

Adrian Picton

Dear Mr Davies,

I write to give my views on the public consultation on the future development of digital radio in the UK.

Firstly, I am very concerned regarding Ofcom's proposal to change the regulation of audio quality so that the commercial radio groups can drop the bit rates of their stereo stations from 128 to 112kbps. Digital radio manufacturers and broadcasters are still marketing DAB as being "crystal clear" and "near CD quality", but this would actually only be the case if stations were broadcasting at least at 192 KBPS. It is already lamentable that the multiplex operators are allowed to broadcast stations at 128 KBPS in order to fit more stations onto the multiplex, and so I feel strongly that this limit shouldn't be reduced even further. As it is there are a number of music stations already broadcasting in mono at bit rates as low as 64 KBPS which I feel to be completely unacceptable.

I believe that one of your own studies found that more people were concerned about audio quality than increased station choice. An increased choice of stations is not likely to lead to a better choice at all, but rather more stations playing non-stop chart music.

I am also concerned about the proposal to license the next two national DAB multiplexes by auction as this will almost certainly mean that the BBC will lose out. When you bear in mind that over 50% of radio listening is to the BBC and public consultations on DAB so far have shown that the biggest concern has been about the audio quality of the BBC output, if this auction process takes place it means that the BBC will be denied any chance of improving the quality of their stations, especially as the new multiplex operators won't be obliged to carry any BBC services.

Finally, the other concern I have about the proposals for the two new multiplexes is that the operators who win the licences will not even be obliged to provide free radio services, and could instead choose to operate subscription-based or pay-per-listen services. I believe strongly that Ofcom should be safeguarding the right to free radio in this country and that this proposal would not be in the interests of the British public.

I look forward to hearing the results of the consultation soon, and hope that the quality of UK radio will be preserved.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Picton