

OFCOM – PSB Review Phase 2 – Digital Age - Consultation
Response

We had hoped that in the light of the criteria in the Communication Act and the BBC's on going several decade's old Charter undertakings for providing diversity and plurality would have given us a '*glimmer of hope*' towards progress. We had expected sufficient evidence in that area would have emerged from several other contributors and that we would not have to repeat it yet again. Sadly, this has been ignored by the majority who have contributed so far as published on your website. Accordingly, we request that the following issues focussed solely on our group's long standing aims and objects are placed in the widest possible public domain.

Summary & Recommendations:

1. As a Public Service Broadcaster the BBC as well as others ought to be accountable to all licence fee and taxpayers on the basis of a good value test. 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 listeners it is unfair that it should expect it to be funded from that source. We do not believe that the BBC is in any way indispensable in the digital age and is deserving of unearned and enforced public subsidy. We believe that broadcasters ought to earn their keep like everyone else in the market.
3. As an alternative, we are in favour of an immediate top slicing of the licence fee to make it equitable with other providers of PSB content.
4. The BBC should be fully regulated by a wholly independent body or OFCOM as in our experience it has so far failed to regulate itself through its outdated internal structures and management, including the impotent new BBC Trust.
5. BBC's lavish and obscene salaries that have come to light recently, ought to be subjected to strict public scrutiny and transparency. We do not feel that any individual, however perceived to be

indispensable is worth the money dished out from the licence fee payer's purse.

6. We remain opposed to the PSB's being funded by compulsory imposition of licence fees on households installing TV sets but funded from general revenue. We do not believe that its independence would in any way be undermined by the tax payer holding it to account directly as it does over other public expenditure.

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* and lip service by the domestic BBC both nationally and particularly so in the regions.
- b. Our group meets the media regularly and our agenda has not significantly changed in all these years. Lack of delivery remains frustrating. Our informed group of diverse community individuals have been actively engaged in trying to improve the fair portrayal of visible and other minorities in all age sectors, for well over 16 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*** uttered by the highly paid and loyal internal black diversity staff, in an attempt to divert issues as rather patronising to say the least. This is particularly so in the lack of senior managerial appointments. We find that very shameful in the current era of the Barak Obama presidency and the need for urgent change.
- 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 within the mainstream. A diverse and multicultural workforce will include more than mere token efforts at recruitment but plans for retention and progression at every level. We require

public sector employers to tackle institutional racism and promote racial equality instead of the current “Old Boy Oxbridge Network”. We are always conscious and particularly so of the recent Jonathan Ross saga, whereby the BBC Trust remained complicit with such misbehaviour and reinstated the culprit who grossly undermined a public service organisation and indeed disservice to its licence fee payers.

- d.* All of us are volunteers and give up considerable time and energy freely advising and encouraging the BBC to improve but our voices remains marginalised. The gatekeepers of this old institution, its new Trust or their internal advisory councils appear to prefer the status quo. Many in our communities have now lost faith and sadly but unsurprisingly do not access BBC at all. They appear to have passed their threshold of intense anger and patience as they see this hideously white ghetto impregnable and beyond their reach despite Scarman, Macpherson and other reports. We had warned the BBC many years ago that this would happen and we warn them again that it will inevitably get worse as the broadcasting sector continues to expand offering greater choice in the digital age to children as well as Senior citizens.

- e. We recognise that there are two BBC's – the state funded World Service and the licence fee funded Domestic service, both operating on two distinctly different zones of the same planet. 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 can be a miraculous a change soon. So far we remain somewhat pessimistic as we do not see much light at the end of that tunnel.
- f. In accordance with our long-standing aim, we seek inclusion and full integration within British society in which visible minorities are now well 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 enlightened wider community. This paternalistic approach has led people to rely solely on Sky digital or other overseas channels who appear to have greater potential in independent news gathering, sports, music etc. Watching some BBC programmes through Sky means that viewers are 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 illusionary* and offers little positive direction to lure them back to play an active role within a non-inclusive BBC. We certainly would never promote any *positive* discrimination of any sort or political correctness. What we continue to face is naked *negative* discrimination from British institutions. Consequently, this makes our work of encouraging our communities to participate, extremely difficult. We have for several years urged the media to include our research in respect of the contribution of nearly 2 million New Commonwealth troops within their war history series and remembrance ceremonies but

the fact of their existing graves on this island are deliberately denied or ignored as of no consequence.

- h. The mistaken belief that setting up separate, independent ethnic broadcast solves the problem. Such broadcast is always welcome but is just another *'fig leaf'* or 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. For example we have not seen any credible schemes to train existing white 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 as we have repeatedly advised but to little avail.
- j. We urge OFCOM to regulate and monitor performance along with strict financial accountability of the extremely lavish style and obscene salaries which the BBC has taken for granted.
- k. The Management and the internal advisory councils ought to be representative of the entire nation and their appointment system made transparent entirely under the Nolan principles. The Director General, Controllers of channels, as day-to-day managers ought to be appointed by open competition rather than the present system of *"invitation by recognised talent"* by friends.
- l. There does not appear to be a defined requirement to broaden the domestic BBC's workforce to include minority communities at all levels within a reasonable time frame. In this context, retention and meritorious promotion is of far greater importance than recruitment. We believe that OFCOM or another wholly independent body 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, will be encouraged rather than suffocated as at present. The Secretary of State or politicians ought not to have any role whatsoever in policy or management of the PSB's.

- m. Finally, we love and admire the British media, including the PSB's and are sad that it has been allowed to decline and feel concerned about its role in the new digital jungle; notably in its portrayal of children and people of later years. It was a great institution and the role it plays globally through its publicly funded world service is invaluable. It is now doubtful, if in the face of competition from other overseas channels it could survive in its past colonial glory. In its national and regional role it falls woefully short on providing a global image to the population as a whole. Thus it has got it right in one area but not in another and it is for this very reason that many of us have fought to preserve its unique independence and help it reform, but in vain.

- n. We hope our above frank views are appreciated and request OFCOM to take them into account.

Yours sincerely

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