

It is good that you are concerned about the future range of television programmes. I do hope though that given that this consultation has financial implications for the BBC that radio will not be ignored. Any reduction in the funding of the BBC will inevitably have implications for the funding of BBC Radio. Radios 3, 4, 7 and BBC Local Radio could not be funded in anything like their present form other than from the Licence Fee. Whilst audiences for BBC Radio have been increasing those for BBC Television have, I understand, been falling. For many of us, I suspect, were we to have only public service radio or public service television, we would opt for the former. That is why I am concerned that yet again you are studying television in isolation.

As you clearly appreciate, the BBC must remain the cornerstone of British broadcasting and the benchmark for the public service element. I tend to think that the BBC has overreached itself in the past ten years and that it would be wise not to attempt to fill so many hours with programmes. The BBC must strive for the good in all genres and make the necessary funding available. It seems to be spreading its funding ever more thinly the result of which is that too many programmes now give the impression of being made not to the highest production standards. One example is that BBC Local Radio no longer seems able to afford anything other than live sequences and news in contrast to the small nations which are much better funded per head of population. Here we can watch and listen to the regional offerings both for England and Scotland. It is clear that the English regions are relatively neglected in relation to the scope of local/regional radio and the range of regional television. Both seem to be limited to news and current affairs to the exclusion of so much of local and regional life which used to be celebrated. I hope to be able to return to regional and local matters in your more specific consultation in the autumn.

The preservation of high standards both in relation to moral matters and the maintenance of strong production values in the field of public service broadcasting is crucial. The BBC is funded through the Licence Fee which brings with it particular responsibilities. It is important that obligations to ensure diversity of output on the commercial channels are also effectively fulfilled. It is crucial that religious broadcasting with its key coverage of spiritual and ethical issues is well represented on the mainstream channels and at good listening and viewing times. BBC Radio is impressive, BBC Television much less so. Channel 4 has

overtaken ITV for it seems that since Michael Grade took over the only religious output on ITV is hidden away after most people have gone to bed. It is hard to believe now that for 40 years ITV carried a live act of worship every Sunday morning and even within the past ten years produced some of the more creative religious programmes such as *Bethlehem Year Zero* which attracted an audience greater than usual following the late ITN news. No longer are there any notable religious programmes on ITV, yet religious programmes well promoted, effectively scheduled and produced to high production values can gain rather than lose audiences.

The public service ethos has traditionally underpinned our culture's approach to broadcasting. The inclusion and strengthening of religious programmes within the remit of public service broadcasters, radio and television, BBC and commercial, is essential in reflecting and serving a broad culture in which the majority believe in God, about 70%, and in which many of those who do not nonetheless express an active interest in things spiritual. We would hope that in an era of lighter regulation, an obligation will be placed on all mainstream broadcasters to ensure the effective representation of religion on the air. Many Christians and those of other faiths contribute to the Licence Fee. This is not an issue that divides Christians from those of other faiths, for the latter see that they will only gain coverage if there is a willingness to feature the spiritual dimension of life. The BBC and Channel 4 have recently given some considerable prominence to programmes about the other faiths represented in Britain.

I remain suspicious that there is quite a lot of special pleading going on at present. You will be aware that the five main channels attract the lion's share of viewing. Michael Grade is a shrewd political operator. ITV is a successful business. As long as that remains so, I feel that it should retain key public service commitments and not be subsidised from public funds. I do not know enough about the overall economics of broadcasting to be able to comment further but thank you for your efforts to retain the traditional strength and range of British broadcasting into the digital future.

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