

Response from the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland of Ofcom to Consultation on Renewal of C4 Licence

- We agree that the 10 year licence should go to C4 but it does give them greater responsibility and flexibility to do more for production in the nations than their proposal of 9%.
- Ofcom's own research shows that C4 is rated as portraying 'my nation/region fairly to the rest of the UK' less favourably than other PSB providers and we would be interested to find out what this figure might be for NI. We also note that the percentage of production for network by volume in NI has failed even to make 1% in each of the last five years.
- It is unclear to us both in reading the documentation and hearing from C4 executives themselves at a meeting in Belfast (18th Sept.), how this figure of 9% has been reached. Nor do we think that if C4 is already providing between 5-7% that this is a very ambitious target.
- We would recommend a target of 17%, as it already is for the BBC. (This figure is based on population). We would then propose that if this more ambitious target were agreed there could be more flexibility on the timescale for reaching the top percentage e.g. 2020/2024.
- We are not convinced by the argument that it is easier for BBC to 'lift and shift' production to the nations than it is for C4 as a publisher/broadcaster to commission from Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.
- Regarding nations' quotas it is not acceptable to aggregate the nations' production. Inevitably this would mean the country with the largest production base would win. Without a commitment to a Northern Ireland quota the independent production base will fail to grow and could indeed wither as the super-indies acquire more of the commissions. Given C4's history of effectively creating a market for, initially, small indie production companies, it would be unfortunate if Ofcom was to allow C4 to effectively favour the bigger indie by not ring-fencing a quota for the smaller nations.
- With Northern Ireland taking a lead in film production we would like to see as many opportunities for this skilled work force to be working in TV production as well. Indeed this is a great advantage now for C4 in terms of receiving commissions of a high standard in all genres.
- C4 has long recognised the need to spread its production spend - first to outside the M25 and then outside England. The next logical step is more clearly defined geographical commitment. It is 15 years after the devolution settlement time, therefore it is surely time for C4 to recognise the entitlement of each nation to a proportionate share of the UK PSB production spend.

Ofcom Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland – 14th October 2013