



## European Scrutiny Committee

Oral evidence: [Scrutiny Inquiry: follow up](#), HC 918

Wednesday 11 March 2015

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Members present: Sir William Cash (Chair); Andrew Bingham; Geraint Davies; Kelvin Hopkins; Chris Kelly; Jacob Rees-Mogg; Henry Smith

### Questions 1-71

Witness[es]: Lord Hall, Director-General and James Harding, Director of News and Current Affairs, BBC, gave evidence.

**Q1 Sir William Cash (Chair):** Good afternoon. Thank you for coming. I draw to the attention of those watching this oral evidence here or online—we expect this to be fully reported by the BBC—that the background to our questions is set out in the Committee’s November 2013 report, “Reforming the European Scrutiny System in the House of Commons,” which is available on the Committee’s website, as is all the correspondence between the Committee and the BBC since the report’s publication.

Lord Hall, you are Director-General and Editor-in-Chief of the BBC. You refused three times to appear before this Committee. Do you now accept that: first, given that under the Communications Act 2003, the BBC’s budget of £3.7 billion is derived from the licence fee payer, because Parliament has authorised that, and that the licence fee is paid into the Consolidated Fund and released to the BBC under clause 75 of the framework agreement and increased by other related activities to more than £5 billion; and secondly, given that, according to the BBC’s own research, 58% of the UK population look to the BBC for news that they trust, it is entirely right for this Committee, under its remit, according to its Standing Orders, to seek to take oral evidence from you?

**Lord Hall:** Sir William, may I say a couple of things at the start in answer to your question? First, could I emphasise your second point that 58% picked the BBC as the one source of news they trust, in particular about Europe? I think one implication of what you are saying for me as Editor-in-Chief is that our coverage and what we do in covering and explaining Europe and its institutions to the British people, and also through World Service, BBC World and BBC Online to the rest of the world, is of great importance. I underline that I appreciate your saying that, because I think it is absolutely right.

In my correspondence to you and the Committee, I really hope I managed to give you the sense of two conflicting principles in my mind. One was the absolute right of Parliament to scrutinise the BBC, recognising, as you have pointed out just now, that we are publicly funded and that, because of that we should appear before Committees of the

House. We submit our annual report and accounts to both Houses and we appear before the CMS Committee and the PAC. I have been before the PAC in the last fortnight about an NAO report and indeed in my first few weeks I was before the CMS Committee talking about my role at the BBC.

I know this is difficult and I appreciate the chance to explain it to you. Countering that, and what I have been trying to weigh, is the other principle: the editorial independence of the BBC and the perception of that. I will not bore you by going through the Charter; you know what it is. You understand the Royal Charter and the enshrinement of our independence in that.

The editorial independence of the BBC obviously matters to the confidence of the organisation and its editors, reporters and journalists who are central to what the organisation does in reporting Europe and its affairs to the rest of the UK. It is also really important to our audiences, not just in this country but globally. The editorial independence of the BBC leads to the reason that BBC World, World Service and online services outside this country are trusted to portray impartially what is happening around the world. Those are the two principles that went round in my mind as I thought hard about my replies to your requests.

**Q2 Chair:** Which led you to refuse to come.

**Lord Hall:** Indeed.

**Chair:** Now you're here.

**Lord Hall:** Now I am here, yes.

**Q3 Chair:** In the context of your letters, to which you referred, and your assertions about the independence of the BBC, do you accept that that is limited and circumscribed, first, by article 6 of the BBC Charter, secondly, by the framework agreement and, thirdly, by the general law, as is clearly set out in article 6?

**Lord Hall:** Article 6—clause 6, so that anyone watching is completely up to speed—states: “The BBC shall be independent in all matters concerning the content of its output, the times and manner in which this is supplied, and in the management of its affairs.”

I hope there would be broad agreement that the independence of the BBC—and the editorial independence of the BBC in that sense—is absolutely crucial. What is open for debate and discussion is the broad remit of the BBC and how we handle coverage in the broadest sense under our guidelines, under the remit given to us by the Trust. Those are the things that I hope we can discuss, though, of course, what you want to ask is a matter for you, not me.

**Q4 Chair:** In correspondence to us and others you claimed: “The fact...that Parliament does not, through its formal structures, seek to question the BBC on its editorial approach to

issues, I am sure reinforces public confidence that the BBC is genuinely independent from political pressure.”

Do you agree that the public is entitled to expect that an all-party Select Committee, in this case dealing with EU issues on behalf of Parliament and the electorate, has the right—indeed, one could say, the duty—to ask the BBC questions about its policies and practice? That is particularly so in your case, as Director-General and Editor-in-Chief, with responsibility, irrespective of the role of the BBC Trust, to comply with the obligations of the Charter and the framework agreement and the general law.

**Lord Hall:** Sir William, in all my correspondence with you and the Committee I at no time wanted to be disrespectful to your role or my role. I was trying to balance your proper right to scrutinise the BBC with the editorial independence of the BBC—if, for example, we were to get into judgments about that item versus this item or this method of coverage versus that method of coverage. On the broad remit of the BBC, I understand your point completely.

When I discussed your letter at the start of the correspondence with the then Chairman of the Trust, Lord Patten, we both felt at that time that the issues you were raising were to do with the overall remit, the guidelines, how the BBC is held to account, which could best be answered by the Trust. Anyway, I am now here and very happy to answer whatever questions you have.

**Q5 Chair:** In one of your letters, you clearly suggested that one of the reasons that you refused was because you thought that, somehow or other, appearing before us might impugn the operational independence of the BBC. I do not think, as we speak now, that you would continue to assert that, would you?

**Lord Hall:** I don’t think that what you are interested in is the operational, by which I mean day-to-day, judgments. For example, what appears on that programme versus what appears on another, who appears on what programme, where this was in the running, and all those things. I think I understand but—

**Q6 Chair:** We will be asking further questions. Let’s pause at that point on that one. In this context, how important do you regard the EU to be in relation to the United Kingdom in terms of the BBC’s coverage? Do you agree with your Europe Editor who, on her appointment, stated, “with the prospect of a UK referendum on EU membership, and an increasing sense of Euroscepticism across the continent, this is a defining moment for the future of Europe” and, therefore, obviously for the United Kingdom electorate and Parliament?

**Lord Hall:** I start with your opening statement. In your second point, you mentioned the importance of what the BBC does for our viewers and listeners in explaining and helping them to understand Europe broadly, by which I mean the nations that make up Europe, as well as the institutions of Europe and the European Parliament. I take that extremely seriously. That is why, when I look at the output that we are providing to people

and the service remits for BBC Parliament, Democracy Live, BBC News and one or two of our other programmes, we make it clear that at the top level we take the portrayal and the information that we provide about what is happening in Europe very seriously indeed. Democracy Live, over this week, is probably the only journalistic organisation in the country that is covering the affairs of the European Parliament, both live and with what I think is a rather good and useful summary of the points that have been made hour by hour, plus background material on what this is all about and what these institutions mean. We take that very seriously indeed.

I am pleased with “Daily Politics” and its various offshoots. Again, we take the political debate in Europe seriously. Going back to the Wilson report, followed up by the Prebble report—what I take from that, as a serious part of the Editor-in-Chief’s role and with James Harding, the Director of News, is that we are also covering as wide a range of voices as we can on the debate, about issues pertaining directly to Europe but also the relationship of Europe to the UK. My view is: is that a job that you can ever finish? No. You have to keep searching out new voices. I very much hope that that is what we are doing across our output.

**Q7 Andrew Bingham:** The Culture, Media and Sport Committee report on the future of the BBC has naturally sparked a debate on the whole governance of the BBC. The Chair of the Trust said that transferring the Trust’s responsibility for regulation and accountability to an external regulator is the “front-runner” and the “cleanest form of separation”. She also spoke about the need for a “simpler articulation” for public purposes. To what extent should such change extend to the oversight of editorial policy, what implication could it have for your role in that, and do you agree that this debate and the creation of any new system carries with it the necessity to ensure compliance with the Charter?

**Lord Hall:** Mr Bingham, forgive me if I do not comment directly on the form of regulation that I am under. I don’t think it is appropriate that I say, “This is the form of regulation I would want.” That is not my job. That is the job of Parliament to decide. Having come back to the BBC, now I am 22 months in—with the previous Chair and the current Chair—we have worked very hard to make the current arrangements work better than they were two years ago. You get back a number of things from the current operation of the Trust, which I think is really important from the point of view of what we are discussing this afternoon. One is that they commission reports on our impartiality—well, it was the governors originally with the Wilson report and then the Prebble report—but they are acting on behalf of the opinions they receive and also what licence fee payers are asking them for to hold us to account by commissioning reports on impartiality and other issues as well.

Likewise, in terms of the polling they do about what issues matter to people and how we are doing against those criteria, that is very much the Trust. The service agreements, which I think are very specific in the area that we are discussing—BBC Parliament, Democracy Live, BBC News—which say more broadly, “You must treat properly the affairs and institutions of Europe”, are an important part of the regulation too.

So the only thing I would say without defining how the BBC is regulated is, whatever you put in its place—if indeed something is put in its place—there are certain factors and

ways of operating that we have currently which it would be bad to lose. Because actually, I think the notion of an independent regulator acting on behalf of the people who are paying for us, accountable in the end to you, is a proper way of governing us. But what that structure means—whether it is what the DCMS Committee are saying or what Rona Fairhead is saying—I think I should remain silent on.

