



## Oral evidence: [The future of the BBC World Service](#), HC

1045

Monday 24 March 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 March 2014

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Members present: Sir Richard Ottaway (Chair); Mr John Baron; Sir Menzies Campbell; Ann Clwyd; Sandra Osborne; Mr Frank Roy; Sir John Stanley; Rory Stewart

Questions 38-77

Witnesses: **James Harding**, Director of News and Current Affairs, BBC, and **Lord Williams of Baglan**, International Trustee, BBC Trust, gave evidence.

**Q38 Chair:** I welcome members of the public to this sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee. This is a short, final evidence session on the BBC World Service to follow up themes from our recent Report on the FCO's performance and financing. The main issues are the degree of protection for the interests of the World Service within the BBC's decision-making structures and future funding.

I give a warm welcome to the Director, News and Current Affairs, Mr James Harding, and to the International Trustee on the BBC Trust, Lord Williams of Baglan. A warm welcome to you both.

Lord Williams, you have been a trustee for a couple of years. Do you feel that you have had an impact?

**Lord Williams:** Yes, I certainly hope so. It is two years and three months to be precise, and I think it has helped to have someone who has seen the World Service from many points. Of course, I actually worked there for eight years as a journalist and editor. I was a founder of the BBC World Service Trust. When I was special adviser to Robin Cook and Jack Straw when they were Foreign Secretary, I was delegated to take a specific interest in the World Service. Additionally, all of my career in the UN was spent outside the UK, which gave me a particular viewpoint on assessing the global impact and influence of the World Service, especially in areas such as the Middle East and south-east Asia.

**Q39 Chair:** Mr Harding, the Director-General said that he hopes to double World Service coverage by 2022. Could you give us an idea of how you will prepare for that and what it actually means for the World Service?

**James Harding:** Certainly. If you look at the way in which the consumption of news is changing, one of the big questions for the World Service is the extent to which it wants to be part of that. Obviously, we have a great audience and a great heritage of radio, but you are already seeing that the way in which people across the world are getting their news is

changing rapidly and radically. Whether that is via Twitter, Facebook or a world of mobile and social media, we are already seeing that take off. We are seeing it take off in our BBC Arabic service and our BBC Hindi service.

Lord Hall and I are convinced and excited by the ways in which we will be able to reach new audiences. As you say, we will grow from an audience of around 250 million to an audience of 500 million people across the world by investing in and exploiting those new means of distribution and those new forms of media. I know that my colleague Peter Horrocks was here a few weeks ago, and he has also talked about how we are going to invest to innovate in the BBC World Service, which is precisely about reaching people, particularly young people, across the world with the kinds of quality and serious-minded journalism that define the World Service.

**Q40 Mr Baron:** One of our concerns as a Committee is that under the new funding system—we have had this conversation before, but we will visit it again briefly, so we can tease you a bit more—is that while there have been promises that it will offer long-term stability and all the rest of it, the BBC World Service is still going to be competing with very popular shows for funding over the long term; whether it is “Strictly” or “EastEnders” doesn’t really matter. We have been assured that the advantage of the new settlement is that it will provide stability and certainty to enable the World Service to make long-term planning decisions, yet almost in the same breath, we now see that the funding extends only for one year, which tends to go back on everything that has been said or suggests that. It does not ease our concerns when we see funding extending only for one year, and it rails against everything that has been said to justify the new system. What assurances can you give about that?

**James Harding:** We have tried to address precisely that concern. If we have not been clear enough, let me have another go at it. What we have said is that we are going to commit to £245 million this year. While we have to make cuts across the BBC, including across news, we are going to give the World Service exceptional treatment, which means that we will protect that budget over the course of the licence fee period and, in addition to that, invest in innovation. I do not think you can draw the conclusion that there is uncertainty about our commitment to the budget; quite the reverse. In addition, of course, there are structural supports for the BBC World Service budget that go beyond the licence fee period, and those are set out in the operating licence.

