

*"Working for quality  
and diversity in  
British broadcasting"*



PO Box 401, Gravesend, Kent DA12 9FY  
Telephone: 01474 338711 / 01474 338716  
Fax: 01474 325440

Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE

E-mail: [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk)  
Web: [www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk)

## **Response from Voice of the Listener and Viewer to the 2010 BBC Trust Review of BBC Radio 3, 4 and 7**

### **CONTENTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY - PAGE 3**

##### **The BBC Radio**

#### **SOME GENERAL CONCERNS IN ADDITION TO THE DETAILED RESPONSES TO EACH STATION - Page 4**

- 1. Radio is the "poor relation" in the BBC family.**
- 2. Budgets Cuts and Radio**
- 3. Programme Scheduling**
- 4. Radio and the internet**
- 5. Trails on Radio**

#### **RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT RADIO 3 - Page 6**

#### **RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT RADIO 4 – Page 9**

#### **RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON RADIO 7 – Page - 12**

#### **CONCLUSION – Page 14**

#### **APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF DETAILED COMMENTS AND CONCERNS - Page 15**

### **Confidentiality Statement**

No part of this response is confidential.

Robert Clark Hon Secretary to the Board of VLV is the contact for this response  
Address and email above

# **Response from Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV) to the 2010 BBC Trust Review of BBC Radio 3, 4 and 7**

*Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British Broadcasting system.*

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

VLV welcomes the opportunity to respond to this review. These three radio stations – BBC 3, 4 and 7 - are core listening for many of our members and Radio 4 has been central to the concerns of VLV since our foundation in 1983. We have encouraged our members to make individual responses and this submission is from the Board and Trustees of VLV.

VLV considers that radio is a key element of the BBC's output and these three stations consistently meet most of the criteria for public service broadcasting. We begin our submission by outlining our concerns about the position of radio within the BBC and the impact of the cuts in budgets that have already been endorsed and encouraged by the BBC Trust. We support the wide range of music broadcast on Radio 3 along with a rich offering of speech that is particularly strong in the coverage of cultural issues together with the broadcast of full-length dramas. Radio 4 makes an equally unique contribution to broadcasting, especially the spoken word, with a wide range of programmes that continue to inform, educate and entertain. Any sequence of Radio 4 programmes contains a variety of intelligent speech based programmes which are the envy of broadcasters around the world and the central jewel in the crown of British broadcasting. We support the role of Radio 7 in making available the radio archive of comedy, drama and readings. We make below detailed comments on some aspects of the content of each service and also list these comments as an appendix to this submission.

## **The BBC**

VLV believes that:

- The BBC remains a unique cultural institution which is greatly admired in the UK and around the world.
- The BBC sets a standard for programmes not just in the UK but for the rest of the world.
- Through its programmes and services BBC radio provides a range of fascinating material to inform, educate and entertain the listener.
- The licence fee is still the best way to sustain the BBC's independence, important not just to broadcasting but to democracy itself.
- Funding via the licence fee means the BBC is not driven by the need to deliver large audiences to advertisers and sponsors of programmes but rather to deliver high quality programmes to audiences. We consider that many listeners value programmes which are not interrupted by advertising. All its services are free at point of use to users in the United Kingdom.

It is from this standpoint that VLV responds to this BBC Trust review.

## Radio

The 2009 *Digital Britain* report makes a very good case for the unique nature of radio. “Being a flexible medium, radio’s appeal to the listener is that it is more than simply a stream of audio: it is an intimate, portable and ambient medium; and it is a very personal medium: the pictures that it forms inside our heads are different for every listener.”<sup>1</sup>

Radio may be one of the oldest forms of electronic media but it has actually grown in popularity at a time when an increasingly wide range of media are competing for our time and attention. Over 90% of the population consume in total an excess of 1 billion hours of radio a week. The importance of radio to the consumer must not be underestimated. But radio is also a vital element in the lives of many citizens of the nations and regions of the UK. Radio is especially important to the elderly, disabled and those citizens isolated geographically or socially.