**Andrew Bingham:** I understand, given the circumstances, but I have got a view.

**Q8 Geraint Davies:** As a follow-up, you are saying—quite understandably—that the BBC should be independent and impartial, but do you agree that, if it is independent, it is quite difficult to police its impartiality and that we have to hope for the best? Secondly, do you agree that there is widespread interest in Europe but also widespread ignorance? People are voting in different ways related to the European issue, but a lot is not known about Europe. Do you feel that in some sense, you have let down the public by not educating them enough, as is part of your remit, in an impartial way, so that they can have informed, rather than ignorant, discussions about Europe?

**Lord Hall:** I think we have common ground, if I may say so, in thinking that our role is in both informing and educating—there is also entertainment, but let's leave that aside in this regard. I think there is an appetite for us to use our airwaves, our online site and so on—I think the BBC has this particular obligation, which I willingly take on—not only to cover the news of the day, but to give a broader agenda of news than other broadcasters maybe can give and also to provide the context by which people can get greater understanding of what is going on around them.

I think it is great, for example, that on the news app today, which we have just relaunched, there is a background piece on Greece and the question, “Have we got right our common views about the Greeks and what they are about?” That is exactly the sort of background that we should have.

It is also very interesting that, as you probably know, when people are asked about what they expect from the BBC and news, they turn to us first because they trust the BBC, but they also want that sense of background. So I think this is a very important part of our journalism.

On impartiality, I think that is just fundamental, I really do. The Wilson report talked about what that meant in terms of Europe. There was an extremely good report, which I read when I was in my previous job, by John Bridcut on impartiality being less a binary seesaw—black or white—and much more of a cartwheel: that you should be seeking as many different views as there are across our country about issues that are important. Personally, I find that a very useful formula for what our job is. It is never done, but I think it is absolutely at the core of what the BBC must deliver to our audience. I do not know whether Mr Harding has anything to say about that from his point of view.

**Q9 Geraint Davies:** You mentioned that there is a duty to entertain as well as to educate and inform. There is the issue that you or some people in the editorial team might take the view that people are not entertained by or interested in Europe, or find it very boring. Is there a

trade-off between what is important, which Europe is, and what is popular and entertaining? Do you think that that is leading to Europe not getting the proper coverage and to the widespread ignorance in the population that you have allowed?

**Lord Hall:** I disagree on one point: I do not think we have allowed it. We must be doing our best to make sure that important issues that affect us all are being covered in a way that means people want to come to us, to understand and to get background to what is going on. What I mean by that is that there are very interesting ways in which you can lead people from programmes that have a mass audience to the background that enables them to understand much more. We are doing that in a number of ways. For example—

**Q10 Geraint Davies:** “The Archers”.

**Lord Hall:** Exactly—and Radio 2. I do not have a European example of this, but a campaign we launched recently called “Get Creative” to get people thinking about the arts is on the back of big, mass audience programmes leading people to think where they can go—online, their radio stations or other areas—to think more about what they might do; for example, join a Scottish referendum campaign or join a general election campaign. We are looking at ways of putting the issues that the public think matter and that politicians think matter before them in as many different ways and in as many different places as we can.

I am speaking the obvious to you, but we have local radio stations that can cover things in a very chatty, immediate and interesting way. I really believe in local radio. You then have our network services, which can do it in a different way, and our global service, which can also do it in a different way. Those are strengths that, by joining them up together, we should be playing on much more to help the country get knowledgeable about and interested in things that matter.

**Q11 Chair:** If I may say so, Lord Hall, I have read the Bridcut report as well, and I do not really share your view that this multiplicity of diffused ideas helps anyone to understand anything very much. It is a perfectly clear question. On the European issue, whichever side of the argument you come down on—whether you are in favour of more integration or against is hugely important as we move into not only a general election but also the prospect of a referendum, with all that that involves. Do you not think, to put it quite bluntly, that many people think that the BBC is in fact not as impartial as it should be in how it deals with these voices and diffused views?

When it comes to the simple question of who governs Britain and the whole relationship between ourselves and the European Union, these are things that can be explained simply. But in the interests of the public as a whole and in terms of educating and informing the public, with the 58% that we have already referred to, you have an absolute duty, as Editor-in-Chief, to make certain that when programmes go out, there is a structure that ensures that the viewer and listener get a properly balanced view and hear both sides of the argument equally. Do you not agree?

**Lord Hall:** Sir William, do we have a duty to be impartial in everything that we do? You can quiz me about that. That runs very deep in the organisation. You look to editors



and others to ensure that we do that. I believe that they do, over time. On most issues—I am sorry to disagree with you on the Bridcut report—there may be things that are very much yes or no. It is not quite how I see the world.

There are people who say, “We believe this particular view for this or that reason.” The world is very complicated; I don’t apologise for that. But it is our job to seek out as many different views as we can, while remembering that we want to get a balance between the different views that you mentioned on the issue of Europe. Our job is to find as many different views as we can.

**Q12 Chair:** But you agree that there are two sides to this equation, in terms of whether or not you want more integration. You cannot really answer my question by referring back to this diffusion of voices. There is a question. Quite simply, there are people who believe that there should be more integration and there are people who believe there should not. On that issue, what I am asking you is very simple—that you make sure that there is a complete and equal balance between those two views as and when they come out of the radio or the television.

**Lord Hall:** Our job is to ensure that we are impartial and reflect all sides of an argument.

**Chair:** So you do agree with me.

**Lord Hall:** Yes, I do.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Lord Hall:** But I’m saying it’s a bit more complicated than that, because there are those who might say, “Well, on this particular issue, I might be saying ‘less integration’.” On that issue, I might be saying ‘more integration’.” We have to make sure we are reflecting those views, too, across all our output.

**Q13 Chair:** Right. Let’s move on. You have stated more than once that you did not seek to evade scrutiny by relying on the fact that you are a peer, a Member of the House of Lords. Why, then, did we have to ask you three times to appear, and do you accept that you decided to come only when the Liaison Committee insisted that you should do so, in supporting our Committee, and when you were asked to treat our letter to you as a formal summons? I can assure you that had you refused again, there would have been a motion in the House of Commons calling for your resignation as Director-General.

**Lord Hall:** Let me just wind back to what actually happened, as opposed to what you think might have happened. I would never use my peerage as an excuse not to appear before a Select Committee or any other part of this House, and I made that absolutely clear at the very beginning. I don’t know where that idea came from, but it’s simply untrue. It would never, ever happen.

I think at the very beginning, Sir William, I spoke to you about the debate I was having around those two principles—scrutiny versus the editorial independence of the BBC, which, as you said, is enshrined in the Royal Charter. I thought very hard about that.

I thought when the Chairman of the Trust and the Chairman of the Editorial Standards Committee came before you, Richard Ayre gave very strong evidence that as we were approaching an election, he would have advised—if I understood his terms right—the previous DG but two not to have come. I think the suggestion was then raised—mooted—but in a very open sort of way, that maybe after the election would be better. I raised that with you. You said, “Absolutely not.” I’m here. There is no influence on me other than the correspondence that you and I have had and my own discussions with one or two people in the BBC I trust about the right answer to it, but I think the right answer is, I’m here now.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Q14 Henry Smith:** Lord Hall, Mr Harding, thank you very much for appearing before us today. Can you confirm that should we, before the dissolution of Parliament, have any further questions we would like to write to you about, you will endeavour to answer those before dissolution takes place.

**Lord Hall:** Completely.

**Henry Smith:** Thank you very much.

**Q15 Geraint Davies:** Further to the Chair’s question about your refusing to come here, do you think there is a real danger that people may feel that you have been dragged screaming and shouting to this Committee, under threat of Parliament, and that you are giving the impression you’re too important—I think you’re paid over £500,000—to sit here and waste your time in front of a load of MPs asking you questions and you’re just using this “Well, they might try to interfere with my editorial independence”, which doesn’t really stand up to any scrutiny? Do you regret refusing in the first instance and having to be dragged here in this way?

**Lord Hall:** Well, let me kick off a number of things. I am not actually paid what you said I’m paid. It is a matter of public record.

**Q16 Geraint Davies:** Isn’t it £552,000, including £82,000 of drawn pension?

**Lord Hall:** No, £450,000 is what I am paid by the BBC—

**Geraint Davies:** Plus the £82—

**Lord Hall:** I have a pension, as I am of an age to take a pension, but that is by the bye.

I don’t think I have been dragged here, to be quite honest with you. I don’t understand that verb. What I have been wrestling with are, as I think I said at the very beginning, these two principles. I can’t speak for you, of course, but I think most people would understand the editorial independence point enshrined in the Royal Charter, versus the scrutiny of Select Committees. I have not been in any way holding back in terms of appearances before Select Committees; indeed, I was before the PAC just two weeks ago on an NAO report, and I am sure that there will be many more Select Committees in my



time as Director-General. I started off by saying—please take this as very personal from me—that this is in no sense any disrespect to you or Parliament. I was trying to work through two principles. I have not been dragged here. Actually, I thought, in the end, that in terms of Sir William’s final letter to me not saying we could go after the election—I understand the point and I am here.

