



BBC Charter Review Consultation

Submission by the Learned Society of Wales

Learned societies exist in large part to recognise and appreciate intellectual excellence and merit. There is a direct parallel with the BBC, justifiably renowned for its excellence as the foremost public broadcaster. While we understand the logic of the present Review, the excellence and independence of the Corporation should not be put at risk. The Fellows of the Learned Society with experience of broadcasting systems abroad are firmly of the opinion that we should maintain one of Britain's iconic institutions, globally recognised for its values. That is not an argument against change, but a counsel of care and balanced judgement in assessing new arrangements.

We consider that the public purposes of the BBC remain substantially valid. As its name suggests, one of its key responsibilities continues to be to promote British values, to nurture a sense of citizenship, and to respond to UK civil society. That role of highlighting what unites our citizens and presenting shared values positively is particularly pertinent in the present context of devolved structures and powers and of multi-cultural identities. Of course the BBC must reach out to reflect the nations of the UK and celebrate diversity, but there is a balance to be struck. Post legislative devolution, the need is to explain, report, and assess the work of Legislatures in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. If the BBC is not to continue to do this, then what institution of like influence and prestige can or will? So the role of representing the UK by serving its constituent nations remains of prime importance.

This is particularly true in Wales where no written press reaches more than 8% of the population. The nation is dependent to a large extent on the Corporation for the coverage of Welsh politics and its relation with Westminster and further afield. This vital service performed by the Corporation extends to both TV and Radio, and includes both the English and Welsh languages. The Society insists that reserve funding for S4C at a sufficient level to ensure good programming must be maintained.

The BBC has long burnished the country's reputation by its principled and impartial reporting of the UK to the world and the world to the UK. It needs likewise to structure and implement a sustained policy of relating the different parts of the UK to each other. We would like to see BBC services reflect Wales more fully in all its rich internal diversity, and we strongly believe it should do so with equal vigour in both languages. The Corporation should actively seek to mediate our politics, our history, and indeed the whole range of subjects which can be termed Welsh affairs, to audiences both in Wales itself and in the other parts of the UK. Its broadcasting agenda should feature a mix of educational, cultural and political objectives in keeping with its core responsibilities as a public broadcaster. And the Society would encourage the BBC to do much more to disseminate the best of Wales outside the nation. The substantial BBC investment in Cardiff is most welcome, as are the benefits accruing from high-profile series of major network productions from Tiger Bay. They are

Royal Patron – HRH The Prince of Wales | Noddwr Brenhinol – EUB Tywysog Cymru

quality products generating substantial income for the Corporation, but we would also like to see a bigger Welsh cultural projection across Wales and outside Wales, and this is lacking. Again the Learned Society stresses the responsibility of the public broadcaster to do more for the constituent nations of the UK, especially in a post devolution state.

The BBC's traditional role of informing, educating and entertaining is more relevant than ever in today's violently fragmented world. Thanks to its unparalleled reputation and reach, the Corporation is uniquely able to deliver balanced information and to present educational programmes. It has a worldwide reputation for natural history programmes. The Society supports the case for more educational programming, noting literacy, numeracy and foreign language training as particular needs across the nations and communities of Britain. Similarly we support the creative and cultural mission of the BBC. It is a hybrid organization, concerned in part with entertainment and in part with culture in its broadest (and indeed its highest) sense, and it has a special opportunity to inspire, to fuel aspirations, and motivate, particularly the young.

Much of the foregoing supports current policies and argues for more specific efforts, especially in Wales. This is not an argument against efficiencies or recognising the role of other providers and platforms, and of course the BBC must respond to changing habits and interests of listeners and viewers. But the Review should start by acknowledging excellence and treading carefully to ensure that the unique quality and reputation of the BBC is not diminished but enhanced by new arrangements.

October 2015