



**CAMPAIGN for
REGIONAL
BROADCASTING**
Midlands



OPEN LETTER

To: Tony Hall, Director General, BBC
From: Campaign for Regional Broadcasting Midlands
Date: 11th April 2013.

Dear Lord Hall,

We are delighted that you are visiting the BBC in the Midlands on Friday 12th April. We hope it is the first of many visits over the months and years ahead and that you will encourage other senior managers to visit more often. They will discover that this region has much to offer the corporation.

We would like to see a much more active engagement with licence fee payers and what is left of the corporation's workforce across the Midlands. This is vitally important to the region and for the BBC because so much licence fee income is raised here (we estimate £912 million from the East & West Midlands and the East of England) but only 9% will be spent 'in-region'. This is, by far, the lowest return to any region this year (we contribute more towards BBC operational expenditure in London than any other nation or region including London itself or even London and the south east combined). For more on this, see our analysis of BBC expenditure (at www.crbmidlands.org.uk).

We agree with those who say that we must open a dialogue and demonstrate how the BBC itself can benefit by building a greater presence in the Midlands. However, it is important to be reminded of the gap in average expenditure per licence fee payer between the Midlands and let's say, the north and south of England (not London). If the BBC was to spend the same average here we would see expenditure increase from an estimated £80 million this year to well over £400 million. A gap like this cannot possibly be fair: it damages our regional economy and it creates the impression that the BBC has very little interest in us, your largest licence fee payer group. If it were to continue, the impression will fester and will not help in the justification of a licence fee in the years ahead. Therefore the gap is highly dangerous, although it offers a starting point from which we can measure what must be done.

We firmly believe in publicly funded broadcasting and we are very positive about what a British Broadcasting Corporation can achieve for itself here. We believe that a devolved BBC, one where there is a more equal spread of programme making and employment across all of the regions will be closer to those who pay for it. Such a BBC will be far more representative and crucially, it will draw upon a wider creativity. These considerations are critically important if the BBC is to maintain its relevance in the rapidly changing media landscape.

We hope that you will see during your visit that the BBC has a much reduced presence in Birmingham and across the region. There are no network television production studios and network radio production is a mere shadow of what it was 10 years ago. We hope you will get the chance to talk with your remaining production staff and not only your management team. You will find they are highly loyal to the corporation despite being surrounded by empty desks.

We too would welcome the opportunity to share our ideas with you. We can offer a number of constructive pathways that would benefit both the BBC and our region. For instance, we believe that the facilities at The Mailbox can be put to a much greater (and cost effective) use. The radio drama facilities could easily form the catalyst for a BBC Radio Drama centre of excellence. The network radio studios could lead to a much greater regional presence on Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4. The BBC can capitalise on Greater Birmingham's large youth population, or the Midland's high ethnic population. Not only that, we have a wealth of writing, production and acting talent.

The Drama Village at Selly Oak has proved itself to be very possibly the most efficient producer of television drama in the country. It should be given the opportunity (and the budget) to produce high quality Midlands based drama for the national peak-time schedules.

There is more we would like to share with you and in the weeks ahead, we will present to you at least two discussion papers regarding the cost effective expansion of radio and television production in the heart of England. The opportunities here are almost endless.

For now, we would like to welcome you to the region and we wish you and your senior management team well, as you attempt to resolve some of the problems of the recent past. We also hope that you take a close look at the BBC's astonishing retrenchment from the Midlands and find ways to re-build a mutually beneficial programme making (and administrative) presence in the region. We would like to see a much fairer return of our own licence fee back into the region. It's not a lot to ask.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Bradley and Tracey Briggs.

On behalf of the Campaign of Regional Broadcasting Midlands.

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The Campaign for Regional Broadcasting Midlands is a community grassroots campaign that aims to promote the Midlands as a place to create and make television, radio & film. There has been a gradual migration away from the region by the major broadcasters and as a result, this important, diverse and highly populated region is now virtually absent from the airwaves.