**Q41 Mr Baron:** But Mr Harding, if I may say so, the licence fee period extends to December 2016. We have the funding for only a year, so it doesn’t extend to the end of the licence fee period. We have got certainty for only one year.

**James Harding:** No, sorry. We have said that we are going to commit to—we are very publicly committed to—maintaining that current budget and, in addition, seeking funds to invest in future innovation, over and above the £245 million. Whereas if you look across the BBC news budget, we have to, as is the case across the BBC, find quite substantial savings: more than £60 million across BBC news. When it comes to the BBC World Service, we are saying that we are going to protect the budget, and in addition to that, we are going to seek funds to invest in its future.

**Q42 Mr Baron:** A final question just for clarity. You have suggested an amount over the course of the next year, but in addition to that, you have given an assurance that that will be a minimum going forward, certainly until the end of the licence fee period and perhaps beyond.

**James Harding:** Yes.

**Lord Williams:** If I may, Chairman, I think that is a very important statement that James has made. It was a consequence of the decision that was taken by the Government to put the World Service under the licence fee that funding would be on a shorter-term basis and that World Service funding is, like funding for any other service, on a 12-month basis. One cannot make an exception for that, not least because it would be a difficult argument to have with the licence fee payer.

**Q43 Sir John Stanley:** Lord Williams, what do you assess will be the impact on the BBC generally and on the World Service specifically of a decriminalisation of the offence of not paying the licence fee?

**Lord Williams:** Gosh, Sir John, that's a difficult question. To be frank, speaking personally, I have always been very troubled. I know that the numbers are small but not insignificant—60 or 70 people a year, I gather, are jailed, and many others, of course, are fined. That is something that has disturbed me. I would hope that it would not have a big impact. At the moment, there is no decision yet by the Government, as I understand it, to move forward on this, although indications are that they may. What the consequences of that would be for the BBC as a whole, I am not sure. There are some areas for concern, I think.

**Q44 Sir John Stanley:** I don't know whether Mr Harding wants to add to that. I have read that there is some considerable concern within the BBC that this could result in a significant degree of non-payment, and therefore shortfall in revenue to the BBC, which could clearly impact on the World Service, in theory at any rate.

**Lord Williams:** It could impact on all services, obviously. I don't know that the World Service would suffer specifically. I think that we as a Trust and the executive would make sure that that would not happen.

**Q45 Sir John Stanley:** Do you want to add to that?

**James Harding:** It is probably too early to tell exactly what the likely consequence would be in terms of evasion and evasion rates. As Lord Williams has said, there is sympathy around the issue of decriminalisation. The concern is that if you see a significant increase in the evasion rate, would there be a willingness to put up the licence fee to compensate for that increase in the evasion rate? If you didn't think there was a willingness to put up the licence fee and if the British public did not want, in effect, to fund that evasion, what would be the consequences for funding across the BBC?

**Q46 Mr Roy:** Lord Williams, when Mr Horrocks gave his evidence last month, his understanding was that the 2015-16 annual budget for the World Service would not be lower than the 2014-15 budget. Is he right?

**Lord Williams:** I don't think that we're in a position to say at the moment that 2015-16 would not be more. In 2014-15, we know it was £245 million.

**Q47 Mr Roy:** But you're not in a position to say that 2015—

**Lord Williams:** No. We can't say it yet.

**Q48 Mr Roy:** When would that happen then? When would you be in a position to tell us the level of 2015-16?

**James Harding:** I attended that session and I may not have heard that element of the evidence. I thought that the position that we had laid out was that we have committed to £245 million for the coming year. As I made clear, we are intent that the budget will not fall below that level, and what we are seeking to do is to find funds to invest—

**Q49 Mr Roy:** But he did say, Mr Harding, that his understanding was that the following year's budget would not fall below that 2014-15 figure.