### **SOME GENERAL CONCERNS IN ADDITION TO THE DETAILED RESPONSES TO EACH STATION**

#### **1. Radio is the “poor relation” in the BBC family.**

While the rest of the media and politicians might be excused for concentrating on the television output of the BBC we are concerned that whenever senior BBC Executives or the BBC Trust make public statements, radio is usually mentioned as an after thought. Examples of programmes are nearly always from the television services. Some specific examples from the BBC Strategy Review:

- During the spring and early summer of 2010 the BBC Strategy Review gave the BBC the opportunity of much media exposure but little mention was made of radio.
- This apparent lack of understanding and commitment to radio may explain why the only channel closures in the BBC Strategy Review were for 6 Music and the Asian Network rather than any significant television output.
- In our response to the Strategy Review VLV noted “We are alarmed by the statement in the Strategy summary “As the internet comes to the living room through television sets, it will become more important still—and indeed, one day, may be the only platform and delivery system that the BBC needs to fulfil its public purposes.”<sup>2</sup> This statement totally ignores the portability and versatility of radio as a platform as well as the additional cost involved in broadband subscription – a cost that is often roughly equal to the cost of the Licence Fee.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **2. Budgets Cuts and Radio**

We are very concerned about the impact of year on year cuts in the budgets for radio. New techniques and technology can save money but - at the level of programme making - much of the activity depends on the work of highly skilled staff across a wide range of disciplines. We consider that the cuts of recent years have already had an impact on programme quality, especially in radio, where programme budgets and teams are small. We welcome the recognition of this in the BBC Strategy Review “future content efficiencies will be targeted carefully: after more than two decades of year-on-year efficiencies, some programme

---

<sup>1</sup> (Chapter 3b paragraph 2)

<sup>2</sup> Putting Quality First The BBC and Public Space - Proposals to the BBC Trust March 2010 (page 9)

<sup>3</sup> VLV submission to BBC Strategy Review May 2010 Section 3 page 9

budgets cannot be reduced further without damaging quality".<sup>4</sup> We would suggest that most programme budgets cannot be reduced further. The Licence Fee could be made to work harder, not by cutting programme budgets, but by slimmed down management structures and perks.<sup>5</sup>

Examples of cuts include the reduction of the Reith Lecture series from 6 programmes in 2000 to four in 2008, reductions in the drama output of Radio 4 and changes to live broadcasts of concerts on Radio 3.

We are also concerned that the rich diversity of Radios 3 and 4 might suffer irreparable damage if the cuts require the removal of whole programme series or major reductions in the number of programmes within a series. Current affairs programmes on all subjects should be broadcast regularly to ensure adequate coverage of the subject.

### 3. Programme Scheduling

We are concerned that much excellent output is scheduled at times when it might not be heard by the target or largest audience. The Tuesday morning and Saturday evening broadcasts of the *Reith Lecture* are an example. The 11:30 am radio 4 slot used for a variety of drama seems to be odd scheduling especially as few are repeated. Many religious broadcasts also suffer from scheduling early and late in the day. The key international news programmes on Radio 4 are often relegated to late morning slots.

### 4. Radio and the internet

We welcome the extra dimension that the internet has brought to radio listening. We value the useful background information provided for programmes on many parts of the BBC website. It also enables anyone in the world with internet access to listen to BBC programmes, thus bringing the UK to the world and fulfilling the 4<sup>th</sup> public purpose in the service licences of Radios 3 and 4.

We have these specific comments

- The use of the iplayer for listening to programmes again or catching ones that have been missed is an excellent example of radio adopting technology that is of great benefit to the listener. However many programmes are only available for a week which limits the access to material that arguably belongs to the Licence Fee payers. This restriction is imposed by the scope of the service licence. We accept that the BBC must be aware of the impact of this service on commercial organisations which produce CDs or charge for down loads. Recordings of music and talking books are important to the commercial sector but we consider that radio documentaries, talks and educational programmes should be made available for at least the duration of the series. We welcome the availability of a major archive of *In Our Time*, *From Our Own Correspondent* and the *Reith Lectures* but are puzzled that *Discovering Music* and the *Essay* are only available for seven days.
- The use of computers to access radio programmes may have encouraged many to adopt this technology and helped bridge the digital divide. This is particularly important for Radios 4 and 7 which attract older listeners.
- We are concerned that 30% of the population do not have access to a computer and therefore are not able to use any of this technology and content. We hope that Project Canvas will go some way to redressing this gap.

