

[GB] Review of BBC Online Services

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The minister for Culture, Media and Sport commissioned a review of BBC online services, originally authorised in 1988, to contribute to the current review of the BBC's Royal Charter; it was carried out by Philip Graf, former chief executive of the newspaper publishers group Trinity Mirror.

The report considered the services in considerable detail and found that BBC Online delivers high quality material in an effective and user-friendly manner. However, some sites such as fantasy football, games sites and "what's on" listings are not sufficiently distinct from commercial alternatives or are inadequately associated with public service purposes. BBC Online may also have had an adverse effect on competition by deterring investment by commercial operators.

The report recommended that the remit and the strategic objectives which guide BBC Online should be clearly defined around public purposes and should be communicated to the public and the wider market. A "precautionary approach" to investment should be taken, so that if there is a "close call" between the public service benefits of a proposed BBC Online service and the costs, it should not be taken forward. The regulation by the Board of Governors of online services should be strengthened by the appointment of two new governors, one with specific new media expertise and one with specific competition law expertise. The Governors should also have access to independent analytical advice on issues such as market impact. At least 25% of online content (excluding news) should be supplied by external or independent suppliers by the end of 2006. BBC Online should prioritise news, current affairs, education and information which is of value to the citizen, and, within those areas, should prioritise innovative, rich interactive content.

The minister gave the BBC's Board of Governors until the end of October 2004 to respond to the review; the response is to include a redrafted remit for BBC Online and a statement of how the BBC intends to involve the private sector. On receiving the response, she will decide whether further conditions need to be imposed on BBC Online's remit.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, "Report of the Independent Review of BBC Online"

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/e4tkl4uj3aq6helvmgfywt3jaobyqkrnybdqvv>

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Press Release 085/04 of 5 July 2004, "Tessa Jowell Publishes BBC Online Review"

http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/press_notices/archive_2004/dcms085_2004.htm

