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*file Arts
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From the Private Secretary

19 October 1988

BROADCASTING WHITE PAPER

As you know, I have passed to the Minister for the Arts' Office a copy of the draft White Paper, and invited the Minister to let me have any comments on the Arts aspects.

The Home Secretary will wish to see, before tomorrow's meeting of MISC 128, the enclosed letter from the Minister for the Arts' Office.

I am copying this letter to Alex Allan (HM Treasury).

PAUL GRAY

Miss Catherine Bannister
Home Office

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From the Minister for the Arts

C88/5026

Paul Gray Esq
 Private Secretary
 10 Downing Street
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17 October 1988

Dear Paul

BROADCASTING WHITE PAPER

Thank you for your letter of 12 October enclosing a copy of the draft White Paper, which my Minister has been interested to read. *with pg?*

Mr Luce's direct concern is of course largely with the cultural content of broadcasting - particularly television - and in this context (which includes the likely reactions from arts interests) he is pleased to note that the special role of the BBC is confirmed and that the additional services in the independent television sector, under the proposed Independent Television Commission, would still be required to provide a diversity of programmes (Chapter VI, paragraph 11). As you know there is considerable concern that increasing the competition and enlarging viewer choice will tend towards the 'lowest common denominator' in terms of style and subject matter. My Minister would therefore hope that artistic quality will be a consideration that the ITC would be asked to bear in mind; and much agitation would be avoided if a specific reference to this could be worked into the text, perhaps by adding in paragraph 11, "to have regard to cultural and artistic content in the balance of programmes".

This proviso would then make the monitoring procedures (in Chapter VI paragraph 17) more significant, and could be of considerable benefit in encouraging programmes of quality. The point would be further reinforced if the penultimate sentence of Chapter VI, paragraph 21 read, "the consumer protection requirements set out in paragraphs 10 and 11."

Turning to programme standards as outlined in Chapter VIII, my Minister naturally supports the provisions proposed, the move towards a code of standards on matters of taste and decency, and the proposal to extend the ITC's monitoring role to satellite services. This is an area where over-restrictive provisions give rise to protests in the name of artistic freedom, and a specific reference to cultural standards as previously suggested would take much of the sting out of this backlash.

On programme production (Chapter X) we strongly support the continuation of the 25% provision for independent producers, which has been a great stimulus to the production industry. As you know, the problem of maintaining a supply of domestically produced programmes, in the face of cheaper US imports, is of great concern in Europe and also relevant to the United Kingdom. It is perhaps a pity that reference is not made to this in the chapter on The International Dimension (Chapter XI) which is at present concerned only with the proposed European Community. Our statements on such matters will be watched very closely in Europe, and there is an air of complacency in paragraph 1 of this chapter which will be read as a lack of interest in European programming problems.

If a paragraph could be added dealing with this aspect (which is mainly a matter for DTI and the Home Office) it might mention the need to understand the growing European market and the increasing opportunities for co-operation. This would give a signal which could make proposals for co-operative ventures in Europe more acceptable, and the European Commission more receptive to UK interests.

Finally, I should say that Mr Luce supports the references to sponsorship in Chapter III, paragraph 18 and Annex A, paragraph 5. Sponsorship is an increasingly significant help with cultural programmes, and we should do nothing to discourage it.

I am copying this letter to Ricky Verrall in Eric Forth's office.

Yours

Martin Le Jeune

MARTIN LE JEUNE
Assistant Private Secretary