---

<sup>4</sup> Page 50 of Putting Quality First

<sup>5</sup> VLV submission to BBC Strategy Review page 10

## 5. Trails on Radio

While many listeners may value the trailing of future programmes and we appreciate the use of trailing as a means of attracting new audiences, we consider that the practice has now gone too far. At every programme break there is at least one trail. Trails are often elaborate adverts or chats about the content of a future programme. These are both distracting and some times too long. During July 2010 trails included in *Today* sometimes resulted in cuts in the weather forecast.

### RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT RADIO 3

*1. Radio 3's main role is to broadcast high quality classical music ranging from the great composers to more exploratory work, with an emphasis on live and specially recorded music. How well do you think that Radio 3 does this?*

We are content that Radio 3 achieves a good balance between broadcasting the core repertoire of the great composers along with a good range of new music.

We support the policy of broadcasting the works of neglected composers as well as little known works by the great masters.

We are concerned that apart from the Proms there has been a significant decline in the broadcast of live concerts of classical music now that fewer live concerts are broadcast in the evening. We are however delighted with the wide range of specially recorded music available both during the afternoon and evening. We consider that the broadcast of a live concert introduced by a Radio 3 presenter in the hall results in a very special listening event. The listener might almost be part of the audience in the hall. When a presenter in the studio introduces a recording of a concert it is a different experience. It is more than a DJ playing CDs without informed commentary but a lot less satisfying as an experience than a live concert. This is important as we consider that one role of Radio 3 should be to encourage attendance at concerts of live music. With fewer live broadcasts the current generation of listeners may not realise the magic of the live event. We assume that this change came in response to cuts in the Radio 3 budget. The eight weeks of live broadcasts of the Proms each summer highlights the loss of live broadcasts for the rest of the year

*2. Radio 3 also includes other styles of music such as jazz and world music. What do you think about this programming on Radio 3?*

A great strength of the network is the wide range of musical genres that can be heard in any week. We note that each genre is relegated to a specific slot so the listener will not chance upon and hear the unexpected genre. The two weekday drive time programmes and especially *Late Junction* often achieve an interesting mix.

*3. What do you think about the range of music played on Radio 3?*

#### Range

In addition to the wide range of musical genres mentioned at question 2 we support the wide range of classical music available on the network. By this we mean the range from chamber music via ensembles to orchestras and opera but also the range from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### The European dimension

The broadcasting of concerts from Europe provided by EBU partners is welcome. We also value the six hour *Through the Night* sequence of rarities, archive and recordings from

5

Europe's leading broadcasters especially as neglected European composers from many periods are included. However we regret that these riches are relegated to insomniacs and those with the time and means to listen on the i-player. We do not have any immediate suggestions for ways to schedule this content so that a wider audience can enjoy it. We suspect that this content is only a small part of interesting programming that is available and wonder if there is a case for a digital Radio 3 Extra. We welcome the occasions when, through the EBU, there are days of themed music broadcasts from around Europe.

### **New Music**

Radio 3 is uniquely able and funded to commission and play new music as it is required to do this by its service licence. It appears however that while the network is keeping to the letter of its licence it could do more. There have been many changes in contemporary music both in the UK and Europe in the last two decades. More of this, usually accessible, music could be broadcast in the evening during *Performance on 3* rather than on the late night *Here and Now* Saturday slot. It appears that more contemporary jazz and contemporary drama is broadcast at popular times than new classical music.

#### *4. What do you think of Radio 3's speech based programming which includes drama, arts and religion?*

There is more speech than appears from a casual glance at the listings.

### **News**

The news during the drive time programmes and at 1:00pm is succinct, varied and carries more items than any other radio news bulletin as it is read straight through with no out takes. It is a most useful service for listeners in a hurry or who do not need long news bulletins.

