



## **OfCOM: A new approach to public service content in the digital media age. The potential role of the Public Service Publisher.**

### **Response from the MLA Partnership**

#### **1.0 *About the MLA Partnership***

- 1.1 We are grateful for this opportunity to respond to the OfCOM document outlining the potential role of the Public Service Publisher. This response focuses on the significant contribution that museums, libraries and archives already make to delivering public value through the use of digital media.
- 1.2 The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the nine regional agencies work in partnership to provide strategic direction and leadership for museums, libraries and archives across England. Together we work to improve people's lives by building knowledge, supporting learning, inspiring creativity and celebrating identity.
- 1.3 The Partnership acts collectively for the benefit of the sector and the public, leading the transformation of museums, libraries and archives for the future.
- 1.4 Our aims are to:
  - Increase and sustain participation** - Users come first in everything the Partnership and sector develops and delivers. We help the sector to engage people who use its services and those who don't, involving communities and giving the public greater access to collections.

**Put museums, libraries and archives at the heart of national, regional and local life** - We speak up for the sector's contribution to a successful, creative and cohesive society. We champion the sector. We play an important role in shaping and supporting government initiatives and others' agendas in all arenas, from local to international.

**Ensure a world class and sustainable sector and put it on the best footing for the future** - We promote innovation and modernisation to build the sector for the

future. We increase access to funding to develop the sector's capacity to provide quality services that users want.

**Lead sector strategy and policy development** - We work with government and others to develop plans and priorities using authoritative evidence that informs policy and demonstrates impact.

- 1.5 Our geographical remit covers England only but we work with our UK peers and partners and at an international level to best represent the sector.

## **2.0 Delivering Public value through Digital Media**

- 2.1 MLA has been active in enabling a wide range of organizations in the public and voluntary sectors to create content and services which broadly fall within the proposed remit of a Public Service Publisher. Indeed, MLA has played an active role in a number of initiatives specifically mentioned in the OfCOM document, including acting as Expert Advisers to the Big Lottery Fund on the EnrichUK programme (also known as the NOF-digitise programme) that invested £50m in the digitization of learning resources. In addition, MLA supported DCMS on the initial development of the Culture Online concept, which had a number of similarities with the Public Service Publisher concept.
- 2.2 The role of the Museums, Libraries and Archives sector in supporting and nurturing creativity in the use of digital media has been recognized in a recent report commissioned by MLA from Demos, titled 'Knowledge and Inspiration: the Democratic face of culture' [see [http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//K/knowledgeinspiration\\_10220.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//K/knowledgeinspiration_10220.pdf)] . To quote from the introduction:

*“Throughout the country, museums libraries and archives are at the vanguard of social and economic change. Buildings from Daniel Libeskind’s Imperial War Museum of the North, to the new Jubilee Library in Brighton are the confident symbols of vigorous regeneration. But, as increased public popularity and higher levels of political commitment demonstrate, there is much more to the sector than cutting edge architecture.*

*Our museums, libraries and archives, whether old or new, make possible a wealth of activities that help build our communities and our futures. They have reinvented themselves from being passive repositories of the past, to become creators of cultural and public value. By giving users the means to understand and question the world in which they live, they have come to play an empowering role in contemporary society: they help us make sense of who we are. They are precisely the means by which we can rediscover from our history the shared values that bind us together. On top of that, the innovation that they have shown in achieving their own transformation, and the imagination that they inspire are essential*

*stimuli to a creative Britain: museums, libraries and archives are the natural resources of a creative age.”*

2.3 These themes are echoed in the OfCOM report where the chapter by Anthony Lilley (Section 2, Page 13) identifies the changing role of the cultural sector:

*This applies even more to cultural activities such as the arts, museums and galleries sector which – in many cases – are moving beyond simply providing access to cultural artefacts, into a mode where many institutions are finding that the facilitation of learning, understanding and participation are more central to their missions than ever before. These and others present compelling reasons why we might want to extend the case for public service broadcasting and re-evaluate it in the light of changing circumstances by looking at it in the wider context of public service delivery as a whole and diminishing the special status which we have previously given to mass media.*

2.4 MLA itself, as well as the wider cultural sector, is delivering services using digital technology which are beginning to address these issues. MLA is supporting the aggregation of a number of these services to create a rich and high quality cultural sector broker, building on the success of the 24 Hour Museum ([www.24hourmuseum.org.uk](http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk)). The 24 Hour Museum currently has almost 10 million visits a year, and is being further developed with funding from MLA, DfES and the Arts Council.

The strength of the 24 Hour Museum is the editorial voice and strong focus on news and events in the cultural sector across the UK, encouraging online users to visit institutions from across the country, outside the major cities. This core infrastructure is also used to support a range of other audiences and initiatives, including:-

- Museums and Galleries Month – acting as a focus for exhibitions and event information
- City Heritage Guides – enabling 11 key cities to highlight activity and engage with their communities
- Untold London – direct engagement with Black and Ethnic Minority groups
- Abolition 200 – acting as a national focus for events and exhibitions across the country commemorating the Bicentenary of the passing of the Act to abolish the Slave Trade

Work is underway to incorporate a range of additional services, particularly the ability to combine information drawn from a range of databases from across the cultural sector. The People’s Network Discover Service ([www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk](http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk)) already harvests indexing information from 15 databases, enabling them to be searched at the same time, and for users to find a vast array of content, including moving image material. MLA funds a range of digitisation projects, and these will be linked into the People’s Network Service, with the next phase taking place during 2008, which will see a series of other databases added.

