[GB] Government Publishes Plans for the Future of the BBC

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The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport has published a Green Paper on its review of the BBC's Charter. This precedes further consultation before the issue of a new charter in 2006, but a number of the most important proposals are now set out clearly in the Paper.

The Paper commits the Government to keeping the BBC as a cornerstone of public service broadcasting, and the new Charter will cover a period of ten years from the end of 2006. The Government has rejected proposals that an Act of Parliament be used instead of a Royal Charter, as that would bring the BBC closer to Government and Parliament, thereby threatening its independence. The BBC will remain “a cultural institution of real size and scope”, not merely a broadcaster of minority interest programmes, and there are no plans to shut down or privatise any of its services.

Funding will continue to be through a licence fee; however there will be reviews towards the end of the digital switchover process (in 2012) to establish whether new types of funding will be needed to supplement or replace the licence fee from 2016, and whether public funding should be used to support public service broadcasting other than by the BBC.

The BBC's remit to “inform, educate and entertain” will be developed to include five distinctive purposes in all services. These are: sustaining citizenship and civil society; promoting education and learning; stimulating creativity and cultural excellence; representing the UK, its Nations, regions and communities; and “bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK”. A further purpose will be to play a leading role in the switch from analogue to digital television.

As regards regulation and management of the BBC, the Board of Governors currently has to carry out the conflicting roles of both running the BBC and assessing how well it is performing. It will be replaced by a new BBC Trust separate from management which will approve a specific licence for each BBC service. A separate Executive Board will be responsible for the delivery of services. The Trust will hold the BBC accountable to its distinctive public purposes; proposed new services will be tested for market impact by the Office of Communications. A clearer distinction will be made in relation to the BBC's commercial businesses between external competition regulation and internal

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rules of BBC behaviour.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, "Review of the BBC's Royal Charter: A Strong BBC, Independent of Government", March 2005

http://www.bbccharterreview.org.uk/have_your_say/green_paper/bbc_cr_greenpaper.pdf

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