### **Arts**

We were critical of the broadcasting of evening concerts as recordings rather than live relays but one advantage is that the earlier start of *Performance on Three* resulted in changes to the evening schedule. During most weeks there are three hours of cultural discussion and 45 minutes of poetry along with the 15 minute *Essay* at 11:00 pm. If the weekly *Music Matters* and *Sunday Feature* are added it represents more serious coverage of cultural matters each week than any other UK broadcasting station. We applaud this development and hope it might be possible to retain this output while also broadcasting more live concerts.

### **Drama**

Radio 3 is the only place in British broadcasting where a full length play is broadcast nearly every week. While there is good representation of British and European classics there is also much new drama. There is also the more experimental work in *The Wire* which is broadcast less frequently. We welcome this wide range of drama but think we have noticed cuts in recent years. There seem to have been fewer radio broadcasts of successful current stage plays and fewer large cast classics. While this is a comparatively expensive part of Radio 3 output we regret the change.

### **Religious Broadcasting**

Regular religious broadcasting is limited to *Choral Evensong*; a live broadcast and a Sunday repeat. *Choral Evensong* is about a specific faith and in line with the service licence has "a strong musical element."<sup>6</sup> This means that the rich tradition of the performance of religious music, especially by cathedral choirs, is broadcast each week. The only pure religious speech programme is the half hour *Belief* broadcast twice a year at Christmas and Easter.

---

<sup>6</sup> Public purpose number 3 for Radio 3

This seems to have been cut from three to two weeks with the inclusion of more repeats. We welcome this programme broadcast since 2001 but consider there is scope to develop the concept further and for Radio 3 to have more speech based programmes about faith. Occasionally the *Essay* is about faith.

*5. Radio 3 features performances by the BBC orchestras and BBC singers. What do you think of these performances on Radio 3?*

The performance groups and broadcasting orchestras funded by the Licence Fee make Radio 3 unique and of world class. The existence of these resources gives the station the ability to programme a wide variety of concerts each week and the fact that these orchestras can broadcast from studios as well as concert halls underwrites a rich and cost-effective service to listeners. As a consequence of this investment in highly skilled performers and players much more adventurous programmes can be made and vital innovation helps to sustain both the UK's commercial and non-commercial music sectors in the longer term. Without its own orchestras the Radio 3 output would be dependant on the much safer programming that other orchestras have to adopt and its live music output would be much less varied and interesting.

BBC singers and orchestras come together for the eight week season of the Promenade Concerts each summer providing around a third of the concerts. We shall have more to say about the performance groups and the BBC Proms when the Trust undertakes a full review of these services.

*6. Radio 3 should help build appreciation of music and culture, particularly amongst people with little knowledge of classical music. How well do you think it does this?*

The wide variety of cultural speech based programmes noted at 4 above, provides a source of information that should aid the life long learning of all listeners. There are some programmes that set out to help build appreciation of music such as *Discovering Music* and others that also contribute e.g. *Building a Library*. There has also been an improvement in the way music is introduced so that the listener can be helped to appreciate and explore the work. We therefore consider that the "educational role" of Radio 3 is done well. However the audience for this station is not large and while it has a loyal following it should do more to enable more listeners to benefit from its programmes. A limited and targeted trailing on other BBC radio services and television could be used. See also our comments regarding Radio 3's website service below.

*7. What do you think of Radio 3's website?*

In addition to our general comments on the value added to radio by the BBC website we make the following specific comments about Radio 3.

- The background information on the site that lists all the music played and gives full details of the performance is particularly helpful if listeners wish to find a recording or score.
- During the Proms there are full programme notes available from before the concert so the listener can obtain as much information as those present at the concert.
- The use of the iplayer to replay programmes is particularly useful as Radio 3 plays much music that is not available elsewhere and the facility to replay it helps listeners to become better acquainted with the composer or genre.

7

## 8. Is there anything else you want to say about Radio 3?

### Sound Quality

Radio 3 is broadcast on digital radio and usually uses the highest bit rate of any station in the UK thus ensuring that the sound quality is adequate. However some of our members do notice a drop in sound quality when the bit rate falls below 192 to provide spectrum for the Radio 5 Extra broadcasts. We hope that the pressure to provide more digital radio output does not result in any further reduction in the sound quality of Radio 3.