**Lord Williams:** That is correct.

**Q50 Mr Roy:** That is fine. I am also asking when you will actually make the announcement.

**James Harding:** When will we set the 2015-16 budget? Can I get back to you with the exact month, because I am not sure exactly.

**Q51 Sandra Osborne:** Could you give us an idea of the types of efficiencies that you would anticipate from integrating the World Service with the domestic news operation?

**James Harding:** Yes. Some of the things we are trying to do are organising our International Bureaux so that our World Service operation and our broader BBC news gathering operation sit together. Therefore, we will try to co-ordinate our rental agreements and our service agreements. Some of it is also internal in terms of structures. Because for many years the World Service was accountable to the Foreign Office, it had some separate organisational structures and financial structures. We are going to bring those within BBC News, again as a way of ensuring that the money that we are spending goes to a higher degree on programming.

**Q52 Sandra Osborne:** Will there be redundancies as part of that?

**James Harding:** I'll have to look at that. Let me check and if you want, I'll answer you directly once we have looked at that.

**Q53 Mr Roy:** Chairman, what do you say to those who believe that the need to fund the World Service from the licence fee is one of the factors for some cutbacks elsewhere in the corporation?

**Lord Williams:** Sorry, I am not a chairman.

**Q54 Mr Roy:** There are people saying that some of the cutbacks that are coming to the BBC—we have heard about several hundred million, or whatever—is due to the fact that the World Service is now being funded. So, given the fact that you are now paying for the World Service, does that mean there will be cuts elsewhere?

**Lord Williams:** I certainly hope not, Mr Roy. My feeling is that the country generally assesses that the World Service is a fantastic asset for the United Kingdom. One thing I am keen on, and about which I want to talk in the coming weeks with James and other colleagues, is making these services more available to licence fee payers here in the UK. After all, we have a couple of million Urdu-speaking British citizens, 200,000 plus Arabic-speaking people in London, and so on and so forth for many of the languages in which we broadcast.

I also think the English service of the BBC World Service would be of great benefit to licence fee payers throughout the UK. Licence fee payers have particular interests, whether it is Radio 3, BBC Sport or whatever. BBC Alba broadcasts in Gaelic in Scotland, although the last time I checked only about 1.8% of Scottish people speak Gaelic. As Ann Clwyd will know, in my native Wales the percentage of Welsh speakers is much higher—about 20%. Nobody wants to close those services.

**Q55 Mr Roy:** You would be able to give an assurance to the rest of the world that none of the cutbacks are because the World Service is now under the BBC's jurisdiction? Is that what you are saying?

**Lord Williams:** No, I am saying we have to look at every service, and the World Service is now a service of the BBC. It no longer comes out of the Foreign Office budget.

**Q56 Mr Roy:** I know that. If the finger is pointed at the World Service and people say, "You have caused cuts to this department of the BBC because you are down in funding," would that be fair?

**James Harding:** The licence fee settlement was what the licence fee settlement was. It was a flat settlement and a request that the funding of the World Service moved from the Foreign Office to the BBC.

**Q57 Mr Roy:** So the answer is yes?

**James Harding:** No, I will go further than saying something as simple as that. It is important for the BBC to be clear that we are committed to the World Service because we are asking the licence fee payer to fund its future. The BBC, as you rightly point out, has to find £700 million worth of savings and it has to make its priorities clear. One of the reasons why I was keen to clarify to Mr Baron the point about our commitment to the budget is that it is a choice that reflects a deep commitment that, I am proud to say, runs across the BBC. Our audience research shows that it also runs across the vast majority of the British public.

**Q58 Mr Roy:** Am I right in thinking that there will be a victim? If you are going to fund the World Service, there must be a victim somewhere else. If you are giving money to one service, you are taking it off another.

**James Harding:** I don't think it is binary. The truth is that if you are running an organisation such as the BBC, there is a host of choices you can make and there are some you do make. One that we have made is a serious commitment to the future of the BBC World Service.