**Q17 Henry Smith:** Given the answer that you have just provided, would you be willing to appear before the successor Committee to this Committee in the new Parliament?

**Lord Hall:** It depends, Mr Smith, entirely on what the subject matter is that you are looking at. But yes, if the subject matter was one that involved the BBC in some sort of way, I or others would appear.

**Q18 Andrew Bingham:** I ask you to speculate. Your refusal and your predecessor’s continual refusal to come here—if the BBC were to report the activities of this Committee in greater length, which is something that we will probably come on to later, how do you think the BBC would have reported your refusal, in the light of the way the reporting of television debates, which is being debated in another place today, is being reported?

**Lord Hall:** Mr Bingham, for about 12 years I ran BBC News. In my 21 months back at the BBC, I know that the editorial independence of the editors and the programme makers who work for the BBC—they will make their judgment about what the important issues of the day are. Whether it is me or whomsoever, on matters to do with the BBC, they make the judgments, and that is entirely appropriate, I think.

**Q19 Andrew Bingham:** You are the Editor-in-Chief.

**Lord Hall:** I am the Editor-in-Chief, but when it comes to issues to do with me or the BBC, they must make up their minds.

**Q20 Andrew Bingham:** And they decided not to report this at all?

**Lord Hall:** They may or may not decide to report this. I leave that in their hands. Actually, I think that it is appropriate that they should be deciding what matters and what is important, as they did yesterday when they reported on the debate, which I think some of you may have taken part in, on the Floor of the Commons, which was on “Today in Parliament”, “Yesterday in Parliament” and on the Parliament channel.

**Q21 Chair:** You do think that your being here in front of this Committee is important, don’t you?

**Lord Hall:** I think it is extremely important my being here in front of you, yes.

**Q22 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** My Lord, I want briefly to touch on your peerage. Anyone else who refused a Committee of the House of Commons once would be immediately summoned, but you cannot lay down your peerage. That is to say that with anybody else, we would immediately have gone to issuing a summons that would have required your attendance. Therefore, although you said that you were not using your peerage, the effect of your being a peer on refusing was to protect you through your peerage.

For future reference, should we ask to see you, as soon as you write back saying no, you are protected by peerage whether you want to be or not. “Erskine May” is absolutely clear on that. We have no means of summoning a peer, and therefore we have to go through this rather elongated process. I am sure that we will want to ask you back at some future date, and I thought it might be helpful to explain that your peerage is not something that you can voluntarily lay down.

**Lord Hall:** That is one thing that I have learned from this process, Mr Rees-Mogg.

**Q23 Chair:** I think Mr Harding—for the record, you are on £350,000 a year. Is that right? Would you like to interject?

**James Harding:** I am slightly worried, listening to the comments that are being made, that the Committee thinks that there is a personal point here. I represent a newsroom, and for us in news there is a really important principle here. If you detect a reluctance among people like me to come to parliamentary Committees to discuss editorial judgments, you are right. There is a real reluctance to do so, and I know that you understand that. I appreciate, Sir William, the points that you made at the outset about the responsibility of the BBC to inform, but the reason why we prize that independence so dearly is that if the public are going to trust the BBC to be independent and to cover politicians impartially, it has got to be clear that journalists, editors and the people who run a news organisation as important as the BBC are not asked by politicians to come and account for what they do and, in effect, do the bidding of those politicians. There is a danger here that you misread what the issue is for us. It is felt very strongly, and it is about a reluctance to come and account for editorial news judgments. We recognise, of course, that we are answerable to our regulator, the BBC Trust, we are answerable in the courts of law and we are answerable to the public. I appreciate all of that. Of course we will, where we can be helpful to Committees such as this, come and try to provide an understanding of the way in which we cover issues and of the thinking behind those kinds of news judgments. Of course we respect the right of Parliament to do that, but please do not misunderstand the reason we care so deeply about that independence. It is critical, and I think it is fundamentally a value to Parliament, too, that a news organisation as important as the BBC is seen to be independent of politicians and politics in that way.

**Q24 Chair:** Without going back over it, do you appreciate what we said about the fact that you wouldn't have any money at all if we didn't authorise it?

**James Harding:** And you wouldn't have anything worth paying for if it weren't independent. I appreciate entirely your point about our being publicly funded, and of course it is right that Parliament accounts for the stewardship of that public money, but in

terms of the BBC's journalism and the public's trust of that journalism, that it is independent and is seen to be independent matters greatly. It matters greatly to me, as a journalist, and to all journalists who work in the BBC.

**Q25 Chair:** Can you tell me where the word “journalism” actually appears in the Charter, the framework agreement or, indeed, in any other of the full documents that regulate your functions?

**James Harding:** I use that as a way of talking about our purpose. As you know, and as the Director-General has just said, our purpose is to inform, educate and entertain. Journalism is an essential part of that, particularly with a view to how we inform and educate people in this country.

**Q26 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** It is a great pleasure to see a distinguished former editor of *The Times* in front of this Committee.

On the independence of funding, I am concerned that the BBC is in receipt of money from the European Union—the total is about €30 million over the past few years. Article 9.2 of the regulations regarding the structural funds, from which the BBC has received money, states:

“The Commission and the Member States shall ensure that assistance from the Funds is consistent with the activities, policies and priorities of the Community”.

Further, the money received in 2009 and 2011 under an international heading was received on the basis of support for media capacity in the area of EU integration. I am a great believer in the BBC being independent both from this place and, more particularly, from the European Union, and I wonder whether it undermines your reputation if you accept money from the European Union that comes with a clear requirement that you support, in the way I have outlined, the institutions of the European Union.

**James Harding:** Forgive me, Mr Rees-Mogg, but was this in 2009?

**Jacob Rees-Mogg:** The money received in 2009 and 2011 was under the condition that it was support for media capacity in the area of EU integration, and then there were general funds under the structural funds. That money was given out under article 9.2, which requires that

“assistance from the Funds is consistent with the activities, policies and priorities of the Community”.

It is a very small amount of money in terms of the BBC's overall budget, but it seems to me that it undermines the absolute guarantee of independence that the BBC ought to have, and it is rather tainted money.

**James Harding:** Mr Rees-Mogg, will you forgive me? I will investigate properly and write back to the Committee so that I understand exactly what it is. It is not money of which I am exactly aware in news, but I want to make sure that we look into it.

**Q27 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** The thing to underline is that the EU has a standard requirement that the money is given for those purposes, and therefore the BBC would not be able to have it on any other basis. It is the EU's requirements, rather than that the BBC has specifically bought into this.

**Lord Hall:** I will look into it and give you a written answer.

**Q28 Kelvin Hopkins:** We last met at the Opera House, when a number of parliamentarians, including myself, came along to see a splendid production of Richard Strauss's "Salome."

I am a passionate believer in the BBC, and I remember, with some regret at the time, the beginning of commercial television, of which I didn't approve at all—that may betray my politics.

It is important to use terminology correctly. The European Union is constantly referred to as Europe. You have done it, as have other members of the Committee. It is the European Union and it is important to use that terminology always in broadcasting. Europe is a wonderful sub-continent that I love dearly and passionately. The European Union is something else; it is a Government. It is like confusing the Government of Britain with Britain; they are two different concepts.

My question is this. We have been supplied by the organisation Newswatch with written evidence, including observations on previous evidence we have received. It attaches correspondence between the BBC and Philip Hollobone MP and other cross-party MPs. Newswatch gave evidence to us as part of the scrutiny reform inquiry and its submission will form part of the written evidence published as part of this session. We would welcome a substantive written response from the BBC on the matters covered, by the morning of Tuesday 17 March—a very short time scale—and we shall be writing to Rona Fairhead in the same terms.

**James Harding:** I am trying to work out how best to cover that. A fair number of issues are raised by Mr Hollobone, Lord Pearson and others who have made their concerns and their research into the work of the BBC clear to us.

Let me in answer in two ways. I appreciate the point you made at the outset about the distinction between Europe and the European Union. It is a deeper point, which is whether you can ensure that the coverage is accurate and specific about the distinctions between what are countries, continents, institutions. Picking up on a word that the Chairman used earlier—"structures"—one of the things that we have tried to put in place at the BBC are structures to ensure we do exactly that. That is, structures that ensure or require us to have a level of coverage that frankly is greater than any other news organisation in the country.

I don't just mean having a Europe Editor who will be there from the "Today" programme to the six and 10. It is about having something like Democracy Live, which means that there is a place where the coverage of Strasbourg happens. It means that having "Politics Europe" requires us, at least a dozen times a year, to bring MEPs on air and hold them to account and explain their relationship with what is happening in this country. It

means using the Parliament channel to film Committees such as this and debates in the House about Europe and make it clear to people.

I hope that we have structures in place that ensure a level of coverage that is unlike any other, and places where what is happening in Europe and the institutions of the European Union are explained to people. There are particular groups of people, political parties and groups, that have long-running criticisms of the BBC, from a number of different standpoints. I feel strongly that our job is to be alive to that criticism, to ensure that we listen and engage. It is not necessarily our job to double-check the methodology of their reports or inquiries. It is to listen and try to take that on board.

With regard to Mr Hollobone, Lord Pearson and others who have made arguments to us about our coverage, we have tried to say, “Okay. Let’s read those reports in full. Let’s meet them and make sure we are listening, feed back their concerns and criticisms.” I do appreciate that some people are not just critical of a particular item on the BBC news. They want to take a more holistic view and would like to make a point about overall coverage. In response to that, we have tried to meet them and hear their answers. That has been our approach.

