

# Cultural Diversity Advisory Group to the Media

**President & National Coordinator:** Anver Jeevanjee.

**Vice Presidents:** Mary Genis, Helen Jackson, Ping Hua, Tom Chacko, Zita Eckett, Sundeep Takhar

**Committee:** George Mathew, Denis Wong, Mohamad Riyami, Yuri Layhe, Shamsul Burki, Alpa Shingadia, Vilma Scott, Di Bernstein

132 Bellemoor Road, SOUTHAMPTON. S015 7RA.

Tel: 44(0) 23 80 773435 / (0) 207 3882850 – Mb:07801 270 205

Email: [anver.jeevanjee@virgin.net](mailto:anver.jeevanjee@virgin.net)

18<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Khalid Hayat

OFCOM

em: [khalid.hayat@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:khalid.hayat@ofcom.org.uk)

Riverside House

2a Southwark Bridge Road

LONDON SE1 9HA

## **OFCOM – ‘PSB REVIEW PHASE 2 RESPONSE**

We had hoped that in the light of the criteria in the Communication Act of diversity and plurality, sufficient evidence of inaction in that area would have already emerged and possibly covered by several other eminent contributors and thus we would not need to repeat. However, the following issues focussed solely on our group’s aims and objects appear to be sadly ignored and we feel we must reiterate.

### **Summary & Recommendations:**

1. As a Public Service Broadcaster the BBC as well as others ought to be accountable to all licence fee or taxpayers in respect of its quality of output and delivery. However, there is a strong case that domestically it has unwittingly or otherwise largely ignored the needs of minority communities and that of today’s culturally diverse United Kingdom.
2. In not being able to make the network fully inclusive of minority viewers or staff, it is unfair that it should expect a contribution or support for its funding from that source.
3. All PSB’s, including the BBC ought to be fully regulated by OFCOM as in our experience it has so far failed to regulate itself through its outdated internal structures and management.

## Substantive Submissions

- a. Cultural Diversity and fair portrayal is of prime importance to our group and presents the current flavour of approach of Her Majesty's recent Communications Act. This area has received a considerable amount of what is known as *box ticking* both nationally and particularly so in the regions.
- b. Our group meets the BBC / ITV / News quest regularly and our agenda has not significantly changed. Lack of delivery remains frustrating. Our informed group of individuals have been actively engaged in trying to improve the fair portrayal of visible and other minorities, for well over 12 years. We acknowledge that although a little progress has been made, generally it has not gone much beyond *action plans, policies* or the ever-fashionable *rhetoric*. In some regions it has not even started and managers lack courage, competence or confidence to proceed. Therefore, we find the current overused term *begun to respond or continuing* rather patronising to say the least.
- c. Managing diversity within the domestic BBC workforce will take more than lip service to equal opportunity policies, camouflaged tokenism or the old divide and rule tactics. Equal opportunities can only occur through conscious efforts to create a conducive working environment. A diverse and multicultural workforce will include more than mere token efforts at recruitment but plans for retention or progression at every level. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act requires public sector employers to tackle institutional racism and promote racial equality. The PSB have yet to recognise that.
- d. All of us are volunteers and give up considerable time and energy freely advising and encouraging the PSB delivery. However, the gatekeepers prefer the status quo. Many in our communities have now lost faith and sadly but unsurprisingly do not access British Media at all. We predicted this and issued warnings in 1992. Minorities appear to have passed their threshold of intense anger and patience as they see the Media beyond their reach despite Scarman, Macpherson and other reports. We warn again that it will inevitably get worse as the broadcasting sector continues to expand offering greater choice in the digital age.
- e. We recognise that there are two BBC's – the World Service and the Domestic service, operating on two distinctly different planets. We have no complaints about the World Service. Indeed the World Service is second to none in its PSB delivery and we would join the entire world in applauding and protecting it at any cost. Domestic Service leaves much to be desired and we are becoming less than

optimistic about its ability to play its part in a new diverse and multicultural world unless there is a radical change soon.

