

Received via email 29 Feb 2008

27 February 2008

Paul Dacre
30-year Rule Review
c/o The National Archives
Kew TW9 4DU

Dear Paul

Thank you for your letter of 28 December regarding the independent review of the operation of the '30 year rule'. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the review on behalf of the BBC.

We very much welcome the Government's decision to review the 30 year rule. We are pleased to note the Government's interest in increasing openness in this area, which would help to promote better historical understanding among the public of government decision-making. Given also that Freedom of Information has been in force for three years, it makes sense to re-examine this rule now.

We believe that the threshold of 30 years has now become outdated. Ministers, special advisers and officials now routinely produce memoirs in a much shorter time-frame, but their accounts can be partial and sometimes self-serving. It would aid fuller public understanding of the events involved if the official papers also became available much more quickly.

Furthermore, because of the Freedom of Information Act it is now accepted that more recent government records can be, and often are, made available to the media and public. However, this is a limited form of disclosure which is entirely dependent on what information requests are actually made. It has established the principle of earlier disclosure and has illustrated the value of it, but it does not mean that the most illuminating and useful material is put into the public domain.

The BBC already makes use of records disclosed under the 30 year rule, both in news programmes when material is released and in special programming such as Radio 4's annual programme *UK Confidential* which is based on newly available documents. Reducing the limit would mean that the issues involved would be nearer to the present day. This would boost the interest of our audiences and result in much more of such material being used in our programming and thus being reported to the public.

The BBC therefore supports reducing the 30 year limit substantially. We favour a reduction to 15 years as a reasonable figure which brings valuable public benefits without causing the problems of being too close to current times. We accept that there are resources implications and this may necessitate a phasing-in stage, in which this new limit is reached gradually over a period of years.

Once again, thank you for asking the BBC to take part in the review, and I hope this contribution is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Mark Thompson