**Q29 Chair:** Though not to reply to their specific questions.

**James Harding:** In the meetings, Sir William, we have sought to reply to their particular questions.

**Q30 Kelvin Hopkins:** You were specifically asked for responses by 17 March—next Tuesday.

**James Harding:** A written reply?

**Q31 Kelvin Hopkins:** Yes.

**James Harding:** I am more than happy to give a written reply by then.

**Q32 Geraint Davies:** May I make a quick comment on Jacob Rees-Mogg’s point about the €30 million from Europe? I think Jacob Rees-Mogg often suggests that money from Europe is wasted. Clearly, as you did not know anything about it, it has been wasted.

**James Harding:** That’s not fair.

**Q33 Geraint Davies:** Okay, can you let us know what that money is being spent on in that case?

**James Harding:** Look, as I said to William—[*Interruption.*] I’m sorry, I’ve got my Rees-Moggs mixed up.

**Q34 Geraint Davies:** I shouldn't bring humour into these proceedings, I agree.

Lord Hall, you are Editor-in-Chief—this is a reasonably simple question—and you are in charge of the overall editorial and creative output, as we have heard. Could you explain how your role operates in practice, in terms of the structures and hierarchies? You have already pointed out, for instance, that in relation to the “Today” programme’s coverage, you would not be demanding that something is covered in a certain way. I was wondering how it works to allow editorial independence not just of the BBC as a whole, but within the BBC between different units, so that it is not some monolithic whole.

Finally, there may be people from time to time who say that some of the editorial coverage is unreasonable. By way of example, members of the Muslim community have said to me that they object to references to IS all the time—Islamic State—because it is not Islamic and it is not a state, and why do we not call it something else, such as ISIL or whatever it is? I know those are different views and you have to take your own view, but how would you, for example, respond to something like that, or do you not have any response? Do you just say, “We do not care what everyone else says; we are impartial, irrespective of the world”?

**Lord Hall:** Quite the reverse. I really do believe in a porous BBC and a BBC where, as James Harding was saying just now, we are engaging with people who are our supporters and our critics. One of our strengths is the fact that we have in our journalism specialist correspondents and editors who help us to keep in touch with what people are thinking, but there is also the strength of our local radio. I go back to our local and regional networks, which make us very special and keep us very much in contact with what people are thinking or stories that are developing outside London and around the country, and around the nations. That is very important.

I carry out my job as Editor-in-Chief—I really do take that very seriously—in a number of ways. One is that we have a way of flagging up stories, programmes or issues that we think are either controversial, or where I ought to know that those programmes are happening. There are two different ways—I will not bore you with it, but those come to me every week. Likewise, I have a system whereby every week every director reports to me with the bullet points of what is affecting their area. So the national directors tell me what is important in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, or England, and then James and others do exactly the same thing.

Likewise, James and I talk regularly. This is very much about trust and people working as a team. I attach huge importance to teams working together and to the flow of information between those teams and the openness of that communication. For example, on *Charlie Hebdo*, James told me as soon as that story broke, and then there were some editorial issues arising from that, which we talked about, and quite rightly I was involved in them.

If we take it one stage further and say, “Look at the Scottish referendum coverage,” every day—sometimes twice a day—I would have a conference call with key executives: in this case, Scotland, James and the director of editorial policy who is aware of all the complaints and editorial issues that, day to day, just arise in terms of our coverage. We air



those, discuss those and make sure that we have a common response. Of course, we also have daily the surveys of complaints—what people are upset about or what they are pleased with—which we will get circulated to us by e-mail. That is just an outline of how the duties of Editor-in-Chief are carried out, but there are other methods as well.

But I go back to one thing. It has certainly struck me, in the jobs that I have done, that trust and an openness of communication between the key executives are really important. Knowledge of what is happening in current affairs is important. We need very tight lines between the people who are running current affairs, James and I so that we can do programmes such as the HSBC investigation or the investigation into the *News of the World* reporter, where we can handle complex and difficult issues responsively and responsibly, and get the stories on the air that we think are right. It is really important for the BBC to listen to people who have strong views and all sorts of views about what we are doing. We absorb those views and respond to them.

**Q35 Geraint Davies:** You wouldn't be involved in an issue like suspending Jeremy Clarkson for allegedly punching somebody, would you?

**Lord Hall:** I have been involved in that. I am involved in that. We have an independent—sorry, not independent—inquiry taking place on that. I cannot say any more than that but it is absolutely something that I am involved in.

**Chair:** I think we want to keep off that.

**Q36 Geraint Davies:** I know that but I was wondering whether commercial value would have any bearing on the decision.

**Lord Hall:** The primary issue is an editorial one about an incident between Jeremy Clarkson and a member of the team.

**Q37 Geraint Davies:** So he won't be presenting European affairs in the future?

**Chair:** I think we'll move on to the next question.

**Lord Hall:** We have an inquiry taking place and we'll see what happens. Can I just leave it at that?

**Q38 Chair:** Just to get it on the record again, you are entirely certain and determined to make certain that there is complete impartiality so that both sides of the argument are heard equally. That is the point that I want to get across.

**Lord Hall:** I had been 27 years in the BBC before going off and having, as Mr Hopkins reminded me, a very happy time at Covent Garden. Impartiality is absolutely embedded in me.

**Q39 Chair:** But there is a widespread perception that the BBC has a rather pro-European bias. That is something that has not just come out of the ether. It is something that a lot of people sense. Are you conscious of that and will you take the necessary steps to make certain that that does not remain a perception in the minds of the public?

**Lord Hall:** We are and will be impartial in all matters concerning our coverage.

**Geraint Davies:** On this specific point, I do not agree completely with the Chair. I do not think that impartiality is having an equal hearing for either side of an argument. For instance, there might be a debate on hanging or whatever, or whether the world is flat. I would not expect the BBC to be arguing that the world is flat equally to arguing that it is not. That would be one of my criticisms about inoculation and other debates that have gone on. Because of an attempt at impartiality over the science of global warming or whatever, there is a presumption among some communities that there is not global warming. Non-scientific beliefs are allowed to emerge because of equal hearings of the type that the Chair is asking for.

**Chair:** What I am saying is—I refer you back to article 6 of the Charter, which we have already dealt with. It is absolutely crystal clear that I am right. Article 6 makes the statement that you have to abide by. In that context, that is all I need to say. Article 6, the framework agreement and the general law govern the matter.

**Q40 Chris Kelly:** Lord Hall, you can't make all the decisions yourself. I want to draw from you some more details around the corporation's Europe Editor. How do you personally ensure compliance with article 6 of the Charter, the framework agreement and the editorial guidelines, which must be consistent with these founding documents, particularly—in our context—in relation to the functions of your Europe Editor? Who monitors the cumulative impact of the individual editorial decisions made by the BBC every working day? Do you believe that on EU matters the BBC is truly and effectively impartial, given the specific requirements laid down in paragraphs 2 and 4 of the editorial guidelines and the statement in those guidelines that “impartiality lies at the heart of public service, and is the core of the BBC's commitment to its audiences”, as well as the requirements of the Charter and the framework agreement? What statistics are kept to demonstrate that impartiality?

**Lord Hall:** Maybe I can ask Mr Harding to answer some of the detailed points about how, day by day and hour by hour, we maintain our impartiality. I visited the Brussels Bureau. Strengthening that and having a Europe Editor was one of the prime recommendations of the Wilson report, which rightly said to us, “You need to improve what you are doing here, in terms of your duties to the public and to the people who are paying for you.”

I was extremely impressed by both the new editor, Katya, and also the team, in terms of doing things which I do not think any other broadcaster or, actually, any other journalistic organisation in this country is doing; and there is a real commitment there to both being intelligent about the issues facing Europe more broadly, as Mr Hopkins was saying, but also the institutions of the European Union. How we ensure that we are covering the right stories, doing the right things, I think maybe Mr Harding could talk a bit about.

**James Harding:** I will give it a go, and I hope, in answering your question Mr Kelly, I might also answer the question that you raised, Mr Davies, about how the Director-General can discharge the duties as Editor-in-Chief.

First, I think the Europe Editor is there to provide judgment and analysis, but also to ensure that there is a frequency and level of coverage around issues of Europe—picking up on the issues that Sir William raised right at the outset. That is why Mark Mardell, Gavin Hewitt and now Katya Adler are extremely proud of having journalists and broadcasters who bring real weight, muscle and experience. The reason I think that you are going to see out of Katya Adler extremely fine analysis and understanding of the issues in Europe is that she has worked in Berlin and Madrid and speaks a fair few languages of the European Union. I think you have already begun to see the impact that she is having on our understanding of the issues alive now in Europe.

How do we make sure that that impartiality that is essential to the public's trust of the BBC exists in everything we do? I think it is worth noting that I have worked in two previous news organisations—the *Financial Times* and *The Times*—which did not have the requirements of impartiality that the BBC does. Impartiality does not happen by accident. A huge amount of work goes into it. There is a huge amount of work that goes into understanding where the arguments are, where the range of opinions are, making sure that you access those points of view. There is a huge amount of work that makes sure that in each piece of the output that is the case—and across the series of our programmes. I go back to the point I made about structures; having Democracy Live, the Parliament channel, Politics Europe helps us with that because it enables us to get those voices heard.

