

BBC Charter Review 2005

*The BBC Green Paper¹ is 116 pages long.
This summary for young people has been prepared by the Children's Rights
Alliance for England. It gives you the main points of the long document.*

*If you have views and ideas about any of this, the Government would really like
to hear from you. You can either follow the 9 questions, or send in your overall
ideas. The closing date for comments is **May 31st 2005**.
Contact details are at the end.*

The BBC was set up in 1922, and got its first Royal Charter² in 1927. Its mission has always been **to inform, educate and entertain**.

There have been seven Charter reviews since the BBC was set up.

The BBC's current Royal Charter runs out at the end of 2006. This Green Paper is the latest stage in the current charter review that is being carried out by the Government.

The growth of radio and television

- Between 1927 and 1955, the BBC was the only TV station in the UK.
- **There are now over 400 TV channels in the UK.**
- The BBC was the only legal radio station in the UK until 1973.
- **There are now over 300 radio stations in the UK.**

There are 10 parts to the Green Paper:

1. What the BBC should do
2. Digital Britain
3. How the BBC is set up
4. Paying for the BBC
5. Running the BBC
6. What the BBC stands for
7. How the BBC is organised
8. BBC Programmes and services
9. Selling BBC products
10. Public service broadcasting in the future

¹ A Green Paper is a report from the Government. It sets out its plans for a particular area of law or policy. At the Green Paper stage, the Government asks for advice and ideas from experts in the subject area, including from members of the public. After a Green Paper, the Government will publish a White Paper. This sets out firm plans for law or policy. This will be followed by the Government publishing the new draft Charter that will then be followed by a period of debate in Parliament.

² The Queen on the advice of civil servants and Government Ministers grants a Royal Charter. Only organisations that work in the public interest can get a Royal Charter. The organisation must have a very special and distinctive role. There are about 400 organisations in the UK that have a Royal Charter. This includes the leading child protection charity, the NSPCC.

PART 1. What the BBC should do

The BBC makes – and pays others to make – TV and radio programmes. It runs Internet services; it sells books, DVDs and magazines connected to its programmes; and it runs projects in local communities.

Right now, the BBC is required to inform, educate and entertain through its programmes and services. It must make programmes outside of London. It must make sure there are a lot of different types of TV and radio programmes, including those that reflect the different people, communities, interests and cultures of the UK. It must have programmes covering the news and topical issues, sport and leisure, education, science and religion. The BBC must have children's programmes.

The Government now wants the BBC to have five 'public purposes'. The BBC must:

- ❶ Help people to be active citizens
- ❷ Encourage people to learn
- ❸ Support creativity and culture
- ❹ Show and reflect the different cultures and traditions and communities of the UK
- ❺ Educate people in the UK about world issues, and bring high-quality radio and television to different parts of the world.

The BBC must use the five purposes every time it thinks about what programmes or services to start, or what programmes and services to continue.

Q1: Do you agree with these five public purposes? Would you add anything else?

If the BBC wishes to make a programme or launch a service that does not achieve these five purposes, it must show that it is at least one of these:

- High quality – in how it looks or sounds, and in what it communicates
- Challenging – making you think
- Original – different from everything else
- Innovative – new and cutting-edge
- Engaging – keeping your interest.

Q2: Do you agree with this list? Is there anything else you would add to the list?

PART 2. Digital Britain

Nearly 60% of homes now have digital television.

Over 800,000 digital radios were sold last year.

People now want more choice. They spend less time watching the main public service channels. They spend more time recording and arranging their own radio and television timetables. The Government has said that it wants all television to be digital in the future. **The Government wants the BBC to lead in making this happen.**

The Government is asking the BBC to help inform people about the switch to digital and to make sure the most vulnerable consumers get help in making the switch to digital TV.

The Government will need to be satisfied that the interests of consumers, including the most vulnerable are fully protected before setting the timetable for digital switchover.

Q3: Do you think that the BBC should make use of new technology and be at the front of its development?

PART 3. How the BBC is set up

The bit of government that is responsible for reviewing the BBC is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The group of MPs in Parliament that check the work of this part of the Government is called the Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee.

This Select Committee has written a report recommending that, instead of a Royal Charter, an Act of Parliament should set up the BBC. The Committee thinks this would make the BBC more independent of government. The BBC would then become like any other public body. The Committee has said that the Government should renew the BBC's Charter for five years whilst it writes the Act of Parliament.

The Government has decided to give the BBC another Royal Charter for 10 years because it believes that setting up the BBC by an Act of Parliament would make it less independent of Government.

PART 4. Paying for the BBC

Each household that has a television must buy a TV licence.

Last year, the BBC collected about £2.8 billion in licence fee money.

People over the age of 75 get a free TV licence; blind people and people who live in nursing and residential homes and certain types of sheltered accommodation all receive a discount. Everyone else pays the same charge, even if they do not watch a lot of television or they have very little money. There is some concern about people getting into trouble for not having TV licences.

