

Response

The founding of a Public Service Publisher (PSP) is an opportunity to make a significant ongoing investment in the vast landscape of public, 'open knowledge' infrastructures already developing on the Net.

We, the undersigned, feel that the PSP could play a vital role in addressing the strategic concerns of the Net as a global and national infrastructure; exploring and protecting the educational, commercial and societal possibilities of what 'public service' might mean in this new context.

We are greatly encouraged by the direction expressed by OfCom's "new approach to public service content in the digital media age." Our response aims to steer the development of this project in the direction our combined experience and practice suggests would be of most value to the UK public.

Firstly, we commend the suggested investment in open content and open data. In particular we urge that, where the PSP funds the generation of new content, such content should always be made available under a license such that others are free to enjoy, redistribute and, most importantly, reuse and refashion that content.

Secondly, we ask that OfCom pay special attention to the ability of the PSP to invest in architectures of participation, both by supporting the development of Free, Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) and Open Content technologies and projects and by investing in the creation of content to encourage the growth of networks around these technologies.

Thirdly, we ask that OfCom recognise the transnational nature of the networked communications environment, and refrain from sanctioning measures designed to limit the benefits derived from the PSP to UK residents alone. The PSP and the projects and content it funds should be viewed as nodes on a global network. It should be assumed that the exchange of information and content across such a global network will be to the net benefit of the UK public.

The success of an endeavour like the PSP will rely upon these details of its founding principles, and we urge OfCom to pay significant attention to those details now. For example, the PSP may commission a website for people to post and discuss short films, investing in the "architectures of participation" suggested above. But unless the use of Free/Open Source software is specified, and the resulting website platform is 'open', allowing re-use and modification by other interested parties, the PSP will not be fully meeting its public service remit. Similarly, The PSP might commission a set of short films to be placed on the website, to seed its growth as a network. But unless the PSP commission explicitly requires that the resulting work be 'open' so that others are free to use, reuse and redistribute the work, the PSP's audience will remain 'consumers' of content, and the PSP will have failed to maximise the opportunities of the digital age.

Finally, the PSP should engage in advocacy and educational initiatives to enable people, organisations and companies to publish their material using open licenses, formats and technologies. It is our sincere hope that the PSP can become a strong, public voice in favour of open knowledge structures.

We welcome this and any future opportunities to respond to OfCom's plans for the PSP.

The Open Knowledge Foundation
The Open Rights Group
Free Culture UK