On a very practical basis, how does it work day to day? Each morning at 9 o'clock, I chair a news conference. We have a weekly meeting that raises any issues that have arisen across the whole of the BBC News organisation and in response to our audiences. As Tony was just saying, our job is to make sure that we give both our organisation and our audiences a jolly good listen; and we are listening to the responses that come from within the news organisation and our audiences. When there is something that is particularly difficult, my job immediately is to take it to Tony. Mr Davies raised IS as an example. Tony just raised the question of how you handle the depiction of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed—the *Charlie Hebdo* case. There are great sensitivities there. There are sensitivities too in our coverage of Europe. When those issues arise, as they do out of either a daily news conference or out of that weekly meeting, I will take that to the Director-General and Editor-in-Chief.

**Q41 Chris Kelly:** With respect to the Europe Editor, you will know that on her appointment she referred to the prospect of an EU referendum. Given that there has been some comment in the media regarding her previous roles as a moderator for a number of events organised by institutions of the EU, do you have any concerns about the extent to which she will be perceived to be impartial?

**Lord Hall:** No.

**James Harding:** No.

**Q42 Chris Kelly:** Do you want to expand?

**James Harding:** I really think that you have got an outstanding journalist. If you look at what she did, the issue that you are raising there is about chairing an event. BBC journalists chair events in an entirely impartial way, so I do not think either in perception or in fact there is anything that should cause you or anyone on this Committee any concern. In fact, I think that if you care about the scrutiny of Europe and the institutions of the European Union, having an outstanding journalist and an outstanding broadcaster like Katya Adler doing the job, for anyone who cares about Europe and its relationship with the UK, they should be very pleased to have a journalist like Katya Adler doing the job.

**Q43 Chair:** The proof of the pudding will be in the eating, won't it?

**James Harding:** Absolutely, Sir William.

**Q44 Geraint Davies:** In general, we are all concerned about Europe. It is not a party political issue as such, although we have got different views. Do you feel that the BBC in practice, and in the quality and depth of its reports, gives the EU a level of coverage consistent with its importance? Do you think that it does enough at the moment, and are there plans to any more or less in the future?

**James Harding:** That is a really good question, Mr Davies. Funnily enough, in coming to this Committee, I thought a lot about it. Think about the coverage of the European Union in the context of the demands on news at the moment. You can see, in the past few years, a big global context and the sense of a world tilting on its axis with the rise of China. There is strong leadership—certainly distinctive leadership—out of China and India, and ditto Russia. Then you have diffuse pockets of huge instability and insecurity in Ukraine, the Middle East and Nigeria, and there are health issues such as Ebola. In the UK, you have a few big strands in terms of the news: the economy, the impact of what happened in the economy on the Government and Government spending, and then, of course, in the run-up to the Scottish referendum and since, questions about the constitutional forces at play and the nature of devolution.

How has Europe fared within those competing demands for time? Clearly the questions that have been most obvious in the coverage of Greece and the arguments about the eurozone have been front of mind. I would say that the issues around the impact of European growth levels on the UK economy have been well covered. There is the question of the impact on inflation and interest rates. All those things have fed through right at the top of bulletins. That has been a very big part of coverage.

We have tried to make sure that we give coverage to specific issues of interest that keep coming up and are specifically on the nature of the regulation and legislation that come out of the European Union and its relationship with Westminster or other Assemblies in the UK—whether you are talking about fees on credit and debit cards, the impact of GM crops, EU work plans. I suppose I am trying to say that we keep thinking about it within the total context of all the demands on news.

**Q45 Chair:** With respect to what goes on early in the morning, some of us get up quite early, and you will be glad to know that some of us are listeners to the “Today” programme and everything that starts at 6 o’clock in the morning. Some of us know a little bit about what goes on in the European context, and we find it rather difficult to listen to a stream of people who are constantly being asked, “But isn’t this going to mean that if the United Kingdom was to leave the European Union, you”—for example, the vice-president of Ford—“would regard it as a complete disaster area for the United Kingdom?” Or, for example, someone such as Martin Sorrell is brought on, who is well known to have views of the kind that he tends to express very volubly. There is a clear indication to those of us who listen to it that there is some kind of a system and/or an accident that leads to those sort of people being asked on, whereas people who have a completely contrary view seem to get less of a bite of the cherry—can we put it that way round?

**Geraint Davies:** Nigel Farage is on all the time.

**Chair:** That is not the question I am asking.

**James Harding:** Is the question you are asking that simply because people who represent big businesses come on, and because big businesses tend to—

**Q46 Chair:** Perhaps you could have a word with Simon Jack.

**James Harding:** Excellent man. He is a brilliant person, so I would be more than happy to. Is the question you are asking that because you see the heads of big businesses on the “Today” programme, who might have a different view from the heads of smaller and medium-sized businesses, there is this—

**Q47 Chair:** As it happens, this morning you had the IEA and John Longworth from the British Chambers of Commerce, who came on in the nick of time with regard to this session today. But I think the general trend has been much more along the lines—as we move into a general election and a possible referendum afterwards, all I am saying, going back to my other point, is: will you please make as sure as you possibly can—indeed, regard it as an article 6 issue—that there is that balance and that people do not want to throw the radio set across the room?

**James Harding:** You may sometimes feel that way; sometimes even I feel that way. But people have strong views. What you see and hear on the BBC is those views properly and impartially represented. I genuinely feel that. Often, people who hear a view that they do not agree with have that instinct to throw their radio.

**Q48 Chair:** As long as you’ve got the message. I think I have made it as clear as I can.

**James Harding:** I’ve got the message.

**Q49 Henry Smith:** Lord Hall, what proportion of your time, roughly, do you spend between your editorial responsibilities and your wider management roles?

**Lord Hall:** I find that a really hard question to answer. What I can answer with certainty is that I spend a fifth of my time out of my office, going round the organisation, meeting people who are doing the hard work that makes the BBC a joy to be around and understanding what they are doing and the challenges they are facing. I enjoy that enormously. It gives me a great boost.

As Editor-in-Chief, some weeks are really busy and some are quieter, so I cannot give you a firm view on that. I would say that this is one of the busier weeks. One thing that I find about this job, which is probably true of almost any of these kinds of role, is that there is—there are a number of things, but this is one—an inevitable pressure on you to be doing the things of the moment, in a very newsy sense.

With something like the BBC, which is an enormously precious organisation to the UK, you also have to make sure that you are spending enough time on the big picture, the big patterns and where you want to take the organisation. In that sense—I go back to the word porous, which I use a lot; forgive me—it is about listening to what people think about the organisation and responding to that. I enjoy that part of the role enormously. But I could not put hours down to it. All I would say is that I am sure, like your life, it involves lots of weekends and late evenings.

**Q50 Henry Smith:** My apologies for adding to your schedule this week. As you know, in the House of Commons there has been quite a lot of discussion recently about possibly dividing the role of Clerk and chief executive. Do you think that within the BBC there is an argument for separating the roles of Director-General and Editor-in-Chief?

**Lord Hall:** That is a really good question. There has been a lot of debate about that. In the end, I come back to a very pragmatic response to it, which is: I think you would find it very hard to divide. It must be the same in your world. In the end, people will say, “All right, so you’re the chief executive but hang on, what do you think of that? You must have a view on it.” You cannot separate out the two.

I go back to something that is fundamentally important in running a large organisation, which is that you get the right team of people around you. I am blessed in having a really great team. Anne Bulford, who is the managing director of finance and operations, does a fantastic job in terms of our savings, as the NAO report made clear yesterday. She is handling a lot of the running of the organisation and talking to me about it, and I am getting involved. You have to spread the load around a team, and communication within the team is therefore crucial. But if you said, “There is a chief executive, and by the way, reporting to that person is an editor-in-chief,” I cannot see that working.

**Henry Smith:** That is very clear. Thank you.

**Q51 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** When we did the report on the governance of the House of Commons, we came up with the title of director-general to be alongside the Clerk, because



we thought that director-general was such a prestigious title on the model of the BBC. There are some things we admire in the BBC.

It would be good to get on to the Wilson report of 2005, which said that there was a “serious problem” regarding the BBC’s coverage of EU-related matters, summarising this under the following headings: first, “Institutional mindset”; secondly, “Over simplified polarisation of the issues and stereotyping”; thirdly, “Westminster prism”; fourthly, which is quite tough, “Ignorance”; and, fifthly, “Omission”. It included the comment, “Senior managers appear to have no well thought out strategy for covering the EU across the BBC’s wide range of output aimed at different audiences.” It noted that all the review’s “external witnesses pointed out that the BBC News agenda understates the importance and relevance of the EU in the political and daily life of the UK.”

Thus, the report found “strategic weaknesses in the BBC’s approach to the EU” and made a number of recommendations. It drew attention to the need to select interviewees more carefully and to monitor coverage more robustly to ensure that a full range of opinions are heard and challenged. It led to further EU training for journalists and the appointment, as we have already discussed, of a Europe Editor.

We have heard passing mention of the Wilson review. I wonder whether you would tell us, in the 10 years that have ensued, how much of it you think has been implemented, how many of the five criticisms are no longer valid, who carries out the training, what the curriculum is, who devises it, and what structure has been put in place for the selection of interviewees.

