

Programmes Review 2003

**A review of Public Service Delivery across ITV1,
Channel 4, Five and Teletext**

by The Independent Television Commission

December 2003

Early in 2004, a statement of accounts for the ITC will be prepared for the financial year to 28 December 2003 and presented to Parliament.

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1 FOREWORD

On December 29th 2003, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) merges with other communications regulators into the new Office of Communications (Ofcom) which takes over the ITC's duty for safeguarding the range, quality and varied appeal of commercial television services in the UK.

This Review, prepared in December, covers only the first nine months of this year's services by licensees. However, at the time of writing, ITV, Channel 4 and Five were on course to meet their statutory public service broadcasting remits for 2003.

In April this year, in the ITC's last full *Annual Report*, we recorded our pride in the way the ITC had contributed to the foundations for Ofcom and in creating the conditions that had helped make British television a real success. The last months of the ITC have seen that work continue, alongside some very significant developments in broadcasting.

The Iraqi war dominated the news and underlined further the extent to which people value television news, as audiences for the main bulletins doubled – and this in a year when, for the first time, multichannel homes became the majority.

There were some dramatic changes in service provision too: the BBC's launch of Freeview was followed by the long-awaited, much speculated, merger between Carlton & Granada, a move which should make for a stronger ITV. The ITC also agreed the move of the *News at Ten* to 10.30pm on weekdays, providing a fixed spot for ITV news and a wider choice for viewers.

There was no shortage of applications for new channel licences during the year – many of them new services for television, ranging from gambling to community channels, and reflecting the choice available in a multichannel market.

In addition to these developments, the ITC's full-scale review of independent production – the Programme Supply Review which had been welcomed by the Government and the independent sector – had virtually all its recommendations adopted by the Secretary of State and incorporated into the Communications Act and will be comprehensively followed up by Ofcom.

Finally, I should like to give credit to the staff of the ITC who have endured a period of organisational change and upheaval involving much personal uncertainty. All but a few will be moving to Ofcom, others have chosen to move to new jobs elsewhere, retire or take redundancy. All have been involved one way or another with building a structure for the future, drafting the new legal instruments and taking forward the policy thinking from where the Commission leaves off, while, at the same time, continuing to undertake the ITC's regulatory functions with the utmost professionalism to the end of the year.

Sir Robin Biggam

2 REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY ACROSS ITV1, CHANNEL 4, FIVE AND TELETEXT

This is the final ITC report on the provision of public service broadcasting (psb). It was prepared early in December and cannot therefore offer a view of the full year or include a final statistical analysis of licensees' services. At that point it appeared that ITV, Channel 4 and Five were on course to meet their statutory public service broadcasting remits.

In a year when multichannel homes became the majority, the public service broadcasters found it harder than ever to hold on to viewers and, in some weeks, both BBC1 and ITV drew lower audience share than the total achieved by satellite and cable channels. Only Five managed to increase its overall share, the others suffering losses. ITV did, however, staunch the large losses of recent years, with only a small further decline.

The Iraq war was the major event of the year and it underlined again the extent to which citizens value television as a news source. ITC research indicated that television was the main source of international news for the vast majority of people in the UK. During the war, audiences for news bulletins doubled. There were mixed views of the coverage itself (61 per cent actually thought there was too much) but over half felt that it was balanced, with Channel 4 and Five rated the best in this respect.

ITV had a long wait before the approval of a Carlton-Granada merger arrived in October. ITV then announced an increase of seven per cent in the network programme budget for 2003/4. ITV's Statement of Programme Policy for 2003/4 itemised what distinguishes it from other commercial channels – its regionality, its investment in original UK production and its range of public service obligations that 'are expected to continue... into the new regulatory regime overseen by Ofcom'.

ITV offered a diverse schedule to its target mass audience. Drama performed particularly well, with *Coronation Street* again attracting the highest ratings. ITV's successful entertainment formats continued to draw huge audiences. Factual programming was generally less impressive with several programmes delayed until 2004 and *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* uneven in range and quality. Regional news suffered from continuing poor inheritance from network programmes and competitive scheduling. These factors and others prejudiced ITV's ability to compete as strongly as it should with the BBC.

