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The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP  
Secretary of State for  
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24 October 1988

*Mr Douglas,*

BROADCASTING WHITE PAPER

I very much enjoyed the discussion on the White Paper on Thursday. I thought it was very useful in clarifying some of the outstanding points on what will be, I believe, a very well received White Paper.

Could I perhaps just remind you of the position of two matters that are really tangential but might occasion some comment? They concern the position of the Open University and Open College.

Firstly, the Open University is entitled under the existing agreement with the BBC to about 1000 hours of transmission time at marginal cost. Actual use is some 800 hours a year. This is roughly 20-25 in a typical week. The transmissions can go out on a Saturday or Sunday morning, as well as during the week, and are often broadcast late at night or early in the morning. I understand that none of these transmissions are made between the night hours of 1.00am to 6.00am.

I think it is important to say somewhere in the White Paper that we would require the BBC to continue to provide the Open University with time of this order. It might well be that the BBC would react to the taking away of one of the night channels from the BBC, for subscription, and immediately argue that this places too much pressure on their non night-hour time. I think this question can be answered quite robustly but you should be aware of it.

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Secondly as regards the Open College, Channel Four also makes available 150 hours a year for transmission of Open College programmes. We should expect this agreement to continue. This matter is more directly for Norman Fowler.

As regards educational broadcasts on the commercial channels, I think as you are aware, there are three types of these. The first is general educational programmes concerning such matters as the environment, the incidence of disease, industrial success stories and scientific inventions. This kind of programme tends to go out in the morning or the afternoon and is usually surrounded with advertising. Secondly, there are children's programmes. These are designed specifically for the children's market and go out in the morning and from 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Again these are frequently programmes of high quality made by the regional ITV companies. I think one would want to require regional companies on Channels 3, 4 and 5 to ensure that time is allowed for such programmes.

The third type is the schools programmes. These are transmitted on Channel 4 and therefore their licence must require them to provide time for the programmes. However, Channel 4 do not make these programmes: they are made by independent companies and it is a straight charge upon their operating costs - no advertising is associated with them.

These programmes are usually very high quality. They are prepared carefully for a term's work with material provided by the television companies and with guidance for teachers. I think one would have to require the regional TV companies to continue to provide such material. I do not think it would be appropriate to require Channel 5 companies to provide school programming. I do think, however, it would only be fair that they should be asked to require children's educational programming.

I hope you find these comments - which are really matters of clarification - helpful.

I am copying this letter to Geoffrey Howe and members of Misc 128.

*Zimmer*

*Hermit*