**Lord Hall:** Can I just pick off one or two points, and then Mr Harding might like to add his thoughts? I was not in the BBC when the Wilson review was put forward, so I am able to see it and the subsequent Prebble review as an outsider coming into the organisation.

I have a number of points. First, although we have talked about it, it strikes me that the strength of our Brussels bureau and the fact that there is a Europe Editor, who is on a par with the Westminster Editor, the Economics Editor and so on, is a really good result of the Wilson review and report. The strengthening of Brussels, certainly since my time, in terms of the number of correspondents working there and the breadth of the things they are doing, is really important. One of the things that I think is really important for the BBC, which goes back to what Mr Hopkins was saying earlier, is that we have specialists covering Europe per Europe—in other words, what is happening within the nation states of Europe. When I was last at the BBC, that, for me, was very important. It is interesting that the Wilson report mentions that.

Another point that I would take from your list is the sense that the coverage should reflect the voices in the various parts of the European institutions back to the UK. It should not just be the voice of Britain to Europe, as it were. I took some heart from the Prebble review, because the breadth of opinion that he thinks we are getting on Europe is now broader than it was when the Wilson report was done. But, frankly, it is a never-ending job to ensure that we are reflecting properly the voices, debates and discussions that are happening within the institutions and the countries of Europe back to the UK, and

reflecting the UK's view of what is happening. There is a kind of triangulation there that is really important.

The third thing that I took from the Wilson report was the sense that—I will put it in my words; it may not be their words—in any of the journalism that you are doing, you have got to have the space where you can stand back from the stuff that is happening daily. You have to look at the broad changes, in terms of policy or environment—I don't mean the global environment, but the environment with a small "e"—of what is happening in the European institutions versus what is happening in the UK.

A particular remark that I took from the Wilson report was about the nature of getting inside something in a consensual way of working, as opposed to our more adversarial way of working. I think that is really important. I hope that we have the outlets for that breadth of journalism to come through, but—you know what it is like to be a journalist—you are constantly working to make sure you are covering the things that matter and are significant, not just the things that happen to obsess people on the day. Do you want to add anything to that?

**James Harding:** The interesting things about the Wilson report and Prebble are, of course, that Wilson, first, reminded people that there is real impartiality within the BBC, but then made the points that you raised. Prebble came back, followed by the Trust, which reviewed Prebble a year on. I am quite gratified that both Prebble and the Trust came back to say that there really has been significant improvement in the range of voices that are made available to our audiences. That has been really important.

Tony has mentioned the importance of the Europe Editor and the strength of our correspondents in Brussels. I think, and I hope the Committee will agree, that when it comes to reporting some of the really significant economic developments that have happened in Europe and the European Union in the last five to eight years, actually the BBC has enabled you to understand some really complicated issues—I don't mean just Greece and the eurozone, but things like quantitative easing and the efforts to try to deal with the economic growth rate across Europe. That is evidence of what we have done.

You raise a point about training, which is really important and something that we look all the time to refresh. This is an odd time in the cycle for us to be having this conversation: obviously, we are just a matter of weeks from a general election and the outcome of that could have a profound impact on what the BBC is expected to do in the year or two that follows, but all I can say is that if you look at the way in which we sought to train people ahead of the Scottish referendum and ahead of the general election, we are really focused on how you ensure that the people who will be reporting very difficult issues are properly informed.

To give you one example—just stepping away from Europe for a moment—we held 30 training sessions in 17 places around the country, talking to 750 journalists to ensure that people were aware of all the issues—and, frankly, the potholes—around covering the Scottish referendum.

It is that kind of thinking—making sure that you have not only something in a manual, but something that is consistently refreshed—that is really important. We are

extremely alive to that, particularly when it comes to the European Union and its relationship with the UK.

**Q52 Chair:** On that, I am interested very much in who does the training: the “quis custos” question. If a trainer comes from a background where their education and training have drilled into them that moving towards integration is a good idea, that will be transmitted to the journalists in the training sessions you are referring to. Of course, that can lead to ignorance, because the complexity of the European issue is such that it requires some serious training and education.

Mr Rees-Mogg asked a question about the curriculum. If you cannot provide the answer now, can you send us the format of the training programme, who does the training and the curriculum that goes with it? It is one thing to have a session saying, “We want to give good coverage to the European Union issue,” which is one thing that we are saying, but we are also saying, “Who is guiding them, and in which direction?”

**James Harding:** I can give you an immediate answer. There are two people who really oversee such things for the BBC. David Jordan has oversight of editorial policy—

**Chair:** I know David.

**James Harding:** And there is another called Ric Bailey, who is the chief policy adviser. Let me put it like this. In my experience, they are both like sticks of Brighton rock: rather sweet, extremely tough and with “impartiality” written all the way through them. I am confident in them. They have been through the BBC and they understand the issues and pressures from all sides.

We have some of our most senior and experienced people ensuring and shaping that kind of training because we understand exactly the point you are making, Sir William. It is how you frame those courses that really matters to the way in which you affect the culture of an organisation.

**Chair:** And you can dispel ignorance in the bargain, because it is the education and information to the public that we are really concerned about.

**Q53 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** Clearly you think there have been some tangible improvements since Wilson. The question would be about the bits that might not have changed—perhaps the institutional mindset. Perhaps there is a general feeling about the BBC that it has a bias in favour of the status quo, and that it is what normal polite people think. The BBC has a lot of normal polite people within it, and therefore challenging the status quo is always an uphill battle; it is always the outsider coming in. Perhaps it is not a deliberate bias at all; it is just that this is what decent people think, and therefore it is quite hard to challenge that. I wonder whether you feel the institutional mindset has changed.

The other thing that I would be interested in is your views on the question of explaining what actually comes from the EU. This is not necessarily about having Europe correspondents; it is your individual correspondents knowing that when some regulation or some law comes in, it may have on its packaging that it was passed by statutory instrument in

the United Kingdom, but in fact it is a European regulation. This is quite hard work to do, because you have to do quite a lot of research to find out where things have come from and explain to people the thoroughness of EU regulation and the effect on UK lives. That does not have bias in one way or the other; it is simply providing information. I might think it helps my case, but it is of itself perfectly unbiased information.

**James Harding:** Let me take the first question first, because it is profound. Is an organisation that is as woven into the life of this country, as is one like the BBC, prone to favour the status quo? My argument to you would be, certainly from a news point of view, I hope not, for two reasons. One is that one of the great advantages, having come from a couple of other newsrooms at the BBC, is that it is an organisation that genuinely lives beyond London. It has all the local radio stations and regional television stations. It is more alive to the views and feelings of people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland than any other news organisation. That forces us to wrestle with the nature of the news agenda and what the status quo is or should be.

The second is universality. One of the things that I find preoccupies me and us a great deal is how we make sure that we genuinely reach everyone, given that we are paid for by licence fee payers across the country. In order to do that, you need to make sure that people feel as though their issues, concerns and voices are represented on the BBC. I hope that we do not have that institutional issue. I know that we struggle all the time to make sure that we do not.

On your second point, the answer is that if it is new, it is easier to address than if it is established. For example, if you take the recent story around allergens on menus, the EU has a point of view on allergens in menus. A bunch of chefs respond. It is a news story. You can engage with it. If you are talking about our role in explaining to people that certain products are on the shelves of their supermarkets, and they are as they are because the EU has required that and it is then passed through Parliament, frankly, we are not that good at it because it is not news.

**Q54 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** And it's a bit boring?

**James Harding:** What you are really asking is how you handle issues around packaging and informing around products. That is a consumer product identification issue. It does not naturally fall to a news organisation or to the BBC in that way.

**Q55 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** Not one of your Reithian obligations to inform as well as to entertain?

**James Harding:** It absolutely is, but you are talking about product by product, and I cannot conceive of exactly the way that you would have a BBC—we are really getting into the weeds here—marking particular products and the nature of their regulatory history.

**Lord Hall:** Just two points on that. My first point is to emphasise something that I think James is saying. One of the real strengths of the BBC—I hope it is one we can build on—is our local radio networks and our regional newsrooms. That puts you in touch with

a non-metropolitan feeling for England, but also with our newsrooms in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. That should give us, and I think does give us, an enormous strength.

If you look at the move to Salford—again, coming back into the organisation, because I did not do this—of Radio 5 live and the “Breakfast” show on television, you are aware of different guests, a different perspective and a different sense of what matters. In terms of whether there is a slight cosiness that we might be part of, those are the things that help us to be much more rooted in what is happening around the UK than others. That is a real strength of the BBC.

**Q56 Jacob Rees-Mogg:** While you are saying that, I had better get on the record how marvellous BBC Somerset and Radio Bristol are and what a marvellous job they do in my area. I really mean that. They are very good.

**Lord Hall:** I visited Somerset last year. Thank you for that. I mean, they’ll know, but I will pass it on to them. What they were doing on the floods and their coverage was absolutely first rate and shows how that sense of involvement in a community is really vital to what the BBC can offer. They are a brilliant crew.