**Q59 Ann Clwyd:** Under the agreement, you will not have the formal sponsorship of the FCO, nor will the same regular meetings take place between the World Service and the FCO. Will there be a process for recognising the FCO's priorities and its reliance on the World Service as soft power in various countries?

**Lord Williams:** There will be an annual meeting between the Foreign Secretary and Lord Patten, the chairman of the Trust. In addition, I have regular meetings with senior figures in the Foreign Office, particularly about the great issues of the day—above all, the Middle East, but also Russia, Ukraine and Crimea in the past week or so. So the meetings will probably be as regular as they have been in the past.

**Q60 Ann Clwyd:** You don't think there will be much difference? I am looking at the terms of the present arrangement and the new framework agreement. One, for instance, says, "Objectives, priorities and targets...To be set by the BBC with the Foreign Secretary." The new framework agreement says, "BBC Trust to agree with the Foreign Secretary". There are lots of nuances like that.

**James Harding:** I think the fundamental issue is that we cannot close or open a language service without the consent of the Foreign Secretary. The chairman of the Trust meets the Foreign Secretary regularly—annually. I also think that, as this Committee knows probably better than me, the nature of the World Service's soft power and the reason it is so formidable is that it is based on quite a subtle contract. The nature of its content is independent. The fact that the BBC is funded by the licence fee and is not, if you like, in that sense run by the Foreign Office, probably will only enhance its respect around the world. When you look at the world we are in and when you look at the likes of China Central Television, Russia Today and al-Jazeera, the fact that the BBC World Service does not have a commercial ambition or a Government agenda, but is genuinely independent and seen to be so, will do more to enhance the soft power of the World Service.

**Q61 Ann Clwyd:** That brings us on to the next question: what part have you played in discussions on how the integrity of the World Service should be protected in areas that are commercially or externally funded?

**Lord Williams:** To begin with, the advertising at the moment is very restricted. It is on the Arabic and Russian-language service websites and on the Berlin relay station. There are two cities in the world where we have FM 24/7—Berlin and Singapore. I am not sure why, in this day and age, British taxpayers and licence fee payers are subsidising two wealthy cities, so I have no problem with that. We have said at the moment that it should not be more than 3%. Possibly in the long run that could go up gradually towards 10%, but we want to do that with the integrity of the World Service protected, so that any sponsorship would not be in the areas, obviously, of news and current affairs.

**Q62 Rory Stewart:** Twenty years ago, the Director of the World Service was a very considerable, very senior figure within the BBC hierarchy and would have been perceived, by the public at least, as being one of the two or three most senior figures in the BBC. Over the past 20 years, there has been a lot of change. We are now in a position where the Director of the World Service is no longer on the executive board, the Director of the World Service is no longer on the management board and in fact the World Service board itself has come to an

end and been replaced by a newsgroup board. It is very difficult for us not to feel that the job has been downgraded—that it is a less senior, less influential job than it used to be.

**Lord Williams:** I don't think that is right, Mr Stewart. First, I want to say that James Harding is here, he is Director of News, and the BBC is exceptionally lucky to have somebody of his calibre: a former FT foreign correspondent, editor of *The Times*, a graduate in Japanese from my old college—SOAS. We are very lucky to have somebody with his international—

**Rory Stewart:** Lord Williams, just to specify, I am not calling into question in anyway James's qualifications, but James is not the Director of the World Service, so you are arguing exactly in the direction of my point. Pointing out that James is wonderful and has a senior position does not address whether the Director of the World Service himself is less important than he used to be.

**Lord Williams:** I do not think he is, but that is not a matter for me anyway. That is a matter for the Director-General to decide. That is an operational issue on the part of the Director-General, who sits on management boards. It is not a Trust issue.

**Q63 Rory Stewart:** Surely as a trustee, your responsibility is to defend institutionally and protect the interests of the World Service within the organisation.