### Presentation Styles and Presenters

Our members have mixed views on the linked subjective areas of presentation style and presenters. Some welcome the informal approach, especially during the drive time programmes, in the hope it will attract a larger and younger audience. Others see no place on Radio 3 for invitations to send in text messages on often trivial subjects or votes for favourite arias. We assume that this approach is seen as contributing to that part of the third public purpose that states “through its interactive aspects ... Radio 3 should facilitate the creation of communities of interest”.

There is also the use by some presenters of “well informed” links between music recordings. Some listeners simply do not want to be patronised and given an abundance of information about a piece of music which follows, feeling it is better to let the music do the work with minimal interruption.

We note that the audience for the station has not dramatically changed recently but in some RAJAR quarters it has fallen. If the RAJAR figures show that the change in style has resulted in an increase in listeners then the changes might be justified otherwise the more populist approach should be reconsidered. We consider that Radio 3 needs to be highly distinctive in comparison with Classic FM. At present the morning drive time is often indistinguishable from the commercial station. The BBC should originate not copy.

## RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT RADIO 4

*1: Radio 4's news output is at the heart of its schedule and includes a range of daily news bulletins and current affairs programmes. What do you think about this programming?*

In recent submissions to the BBC Trust we have been critical of the general news output of the BBC. While much of this criticism was directed at television output, news on radio is not immune from what we see as a fall in standards. We are concerned that sensationalism and a populist agenda set by other media have sometimes been followed by the BBC, resulting in weakened news output. “There is also evidence that news analysis is being replaced by the less demanding, and the less helpful activity, of speculation..... A non populist approach may result in some of the news services provided by the BBC seeming less exciting than the more personalised, sensational services offered by some commercial organisations”<sup>7</sup> .

*Today and to a lesser extent PM and Broadcasting House sometimes seem more interested in creating news than “the in-depth, accurate, impartial and independent news” as required by the service licence. While the BBC news must not be deferential and many value the tough questioning of politicians, the presenters and correspondents often intrude into the key object of broadcasting the news. Talking over interviewees and not allowing them to finish a*

---

<sup>7</sup> VLV submission to BBC Strategy Review Page 4

sentence often infuriates our members. The BBC should be about the provision of trusted information.

In general however radio news is more likely to maintain the high standards of news broadcasting than television with the weekday *World To-Night* setting a particularly high standard. The *Six O'clock News* commendably generally carries a wider range and more items than any equivalent news broadcast on radio or television at that time.

We consider that more use could be made of the BBC's local radio stations that have material made on the doorstep as well as a range of fresh contributors, experts in their field. A BBC correspondent sent to the scene is no substitute for the voice of local people.

The provision of news bulletins on almost every hour is useful for those listeners who want to hear the latest news on a regular basis but does militate against the broadcast of programmes such as plays and some in depth documentaries lasting more than an hour.

The radio schedules are flexible so when there is a major news event bulletins and current affairs programmes can be extended. This should be used sparingly as these changes are often at the expense of other programmes. Generally the station gets this priority right but VLV supports the criticisms of the extension of *The World at One* to an hour during the 2010 General Election; there was little extra news at that time of day.

*2. Through its documentaries and factual programming, Radio 4 should deepen and broaden audience understanding of a range of subjects such as business, finance, education, food, travel, religion and science. How well do you think it does this?*

We have no criticism of the very wide range of documentaries and factual programmes on Radio 4. However we think we have noticed a trend towards more studio based discussions and less investigative documentaries. VLV values intelligent and well-structured discussion as radio is the ideal medium for this format. The BBC can call on experts of high quality to take part. However there should be more documentaries that exploit the in house experience of the BBC news teams. Radio documentaries can be more intimate, less intrusive and made at a fraction of the television equivalent.

