

BARONESS CRAWLEY



Minister in the Government Whips Office
Government Spokesperson for the Cabinet Office

The Lord Puttnam CBE
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

29 March 2010

Dear David,

During the debate of the Information Committee's debate on the report 'Are the Lords Listening Creating connections between People and Parliament', I committed to reply to your question below:

'At a moment when the BBC is looking at cuts and changes, can we assume that this important area of its work is being developed and is ring-fenced, and that the action plan that was asked for five years ago will be implemented and presented to Parliament?'

BBC Parliament is regulated by the BBC Trust and issues relating to it are primarily for the BBC. BBC Parliament liaises with relevant officials within Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

I have asked Peter Knowles, Controller of BBC Parliament to write to you directly. I am placing a copy of this letter and Mr Knowles in the House of Lords Library.

Yours Sincerely

BARONESS CRAWLEY



Political Programmes

BBC Parliament
4 Millbank
London
SW1P 3JA
18th March 2010

Dear Lord Puttnam

BBC Parliament is regulated by the BBC Trust in the same way as all other BBC services. Each year the channel reports its programme plans and objectives to the BBC Trust as a Statement of Programme Policy and its success in meeting its objectives is measured by the Executive in the Annual Report. In each 5 year period the channel is subject to a Service Review by the Trust.

Here are the three key documents which describe the regulatory framework and performance review:

The Trust has granted BBC Parliament a Service Licence, updated in August 2009:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/service_reviews/service_licences/bbc_parliament.shtml

Its programme commitments are published each year as a Statement of Programme Policy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/statements2009/news/parliament.shtml>
The progress made against each commitment is updated quarterly.

BBC Parliament's performance is reviewed each year by the BBC Executive at http://www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/exec/performance/journalism/bbc_parl.shtml
The report assesses BBC Parliament's success in reaching an audience and its success in achieving value for money, expressed as cost per user hour. The Annual Report also includes data on BBC Parliament's statutory commitments under Ofcom regulation.

BBC Parliament has a dedicated budget and dedicated resources but it benefits from being a part of the extensive News operation. Below, are some examples of how BBC Parliament has gained from its place within the wider context of News and other services.

The channel is distributed on the Freeview (Digital Terrestrial TV) platform as part of the portfolio of BBC services and to this one fact alone can be attributed the major part of the very great audience growth the channel has enjoyed in recent years. In 2009 BBC Parliament reached an average monthly audience (including recesses) of



1.5 million – a multiple of the audience size reported by any other dedicated parliamentary channel in the world.

BBC Parliament picks up a substantial part of its audience from the frequent use of pointers from the BBC News channel to events broadcast on this channel. It also enjoys occasional very high profile trailing to special events and special programming. These trails appear adjacent to programmes such as Newsnight, the Ten o'clock News and Question Time.

BBC Parliament is produced by a newsroom which plays a significant part in the overall work of BBC News. BBC Parliament is able to share the studios, staff and facilities of other news outlets and it will, during the general election campaign, be able to draw on the full range of BBC programmes to make an exciting and attractive schedule.

BBC Parliament, like the rest of BBC News, is half way through delivering the efficiency and re-investment programme: 'Delivering Creative Futures'. Our move to a purpose built all-digital newsroom in September 2009 was both a step change in the technical delivery of the channel and at the same time achieved very significant cost savings. At the same time, BBC Parliament has benefited from a huge investment in online technology with the launch in November 2009 of the channel's online expression at www.bbc.co.uk/democracylive. The quality of our web presence (an eight stream video wall and speech-to-text search technology) is unrivalled in the world.

For all these reasons I have not and would not seek to place BBC Parliament in a special category, immune from the pressures of the BBC but unable to access developments other than by laying claim to an 'exceptional' status. I believe the current status of the channel alongside the News channel and the position of our newsroom as a department within Political Programmes, all subject to the same rigours and tests, serves us well.

Yours Sincerely



Peter Knowles
Controller BBC Parliament