- f. In accordance with our long-standing aim, we seek inclusion and full integration within British society in which minorities are now over 10% of the population and growing. Added to this are several new citizens joining us from the expanded European Union. Merely, small offerings of slots in respect of our various festivals or events, usually during non-peak hours are divisive and also fail to serve the enlightenment of the wider community. This paternalistic and arrogant approach has led people to rely solely on commercial or other overseas channels. Watching some programmes through Sky means that viewers are currently forced to pay again over and above the licence fee.
- g. Minorities have gradually drifted away from the British media for some considerable time. They do not see much in it that attracts them. Moreover, some of the negative and stereotyped language used on the local BBC radio stations against sections of the community, such as *asylum seekers, Islamic terrorists etc.*, is simply offensive. Our complaints receive apologies and often-unconvincing excuses but the *show goes on*. Currently, minorities perceive that their *inclusion is rather illusory* and offers little positive direction to lure them back to play an active role within a non-inclusive PSB. We certainly would never promote any *positive* discrimination of any sort. What we continue to face is naked *negative* discrimination from British media institutions. Consequently, this makes our work of encouraging our communities to participate, extremely difficult.
- h. The mistaken belief that setting up separate, independent ethnic broadcast solves the problem. Such broadcast is always welcome but is just another smokescreen as far as recognition of minority issues *within the mainstream* is concerned. Minority broadcasting *could* provide solutions to our problems; at the moment it is merely palliative.
- i. Much as one admires the PSB in Britain, it has always been scathingly patronising and arrogant towards minority opinion. The prevalence of such an endemic colonial culture within the gatekeepers of the media makes it very difficult for outsiders to penetrate its sanctuary.
- j. Minorities are not treated in this manner by the SBC, CBC, CNN, KBC and in many other regional or national networks of other countries. It would be wise for policy makers to observe those countries and try to emulate them here. Unlike the BBC many of those countries do not extract licence fees from vulnerable viewers and deliver proportionately very little. Many are state funded on a current year-to-

year basis with a mandate to deliver high quality, inclusive and distinctive programming.

- k. Do we ask ourselves if PSB's reflect the cross-section of our population? Has diversity become a pervasive part of our culture, more relevant to more people? Does the PSB mirror the entire licence paying public? Irrespective of culture do we reflect sensibility or tolerance? Do the PSB's bring in local flavour and a range of voices or perspectives over pressing issues such as the brutal and barbaric re-colonisation of Iraq? Do we extend a genuine hand of friendship to minority workers or audiences? The answer to all those and similar questions must be an emphatic 'NO'.
- l. We have not seen any credible schemes to train existing staff to meet the challenge of a new culturally diverse Britain. Encouragement for staff to go out and build genuine links and trust with those isolated communities is patchy or completely lacking. Minority broadcasting (amongst other measures) could provide a link here. We await progress but with little optimism at present.
- m. We notice a sudden surge of activity recently at the BBC. We put that down to be in the spirit of the *Charter renewal season* and are unsure whether this would last post renewal. Therefore we urge caution in this area and monitoring of its performance and strict financial accountability. We oppose any increase of licence fees for the BBC. On the contrary we propose that the licence fee ought to be shared by all PSB's who meet the market test challenge. This would include grants to the current minority radio or TV stations.
- n. The BBC's Board of Governors and the internal advisory councils ought to be representative of the entire nation and their appointment system made transparent. Views have been expressed that the Governors ought to be elected by the licence fee payers and in the electronic age today this ought to be possible. The Governors terms of service ought not to exceed 3 years. The Director General as a day-to-day manager ought to be encouraged to attend Governors meetings but she or he while taking advice from them should remain entirely independent of them.
- o. There does not appear to be a defined requirement to broaden the domestic PSB's workforce to include minority communities at all levels within a reasonable but strict time frame. In this context, retention and meritorious promotion is of far greater importance than recruitment. We believe that OFCOM would be able to monitor this process effectively and with greater transparency. The present system of relying on the *old boy or girl network* has proved to be largely unsatisfactory and in any case lacks creditability. We feel confident that OFCOM and its advisory panels would also reflect the diversity of our communities and grass-root

minority views, such as that of our independent group. We urge greater transparency should be encouraged rather than suffocated. The Secretary of State or politicians ought not to have any role whatsoever in policy or management of the BBC or any other PSB.

- p. In its national and regional area PSB's fall woefully short. Many of us have and will continue to struggle to preserve its unique independence and help it reform. We are indeed saddened by the reduction of airtime given to Meridian, ITV and other regionally produced programmes. This would greatly harm local democratic debate, ethnic issues and community network, particularly as the analogue switch off approaches.
- q. We hope our above frank views are appreciated and urge OFCOM to take them into account.

Yours sincerely

Anver Jeevanjee  
President  
Cultural diversity Advisory Group to the Media