*3. Through its news, current affairs and factual output, Radio 4 should feature extensive and wide-ranging coverage of international issues. How well do you think the station does this?*

In our submission to the BBC Trust on the Strategy Review we welcomed "the commitment to strengthen international newsgathering; in particular proposals to strengthen and extend international reporting, for example, in areas such as China and Brazil. We are concerned that, apart from coverage of the USA, there is inadequate reporting from Europe and the rest of the world."<sup>8</sup> News bulletins often seem to value domestic trivia and celebrity stories over richer, more significant foreign news.

Radio 4 has a better range of programmes on international issues than television. The weekly *From our own Correspondent* and regular *Crossing Continents* provide good coverage from around the world. However the general news output is biased towards home news and often has a London metropolitan bias as well. We are particularly concerned about the lack of international coverage in the main news bulletins and *Today*. An exception is *The*

---

<sup>8</sup> VLV submission to BBC Strategy Review page 4

*World Tonight* which often lives up to the programmes title by using interviews with experts around the world. However even this programme could do more. Our members particularly value coverage of international issues; *From our own Correspondent* regularly comes top of the voting in the VLV annual awards for excellence.

*4. Radio 4 should offer a wide range of drama and readings including plays, serials and adaptations. How well do you think it does this?*

This is an area of Radio 4 output that varies greatly in its achievements. Broadcasts of drama and serialisations have to be fitted between the hourly news bulletins with the exception of Saturday afternoon. This means that, although Radio 4 exceeds its service licence agreement by an hour a week in broadcasting 650 hours of original drama and readings a year, its drama content is mostly the equivalent of one act plays. While this is a valuable genre and ideal for fledgling playwrights we believe there should be longer, full-length drama on Radio 4. News bulletins could be inserted into the schedule after a 75/90 minute play. This would not upset listeners and those who require the news on the hour can switch to other radio stations.

We consider that this is an area where cuts in the budget are most apparent (see our general concerns above page 4). We are particularly concerned about the total removal of the *Friday Play* which had already been reduced to just 12 plays in 2009. The Controller explained that rather than reduce budgets across the entire drama output this strand was initially reduced and then abolished.<sup>9</sup>

*5. Radio 4 should be the home of BBC radio comedy and help develop new writing and performing talent. What do you think of the comedy programmes on Radio 4?*

Comedy is a very subjective matter. VLV members are as diverse in their praise and criticism as the rest of the Radio 4 audience. We suggest that this means that the range and quality of comedy on the station is about right. As with the drama output radio 4 comedy nurtures new talent. In particular we have been encouraged by attempts to attract younger audiences through innovative comedy shows, even if they have not been to the taste of some of our members. It is of paramount importance for Radio 4 to continue to unearth new writers and performers in this genre even if there are inevitably a few failures on the way.

*6. Radio 4 should provide a wide range of programmes that inform educate and entertain. What do you think about the variety and balance of programming on Radio 4?*

The greatest contribution that Radio 4 makes to broadcasting is the wide range of programmes that, with the reservations outlined above, continue to inform, educate and entertain. Once the early morning slot dominated by *Today* on weekdays is past any sequence of Radio 4 programmes contains a variety of intelligent speech based programmes that are the envy of broadcasters around the world and the central jewel in the crown of British Broadcasting.

---

<sup>9</sup> Mark Damazer on Radio 4 Blog 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010

## 7. Is there anything else you want to say about Radio 4?

### **Cultural programmes**

Radio 4 service licence limits its cultural requirement to its drama output. However Radio 4 complements Radio 3's coverage of cultural matters by broadcasting the half hour *Front Row* nightly. In addition to specific programmes on books, poetry and film several of its general discussion programmes also include specific items about cultural events. A merit of the cultural strand is that it provides a balance to the news and drama output of the station.

### **Listener Feedback**

In *Feedback* Radio 4 provides the only regular programme where listeners to all BBC radio services can provide feedback and sometimes hear their concerns put to BBC programme makers or management. This is a valuable series as it enables listeners to hear directly from all levels of the BBC. It is a channel for both criticism and praise. *Feedback* provides factual information about how and why programmes are made. We regret that BBC programme makers often either fail to appear on *Feedback* when asked or provide such anodyne answers they appear patronising to the listener. The BBC Trust could play a major role in encouraging producers to be more understanding in responding to the concerns of listeners.

