

[GB] Reviews of BBC Digital Television and Digital Radio Services

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As part of the continuing process of the review of the BBC Charter, reviews commissioned by the Culture Secretary of its digital television and digital radio services have been published (for an earlier review of its on-line activities, see IRIS 2004-8: 9). The first review was conducted by Patrick Barwise of the London Business School and covered BBC3, BBC4, CBeebies and CBBC (the latter two being childrens quote channels). It noted that the services had been intended to help drive digital take-up, create public value and extend the reach of public service broadcasting. In assessing the services against the conditions on which they were approved, the report found that CBeebies is 'a triumph and an exemplary PSB service for preschool children'. CBBC, for older children, is an overall success, but there were concerns about its tone and style which the BBC would address. BBC3 was aimed at viewers from 25-34 years old; the report questioned the desirability of aiming a channel at such small market segment, and recommended broadening its remit to emphasise overall audience share and reach. BBC4, the cultural channel, has very low viewing share and reach; its budget should be increased to enable it to reach more viewers and assist more effectively in driving digital take-up. Overall, taking into account both citizenship and consumer aspects of value for money, the four channels represented excellent value for money (CBeebies), very good value for money (CBBC) and fairly good value for money (BBC3 and BBC4). The impact on the revenues of the commercial channels and the competitiveness of the programme supply market had also been small. The report recommended that measures be taken to increase the audience impact of BBC3 and BBC4, and resources should be focussed more clearly on driving digital take-up. The second review was conducted by Tim Gardam, the former Director of Television and Director of Programmes at Channel 4; it covered 1/Xtra, BBC6 Music, BBC7, BBC Asian Network and Five Live Sports Extra. The report found that the digital services have acted in accordance with their original proposals and meet the terms of the conditions of their approval; indeed, their distinctiveness 'is down to the fact that the BBC has gone above and beyond the general conditions laid down by the Secretary of State'. However, as the market develops they will need clearer remits. BBC 7 had been the most significant service in driving digital switchover, but had also had the most significant market impact, contributing to the failure of its commercial counterpart. The remits of all the services should be redrafted to reflect more accurately the points of distinctiveness from their commercial

counterparts. The approach to radio sports rights negotiations should also be reviewed to ensure that the BBC does not pay significantly more than the market rate.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 'Independent Review of the BBC's Digital Television Services' (13 October 2004)

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/et4ih4gay653hxfopei6kgyclw24vaymjtr3os3bsknmx753ifjvoj2q5nfw542r5qvbnujgwpid246bpy3glukkxtd/IndependentReviewoftheBBCsDigitalTelevisionServices.pdf>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 'Independent Review of BBC Digital Radio Services' (19 October 2004)

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/eztbxgsfcyaed2aaxyf2ptvvpuu6bre54ummyh2r2whxaqy2jft4cnwodkaxyqcrl26jnv5mmc7h7duuggr4elk7hf/FullReportIndependentReviewoftheBBCsDigitalRadioServices.pdf>

