

J Edward Milner

Dear Ofcom,

I would like to contribute to your consultation regarding holding the BBC to account for its mission and purposes as the primary Public Service Broadcaster in UK.

I have been a licence-fee payer for over 40 years, and worked as a television producer for BBC for 16 years between 1969 and 1985. During that time I directed and produced a wide range of documentaries in many other countries from Surinam to Malaysia and Netherlands to Mozambique.

I have been concerned for some time that palette of programming (outside News) by BBC has become narrower, and shallower. This is especially true of coverage of other parts of the world, especially what is known as the global south, but also much of Europe, even life outside London and other major cities within UK. Apart from news of major conflicts and other disasters, plus sport, programming about the rest of the world has become almost totally restricted to white people visiting exotic locations, what one might term various forms of more or less extreme/adventure tourism (for food, wildlife, sport etc). People from most other countries (especially those inhabitants who do not speak English) are reduced to minor bit parts. Ordinary life in many parts of the world is absent from our screens. The total effect is to reinforce an idea that the world is centred on London and bears a frightening similarity to that which prevailed when the British Empire still existed. This is not responsible Public Service Broadcasting. Informing the audience about the rest of the world other than through the prism of British perceptions must be a vital part of PSB.

I would suggest several types of programme which need to be restored to the schedules if a responsible range of PRS in this context is to be restored:

1. Documentary programmes, especially 'authored documentaries' which more or less disappeared some years ago. There are no regular genuine documentary slots of the 'World About Us' type, without a white (celebrity) presenter and this is currently a major gap in the schedules. Regular documentaries about social issues (other than more or less sensational programmes about major scandals) are also virtually absent. Films showing popular festivals don't exist.

2. Foreign made documentaries. On most other television stations with a PSB remit around the world, foreign documentaries are a major element of the output, some of which are totally financed by the stations concerned. In other words there are many high-quality documentaries being made in other countries and shown around the world very few of which are shown by BBC. The Storyville series (BBC4) is the only contribution to this genre.

3. Foreign films. BBC2 used to show foreign cinema films (with subtitles) on Sunday nights. This is a genre that is now missing from the schedules.

Proposal

In the light of the above, I suggest that in order to meet Purpose 1 (which includes 'building people's understanding of all parts of the UK and the wider world') and so as to assure the BBC's distinctiveness, Ofcom should measure and report on the delivery of programming about the rest of the world (apart from wildlife, cookery and celebrity led shows). Successive reports by IBT and 3WE have flagged up the reductions in coverage of the rest of the world over the past 15-20 years, but to no avail. Can I suggest as a matter of urgency that Ofcom institutes this as part of its monitoring framework for assessing BBC delivery of its mission?

Yours sincerely,

J Edward Milner