

Tony Hall's Joined Up BBC

In the words of Baldrick, BBC DG Tony Hall has a 'cunning plan'. But unlike Blackadder's scrofulous sidekick, his one might work.

Hall's [keynote speech about the BBC's future](#) had an audience of [external media folk](#), but it's main impact might well be internal. This was a masterly synthesis of the idea of a [networked media organisation](#) delivering content in new ways with, rather than just for, new kinds of audiences.

There were some shiny new ideas: BBC Store; a revamped iplayer; a customised personal [music platform](#); a personalised 'Open Minds' initiative; turning the BBC's global website into a multi-media portal; plus 20% more dosh for the arts. All these add up to an array of on-demand services that someone might just want to charge for in the future?

There was also what sounded like an ambitious [multi-stakeholder plan](#) to encourage the public to take up computer programming.

Those were the kinds of lovely things that Hall hopes will make the licence fee worth paying in a multi-channel world and worth working for in an era of 20% cuts.

He certainly understands the idea of moving from a [fortress factory to a partnership network](#). He hopes to change the definite article from 'the' to 'my' BBC. Mobile will be key to this.

All this is fairly familiar territory to anyone in mainstream media but Hall has the confidence in his ability to steer a simplified BBC management in the right direction. BBC folk will be more likely to trust him because he takes a very traditional view of the BBC's public service ethos. So, he was very strong on the commitment to universalism and insists the idea of the channel remains central.

He ignored some big questions:

- How far is he prepared to go in monetising services – for example to achieve his goal of 500 million global consumers?
- He has ruled out closing any channels – is there anything the BBC is going to withdraw from or do less of?
- Will the partnerships extend beyond cozy couplings with traditional public bodies such as the Arts Council and platform deals with companies such as Spotify?
- How will the BBC balance its role in bolstering the UK's creative industries with its potentially inhibiting effect on the commercial sector?
- Further off – how do you justify the licence fee in a world where people access content in different ways?

I am sure Rupert Murdoch will have other questions, and many MPs will remain sceptical of the BBC's appetite for real reform.

But this was an impressive presentation. It had less jargon and rhetoric than recent BBC DGs. It gestured with gravity towards some of the BBC's recent travails, but reminded everyone that the corporation is much bigger and more important than its mistakes.

Politically, this strategy will almost certainly save the licence fee for this Charter Renewal but it also felt like it was



laying the ground for a subscription-related revenue, membership – perhaps even a [mutual](#) future?

[My colleague @DamianTambini's [take, focusing on on-demand services is here](#)]

[You can read [my take on a possible BBC future here](#)]

Good summary with at-a-glance feature by Telegraph [here](#)

Interesting [take by Nigel Whalley](#) that takes Tony Hall to task for trying to use BBC platforms to dominate on-demand TV without proper collaboration

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science