**James Harding:** I should say that the former managing editor of Radio Bristol is here.

**Q57 Chair:** Apart from that extremely self-congratulatory evidence, I hope that we are conveying a clear impression to you that we really want to get from you the sense that there is going to be, post-Wilson, a really serious reanalysis of the position. Some of us regard Prebble as being a bit of a let-off—let’s put it that way round—but let’s not pursue that. It is a question of what the Charter says, the framework agreement and the article 6 point that I made.

Basically, we really want to be sure that, whichever side of the equation one is coming from, the manner in which the listener or the viewer gets the information satisfies the requirements. I think you are saying that you genuinely want to achieve that. However, there is still a perception out there that perhaps many people do not think that it is happening.

Can I just re-emphasise that? For example, some years ago, I was on a programme with Alastair Campbell. I was, I suppose, the Conservative anchor. I took over from Vincent Hanna. Somebody called Bill Bush turned up regularly. We did not really know anything much about him, but it turned out that he was head of research, which brings me back to the question of training and who chooses the people—the “quis custos” point—who are responsible for delivering the information. I think I am right in saying that he ended up as Tony Blair’s head of communications.

**Lord Hall:** I think that Bill Bush is now at the Football Association.

**Q58 Chair:** Well, he may be now but he wasn’t then. There are other questions. I think there that there is a bit of controversy at the moment—I do not want to go into detail—about Mr Underwood. Also, the head of British Influence now is somebody who was a regular for

“Newsnight”. I think her name is Paola Buonadonna. The important point that I am trying to make is about the impression that can be gained from people who seem to move seamlessly into arenas where they have a lot of influence but, at the same time, clearly do not come from the kind of background that some others feel represents the Euro-realist view. They might give a particular impression or perception. We mentioned Katya Adler just now and you made a very clear statement about her. When people who were employed by the BBC appear to have attitudes that carry them into areas of the kind that I have described, perhaps there is an indication, a consciousness, that there is a form of the institutional mindset that Wilson referred to, which will cause some concern. Do you see what I am driving at?

**Lord Hall:** I think I do. The way in which the BBC employs people from all sorts of different backgrounds and places is healthy. That diversity of opinion within the organisation is really important. But let me just assure you of one thing: once you join the BBC, you hang up whatever boots you might have and you are there to do a public service, to be impartial and to be part of all the values that the BBC stands for.

**Q59 Chair:** Robin Aitken, for example, wrote a couple of books, such as “Can We Trust the BBC?” We do not have time to go into all that, but he was an insider. Indeed, I think Peter Sissons and others have written about it as well. There is a fairly constant stream of commentary from past BBC employees who have been concerned about the extent to which the degree of impartiality that you are asserting has been as strong and as clear as I understand you want it to be.

**Lord Hall:** I am afraid the BBC attracts lots of people who then want to write about it and talk about it. I cannot answer for them. In answer to the main thrust of your point to both of us—do we think we have an important role in covering Europe, the institutions of Europe and opinions on Europe, both in this country and around Europe? Absolutely. One of the missions of BBC News, which is the most brilliant news organisation, is not just to report the news but to explain it, and help people to understand what is happening.

I also think, Sir William, that the tools available to us now to help people to understand what is happening in the world and give them background are far greater than when I was putting out what was then the “Nine O’Clock News” many years ago. With ambitious journalists working with the technical tools we now have, I think we can do that job and are doing it well. We can always, of course, do it better.

The second thing is that the organisation is about being impartial. You and I might differ on the Bridcut report and the fact that I think our looking for the breadth of opinion on key things that matter to this country is really important. But enshrined in the organisation is impartiality.

**Q60 Chair:** Can you therefore explain the extent to which BBC editors, correspondents, producers and interviewers devise the questions and coverage to reflect all sides of the EU equation in accordance with the BBC Charter and its obligations? After all, they have to do the same for other stories of equivalent complexity—for example, the benefits system. No one can say that that is not very complicated.



There was a suggestion in our previous session on the BBC and other media attention to the European questions, by which I mean EU questions, that those questions were regarded as rather challenging because of their complexity. But everything that we have discussed in terms of curriculum, training and complexity applies to many, many other issues as well. Some people are left with an impression that these questions are highly challenging when actually, because of the importance of the issue, the degree of training and the degree to which the right questions are asked—this goes back to the issues of ignorance and omission mentioned by Wilson. Are you satisfied that you are putting in place a sufficient degree of comprehensive analysis to enable the right questions to be asked of the right people?

**Lord Hall:** What strikes me about the organisation is that it is very reflective. It thinks very hard about what it is doing. It thinks very hard about whether it has done things as well as it could—whether we could have done better on that story or this story. It is an organisation where I see editors and producers thinking very hard about whether they have got something right or wrong and whether they could have done it better here or there. The culture, I think, is one of questioning. I do not see a culture other than one of thinking, “How can we do this better? How can we tell these stories better?”

That brings me on to the second point, which is that complexity is what journalists are there to penetrate and work through. I don’t think complexity is something where you say, “Do you know what? This is all very difficult and complex. Therefore, I will give up.” It is quite the reverse. The challenge is to say, “This is complex; it matters. Now we, as journalists, must try to get to grips with it.”

**Chair:** And you will appreciate that we have exactly the same problem, because we have to deal with some very important and difficult questions, and to make reports on them.

**Q61 Kelvin Hopkins:** The Trust Chairman, in her oral evidence, referred to “the database of voices on Europe”. That should be the European Union my view. Surely this is not just an arithmetical exercise. Is it not critically important that different views on EU issues are always reflected in the BBC output? I shall come back to that. Those views cut across all political parties and are of great importance to enable the public to form a judgment about their relative merits. They must therefore be given equal weight in the public interest. Do you agree that that is the role of the BBC, to be careful to ensure that that range of views is discussed?

**Lord Hall:** There are two things I would say. One of the strengths of the BBC’s journalism is that we have specialist correspondents and people based in the places that matter globally. Now, coming back into new Broadcasting House, the real glory is to be in the lifts and be aware of different languages being spoken and to have this extraordinary concentration of editorial, journalistic and programme-making fire power.

I don’t think anywhere else in the world has got that: namely, having the World Service, BBC World and our global services there as well. That is an enormous strength and I see it or listen to it night after night on the news and programmes and will see it online as well. To my mind, tapping into that is a way to ensure that we get the diversity of opinion that is the brunt of your question.

Plus—and I go back to it—I also think that being able to use our roots in communities up and down the country to find as broad a range of opinion as we can is also really important for the BBC. That is something that we constantly need to keep milking.

**Q62 Chair:** Of course, multinationals have been vigorously expressing views on the question of the future of Europe and the issue of whether we will have a referendum at all, let alone whether we should go out as a result. Do you not agree that this issue of views is not just cutting across political parties? The question of the European Union is not party political; it is a matter of public policy, which is clearly identified in the Charter and the framework agreements.

Therefore, to get the balance right, it is not just a question of what the respective political parties think. The issue before the person doing the interview or analysis is the matter of public interest, on which it is important not to get just one point of view.

**Lord Hall:** That is why I go back to John Bridcut's report. We should reflect the notion that there are different views within parties. We need to reflect that there are different views within industry. We need to reflect the fact that there are different views across the country about things to do with our relationship with Europe or GM foods or all sorts of other issues. I go back. That's why I think that the basis of our journalism is specialism. It is the job of our programme editors. It is the strength of the BBC that we are based in Brussels, but we also have weight around the country. That is really important. The diversity of opinion that we portray is one of the leitmotifs of the BBC.

**Q63 Kelvin Hopkins:** There is one segment of opinion that I find missing constantly. That is the Labour left Euroscepticism. I don't expect you to defend this in a way; I am just letting you know. Historically, the Labour party had great figures such as Tony Benn, Peter Shore, Barbara Castle, Michael Foot who were all strong Eurosceptics. That opinion is still represented within the party, but it never appears.

The populace gets the impression that Euroscepticism is essentially a right-wing movement and that there is not a left-wing movement, and yet millions of Labour voters want a referendum. I support Labour for a Referendum, but I have not seen that organisation referred to at all in the media—the newspapers or elsewhere. I don't want you to personally defend that, just to register that left Euroscepticism has been ignored. It is only recently, as Syriza and Podemos have suddenly arisen, that people are saying, "Oh dear. Actually, it is working class people, socialists and the left who have got a problem with the European Union. It is not just right-wing nationalists."

**Lord Hall:** I take that point.

**Chair:** While we are on that subject, Nigel Farage has been repeatedly put on heaven alone knows how many flagship programmes—it has been calculated at something of the order of over 30. Some people say that that has the effect of demonstrating a division of opinion between those within the Conservative party who have similar views and the views of UKIP. That, therefore, plays into a narrative that the whole of the Euro-realist side of the

equation is somehow or other divided between the UKIPites on the one hand and the Conservatives, who, in my case, go back to the Maastricht rebellion.

I believe that what Kelvin just said is equally important, because it comes back to the question that I raised a little earlier, which is that this is not strictly speaking a question of party politics at all. It is about the Government of the United Kingdom, our democracy, the Westminster Parliament and the European institutions. Therefore, one needs to strive to ensure that there is a proper opportunity for people from all sides of the equation to be heard in a manner that genuinely reflects the importance and significance of these issues.

