



From The Chairman

16 December 2003

The Lord Pearson of Rannoch  
House of Lords  
LONDON  
SW1A 0PW

*Dear Lord Pearson*

I would like to draw your attention to two important announcements which have been made by the BBC in the past few days. These announcements are intended to ensure that the BBC, the nation's leading public service broadcaster, adheres to the highest possible standards of editorial compliance and impartiality across all of its output, and especially in the vital area of news and current affairs.

First, we have announced the appointment of Mark Byford to the newly-created post of Deputy Director-General. Until now, Mark has been Director of the Global News Division, including the World Service and BBC World. While retaining this post, Mark will now also assume responsibility across the BBC for all pre and post broadcast programme compliance, and for an enhanced complaints operation. He will also deputise for Greg Dyke, the Editor in Chief, during his absence.

Second, the BBC has announced that it is tightening the rules under which its journalists are permitted to write articles in outside newspapers and other publications. The changes mean that no staff, or regular freelance journalist whose main profile or income comes from the BBC, will be able to write newspaper or magazine columns on current affairs or other contentious issues. (Current contracts in place mean that some columns will continue until Spring next year, and freelancers who derive most of their income from outside the BBC will be exempt.) Articles on specific BBC programmes that are part of an overall press and publicity plan will be allowed, as will columns on non contentious issues and food, film or music reviews, or syndicated articles that appear first on BBC News online. But all must still be approved by a senior manager. The intention is to ensure that BBC journalists do not write articles which breach the BBC's impartiality requirements in outside publications.

These changes, and others which are in the pipeline (relating, for example, to the producers' guidelines on the breaking of controversial stories and to the use of anonymous sources), have stemmed from a considerable body of work which the Board of Governors, the Director-General and the Executive Committee have undertaken in the past few months. I believe that the public would expect the BBC to re-examine its procedures as a result of the experiences of this summer, and to make any necessary changes to ensure that things are working properly going forward.

In order to do this, the Governors in September asked the Director-General and the Executive Committee to formulate proposals for reform in several key areas. Some of these were related to the Kelly affair, others were not. All of them merited a re-think.

The BBC's future depends on it retaining the trust of its licence payers. I am therefore happy to report that the trust of the public in the BBC, as measured in our monthly tracking survey of public opinion, has remained solid at a very high level throughout 2003. The changes which we are now in the process of implementing are designed to ensure that that remains the case in the future.

I should end by saying that one thing will not change, and that is the BBC's basic approach to journalism. Unless we fearlessly seek to tell the public the truth, and to scrutinise the decisions and behaviour of those in the public domain, we would be failing in our mandate and we would not deserve the licence fee. As we carry out these tasks, our commitment to impartiality, accuracy and fairness will not waver.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Gavyn Davies', written in dark ink.

Gavyn Davies