**Lord Williams:** Absolutely. That does not mean to say that that cannot be defended if the Director is not on the executive board.

**Rory Stewart:** One would have thought that one of the clearest ways of institutionally protecting an organisation, any organisation, is to think through how the organisation is designed. It is not simply a question of informal, but formal procedures.

**Lord Williams:** I am not sure that I can say more on that, because it is not something that we as a Trust have got involved in.

**James Harding:** Obviously, we gave some thought to the point, not least because we were aware that some people on this Committee were interested in whether the Director of the World Service should be on a management board, or the executive board. Can I just explain to you what the thinking was and why I think that this concern that you are voicing is misplaced?

Actually, the question we are trying to answer is this: what is the best possible safeguard for the future of the BBC World Service, not over the next two or three years, but the next 25 years? How are we going to be sure that, when we look back, we have safeguarded its future? Our thinking was around three particular things. One was that the executive board of the BBC is very small and now, for the first time, the Director of News, an executive director, is directly responsible for the World Service, and, if you like, the World Service has a voice at that top table.

I also think that we, generally, as the BBC are trying to reduce our number of boards, to try to make things simpler. The idea of creating a structure that would duplicate the organisational structure in news would not only be wasteful in terms of resources, but would not necessarily help answer that bigger question of who at the top table answers for the World

Service. The truth is that I—or my successor as the Director of News—will answer for the World Service. That is in the long-term best interests of the World Service.

Here, fundamentally, is the point of principle. The worst outcome for the World Service would be that it is considered to be an adjunct to the BBC or a ghetto or, even worse, a political obligation of the BBC. I think it needs to be front and centre of what we do and what we are striving to do. It seems to me odd that the Director of News would not be responsible for its success or otherwise. So in the structure that we have put in place, the Director of News sits on the executive board, answers for the BBC World Service and seeks to ensure that the rest of the BBC backs it in all that it does.

**Q64 Rory Stewart:** Just to challenge that a little bit, it seems strange to suggest that putting the BBC World Service in a senior position would somehow make it a ghetto or a political exception. In any organisation, when a decision is made to promote a particular department or interest to a more senior level, that is not normally seen as an expression of its being a ghetto or a political exception; it is, instead, a way of saying, “This is something which is distinctive, which matters to us, which has its unique values, its own unique history and traditions and which we want to give priority to.” In the same way, if the Foreign Office decided to elevate the position of the person responsible for the Asia-Pacific region; that would not be seen as putting them into a ghetto, but as a way of saying, “This matters, it is significant and serious and we want to give it real weight.”

The danger of your current situation is that you are not only responsible for the World Service, but for many other things, so when you are on that board you are not advocating relentlessly to make sure that—to put it in concrete terms—the particular station in Nigeria that needs the television engineer gets that television engineer, or that the particular station in Thailand that needs a particular bit of support gets it; you are having to represent news as a whole. You yourself will be weighing up the interests of domestic news against international news. You cannot be expected to be a passionate exclusive advocate for the World Service.

**James Harding:** There are two points there. One, to speak to Mr Roy’s point, is that we are not going to live in a world where we can talk exclusively about the World Service. Actually, one of the things that we want is to see that the World Service genuinely informs the nature of our news in the UK.

Personally, one of the things that I found thrilling about coming to the BBC is that you sit at news conference in the morning. At 9 o’clock this morning, for example, it is the team from the World Service that is really informing our thinking about what is happening in Ukraine, or it is one of our young editors who has come off BBC Arabic who is laying out what has just happened in Cairo. That is hugely important and it is important that we integrate what is happening in the World Service across the whole of news and that it informs what we do. Increasingly, as you have already seen, you are seeing figures from the World Service appearing on the BBC domestically; whether that was Anne Soy in Nairobi or Nomsa Maseko, at the time of Nelson Mandela’s death. I make the point because maintaining the public support for the BBC World Service, and enabling the public to see the value of that support, is extremely important.

