

Friends of the Creative Domain

<Date>

<Name>

<Organisation>

<Street>

<City>, <Post Code>

Dear <Name>

We write to express our support for the BBC Creative Archive, and our concerns relating to how it will be implemented.

As TV licence holders, citizens concerned about access to our national heritage, and artists and students who have witnessed the shrinkage of the creative domain, we strongly supported Greg Dyke's August, 2003 commitment to take "a massive step forward in opening our content to all — be they young or old, rich or poor."

There are many obvious reasons for taking such a step. Digital technology now gives us the chance to unlock and democratise an otherwise inaccessible part of our national culture, an opportunity of immeasurable educational value. An online archive of past and present BBC material could give artists and students unprecedented ways to build creative works, and making material available for non-commercial use would open new markets for our nation's artists and the Corporation. In short, the Archive has the potential to ignite a "digital campfire" for the nation.

However, we have become concerned that the BBC will not ultimately implement the Archive in a way that is conducive to these social goods. Some commercial broadcasters have already expressed opposition to an accessible archive of free material for non-commercial use, even while asking the BBC to "seed" the market for digital content. We worry that the BBC will face political pressure from these broadcasters to pursue commercialisation above access.

We also worry that the recent changing of the BBC guard places the original vision of the Archive in jeopardy. The BBC's new chairman, Michael Grade, has said that a top priority of his is creating a commercial plan for the archives. Recent reports that the Board of Governors will take more control of the BBC's policy and planning division suggest that champions of the Creative Archive may not be able to overcome pressures to limit access.

We do not object to a commercial plan in principle, as long as it does not unreasonably impede non-commercial use by licence holders. However, the latest reports about the initial implementation of the Creative Archive indicate that only short three-minute clips will be available. Although we are confident that the BBC management has more ambitious long-term plans, the lack of concrete proposals or public discussion of these plans stokes our fears that the Archive will not go beyond a shop window for content that TV-licence holders have already paid for.

We believe that the stakes for the Creative Archive are high enough to merit a public discussion on how to achieve the project's fullest potential. This discussion should bring in all the relevant stakeholders, including TV licence holders, digital video artists, actors, musicians, producers, librarians, archivists, historians and students.

Now is an ideal time to open this discussion and to update the BBC Charter to allow the BBC to fulfil its public mission in the digital age. We support new charter language that would:

- Make the Creative Archive one of the primary objectives of the Corporation, with an emphasis on access and creative use.
- Specify prospective licensing of content for online use in a way that allows licence holders to get their best value for money.
- Specify the conditions of retrospective licensing of content for online use in a way that would maximise the educational and cultural value of the archives.

We respectfully request a meeting with you and your staff so that we may discuss these concerns and proposals.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Friends of the Creative Domain

Damian Tambini, Director, PCMLP
Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, PCMLP
David Tannenbaum, Union for the Public Domain

<additional signatories>