



From the Director-General

25 August 2009

Lord Pearson of Rannoch
9 West Square
London SE11 4SN

Dear Lord Pearson

Your recent correspondence to Sir Michael Lyons has been passed to me for a further response. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying – I've been on leave.

I sent a very detailed explanation on the BBC's approach to coverage of the Norwich by-election to Peter Reeve, and I have enclosed a copy for your information.

Turning to the BBC's coverage of climate change, the BBC has broadcast many programmes which have looked at this issue. As an organisation we are well aware of the strength of debate from both sides, and consequently the amount of scrutiny that our coverage receives. Our coverage of this, a scientific issue, tends to reflect the widely accepted scientific viewpoint. This doesn't mean that the BBC does not give a voice to people who disagree with the widely accepted view, or that we are biased against them.

The BBC News approach to this issue has been very well set out in this entry on the BBC News website by environment correspondent, Richard Black, and environment analyst Roger Harrabin:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2007/11/climate_sceptics.html

BBC News currently takes the view that our reporting needs to be calibrated to take into account the scientific consensus that global warming is man-made. The BBC's Editorial Guidelines state that "*we must ensure we avoid bias or an imbalance of views on controversial subjects*" and, given the weight of scientific opinion, the challenge for us is to strike the right balance between mainstream science and sceptics, since to give them equal weight would imply that the argument is evenly balanced. The BBC Governors and BBC Management jointly commissioned a report, "From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel – Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century", published in June 2007, which noted that:

“There may be now a broad scientific consensus that climate change is definitely happening and that it is at least predominantly man-made... the weight of evidence no longer justifies equal space being given to the opponents of the consensus”.

The BBC has received some feedback which states that we shouldn't give as much space to the sceptics as we do. You may be interested in an appeal which went to the BBC Trust's Editorial Standards Committee (ESC) from a complainant who raised just such an objection. I am enclosing a copy of the ESC finding, which did not uphold the complaint. I am also enclosing a copy of another ESC finding on our climate change coverage which may be of interest to you.

BBC News policy is that while we do need to reflect the views of sceptics, we also need to put our reporting in the context of the mainstream scientific consensus; Roger Black and Roger Hermiston's website article explained: *“We are still living with criticism over our coverage of MMR when we gave the impression that each side was underpinned by approximately equal weight. We must get it right on climate”.*

In summary, BBC News takes the view that when the vast majority of scientists, who are expert in this field, believe there is evidence of climate change, and the associated research suggests that this is mainly caused by man's activities, it would be unbalanced always to refer to the opponents of their view and could be detrimental to exploring the range of views among mainstream scientists, for example, and the range of solutions. This is in keeping with the Editorial Guideline on impartiality which states that “we seek to provide a properly balanced service consisting of a wide range of subject matter and views broadcast over an appropriate time scale across all our output.” That said, it is also right that we reflect the views of sceptics, and we should apply the same rigour in testing views about climate change as we do in any other area of journalism.

Turning to factual television, you may be interested to learn that we have some interesting commissions in the pipeline, including *Hot Planet*, a BBC One programme which will air later in the year, and *Panorama* will also be reporting around the time of the Copenhagen Summit. On BBC Two, there will be a series of *This World* films presented by Justin Rowlatt which we expect to be broadcast ahead of the Summit, and of course there will be special coverage of the Summit on *Newsnight*.

Best wishes


Mark Thompson



Sir Michael Lyons
Chairman
BBC Trust
Room 211, 35 Marylebone High Street
London W1U 4AA

24th August 2009

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 20th August which has reached me today. I look forward to receiving Mark Thompson's answer to the points about the BBC's EU coverage in my letters to you of 2nd June and 5th August. I hope you agree it is important that I can report his reply to the UKIP Conference on 4th September. I fear that anger continues to rise amongst our members, and amongst Euro-sceptics generally, especially after the Norwich saga. A clear commitment from Mr. Thompson to deliver on the BBC's assurances given after the Wilson Report, and to treat UKIP even-handedly in future, would of course be helpful.