### **Religious and Faith Broadcasting**

At a time when many broadcasters are reducing the output of religious, faith and ethical issues we welcome the commitment of Radio 4 to this strand through a wide range of programmes. As the UK is still a Christian country the regular broadcasting of Christian services is a reasonable part of the daily schedule. However the UK now has a diversity of Christian groups and significant numbers of active worshipers from all the major world religions and it is right that this diversity is reflected in *Beyond Belief*, *Sunday* and *Something Understood* along with a wide coverage of faith and ethics matters across the factual programmes.

## **RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON RADIO 7**

*1. Radio 7 should broadcast a range of speech based programmes including comedy, drama, stories, documentaries and readings, and be the home of children's radio on the BBC. Most content will come from the archive but some should be specially made. What do you think about the programming on Radio 7?*

The service licence clearly indicates that Radio 7 is a speech based entertainment station. Earlier we generally supported the comedy, drama and readings output of Radio 4. As the core content of Radio 7 is taken from recent programmes on Radio 4 or from that station's archive we consider its basic remit is met. The wide range of material from the 1960's to the present provides a variety of entertaining programmes across several genres. Some of our members particularly appreciate the repeats of earlier classic comedy programmes.

There is one area where Radio 7 seems to fail to meet the remit "the station should commission some original content, particularly of types of output rarely found on BBC Radio"<sup>10</sup>. We see little evidence of the commissioning of this type of content at present. It would also help the promotion of the station if some of the original programming on Radio 7 could be rebroadcast on Radio 4.

We comment on children's programmes below.

---

<sup>10</sup> Final section of BBC radio 7 Remit in Service Licence May 2010

2. BBC Management propose to develop Radio 7's current offering through new content and closer ties with Radio 4 – culminating in the re-brand of the station as 'Radio 4 Extra.' Although the specific details of this re-brand are still being developed by BBC Management, have you any initial thoughts on this proposal?

Renaming the station *Radio 4 Extra* is logical. It reflects the fact that Radio 7 is already an extension to Radio 4 and that nearly all its content comes from Radio 4. As *Radio 5 Extra* encouraged sports enthusiasts to try digital radio a more accurate branding for Radio 7 might encourage a similar move.

The re-brand concept comes from the proposals by the BBC to encourage more people to listen to programmes broadcast on digital radio. VLV has been a supporter of the concept of digital broadcasting for over a decade. However we have reservations about many aspects of this proposal. We have regularly highlighted our concerns about the impact on listeners of especially an early switch to digital radio.<sup>11</sup>

- We have concerns about the broadcasting of some popular material on Radio 4 Extra prior to its broadcast the main station as it will deprive the majority of listeners of programmes when they wish to hear them on receivers of their choosing.
- The experience of many Radio 4 listeners is that digital radio reception is unreliable so they have not adopted digital for many of their sets.
- Many other listeners will not have changed as they have perfectly reliable LW and VHF sets and do not want to incur unnecessary expense or disposal problems.
- There is a very strong loyalty among Radio 4 listeners to using particular spectrum. For example whenever cricket is broadcast on Long Wave displacing regular programmes there are complaints, particularly from listeners in vehicles. This is not due to an innate conservatism (many of the same listeners probably download podcasts) but because LW is a proven reliable source of receiving Radio 4, especially on the move. There is an even stronger loyalty to VHF.
- Moving existing Radio 4 programmes exclusively to a digital Radio 4 Extra, even a short while before broadcast on VHF, will be seen as bullying loyal listeners and could provoke resentment. If the intention is to tempt listeners to change then the digital content should be an extra, an addition to an existing programme. For instance, we understand that it might include a version of *Desert Island Discs* that would play the entire track chosen by the castaway rather than just an extract.

We are also concerned about the impact of moving current Radio 4 programmes onto the schedule of the digital station. The existing mix of recent and classic comedy and drama now has a loyal following. If too much is displaced by extras from Radio 4 will the existing audience be alienated?