**Q64 Andrew Bingham:** The BBC does regular surveys of audience opinion. I have found today's discussion fascinating, and I would love to broaden it, but we would be here for many hours discussing the BBC, not just in relation to what this Committee does. The question that those surveys use that is relevant to our work is, "Does the BBC help me understand politics in Europe?" We are back to the terminology of "Europe", as opposed to "the European Union". Do you think it is a bit woolly and vague, and that it is a question that is just thrown out? Do you think the question should be more direct? Should it be, "Does the BBC help you understand how the European Union operates and how it is relevant to the citizens of this country, in terms of the way they are governed?" Do you think it should be a more direct, specific question, to get a better answer that you can work with?

**Lord Hall:** I am happy to take advice on how we can get better in touch with the feelings of the licence fee payers on all these key issues. Of course, that is only one route for us to judge whether we are doing our job properly. I am with what Mr Hopkins was saying earlier. I find that statement helpful, because it reminds us of the challenge not only of covering the European institutions, but of covering Europe per Europe and making sure we cover the nations that make up Europe properly. Whatever helps us in that task, I am sure the Trust—it is their work, not ours—will take it on board.

**James Harding:** Can I just make one point, Mr Bingham? That is a really interesting point. You will have noticed that the answer to that question has risen—the number of people, from 2008 to now, who think that the BBC is helping them has risen, albeit marginally. If you take a particular story—if you take Lampedusa and the immigration story—the reason why it makes sense, to my mind, to phrase it that way is because there are competing issues. There is an Italian issue and an issue about immigration from north Africa, which, if you like, is a European one. Then there is the EU's intervention, or its attempts to intervene on that front, which is an EU issue. I think that the nature of the question that we have got there covers both what is happening in the context of Italian politics and what is happening in the context of the EU. That is probably a better way of dealing with it, from the point of view of audiences who may not make exactly the distinctions that Mr Hopkins and you are making.

**Q65 Andrew Bingham:** We talk about coverage of EU institutions. I just want to touch on the coverage of this Committee. Please do not take this as some narcissistic wish to get on the telly. I do not necessarily share my mum's wish to see me on the television, unless you want me to drive that car around on "Top Gear" but after today's events that is probably not going

to happen either. I suspect that a media storm is raging around that, which you will walk into when you leave the room.

I am interested to know how you decide on Select Committees, what coverage there is and what members of Select Committees you have. I am not saying that the BBC is turning into Vazvision but there seems to be very little coverage of this Committee and our Chairman is a fine looking man who would make good television. On a serious matter, given the significance of what we do on this Committee in dealing with democratic control of EU legislation and all the rest of it, there seems to be very little coverage of our work and particularly the report that we did on scrutiny reform in November 2013. Please, as I said, do not ring me up and say that you want me on the telly to talk about EU scrutiny because I have no wish to do that.

**James Harding:** I appreciate not only the question, but the way in which it is raised. It is easy, in such contexts, to think, “The argument is about how much we are on TV and we must do more of it.” I like the phrase—

**Andrew Bingham:** When you have a face for radio like mine, that is no problem.

**James Harding:** I had a look at the matter because I realise that what you are trying to get at is how you ensure that the Westminster end of this process is properly covered. That is a serious and legitimate point. A number of you are obviously on the airwaves of the BBC quite frequently. This Committee has been on—I haven’t counted exactly—about half a dozen to 10 times. As a TV and radio organisation, we are best when people are coming to give evidence. It is broadcast on the BBC Parliament channel. Clips of it are often broadcast on BBC News in other formats. That is where it appears.

The reality is, as I said when I was talking about the context of covering Europe in answer to Mr Davies’s question, that there are a fair few Select Committees in this House and in the House of Lords. There are 40-odd, so it is about exactly how you ensure you cover those ones. Sometimes it is about the issue that is being addressed. Sometimes it is about the people who are appearing before the Committee. We try to ensure that we use the means at our disposal to get as much of it covered as possible.

Forgive me if I bash on about things like Democracy Live. But a really phenomenal thing that has happened in the way that these issues reach people—this is the really significant change from Wilson in 2005. If you go online and look today, you can see—not, in this case, this Committee but what is happening in Strasbourg—a level of detail that would just not have been possible in terms of reaching large numbers of people. That is what I hope is happening in the treatment of Committees such as this. I do not just mean this Committee, but Select Committees in general.

**Henry Smith:** I am sure that you will be pleased to know, Chairman, that clearly this Committee is being watched. I have just seen on Twitter a Sky News feed reporting your comments, Lord Hall, that you are involved in the Clarkson episode. Clearly, we are being picked up.

**Jacob Rees-Mogg:** By Sky.

**Q66 Chair:** We may be being picked up but not necessarily for the right reasons. In the reform report that we produced in November 2013—this is a really important issue and I want to conclude on this note—an all-party Committee, for the first time since 1972 when the European Communities Act was passed, came to the conclusion that we should repeal, in our national interest, unilaterally at Westminster, legislation that was not regarded as being in the national interest.

We also recommended that we should reintroduce a veto with respect to legislation in the pipeline. Ask anybody, from Brussels to Strasbourg, and in all 28 member states. In fact, I was in the Dublin Parliament only yesterday and was asked this very question. They will say to you, “This is the most seminal question which faces the issue of the European Union in relation to its relationship with the United Kingdom and the Westminster Parliament.” But it was given almost no coverage whatsoever, and that was not without attempts to get it in front of the BBC. It was basically ignored.

I really regard that as a serious challenge to most of the evidence given today, because actually anyone who knew enough, knew that this was being omitted and had a mindset of the kind described in Wilson could not possibly ignore the report. That is not just because we made it, but because we have expertise in this Committee based on our responsibilities and duties to the House of Commons, and it was unanimous. If the BBC chooses to ignore that, you have to accept that that was a serious mistake.

**Lord Hall:** I don’t agree. I am not going to get drawn into news judgments on the day your report came out—I don’t know the day it came out and I don’t know what the pressures were on the news teams from global events or indeed events in this country. I can’t and won’t say whether that was right or wrong.

What I will emphasise is what I hope Mr Harding and myself have been emphasising throughout this session: we take the issues of Europe, the coverage of Europe and European institutions and the diversity of opinion on Europe extremely seriously. We think it is an important part of what our job is journalistically and editorially to the people who pay for us.

**Q67 Chair:** But we have a responsibility to Parliament and when we as a Committee make a judgment of that enormity, in terms of educating and informing the public, this is not about what you or we are doing in a silo; it is about what the listener or viewer—the public—know is going on by virtue of the knowledge and expertise accumulated in a Committee of this kind. We have many different points of view, but when something like that happens, I put it to you again that it is astonishing that that was given so little coverage. Perhaps I can leave it at this. You have made your remarks, but maybe you can reflect on them and write to me about how that report happened to be virtually ignored by the BBC.

**Lord Hall:** I am very happy to reflect on that, and both of us will reflect on all the things raised this afternoon, Sir William.

**Q68 Andrew Bingham:** On the whole issue about how the EU does and does not work in the context we have discussed, I sincerely hope that, in the next couple of years, we will have a

referendum on the EU, and that the BBC will play a huge part in reporting the contrasting arguments on that, which are complex and will be fully articulated by both sides. It would be sensible to reflect on the way in which you have reported the EU to date and the way you would like to report it as we lead up to something that I think will energise the British public along the lines of the way the Scottish referendum did in Scotland.

**Lord Hall:** If there is a referendum, we will take our job in that seriously, as we did for the Scottish referendum and as we will do for the general election. The general election is a serious moment for the UK and we take our job in that extremely seriously indeed.

Sir William, I do not want to get drawn into answering detailed questions about editorial decisions we have made in the past, because what we have been discussing are broad principles that we apply: impartiality, but also the range of opinions we seek in our coverage. So forgive me if I don't reply to you on that, but on all other matters to do with the way in which we handle ourselves at a high level, I am happy to take other questions.

**Q69 Chair:** My last thought is this. The parliamentary channel may—we hope it will on this occasion—carry the proceedings of this session, because, after all, that would be a good opportunity for people to get the flavour of how some people feel and your responses.

The parliamentary channel on a statistical base is not watched to the extent that some people would want. On the other hand, there are flagship programmes—we know what they are: Radio 4's "PM" programme, "World at One" and so on—and it seems to me that when James Harding was responding to Andrew Bingham's question, he was rather referring to the parliamentary channel as the main channel by which people would obtain information regarding the European Union, when it affects them so much. Can I ask you again to reflect on the fact that the flagship programmes—"Sunday Politics" and so on—are an opportunity for the public to get fuller and better education and information on what is going on?

**Lord Hall:** I completely agree about the flagship programmes: "Sunday Politics", Andrew Marr's excellent programme, "PM", "World at One"—I could list them all. But I think the plus side about the BBC now is that you can lead from those programmes into seeing for yourself what is happening on Democracy Live or understanding more through what we offer on our website and the BBC Parliament channel. That is one of the opportunities that we are really running with, and I think the teams do a fantastic job.

**Q70 Chair:** I think we have covered more or less everything that we wanted to ask you about. Thank you for coming. You will, I hope, be prepared to answer any follow-up questions that we may wish to ask.

**Lord Hall:** Very happy.

**Q71 Chair:** And we have given you a sort of deadline for the response on the Newswatch issues.

**Lord Hall:** You have.



**Chair:** Noon on Tuesday 17 March. With the resources at your disposal, I am sure that you can come up with that. Thank you very much indeed.