As to the BBC's coverage of climate change generally, I feel I should leave that to Lord Monckton, Christopher Booker and others more knowledgeable than me. As you say, my complaint about the programme(s) when climate change and the EU coincided is with your Editorial Standards Committee. But I can't help saying that I trust the BBC is taking the Australian geologist, Ian Plimer's new book "*Heaven and Earth – Global Warming: the Missing Science*" seriously. This seems to be a very serious, possibly definitive, contribution to the debate which should now take place. My offer to facilitate an informal lunch or meeting on climate change between my friends and key BBC people still stands, of course assuming that the BBC's mind was not closed on the 26th January 2006!

With good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lord Pearson of Rannoch'.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch

cc Christopher Booker
Christopher Monckton
Mark Thompson



Sir Michael Lyons
Chairman, BBC Trust
Room 211
35 Marylebone High Street
London W1U 4AA

By e-mail and letter

5th August, 2009

Dear Sir Michael,

Thank you for your kind reply of 3rd June to my letter of 2nd June, and for passing it on to Mark Thompson so that he might reply to me directly. So far, I have had no such reply, or indeed an acknowledgement from his office.

I was disappointed that neither you nor Mr. Thompson had time to answer the suggestion I put to you in our Parliamentary meeting on 14th July.

This is that the BBC remains editorially biased:

- (a) In favour of the anthropogenic global warming (AGW) theory; and
- (b) Against those who believe that the UK would be better off out of the EU.

The first of these suggestions is the subject of a specific complaint I made against the *Today* programme, which I am now passing to the Editorial Standards Committee in view of Ceri Thomas's unsatisfactory replies (all attached).

Can you tell me whether the BBC held a seminar on 26th January, 2006, at which its editorial line to support AGW was agreed? If so, who was present, and who spoke on each side of the debate?

The second suggestion is more within the sphere of my own personal knowledge and experience, and I regret that the points I put to you in my e-mail of 2nd June remain unanswered. Indeed, *Today's* treatment of Nigel Farage sank to new lows on 8th June, and this is the subject of another specific programme complaint (attached).

And then the BBC decided to airbrush UKIP out of the recent Norwich bye-election, even after it had finished third in the European Parliamentary Elections on 4th June. The attached letter of 28th July from Nigel Farage to David Jordan is a model of restraint in the circumstances.

Continued .../

You say in your letter of 3rd June that “the Trust does not get involved unless, for example, it relates to a breach of the BBC’s editorial standards”.

So I come back to where I started, yet again. The BBC’s failure to explain to the British people how the EU works and how it affects their daily lives is also an editorial failure, and I am beginning to suspect that, like AGW, it is deliberate. Let me be more specific.

In its reply to the Wilson report in May 2005, the BBC claimed that its editorial line on “Europe” was and would henceforth be as follows:

“With specific reference to Europe our aims are:

- to offer our audiences across all platforms clear, accurate and accessible information about the way EU institutions work and their impact on UK laws and life;
- to ensure impartiality by reflecting the widest possible range of voices and viewpoints about EU issues; to test those viewpoints using evidence-based argument or informed opinion;
- to demonstrate the relationships between the different member states and the European Union;
- to reveal and explain to our audiences areas of contentious fact and disputed principle.”

The BBC’s words, not mine. Yet, as far as I can tell, the BBC has done none of this. Surely the Trustees should now instruct the executive to fulfil that promise?

I have been asked to address the UKIP conference in Southport on the 4th of September on “UKIP and the BBC”. I would be grateful for your reply about editorial policy before then, and for that of Mark Thompson about its execution, so that I can share it with my audience. It would also be helpful to have the Executive’s reply to Nigel Farage by then, of course.

I look forward to hearing from both of you.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Pearson of Rannoch