Channel 4 is required to focus more on minority audiences, on experiment and innovation, on education and diversity. At the same time, as a commercial broadcaster, it must also show programmes that will attract larger audiences and advertising revenue. In 2002 the ITC called for more innovation and Channel 4 responded with some challenging material, often in peak-time, while adding an experimental slot to its late night schedules. Encouragingly, the overall amount of news, current affairs and factual material was at an all-time high, with educational material also increased. However, the impression remains that the channel has not quite struck the difficult balance between the demands of its remit and its search for ratings winners. The 16 to 34 age group is, of course, important, but the channel's entertainment, largely aimed at this age-range (and not to all tastes), has had mixed success even with the target audience. The channel has also still not identified its audience for drama and the uneven provision of arts was disappointing, given that when programmes did appear they were often exceptional.

Five moved into profit for the first time and built further on the strengths in factual programming, notably well-scheduled arts and history, introduced over the last two years. There was slightly less reliance on films, though acquired programming remained key to its audience share, and its range of quality original programming remained narrow. Entertainment hits were still elusive.

News

News programmes this year were dominated by the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Comprehensive (and expensive) coverage of the most media intense war in history was provided on all channels, with ITV scheduling an extra bulletin at 9pm for the duration of the war, with audiences reaching 9 million for one programme. During the year to date, ITV's news programmes have seemed more confident and assured, especially on consumer and health issues, and in tune with their market. But the new and leaner contract with ITN makes it more difficult for them always to compare in-depth with their competitors. Channel 4 News retained its reputation for analytical coverage, though the rapidly changing picture made some programmes more 'reactive' than usual. *Five News* benefited from pooled reports provided by stations with larger budgets, and its coverage was characteristically accessible, while *Sky News* provided unmatched rolling coverage.

Channel 4 also launched its *News at Noon* during the year, while in October ITV proposed and the ITC agreed that the late news on weekdays could be transmitted at 10.30pm, but with provisos for regional programming and budget protection for ITN.

Current affairs

Channel 4 is the mainstay of current affairs on the commercial channels and series like *Unreported World* and *Dispatches* contributed significantly towards the channel's remit for international coverage, with Iraq, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe prominent. There have also been several high profile personality-based programmes and the more analytical... *On Trial* series, but the channel's aims of series on major policy issues and more programmes with multicultural bases have only been partially realised.

Apart from its annual John Pilger special, ITV depended largely on *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* and the reliable *Jonathan Dimbleby*. The former certainly attracted significant audiences (often 3 million to 4 million) to current affairs and achieved several coups, though the range was compromised by too high a concentration on health and lifestyle issues, and with little attempt to look beyond our shores.

Five sought to 'transform' its coverage in 2003 with major investigative documentaries and ultra-topical programmes. Such material is expensive and Five's efforts to date fell short of transformation. The accessible daytime discussion show *The Wright Stuff* remained the basis of Five's contribution.

Documentaries and factual

The three psb channels, taken together, delivered an appropriately comprehensive service of factual programmes, complementing each other to serve most tastes with a range of often high quality programmes.

Channel 4 continued to provide the most challenging material across the widest range of subject matter – notwithstanding a concentration in the mid-evening schedule of lifestyle-driven programmes. The channel had a creditable list of programmes from the popular *Wife Swap* through *The Last Peasants* and *The First World War* to the harder to watch *The Day I Will Never Forget* on female circumcision, and *Child Sex Trade*. *Cutting Edge* included many powerful programmes, drawing in some audiences of over four million. An unhappy bunching of programmes on sexual issues in October, in particular, raised again last year's concerns about the level of such content.

ITV played safe for most of the time with established audience pleasers such as *Airline, the... from Hell* strand and late night sex series, but still mounted the occasional *Real Life* and other single documentaries of note; regrettably, much of the more heavyweight material promised in its statement failed to appear. When well publicised, programmes like *Living with Michael Jackson* can attract audience figures of a genuinely mass-appeal channel, though the bravely scheduled *Maggie – The First Lady* proved less attractive.

Five packed more factual material into the key 8pm to 10pm slot than the other two channels. Though rather over-dependent on history, warfare and archaeology, their factual output has continued to mature.

Adult education and social action

There were many commendable initiatives during the year from Channel 4, with history and property programming no longer as dominant. Archaeology, architecture and science/technology were all represented with the series *The Theory of Everything* particularly worthy of note. *Born to Be Different* was a well-received three part series on disability. Five also contributed a variety of material with *The History of British Sculpture*, another sign of the move up-market. ITV's *This Morning* fulfilled the promise to cover health, parenting and other lifestyle issues (with associated factsheets and web site information) while *Don't Drop the Coffin* belied its humorous title to be an informative series on funeral directors.