I think you are right. If it were the case that the only part of the BBC that would be promoted by your structure would be the World Service, and all other parts of the BBC would be happy in that circumstance not to be on the executive board, I think there is a logic

in your argument; but once you start doing that, you would have to start changing the composition of a host of other parts of the BBC, because the argument would then apply equally to those other parts of the BBC. That would be around nations, around different parts of the BBC.

Then you would have, essentially, an executive board which became bigger and bigger, and less functional. So the aim is to try to make sure that you have a small group of people who can be an effective decision-making unit, who can make difficult decisions about budgets; but in that small group there is an individual who is responsible for the success of the World Service.

**Q65 Sir Menzies Campbell:** My questions really follow the same theme. If you were here when evidence was given by Mr Horrocks you will remember that there were some pretty specific questions asked about that. It is not just the executive board; it is the management board—is that right?—from which the Director of the World Service is excluded; I am trying not to be pejorative about this.

What I do not understand is this: the World Service has not been incorporated into the whole of the BBC before. It brings with it a very significant different tradition; different obligations; and a different culture. Indeed, we discussed this with Lord Williams in the past. You know that there is a great deal of apprehension, not just on this Committee, but elsewhere, that the particular, intrinsic merit and values of the World Service may be diluted. Certainly in the short term, but perhaps even in the long term, surely there is a case for ensuring that this very unusual grafting on to the BBC as a whole should be protected. One of the ways of persuading the public that it is being protected is if there is a very visible indication that the World Service is recognised for its special characteristics by, for example, membership of the management board.

What I find difficult—and I think Rory Stewart and others do—is why there is so much resistance to this.

**James Harding:** That is a really good question. Why is it? I thought about that quite a lot, particularly in considering this proposal. I think if you joined the BBC you would share with me a determination to ensure that, as much as is possible, we are focusing our resources, our journalism, on the story and on our audiences. I think there is a healthy reluctance to create new structures and new management positions.

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** I understand all that.

**James Harding:** I am explaining why there has been that resistance. I also agree: I think the public will want to be reassured that we understand the values of the BBC World Service; that we are going to safeguard them. Personally I think that we have to do better than that. I believe that we have to honour the history of the World Service by securing its future; but I do not think that a bureaucratic, or even a technocratic, appointment makes a meaningful difference. I think the measure for us, bluntly, is going to be what we do on air, on screen, and being judged by our work. Personally I think that—and this is regardless of who happens to be the Director of News—the Director of News should be responsible for the output, for the success of the World Service, because it is such an essential part of what BBC News is.

**Q66 Sir Menzies Campbell:** But the anxiety is that by folding the World Service into—it is not very accurate—the whole of the BBC, that very special culture, which I think you would recognise, may, I suppose, in the worst case, be destroyed; but it may be diluted. That is something about which the public have to have confidence—that it will not happen. If the position is that decisions taken about the future of the World Service are taken in the absence of the person who has the responsibility for carrying them out, I fear that that will only add to the anxieties of people like me and the members of this Committee. Do you not accept that?

**James Harding:** I understand the argument. I think I probably take the opposite view, fundamentally, which is that there is a bigger risk to the World Service over time in being treated as a separate organisation to the side of the BBC, not least because we are asking British licence fee payers to fund it. What is essential is to consider the best way of safeguarding its future. My concern is that if it sits to the side, it is more likely that it will be chipped away and subject to a separate debate about its future. I think I share with you—I think we all share—the commitment to determining how we best safeguard its future. Our judgment has been that ensuring that the BBC World Service is front and centre at the heart of the BBC and BBC News is the best way to do so.

