

Respondent: Mrs Janet Maxwell, Head of Synod Services on behalf of the Church of Ireland Broadcasting Committee

Discussion Paper: The Future of Children's Television Programming

Question 1

Comments on general analysis and conclusions

- 1) The general analysis and conclusions of the report are factually based and effectively presented.
- 2) The emphasis on the public service element of children's programming is very welcome, particularly in a context where funding children's programming is presenting difficulty.
- 3) The impact of children's programming and related multi-platform products is so extensive and significant a part of culture, identity and social development, that maintaining the public service philosophy at the core of this sector, rather than moving to a market driven approach is desirable.

Question 2

Policy approaches recommended by stakeholders

- 1) **Maintain status quo** – bullet point two. The BBC's record in providing quality, diverse children's programming is excellent. Any proposal that would remove or limit a centre of industry excellence might be viewed with caution.
- 2) **Broadcaster based interventions** – would require a strong, competitive market with a clear plan as to how return is to be gained on the programmes. The report indicates that stakeholders do not feel this situation exists in the the market currently, so the feasibility of 'creating' such a model in sustainable form must be open to question.
- 3) **Production incentives** – production incentives, whether tax reliefs, 'public licence fee type support', or new charitable funds. While such public or charitable funding is likely to be a necessary part of any public service children's programming/publishing – careful consideration should be given as to how this is to be allocated. Most broadcasters would be obliged to look for market return, even if dedicated funds or tax credits were to be established. The main mechanism for increasing return would appear to be the development of multi-platform 'add-ons'. Since this is the emerging shape of the future product range for children in the programming/publishing sector, the content of those multi-platform products accessing public or charitable funds should be subject to regulation to address public service needs in respect of children. Such public or charitable funds would inevitably lose credibility if it became apparent that commercial add-on products were being supported in this manner. There may be different cost structures in developing PSB on multi-platform models from traditional broadcasting. Any proposals to develop public funding for children's programming ought to address these costs. As well as special tax credit provisions, special provision in terms of charities legislation may be necessary to establish such funds and some attention given to how their existence would be promoted to industry and public benefactors alike.

- 4) **Extending the remit of existing PSB institutions.** No comment - a question for the regulator and the industry.
- 5) **New institutions** – No comment - a question for the regulator and the industry.

Question Three

Should any of the policy approaches be tailored to different age groups

- 1) Regardless of the policy, it is desirable that the various age-groups and types of programming are provided for.
- 2) While appreciating the cost factors of production, many of the current entertainment programmes tend to draw on participants that are within easy reach of the production centre, which tends to give a rather one dimensional view and sound to much current material. Drama and factual programming may also be coming under some pressure as a format. It would be desirable to see such content sustained.
- 3) As regards policy approaches, it would seem useful that the regulator has some role in monitoring children's programming to ensure that no age-groups are left out and that policy addresses the need for a range of different types of programme.

Questions for the second public service television broadcasting review

Question Four

Role and importance of UK-originated programming?

- 1) The role of UK-originated programming for children is significant in reflecting the cultural and social context of community life, assisting children to understand social and ethical values and behaviours in terms of their individual development.
- 2) The Church also sees the home, the family, the local community and its institutions – the school and the church and youth organisations as other important elements in the developmental environment.
- 3) However, it is significant that to a great extent, children's programming has replaced community story telling and the interaction that accompanies it. This increases the significance of UK-originated programming for the cultural life of children.
- 4) Particularly important are those aspects that help to develop an understanding of how we are as community and society, what we believe, the values we espouse and how we engage as individuals and as groups.

Question Five

What is the role and importance of plurality in the provision of children's programming?

- 1) Society is increasingly pluralist and the various elements are viewed both positively and negatively – children's programming can help children to sift their way through some of the issues that arise as a result of living in a

pluralist society. The issues embraced under the heading of 'plurality' are among the most difficult facing society today.

- 2) Children's programming that does not reflect plurality can become remote and isolating for children. Social comfort and participation is reinforced by a sense of having positive connection and relation with others. One objective that the public service contribution ought to promote in terms of children is the modelling of positive aspects of pluralism as a counter to some of the negative discourse that surrounds this set of issues.
- 3) While every programme cannot reflect the whole range of issues, the regulator should have some input to ensure that plurality is there in the mix.

Question Six

Should further consideration be given to provision of public service content for children over platforms other than linear television?

- 1) Yes.
- 2) These multi-platforms seem more akin to broadcasting than to print media and should, at least initially, be treated similarly.
- 3) The various platforms are usually accessed by children as individuals at a relatively young age so that on an individual basis they make selections and are exposed to accompanying commercial messages. Therefore, public service elements should also be available for consumption to ensure a good range of choice.
- 4) More knowledgeable persons may be able to confirm a view that children process the discourse of multi-platform content in an integrated way, also making the case for maintaining a strong public service element in content across these platforms.
- 5) Therefore, at the outset of a new type of programming/publishing platform, it seems right to recommend provision of public service content throughout.

Question Seven

Does the policy approach for children's programming need to be different to the policy approach taken to public service broadcasting overall?

Any policy adopted should be reviewed against agreed criteria to evaluate its effectiveness.