2.5 MLA has supported a Big Lottery Funded £250,000 digitisation programme of WW2 films by the Regional Film Archives, and work by a number of Regional Agencies has identified their pivotal role in relation to supporting the moving image creative industries. They are more than an inspiration – they are a frequently used source, but need funding properly to provide a fast, efficient and effective service to film and TV companies as well as fulfilling their cultural access brief. An integrated approach to online archives would support the development of new business models.

2.6 At a European level, the European Commission has published a Recommendation on the European Digital Library ([http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item\\_id=2782](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2782)) which outlines a number of actions that it wishes Member States to take in order to link archives, with audio-visual materials being a focus for future development. Culture Ministers from across Europe have agreed to address the issues related to digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation. The activity will reinforce co-ordination within and between Member States by setting up national coordination mechanisms for digitisation activities, including at the regional and local levels, in the field of cultural content. MLA will be working with DCMS and a range of cultural sector organisations to develop a policy framework for the cultural sector.

### **3. OfCOM Questions**

MLA is very interested in participating in the on-going discussions on the concept of a Public Service Publisher, and some of our areas of interest are indicated in our response to the questions posed in the report.

#### **3.1 The appropriate nature of intervention in the digital media age, and the balance between TV and non-TV forms of public service content distribution**

The report outlines the pressures that will be resulting in a lack of public service content, and the changes in the way that media is being consumed. MLA considers that this will lead to fundamental changes in broadcasting, and the ways in which the wider cultural sector will engage with its audiences. Museums, libraries and archives are important to the traditional broadcasters, supplying rich content, historic materials and also the skills and expertise that used by broadcasters in creating public service and commercial content. Programmes as diverse as BBC's 'Who Do You Think You Are' or Channel4's 'Time Team' could not exist without the active support of museums, libraries and archives. These two programmes are amongst the most watched UK-originated programmes on these traditional broadcast channels and demonstrate a deep interest in the cultural sector.

Museums, libraries and archives are already active in the online world. The report identifies the role of some of the larger institutions, but for some smaller institutions, their online audience is already greater than those who visit in person. Institutions are increasingly using the web to enable access to their collections. Particularly important is the activity to digitise film archives, particularly the British Film Institute and the Regional Film Archives. We are also seeing the creation of 'virtual' collections, particularly where members of the public digitise photographs and documents that are their personal and

family history, and, with other people in their community, create a virtual community archive.

Our institutions are also embracing videoconferencing technology, enabling museums, libraries and archives to show their collections and engage communities with those collections. As broadband technology has been introduced into the classroom, teachers are increasingly connecting to cultural sector institutions, as a complement to a real-life visit, or enabling connections to be made across the country, or across continents. In some cases, these sessions are also being webcast and are being used by institutions to build a video archive.

With the falling cost of equipment and media distribution, museums, libraries and archives are also beginning to be more active in commissioning and creating their own linear broadcast materials. Tate, with TateShots ([www.tate.org.uk/tateshots](http://www.tate.org.uk/tateshots)) is creating a monthly set of short videos that can be streamed or downloaded. However, many other institutions are also creating short programmes, often based on lectures or presentations by members of staff. An outstanding example is the Natural History Museum Darwin Centre (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/science-of-natural-history/darwin-centre-live/index.html>).

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate the existing activity that could be drawn together as part of an offer of compelling public service content.

### **3.2 The potential role of the PSP and its creative remit**

The report outlines some of the initiatives that have led to the creation of content, such as the NOF-digitise programme, or Culture Online. A PSP could have a similar role, but there is now the opportunity to link the development of services with user demand. MLA has been working with the DfES and Becta to look at the need to content and services in education. In addition, MLA is a partner in the Strategic eContent Alliance, which has a range of public sector partners, and which has identified some work that it will be doing to look at user requirements. From this type of activity, and the wider view that OfCOM and other partners would be able to develop, it should be possible to create a commissioning model based on real understanding of user needs, whilst also ensuring that there is no impact on commercial opportunities.

The OfCOM report highlights amongst the possible content propositions the role of community archives – in PULSE. This example is particularly interesting as it is a concept that no existing public service broadcaster has developed, any examples of this type of activity have been short-term and have not been created with a long-term perspective in mind. The concept would deliver economies of scale, critical mass and coherence to an important area of community engagement with digital media – and link closely with the media literacy agenda.

However, a PSP could also address some of the fundamental sustainability issues that are unresolved in current funding programmes. The creation of a national body that can bring economies of scale and underpinning infrastructure to ensure the continuing delivery of services and long-term preservation would be warmly welcomed.

### **3.3 The operating model – in particular, the approach to rights management**

At the heart of the concept of a Public Service Publisher is the need to ensure an appropriate balance between the needs of users and the interests of rights holders. An example is the Creative Archive Licence, based on Creative Commons. The Creative Licence Group, set up in April 2005, aims to make it easier for institutions to make their content available for download under the terms of a single, shared user licence scheme for the downloading of moving images, audio and stills (<http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/>). MLA is a member of this group, along with a number of public and private bodies, such as the British Film Institute, BBC, Channel 4, Teachers TV and ITN Source. This type of innovative approach enables content to be made freely available for non-commercial use, whilst also enabling the re-use of the content for commercial purposes.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

- 5.1 Our sector forms the Knowledge Bank for Life and its treasures provide the natural resources for a creative age. Museums, libraries and archives are vital to the social and economic wellbeing of our nation.
- 5.2 We believe that the sector has much to contribute to the discussion about a Public Service Publisher, and MLA would like to be involved as OfCOM takes the work forward.

If you would like any further information, please contact in the first instance:

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