

Northern Visions/NvTv

Belfast Community Television

www.nvtv.co.uk

Response to the consultation: Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review - Phase One: The Digital Opportunity consultation

Northern Visions is an open access media centre offering skills training, project support, advice and access to resources in film and television production. An active citizenship programme gives production opportunities to people marginalised by mainstream media or denied self and/or collective expression.

Northern Visions holds the licence from OFCOM for the free-to-air, terrestrial local television service broadcasting to the Belfast area, NvTv. Broadcasting, through NvTv, enables local community/cultural groups, individual artists and filmmakers and interested citizens to communicate and engage with the wider public.

These are not-for-profit community ventures, which seek to create a civic space where:

- *new faces are brought to the screen;*
- *local issues are presented in informative and entertaining ways;*
- *health, education and economic resources in the community are promoted;*
- *local talent and cultural initiatives are celebrated and participation;*
- *is inclusive of all underrepresented communities (whether geographical, racial, ethnic, cultural or generational).*

An important element of this service is to act as a forum for public discussion and good relations and to promote community access to television broadcasting.

Currently NvTv broadcasts, a terrestrial picture, with an analogue frequency - (Channel 62/ 799.276MHz).

In relation to Ofcom's main objective of furthering the interests of citizen-consumers; in particular, developing "*a new broadcasting licensing regime to foster self-regulation and broaden citizen/consumer choice*" we believe that Ofcom should consider acceptance of local community television as public service broadcasters.

One of the difficulties for anyone responding to an Ofcom consultation about alternative and new services within the public service broadcasting arena is that the majority of people, particularly in England & Wales, are not aware that there are alternatives to public service broadcasting such as local television because they have not had access to it in their area. Their frame of reference tends to be the BBC and commercial television services.

We agree with Ian Stewart, MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Community Media when he stated '*UK citizens are amongst the least well served in the entire democratic world for access to local news and information from television. I feel very*

strongly that local TV must be extended so that everyone has access to a local channel on Freeview no matter where they live and without the need to subscribe to pay-TV or the Internet’.

Northern Ireland has been in the forefront of providing local television services in the UK and both of its two local television stations have enjoyed widespread support within the community since Ofcom issued licences to them.

In the case of Northern Visions/NvTv this community support has been recognised by central government, which has supported certain initiatives including research and development for Northern Visions/NvTv via the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, a training and programme production via the Irish Language Broadcast Fund and Renewing Communities (St Andrews Agreement: Annex B which sought to ‘improve life prospects and public service and a shared future’). We have also enjoyed local authority support. Northern Visions/NvTv is recognised as one of the city’s flagship arts organisations by Belfast City Council through its MAF support programme.

Local TV remains the most significant ‘additional’ public demand for PSB (or universal service) (HPO 2006). It was recognised that local television was necessary to revitalize “maintain and strengthen PSB in the future” (Ofcom, 2007).

We believe local television remains the missing element in the UK’s public service broadcasting.

Research Findings

The latest research by Ofcom only serves to reinforce what has been known since at least the early 1970s. Local Television was the most demanded new application in Ofcom’s Digital Dividend Review consumer research. In Ofcom’s research, “local TV on Freeview” was the number one new application demanded by consumers, ahead of both “extra Standard Definition channels” and “High Definition on Freeview”.

Importance to you personally of services that could use digital dividend spectrum

Order of popularity	Application	Mean average score out of 10
1	Local TV on Freeview	6.3
2	Extra SD channels on Freeview	6.2
3	Better mobile phone coverage and mobile broadband	5.9
4	Wireless home networks	5.7
5	HD on Freeview	5.6
6	Mobile TV	3.3

Q8.3a “For each of these services please score each on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means extremely important and 0 means not at all important to you personally” (mean scores are shown). Source: Ipsos

These latest findings confirm Ofcom's research in its first PSB review...for example...

"The English regions are often too large to be relevant to most viewers, who tend to live most of their day-to-day lives within at most 25 miles of their homes and be most interested in news and community issues within that range. Both our qualitative and quantitative research suggests that people identify most strongly with their neighbourhood, town and city. If there were ways of delivering cost-effective TV services at this level, we believe they would be significantly more compelling than current regional provision."

Similarly, Ofcom's review, *Digital Local*, acknowledged the important public service role played by local (rather than regional) television. It acknowledged that the many benefits of local services were unlikely to be provided by commercial concerns. It highlighted that a dedicated block of capacity on a national public-service broadcasting multiplex for local channels would be best suited to provide local television.

As Northern Visions/NvTv supports the United for Local Television submissions to Ofcom, we will not duplicate the arguments here, other than to say that our vision is of an inclusive society, which is respectful, embracing and reflective of all people's cultures and backgrounds.

Local public service television has a crucial role to play in achieving this.

Active Citizenship

Despite some insurmountable odds, most of which was connected to the current UK broadcast and engineering framework, Northern Visions has sought to empower citizens to become content providers and creators of media that reflects and raises awareness of local issues and interests.

There are many aspects of this work, which have been tremendously successful. Thousands of people have been given an opportunity to participate and there has been a bedrock of volunteer support from members of the public and from community and cultural organisations. In this, the sense of pride about the work being done at a grassroots level in the community and the collective wish to share experiences, build relationships and interconnect with others and to actively participate to improve quality of life for all, has always been evident.

The issues we grapple with are not local people's enthusiasm and support for local television but the inadequacies of the framework in which we operate the distribution system of local television, including a flawed frequency. In this, we recognise that Ofcom has made some efforts to find a solution and we trust that this will continue apace.

Community Radio

On the wider community media front, we believe there is a need to recognise the importance of community radio in the provision of public service broadcasting given the deep connections which the community stations sector have built up with the communities they serve. Like local television, these diverse communities constitute the "public" that public service broadcasting is dedicated to serve.

In Northern Ireland, Ofcom should consider extending the Raidió Fáilte Irish language service coverage, currently provided for Belfast, to make it more accessible for other Irish speaking communities in Northern Ireland. This would also serve as a model for the many minority languages spoken in the region.

Cultural Diversity & Language

Diversity of culture and of language is central to many of our communities and UK community radio and local television stations are reflecting this. Ofcom should recognise and facilitate this diversity, including the facilitation of minority indigenous languages.

We would also wish to point out that the lack of domestic legislation with regard to indigenous languages in Northern Ireland leads to uncertainty about rights and the responsibilities of broadcasters. In turn this impacts on funding and status, broadcasting provision and sectoral development.

It is also important, we feel, that in terms of public service broadcasting, as well as an increase in broadcasting a variety of Irish language, Ulster Scots, Cantonese and Mandarin (for example) programming, there is also a need for programming, which reflects identity, culture and heritage. These programmes could be in the language concerned, bilingual or in English and should be viewed as cultural output not language output.

These issues, and many others, which relate generally to plurality and diversity as previously outlined by United for Local Television submissions are evident across the UK. The Ofcom research findings are there, people want local television. The technology to deliver universal local public service television across the UK currently exists; we can begin to deliver on this TODAY.

Northern Visions, Belfast

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