSCRIPTIONS.

BEING FUNDED BY THE PUBLIC AFFECTS PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE BBC.

Board 6: Programme characteristics

ALL BBC PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE:

- OF HIGH QUALITY
- CHALLENGING
- ORIGINAL
- INNOVATIVE
- ENGAGING/ENTERTAINING

Board 7: The five core public purposes

FOR A LONG TIME, THE BBC WAS REQUIRED TO 'INFORM, EDUCATE, AND ENTERTAIN'

SOME PEOPLE THINK WHAT THE BBC SHOULD DO NEEDS TO BE SPELLED OUT A BIT MORE. PERHAPS...

- KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED THROUGH NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS
- PROMOTE EDUCATION AND LEARNING THROUGH GENERAL PROGRAMMING AS WELL AS SPECIALIST EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES
- EXPLORE WHAT RADIO AND TELEVISION CAN DO, TO ENRICH THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE, BY DARING TO MAKE EXCEPTIONAL, DISTINCTIVE, INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMES
- MAKE PROGRAMMES THAT REFLECT THE UK'S DIFFERENT REGIONS AND COMMUNITIES AND ENSURE THAT THE UK'S CULTURAL DIVERSITY IS REFLECTED IN ITS BROADCASTING
- INFORMING THE UK ABOUT THE WORLD, AND THE WORLD ABOUT THE UK

Board 8: Digital expansion

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY BRINGS MORE CHANNELS ON TV AND RADIO; INTERACTIVITY; THE ABILITY TO SEE AND HEAR PROGRAMMES VIA THE INTERNET; AND POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN PICTURE AND SOUND QUALITY.

Board 9: responsiveness to public opinion

TO INCREASE PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND INFLUENCE OVER THE BBC, THERE COULD BE:

- Audience opinion – survey research and consultation
- Voting or consultation on the BBC's the Annual Report
- Viewer/ listener panels
- Regular, webcast open meetings and 'virtual' AGMs
- Formal E-discussion boards
- Public approval ratings could be linked to dismissal of Governors

TO INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY OF DECISION-MAKING:

- Governors' meetings could be webcast
- The minutes from meetings, and the reasoning behind particular decisions, could be published.
- A system for handling complaints with right of appeal to an independent body

Board 10: BBC governance

THE BBC HAS A BOARD OF GOVERNORS THAT TAKES DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT THE BBC'S AIMS SHOULD BE.

THIS SAME BOARD ALSO ASSESSES HOW SUCCESSFUL THE BBC HAS BEEN IN MEETING ITS AIMS.

Board 11: BBC governance continued

SOME PEOPLE THINK THE CURRENT SYSTEM SHOULD BE CHANGED, SO THERE IS A SPECIAL BODY TO JUDGE HOW SUCCESSFUL THE BBC HAS BEEN.

Board 12: Regions

LAST YEAR, THE BBC SPENT MORE THAN £3 OUT OF EVERY £4 OF ITS INCOME IN LONDON.

Board 13: Scope of publicly funded services

AT THE MOMENT, TESSA JOWELL, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR MEDIA HAS TO GIVE APPROVAL FOR ANY NEW SERVICES THE BBC WANTS TO START UP, EG ITS NEW DIGITAL TV CHANNELS, INCLUDING CBEEBIES AND BBC THREE, AND DIGITAL RADIO STATIONS, INCLUDING BBC ASIAN NETWORK AND SIX MUSIC.

Board 14: Magazines

THE BBC CURRENTLY PUBLISHES A NUMBER OF MAGAZINES. SOME OF THESE, LIKE RADIO TIMES AND TOP GEAR, ARE CLOSELY RELATED TO THEIR PROGRAMMES, AND SOME ARE UNRELATED, LIKE BBC HOMES AND YOUR HAIR. YOUR LICENCE FEE IS NOT USED FOR THIS.

EXAMPLES ARE:

Radio Times
BBC Homes and Antiques
BBC Learning is Fun
BBC Top Gear
Bob the Builder
The World of Cross Stitching
BBC Parenting Magazine
Your Hair
BBC Wildlife
BBC Gardeners' World