

The future of Children's Television Programming Ragdoll response to Ofcom discussion paper.

We recommend encouraging Government to change the existing tier status and regulatory framework to provide ongoing statutory protection rather than current co-regulation/market forces. Production and broadcast quotas and/or other safeguards for UK (and EU) originated content are necessary – this is important for the viewers and also the UK economy by supporting our creative industries.

This suggested change should apply to all PSBs including the BBC to ensure we maintain creative competition. We need a healthy and strengthened BBC to survive current budgetary pressures and cuts and we must resist top-slicing their licence fee income unless allied to a major ring-fenced increase specifically for the children's sector.

Children's TV protection should be consistent with overall PSB review but timing is critical and therefore the Children's genre merits urgent action before it is too late.

Children's – whilst we agree that factual and drama are currently most at risk, we should not assume younger and pre-school are safe as this audience is certain to come under more funding pressure as budgets continue to be diluted – perceived, but not necessarily real, commercial viability is not enough to ensure the future of quality and innovative content. Our experience is that it is harder than ever to raise deficit funding whilst barriers to international markets are increasing.

In the short term the following separate funding proposals will help, but to make any real difference they are all needed:

- Tax credits are fundamental to making additional funding available, although this should apply to all children's content not just limited sub-genres – projects that are part funded this way and become commercially successful will return the tax credit on profits generated.

- 3rd party commercial sponsorship should be available to directly fund production costs rather than be retained by broadcasters – this would need to be agreed as part of production “terms of trade” but should have regulatory support and a mechanism to ensure appropriateness of brand association.
- A Children’s Creative Industries Government Fund should be made available to encourage innovative development work whilst supporting new, and retaining existing talent.
- Lottery and other charitable foundation funding should be encouraged although there are risks that the work could be marginalised.

Even if the funding situation is improved from new initiatives, the question of available platforms needs to be considered in tandem – it is not enough to have adequately funded content if there is no outlet e.g. even the existence of “free” programmes is unlikely to prompt ITV to revisit its terrestrial weekday schedule. With additional funding available we should work with, and maximise the potential of, existing television channels before creating a new Public Service entity that provides greater fragmentation and limited impact.

Ragdoll

20 December 2007