**Q67 Sir Menzies Campbell:** I hope you will forgive me if I say that to describe it as an adjunct is, in a sense, pejorative. We all accept that the World Service is now part of the BBC. Our particular anxiety is to ensure that its special character is preserved. I am not suggesting that you put it in a silo and off to one side. That is the kind of existence that it has had in the past. That has changed and we all accept that. We have some considerable reservations on whether it should have changed, but that argument is over. My anxiety, which I am pretty certain is shared by the rest of my colleagues on the Committee, is on whether in five years we will still be as confident as you appear to suggest on the special nature of the World Service within the BBC.

While you are digesting that, on the point on the Director-General, he of course has the responsibility for determining the management, but he is answerable to a board of trustees. Were he to do something that the trustees regarded as being unacceptable in the management structure that he created, the trustees would have the obligation to say, “Stop, you cannot do that.”

**Lord Williams:** If I may just add, it has been a long time since the Director of the World Service has been on the executive board.

**Q68 Sir Menzies Campbell:** The problem is that you have joined on two institutions that have virtually had a separate existence. The anxiety that we all share is on ensuring that the essential character of the smaller component joining the larger component is not subsumed by the larger component.

**James Harding:** Yes. I will answer in two ways. First, we all know the people who work in the World Service and we all know their character. On a day-to-day basis, given the nature of the work, their relationship with their audiences and the work they do in 27 different languages, there is a character to those teams, editors and newsrooms that will not and cannot be subsumed.

The trick is—I genuinely appreciate the thoughtfulness of what you are saying on how we preserve something as good and as valuable as the World Service and its values—

working out how we ensure, now that it has come under licence fee funding, that licence fee payers can see and witness the best of what the World Service does and how we enable it to inform the quality of the BBC's journalism across the board while maintaining that separate identity and special set of values. That is the requirement that has been asked of us as a result of this settlement. I personally do not think that the appointment of an individual to a particular board is the answer to that, but I genuinely understand the thinking behind it.

**Q69 Sir Menzies Campbell:** Maybe that is as far as we can go. One last point. Although the BBC is the responsibility of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I hope it has realised that this Committee will want to take a keen and continuing interest in the role of the World Service.

**Lord Williams:** I certainly hope so.

**James Harding:** I might regret this, but I think that it is good for the BBC World Service to have the interest of this Committee, not least because there will be people who speak to members of this Committee who will be able to relay to us observations and concerns. Obviously, it is up to you as and when you call us, but we would be more than willing and keen to do so.

**Q70 Chair:** We have said on many occasions that we intend to go on taking an interest. Are there any plans to dispense with the post of Director of the World Service?

**James Harding:** No, quite the opposite. I think it is very important that you have someone who has oversight of the World Service. As you have seen, we have renamed Global News to be the World Service Group and to have oversight of the World Service. You clearly need an individual who—precisely to your point, Mr Stewart—is able to focus specifically on an issue such as the provision of technical assistance in the Hausa service or something like that.

**Q71 Chair:** When Mr Horrocks was last in front of us, he said that decisions regarding the World Service would in future be made by the newsgroup board, which he sits on. Who else sits on that board?

**James Harding:** Under the plans we have, the budget will be drafted by the Director of the World Service in consultation with the Director of News and then passed by the newsgroup board. The board represents everyone across news. It goes from there to the Trust. The kinds of people you would find on the newsgroup board are the person who runs news gathering across the BBC; the person who runs the newsroom, with oversight of all our bulletins; the person who runs our programmes; and the person who runs our political programmes out of Millbank.

**Q72 Chair:** Strictly, are they the right people to run the World Service?

**James Harding:** They are excellent, but I think the point there is that we have some method of overseeing the judgment that the Director of News and the Director of the World Service make in proposing the budget before it goes to the executive. The executive also do not have direct involvement in the day-to-day running of the World Service, but they are there to cast an eye over the proper spending and the proper ambitions of the BBC World Service.