---

<sup>11</sup> Most recently in written evidence to House of Lords Communications Committee (2010) *Digital switchover of television and radio in the UK* pages 201 to 206

*3. Children's programmes on Radio 7 are aimed primarily at pre-school listeners. BBC Management are keen to change the focus for children's programmes in order to appeal more effectively to both older children and their families and carers, as well as reduce volume of programming overall. What do you think about these proposals?*

We cannot see any linkage between the general aims of children's content outlined in the service licence for Radio 7 and the actual output. The licence states "Children's programming should form an integral part of the schedule, including readings and feature programmes for children broadcast in a non-commercial environment. Its schedule should be zoned so that adult and child audiences know when to expect output designed for them". At present the only children's output is from 6:00am to 8:00am.

The BBC Strategy Review has "outstanding children's programmes" as one of five editorial priorities. We fully support this objective. "If children ... listen throughout childhood and adolescence they will retain the habit of using quality broadcasting into adult life. However there must be appropriate quality programmes that will attract young people at each stage or they will turn to other media for information and entertainment."<sup>12</sup> We have reservations about limiting children's radio output to a digital only station in accordance with our concerns about digital radio outlined in the bullet points at Question 2 on Radio 7 above. However if Radio 7 is to be the home of this output then its scheduling and content need to be changed to include at least one other time in the schedule when children and accompanying adults can listen to them. While there might be scope for a small cut in the morning sequence there should be an increase in the total hours broadcast each day.

## **CONCLUSION**

VLV has concerns about the detail of some of the programmes on Radios 3,4 and 7 and is worried about the impact of escalating cuts in programme budgets. However, essentially, we are content with the general direction of these stations. We summarise below our detailed concerns in the appendix below.

The BBC Charter Agreement requires that every programme in a public broadcasting service must exhibit one of the following characteristics: high quality, challenging, original, innovative or engaging<sup>13</sup>. BBC Radio 3, 4 and 7 often exhibit most of these characteristics and the stations are a flagship of public service broadcasting. They are beacons not only for the UK, but are seen by many overseas listeners and commentators to provide an example and standard of programming for broadcasters across the world to emulate in their own distinctive ways.

24 August 2010

---

<sup>12</sup> VLV submission to BBC Strategy Review Page 6

<sup>13</sup> BBC Charter agreement July 2006 clause 14

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY OF DETAILED COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

#### General

1. Radio is the “poor relation” in the BBC family. When senior BBC Executives or the BBC Trust makes public statements, radio is usually mentioned – if at all - as an after thought.
2. We are very concerned about the continuing impact of year on year cuts on the budgets for radio. The cuts of recent years have already had an adverse impact on programme quality.
3. Much excellent output is scheduled when it might not be heard by the target or largest audience.
4. On the i-player many programmes are only available for one week which limits the access to material that arguably belongs to the Licence Fee payers.
5. The BBC website is not available to the 30% of the population that does not have access to the internet
6. There are now too many trails on radio.

#### Radio 3

1. The significant decline in the broadcast of live concerts of classical music has resulted in a significantly less satisfying listening experience.
2. We regret that recordings from Europe's leading broadcasters are usually relegated to over night programmes.
3. More new music could be broadcast in the main evening programmes.
4. Radio 3 could have more speech-based programmes about faith.
5. Pressure to provide more digital radio output must not result in any further reduction in the sound quality of Radio 3.
6. Radio 3 needs to be highly distinctive in comparison with Classic FM especially during drive time programmes.

#### Radio 4

1. We are concerned that sensationalism and a populist agenda set by other media have sometimes been followed by the BBC, resulting in a weakened news output. The BBC should be about the provision of trusted information.
- 2 There should be more investigative documentaries.
3. There should be more news from Europe and the rest of the world.
4. There should be longer full-length dramas on Radio 4.
5. While valuing *Feedback* as a channel for listener’s concerns we are concerned that BBC staff often fail to appear, preferring to make written statements and often provide inadequate answers when they are interviewed.

#### Radio 7

1. More original content should be included in the schedule.
2. We have regularly highlighted our concerns about the impact on listeners of a precipitate switch to digital radio and have concerns about using Radio 7 to pressurise listeners into making the switch.
3. There should be an increase in the range and hours of children’s programmes with improved scheduling.