The BBC also makes money from selling products related to its programmes. It also gets money for its World Service radio programme from the bit of government that deals with international issues – the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Government has looked at three different ways of funding the BBC other than the licence fee.

Government to pay for the BBC. Some people think this would make it fairer to people who do not have much money and to people who do not watch a lot of television. It would make the BBC more like the NHS or schools. The Government disagrees with this option because it says government would then have too much control over the BBC.

Advertising and sponsorship. Most people value the BBC because of the lack of adverts therefore introducing them would be unpopular with the public. Sponsorship on its own would not pay for the BBC.

Subscription. Some research shows that people might be willing to pay for BBC services. But this option would conflict with the principle that the BBC should be free at the point of use. It might lead to low-income households no longer having access to the BBC. Also, we haven't yet got the technology to regulate individual use of radio and terrestrial TV.

The Government's first consultation showed that two-thirds of people want the TV licence to stay as the main way of funding the BBC.

The Government has decided that, for the next ten years, the best way of funding the BBC is through the TV licence.

PART 5. Running the BBC

There is a problem with the current system of BBC management. The BBC Board of Governors has two roles. It has to manage the BBC but it also has to make sure it is being managed properly and sometimes has to make judgements about the BBC. It is very difficult to balance these two jobs. That is why the Government has decided to replace the BBC Board of Governors with a separate group, called the BBC Trust. **There will also be a group of people in the BBC who will manage things on a day-to-day basis called 'the Executive Board'.**

Q4: Do you have ideas on who the people that run the BBC should be? Should young people have a say in how the BBC is run?

The Government says the BBC Trust should work first and foremost for the good of the public. It should be in touch with what the public wants and needs from the BBC. To help achieve this, the Trust's meetings could be open to the public; it could web cast its meetings; and it could hold meetings for the public. It could also publish notes from its meetings and publish the results of research. The Government says there should be a fair and open system for making sure members of the Trust are doing a good job. This could include licence fee payers being able to give their views on how well Trust members are doing.

Q5: Do you think these are the best ways for the BBC to listen to the public? Are there any other ways you can think of? What about people who are not licence fee payers (such as children and the over 75s). Should the BBC listen to them? Why? How?

PART 6. What the BBC stands for

The Government wants the BBC to continue to be a very important part of UK life. It should be a major broadcaster across a wide range of channels and programmes but it should not be linked just with London. The Government says it may have to change what it does and how it works to keep up with technology and the public's changing interests. And it will have to be efficient.

PART 7. How the BBC is organised

The BBC must spread itself outside London. It has an important job in helping to train people in broadcasting and in developing new technology. The Government says it must do more to make sure that independent companies get a fair chance to make programmes.

Q6: Do you think it is a good idea for the BBC to have some of its offices and studios spread across the UK?

PART 8. BBC programmes and services

The Government believes that the BBC should keep all the services it has – TV, radio, Internet, etc. In the future, when it wants to add a new service – for example a new TV or radio channel – it must use a public value test to look at how the new service will benefit the public and whether it is a good use of public money. The BBC Trust will check to see if individual services meet the test.

The Government says the BBC must get even better at making sure its services work for people who have sensory impairments (people who are blind or visually impaired, or deaf for example).

Q7: Do BBC TV and radio stations and BBC services, like the website, have programmes and information that are interesting to you? Do you think the BBC should be able to add or change its services in the future as technology develops?

PART 9. Selling BBC products

The Government wants the BBC to keep selling products connected to its programmes. It says each type of product should be tested against four rules: is it related to the BBC's public purposes (see part 1); is it the best way of making money, or would the BBC get more money by letting another company sell the product; does it help or damage the BBC image in any way; is the BBC acting in an unfair way to its competitors who do not get public money.

Q8: Do think that the BBC should continue to sell things (like books, DVDs and magazines)? Do you think the BBC should only be able to sell things that are linked to its programmes?

PART 10. Public service broadcasting in the future

Public service broadcasting is television and radio that helps children and adults to learn and find out about new things, and it helps different people and communities understand each other and get on better. As well as the BBC ITV, Channel 4 and Five have to provide some programmes, for example news, documentaries and new drama, that are described as public service broadcasting programmes. However they don't get any money from the public. They get their money from advertising.

The Government will, in the future, look at whether other organisations should receive public money to help pay for these kinds of programmes, through the licence fee for example.

Q9: Do you have any further comments on any of these ideas in the Green Paper?

Please send your comments by **May 31st 2005** using one of these methods:

Web www.bbccharterreview.org.uk
Email bbccharterreview@culture.qsi.gov.uk

Post BBC Charter Review Consultation, Department for Culture, media and Sport, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH.
Phone London 020 7211 2188

Useful links

Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee web link to report on the BBC
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmcmds/82/8202.htm>

Children's Rights Alliance for England web link
<http://www.crae.org.uk>

If you want to speak with someone in the Children's Rights Alliance for England about this Green Paper and your rights, please email info@crae.org.uk or telephone London 020 7278 8222 (open until 6pm every weekday).