

To: BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

From: The Community Relations Council
6 Murray Street
Belfast
BT1 6DN

Date: April 2006

BBC White Paper

The Community Relations Council (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the BBC's White Paper. CRC's aim is to lead and support change in Northern Ireland towards reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust and promote sharing over separation. We work by promoting constructive and relevant dialogue, by actively supporting those taking real risks for relationship building, by acting as a practical bridge between groups in society and between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and by promoting wider learning through developing better practice. Our overall aim is "to lead and support change towards a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation, respect, mutual trust and good relations".

Government policies such as 'A Shared Future: Policy & Strategic Framework for Good Relations in NI' and the 'Racial Equality Strategy' set out the aims and objectives of the government in delivering a shared future for everyone in Northern Ireland. Responsibility for the implementation of these policies lies with central and local government, and organisations such as the Community Relations Council. CRC believes that as well as government leading the way in this policy area, other organisations and individuals need to contribute in a positive manner to help achieve inclusion, partnership and sharing.

The BBC is an important institution in today's society and has developed a wide range of key objectives which CRC feels fit in with the aims of A Shared Future and the Racial Equality Strategy. The BBC has a responsibility to educate, inform and entertain individuals, and BBC Northern Ireland needs to play a critical role in investigating and reporting the alternative Northern Ireland. The Review presents a positive vision for the future and there is an opportunity in a number of objectives e.g. 'sustaining citizenship & civil society' to support all the positive things in Northern Ireland.

The key question is 'How can the BBC contribute to the goals of A Shared Future'? We have seen and listened to the heavy costs of division, sectarianism and hatred, on TV and radio, over the last 30 years. Now there is an opportunity, as we try to create a

shared future, to highlight and promote further understanding of the two traditions and the new cultures in our society. The BBC needs to report this positive view of Northern Ireland.

There is not only a need to report the politics with the 'big P', but also the politics with the 'small p'. There are plenty of examples of disagreement, division and dissent in Northern Irish society, but equally there are positive examples of good relations, partnership and positive cross community relations. This type of politics needs to be covered and promoted. The BBC should:

- engage with communities and voluntary groups to learn and report on local initiatives that show that through cross community action and partnerships stronger communities are emerging;
- proactively investigate and report on good news stories that represent a confident, growing and more diverse Northern Ireland;
- present issues in their context. The BBC has stated that 'education' is one of its key objectives, and therefore has a duty to educate audiences on the different cultures and traditions in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, if the BBC examines the community and voluntary sector, a broader context is being presented more than 'the Orange and the Green', and this should be reflected in radio and TV programming;
- not stereotype communities. On occasions individuals and communities are bracketed and pigeonholed into certain categories. The BBC should present the alternative public image of our society – the majority of individuals and communities who live, work and socialise together;
- lodge itself in the new articulation of division. Media should move away from the negative language of division and concentrate on the positive such as diversity, sharing etc;
- Northern Irish society is more culturally diverse than ever before and there needs to be more coverage of ethnic minorities and other minority groups. BBC Northern Ireland should be brought into line with the BBC in other regions and provide network programming that reflects, in a balanced and accurate way, that activities and cultures of the diverse range of different communities within the UK;
- Provide a larger amount of dedicated programming in and for each of the devolved regions (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales); to include provision in indigenous minority languages across a range of platforms;
- and develop the unique relationship between RTE and BBC Northern Ireland and encourage joint productions.

CRC would also like the BBC to make a significant commitment to supporting local directors and producers who have strong links with Northern Ireland when sourcing new productions. Local producers have an ability to reflect the attitudes of local society not just in their production but by the use of a range of local voices. The BBC has an important role in increasing the local capacity in terms of production and enabling it to

reflect on local society. A commitment to this should be evidenced in any further contracts to broadcast in and to Northern Ireland.

The key principles behind our comments are inclusivity, diversity and equality which underpin the Council's commitment to building sustainable relationships across and beyond Northern Ireland. How a public broadcaster conveys the story of the lives and concerns of people and communities to a mass audience which has often grown up in division and hostility plays a critical and practical role in our work

CRC would be happy to assist the BBC and BBC Northern Ireland in its role of promoting A Shared Future and look forward to working with them.

END