

**The Future of the BBC: Perspectives on public service broadcasting in Scotland
Contribution of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
to BBC Scotland's Charter debate**

As the representative body of the Jewish community in Scotland, we read with interest the essays in 'The future of the BBC: perspectives on public service broadcasting in Scotland' and agree with Alf Young that the Charter debate 'is about the kind of society we want to live in.' Several of the other contributors refer to the communities, geographic and otherwise, that make up Scotland in the 21st century, 'built with effort and thought, on a basis of shared values and common aspirations' (Joyce McMillan).

We consider that as a public service broadcaster the BBC has a responsibility to provide programmes for all sections of the public, 'to people with a community of interest', giving 'a voice to our common life and values at every level from the local to the global' (Joyce McMillan). We are concerned that one aspect of that 'common life and values', namely religious broadcasting, is entirely missing from these essays – as it is from the objectives set out in the BBC's Annual Report 2003/2004. The closest any of the essays approaches to religion is a reference by Joyce McMillan to the broadcaster's 'respect for persons, and for their suffering, that reflects the nearest thing we have to a common ethic for the whole human race', but the obligations of a public service broadcaster extend beyond such generalisations.

Faith plays an important part in the life of numerous people in Scotland, and faith communities make important and wide-ranging contributions to Scottish society. As Robert Dunbar points out, 'there is more than one culture and language in Scotland' and we share his hope that a new Royal Charter 'would reflect the multilingual and multicultural reality of Scotland'.

In 'Building for the Future' the BBC commits itself to 'faithfully reflect modern Britain's diversity in mainstream as well as specialist programmes' and we would urge the BBC to ensure that this commitment includes religious broadcasting.

Members of faith communities should have access to accurate, informative and stimulating programming from the BBC on matters of concern to them, and we would strongly support the Scottish Religious Affairs Committee's suggestion that 'work should continue to identify new ways of engaging with [the] audience on a range of ethical, moral and religious issues' (BBC Scotland Annual Review 2003/2004).

During the first eight months operation of Section 74 of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, which permits an offence to be proved to have been aggravated by religious prejudice, the police reported 262 cases that included an allegation of religious aggravation. Given this confirmation of the presence of religious hatred in Scotland, including sectarianism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, we believe it to be of the utmost importance that programmes handling religious issues, (be they news broadcasts, documentaries or drama), should do so in a responsible manner and style.

Inevitably errors of fact and judgment will sometimes be made in the reporting of religious matters, and we would like to see more effective mechanisms developed for dealing with such cases. Where complaints are substantiated we would urge the BBC to acknowledge their error promptly on-air, at a time when it is likely to be heard by those who listened to the original broadcast.

As the Governor has recognised in his foreword, there is a 'responsibility to listen carefully to the views of audiences in Scotland'. 67% of that potential audience identified themselves in the 2001 census as having a religion, and we would urge the BBC to follow the advice of Sir Robert Smith and 'ensure [the BBC] takes due account of them in delivering programmes and services'.

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