Schools

As usual, Channel 4 far exceeded the minimum requirement for schools programming. Teachers' support material, particularly in resources for secondary schools, is now largely web-based which seems to reflect the needs of those who use it.

Daytime Factual

ITV has indicated that 'the juggernaut that was ITV daytime is being re-engineered'. Though *This Morning* and *Trisha* (which attracts 40 per cent share) remain, new shows like *Today with Des and Mel* and *I Want That House* have been introduced. Channel 4 reorganised its afternoon line-up, to the annoyance of many *Countdown* fans.

Drama

Viewers were well served this year with an impressive range from historical to contemporary. ITV's increased investment allowed it to match the BBC in terms of quantity, to include a wide variety of formats and to schedule a number of landmark titles: *The Second Coming*, *Sons and Lovers* and *The Forsyte Saga*, while *Henry VIII*

attracted younger viewers and 7.5 million overall. Many single dramas and mini-series were also popular with critics and viewers. ITV introduced new series for its heartland audience though not all could sustain a peak-time audience.

The soap landscape changed with the demise of *Crossroads*, *Night and Day* and Channel 4's *Brookside* but, with *Emmerdale* sometimes reaching six episodes a week, the peak output remained unchanged. *Coronation Street* attracted both very large audiences (up to 17 million) and awards.

Channel 4 again failed to spark the renaissance it has sought. Though there were some acclaimed high-profile pieces (*The Deal*, *Second Generation*, *Buried*), and the late-night *Outside* zone offered a valuable outlet for more experimental work, there was no sign yet of a long-running series to join the successful *Teachers*, and the channel fell short of its promise to show original drama for 50 weeks of the year.

Arts

The BBC's renewal of its arts coverage has not been matched at Channel 4 where, despite ambitious and award-winning projects like *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *Operatunity*, the provision has been down in the last two years.

Five continued to focus on the point where arts and religion intersect in series like *Easter in Art*, while also offering programmes to tie in with major exhibitions such as those on *Titian*, *Art Deco and the Gothic*. Though with limited audiences, such programmes have been scheduled in peak-time.

The South Bank Show maintained its high standards on ITV where Melvyn Bragg's ambitious *The Adventure of English* concluded.

Comedy and Entertainment

Though new ideas remained thin on the ground, ITV's *I'm a Celebrity Get Me out of Here* and *Pop Idol* again proved to be winners, while popular stars like Frank Skinner, Ant and Dec and Harry Hill provided a welcome alternative to game shows and 'reality' formulae. *Creature Comforts* was a novel animated series, prominently scheduled. A number of Channel 4's entertainment shows, notably *Boys and Girls*, failed to attract the young audience they sought. More successful were *Without Prejudice*, *My New Best Friend* and *Peepshow* while the channel continued to do well with returning series like *Phoenix Nights* and *The Book Group*. Five's early evening show, *Live with...* fared no better when Chris Moyles was replaced by Christian O'Connell.

Both Channel 4 and Five found new life in magic shows of one sort or another, from the more traditional to the less easily classifiable performances of David Blaine and Derren Brown.

Children's

The twenty dedicated children's channels, including those operated by the BBC, put great pressure on commercial psb channels. ITV responded to a declining audience for Ctv by strengthening the commissioning team and expressing faith in the value of original programming. Ctv increasingly concentrates on the 6 to 10 age range. It has started to outrate BBC1 on some days. Other channels similarly have narrowed their

focus to concentrate on particular age groups, Five with preschool children and Channel 4 with teenagers.

Religion

The Central Religious Advisory Committee was supportive of the range and variety of religious programming across the channels, though noting the danger that controversial and ‘challenging’ programmes can outweigh those reflecting the faith and beliefs of millions. The increase in full worship services on ITV was welcomed though the need to pre-record for financial reasons remained a sore point. The remembrance service from St Bride’s, the journalists’ church, was particularly moving. ITV series like *Sex and Religion* and *John Meets Paul* were also praised, though the late night scheduling was regretted.

Channel 4 supplied some outstanding programming – *Blaming the Jews, Some of My Best Friends are...*, *The Hajj* – and Rowan Williams’s appearance in a short series of discussions of ethical issues was a major coup. Five continued to offer a quirky alternative with series like Brian Sewell’s *The Naked Pilgrim*.

Sport

Despite Sky’s commitment to dominating major sports coverage – reportedly, nine million viewers, over half of them in pubs and clubs, watched the Turkey-England football match – the commercial companies still managed to offer a good range. ITV included football with the Champions League and, for the last time, The Premiership, Formula 1 motor racing and cycling’s Tour de France. The Rugby World Cup exceeded all expectations, with the final attracting up to 14.5 million viewers, a high proportion of them ABC1 males (though not all the ‘home country’ matches were on ITV1 as promised). Channel 4’s admired cricket and horseracing coverage continued, and skiing was added, while Five contributed coverage of US sports. Sky and the BBC have taken a lead in multi-screen interactive developments that others have yet to follow.

Multicultural

Channel 4, with its clear multicultural remit, fulfilled its promises on the appointment of ethnic staff and work with independents to improve diversity in production, and the results of these initiatives are now awaited. Series like *Soul Nation* and *Segregated Britain*, the diverse casting of *Twelfth Night*, the rare oriental coverage in the *China TV* series and the presentation teams on Channel 4 News represented real achievements. But the lack of ethnic comedy remained a weakness and a high proportion of multicultural material appeared after midnight.

ITV’s drama, arts and children’s programmes showed a real determination to ensure multicultural representation, though entertainment shows were often disappointing in this respect. Five brought Chris Eubank into the nation’s homes but the aim of ‘broad cultural representation’ remained a target, in factual programming in particular.

Nations and Regions

Licensees delivered the range of programmes indicated in their Statements, and were on target to achieve the necessary amount, with significant extra hours supplied by Scottish, Grampian, HTV Wales and UTV during the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish elections.

The audience share for ITV regional news programmes continued to suffer from poor inheritance and strong competition. HTV West's news share improved significantly. Border's Lookaround remained the most popular commercial regional news service in the country with share over 30 per cent.

Anglia, Granada and YTV all invested in new sets and graphics for their 1800 bulletins. There were other investments in news resources. UTV and YTV spent significant sums on technology and hardware to enhance their ability to inject live material into news and other regional programmes, HTV Wales opened a new news centre in Colwyn Bay, while Central installed a new set and virtual studio for its West news service. Grampian moved to its new headquarters as part of a £5 million investment which included a new fully digital newsroom. New technology and working practices inevitably have an effect on jobs, for example, Meridian's proposed move in Southampton and the integration of the LNN news service into ITN; and the full impact of restructuring following the ITV merger remains to be seen. These changes will need to deliver better on-screen performance and enable ITV to improve on its generally declining audiences for regional programmes.

The scheduling and performance of current affairs across the year was patchy with a greater tendency to show current affairs programmes at 10.30pm or later, with fewer series in peak. The broadcasters in the nations continued to offer extensive coverage of political issues both in news and current affairs programmes.

There was a good range of diverse material overall and an over-reliance early in the year on content common to more than one licensee was dealt with.

All licensees were on course to meet the requirement of the Charter for the Nations and Regions in terms of scheduling the appropriate numbers of slots in and around peak. However, it was hard to identify any significant extra investment in non-news peak-time programmes as might have been expected. The network pre-empting of regional slots at short notice, particularly on Sundays, remained an issue.

GMTV

GMTV had six million viewers a day and built its share up to an impressive 10 per cent lead on the BBC, its additional viewers largely attracted from satellite channels. News coverage was good and the Sunday programme's political and religious coverage is valuable. The pre-school programme *Boobah* (made with ITV) has done well in terms of audiences, overseas sales and merchandising. Onscreen diversity has not been achieved across the service to date and the company's assurances that it is addressing the issue must be seen to bear fruit.

Teletext

Teletext attracted 18 million viewers each week although commercially the service relies heavily on the holiday market which was affected by the Iraq war and the 'Sars' crisis. The company has embarked on a 10 year contract to supply editorial and commercial text services to accompany Channel 4 services, including the replacement of the FourText programme listing pages.

Equal Opportunities

The past year has been one of consolidation within the terrestrial broadcasting sector. Across the 19 licensee companies there has been a decrease of over 1,100 staff (11.7 per cent), from 9,524 reported in 2002 to 8,402 this year. Only three companies, Channel 5, Border and Scottish have maintained or increased their staff numbers.

Gender: The employment of women remained steady at 46.6 per cent (2002: 46.5 per cent) as did their employment status, with 44 per cent of them employed on permanent contracts.

Ethnicity: Minority ethnic representation has improved against the background of reductions in staffing. Ethnic minority employment now accounts for 7.1 per cent amongst all UK terrestrial licensees compared to 5.9 per cent reported last year. Eight companies actually increased the number of minority ethnic staff that they employ, and it is encouraging to see also an increase in the proportion of permanent contracts. Of particular concern in this year's statistics is the significant decline in the percentage of minority ethnic staff involved in programmes – down from 6.5 per cent of all programme staff in 2002 to 4.5 per cent this year. Licensees and the broadcasters' Cultural Diversity Network need to explore and reverse this trend.

Disability: Although under-reporting makes firm conclusions hazardous, the number of staff with disability reported by all licensees in 2003 was only 108 (1.3 per cent of all employees), compared to 154 (1.6 per cent) in 2002. This is very disappointing, particularly as 2003 was the European Year for People with Disabilities, during which the ITC and the Broadcaster and Creative Industries Disability Network (BCIDN) ran a series of workshops for programme makers and HR Directors, to assist in attracting more disabled people into front-of-camera and behind-the-scene roles; and the ITC subsequently published *Make A Difference, a guide for programme makers*. A number of licensees have indicated that disability issues will be a particular focus next year.

Training

Many licensees reported a continuation of the initiatives mentioned in their 2002 reports while uncertainty about the Carlton/Granada merger led to more cost-effective training solutions. There was a concentration on developing managerial skills with a number of licensees providing management and leadership development skills programmes in conjunction with business schools.

Some licensees are continuing to expand their portfolio of e-learning activities for staff. The growing costs of traditional off-the-job training delivery saw a continuing shift towards more on-the-job training options coupled with a move to give more responsibility to individuals for their own professional development. Total spend for off-the-job training has remained steady at approximately £12.5m (2002: £12.4 million) with an average of 2.5 training days per head (2002: 2.4 per head) for all staff.

The regulation of training has been under discussion throughout 2003. Skillset set up the Skillset/Ofcom Task Force at the request of the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport. It reported in October and it is now for Ofcom to decide how to take forward its recommendations.

Complaints and Compliance

The trend in 2003 has been for an increase in complaints about both programmes and advertising, although no sanctions were imposed on public service broadcasters during the year.

On ITV, 34 viewers complained about a *Pop Idol 2* promotion involving the blowing up of a toy tortoise, most of them upset that it was shown after a programme for small children. These complaints were upheld, but 50 complaints about the treatment of insects and animals in *I'm a Celebrity, Get me out of Here* were rejected, as were 41 complaints about Richard Hillman's attack on Emily Bishop in *Coronation Street* and 45 alleging religious offence in the drama *Second Coming*.

The only Five programme to attract a large number of complaints (37) was *Camera, Lights, Action* in which a man swung a small child in an alarming manner. Complaints were upheld.

In November, the ITC's Sanctions Sub-Committee met to consider a report on Sky News broadcast during the Iraqi war which purported to show a missile being fired at Iraq from a submarine. The Committee considered that the report had seriously breached two sections of the *Programme Code* in terms of due accuracy and as a misleading 'reconstruction' and that although there were strong mitigating circumstances, a sanction was justified.

Viewer reaction to television commercials reached new heights with the *Wrigleys Xcite* advertising. 860 viewers complained of having been revolted or made physically sick by the image of the dog being regurgitated from a man's mouth to demonstrate his 'dog's breath' halitosis: the largest number of people to complain about a single advertisement in television advertising history. The complaints were upheld and the advertisement was permanently withdrawn.

Two other commercials drew large numbers of complaints. 318 viewers found an advertisement for a magazine – *Take a Break* – offensive because it used the scenario of an elderly lady seemingly abandoned by a mobile meals service whilst the driver had a break to read the magazine. The ITC upheld these complaints, but not those of the 323 who objected to seeing a range of naked bottoms in a *Velvet* toilet tissue advertisement.

The beginning of the year saw a trend towards mocking homosexuals. Complaints were upheld against *WKD*, a Vodka based alco-pop, and *Yahoo*, an internet bank, for using offensive and outdated homosexual stereotypes in a manner which some viewers described as capable of encouraging the acceptance of anti-gay behaviour.

Noteworthy in 2003 was a surge of interventions against satellite and cable channels. *Auctionworld* and *Shop America* were both fined during the year for breaches of the *Advertising Code*, while *Ideal World* was required to broadcast an apology. You TV incurred two financial penalties for breaches of both *Advertising* and *Programme Codes*. The Swedish channel, Kanal Fem, was required to broadcast an apology for including sexual activity in its version of *Big Brother*, while Living TV was directed not to repeat some programmes from its late night *Sex Court* series.