

Consultation Question 6: What do you think about the opportunities for collaboration we have referred to? Are there other opportunities or barriers we haven't identified? P.54

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to the consultation. Our seminar group studied a number of the questions in the consultation, but here I am choosing to specifically respond to question six.

1. British public service media companies are sitting targets that do not have the stature of muscle to hold off the onslaught of American media companies. Just as the net has been colonised by Google, Facebook, and Amazon, the same risks happening to the UKs smaller PSBs if something radical is not attempted. So, I make the following proposals that may enable UK PSBs to not just keep a foothold in the UK, but also make gains internationally - which I think must happen if UK PSBs want to grow their income, brand, and influence.
2. Britain can and must learn from its mistakes from the past, and the previous barriers to cooperation must not be used as a way to prevent further coalescing between UK PSBs. This is surely the UKs only real - and maybe last - chance of being able to represent themselves internationally against the US behemoths. A lot of the UK media is already owned by foreign

interests¹, and if the UK wants to be able to represent itself both domestically and internationally, then it is surely imperative that it maintains a significant British presence in PSM. We have ample and obvious evidence of what a lack of plurality² and transparency in media ownership has done for the UK print media³; the idea of this happening to broadcast PSM as well must be considered unthinkable.

3. Firstly, to achieve this ambitious objective, all British media content should be removed from the large American platforms such as: Amazon Prime, Disney+, Netflix etc. This act would prevent UK audiences abandoning already existing platforms from the UK PSBs and fleeing to their US counterparts. It is important for the PSBs to keep their audiences, as much as possible, in their own walled garden or platforms; this is something Apple, Amazon, Google, and Facebook figured out and constantly strive to do.

4. Secondly, Britbox - or equivalent - needs to be made available internationally so that international audiences are driven to a central British

¹ Rupert Murdoch/news UK, Sky/Disney, Channel 5/Viacom

² <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/about/media-pluralism>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/oct/21/uk-media-plurality-threatened-by-dominant-group-of-large-firms-report>

platform that can provide audiences with the content that our PSBs have to offer from the UK.

5. I understand this may be a somewhat complicated process given the issue of rights and the partners involved such as: BBC Worldwide, BBC America, and other commercial associates. However, this is surely not insurmountable as we already have ample evidence from the American platforms that this is achievable if the will is there. Speaking of which, we only have to look to Netflix and their pricing models to see this could potentially be an area ripe for exploitation. The money earned from the international audience could be reinvested back into making original home-grown content that would air domestically on the PSBs, and internationally on a Britbox type platform. But this would only work as long as content from British PSBs was not available elsewhere internationally; this would be essential for the success of a British Netflix/Prime/Disney+ type collaboration. Equally, the BBC currently has one of the best online video players and mobile apps, and it is crucial that Britbox - or similar - has the same excellent video player and app. However, the equivalent online platforms for ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 currently lag behind what the BBC has to offer, both on desktop and mobile app. Here is an area where BBC cooperation with their rivals would be of huge benefit and would help those commercial PSB platforms

improve their online desktop and app experience, which would in turn help ensure audiences spend more time there than going to their American rivals.

6. There needs to be a more robust guarantee of high-quality sport on free-to-air PSB channels; not everyone wants or can afford to subscribe to premium TV. This has been a perennial problem since Rupert Murdoch entered the fray and bought the rights to a lot of sport. The argument from Sky is that they have pumped millions of pounds into British sport that could not be done by the PSBs, and whilst this is true, it must be weighed against the notion of the public interest. Where is the next generation of athletes going to come from if they cannot watch their favourite cricketer, runner, racing driver that is exclusively on subscription and/or pay per view service which their parents may not have.

7. With this in mind, a good example of this collaboration in recent years has been the pooling of resources to acquire rights to the Six Nations rugby tournament by the BBC and ITV to broadcast live matches. Even more recently (2020) we saw the agreement to broadcast Premier League football matches live on free-to-air PSBs for the first time since the beginning of the Premiership – now Premier League – when the rights were originally sold to satellite broadcaster Sky. It can be argued the creation of

the Premiership and Murdoch buying the rights to it is what truly enabled Sky to build its brand and customer base. However, as football is culturally significant to the UK, there is an argument that more live domestic football should be available on PSBs. This is especially relevant as Amazon is also moving in this direction and is acquiring rights to Premier League football for its subscription Prime service. There are also constant rumours of Facebook wanting to move into this arena too, surely in the knowledge that that is how Sky grew its business in the UK; after all it was not films but sport, and more importantly, football, that achieved this.

8. The UK risks being a small fish in a small pond in its own back yard. For ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, and to a lesser extent the BBC, it is vital for them to strengthen their collaboration efforts with each other. By pooling their resources which could include financial, technological, and production could enable these PSBs to continue to provide high quality content which would be attractive to UK audiences and international audiences alike. Ultimately, a policy such as this has the potential to benefit UK PSBs and the wider culture industry in the UK as a whole.

Thank you for taking the time to read this; I hope it is of some use and I wish you good luck with the consultation.