**Q73 Chair:** Would you be able to let us have a list of the members of the board?

**James Harding:** Of course.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Q74 Sir John Stanley:** The key protection for the World Service under the previous system—a grant in aid from the Foreign Office to fund the World Service—was that if there were cuts, there was direct ministerial accountability to Parliament. That could bring into play the full force of parliamentary pressure for those cuts to be reversed, as happened during the previous Conservative Government. Why do you think that the removal of that key protection can be in the interests of the World Service, which surely will now be left significantly less protected, and will not have the same degree of parliamentary protection that previously was afforded to it?

**Lord Williams:** That is, surely, Sir John, a consequence of the decision to take the World Service from the Foreign Office to come under the licence fee.

**James Harding:** I understand entirely the sentiment behind the question. All I can say as some form of reassurance is that, in the operating licence, the commitment that was made was that the BBC could not make significant cuts to the World Service—that would be in contravention of that operating licence as overseen by the Trust, and the Trust itself is accountable.

I appreciate that it does not have the same method of oversight as it previously did, when it was funded by the Foreign Office, but there was an express attempt to put in place some kind of lock that would preserve the budgetary commitment to the World Service.

**Q75 Sir John Stanley:** But you would agree that when you say the Trust is accountable, there is no way that there is a comparison between the accountability of the Trust and the accountability of Ministers, who are accountable to this Committee, on the Floor of the House, through questions, through emergency debates and through non-emergency debates? There is no equivalent accountability.

**Lord Williams:** No.

**James Harding:** No.

**Q76 Chair:** Mr Harding—this is just about within the terms of reference of this session today—last Friday this Committee published a report on instability in North and West Africa. It has taken nearly a year to produce and it has a very detailed analysis about the conflict and the situation emerging down there. It looks very closely at three areas: conflict in Mali, conflict in Algeria—the attack on the In Amenas gas facility—and the operations of Boko Haram in Nigeria. It has a detailed analysis of the problem and it puts forward a number of recommendations about the way forward.

The report had no coverage whatsoever apart from one online piece. It was not covered by the news channels, current affairs or the World Service. It is the worst coverage this Parliament that any report has had, and it is one of our best reports. The “Today” programme this morning carried a piece about the operations of Boko Haram in Nigeria. It was quite an

interesting piece, but it was quite shallow—interviews with one or two people whose relatives had been killed, and things like that. Would your advice to us be that if we are trying to use the BBC to convey our message to the public, we actually should be dumbing down our reports?

**James Harding:** Certainly not. Let me say a couple of things. First, I should just say in defence of Will Ross’s piece this morning on the “Today” programme that I thought it was a very effective and powerful piece of on-the-ground reporting. It is exactly the kind of thing that we should do to bring a story like that to our audiences.

I share your frustration with sometimes not always being able to get the things you want on the news. I think in this case the fact that it was reported online is important, because a great number of people will have seen it. That is certainly where I read it. Sometimes, however, the way things fall is just unfortunate. If you think back to Friday, it was a very, very busy news day, particularly in international affairs. The significance of what is happening in Ukraine and Crimea, the uncertainty over what was happening in Turkey and the events around the Malaysian airliner meant that there were some very significant and, in certain cases, dramatic developments happening in international affairs. As a result, what is clearly an important report about an area of some concern did not make as many bulletins as it sometimes might have done. All I can say is that it did make online, and it was clearly widely read within the BBC.

**Q77 Chair:** In the past, this would have been bread and butter to the World Service. So many issues that the World Service had been focusing on are covered in here—demography, the effect of population growth, the role the Department for International Development has in combating conflict—and you would have thought that someone in the World Service would have picked up on it. Is this a sign of things to come?

**James Harding:** I do not think it is a sign of anything very much more than the fact that some days you have a very busy news list in international affairs, and unfortunately the report fell on that day. That is, I think, all that it is a sign of. I certainly hope that you will continue to work on reports like that.

**Chair:** May I thank you both very much indeed? It has been particularly valuable to us. May we convey our appreciation to everybody in the World Service for the work that they do as you move away from the broad ambit of the Foreign Office to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport?