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Children's programming on PSB channels

Today, Ofcom published the findings from our review of children's programmes on TV and online (available on our website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/childrens-content-review-update.pdf>).

The review was carried out under a new power in the Digital Economy Act of 2017, and specifically asks Ofcom to consider the case for new children's requirements to be applied to the commercial Public Service Broadcasters.

The review focused on current children's provision, at a time when their viewing habits are changing radically, as set out in Ofcom's first Media Nations report last week.

The Review identified three specific areas of concern:

- a) A lack of original, high-quality programmes specifically made for older children across all programme genres.
- b) A limited range of children's programmes that help children to understand the world around them.
- c) A limited range of original, high-quality children's programmes available that allow children to see their lives, reflective of the UK today, played out on screen.

One of the collective responsibilities of PSBs is to provide high quality programming for children. The BBC has enhanced requirements in its new Operating Licence to provide a range of original programmes on CBeebies and CBBC as well as a minimum amount of drama, news and factual programming. Channel 4 has committed to invest more in programmes that appeal to older children through the annual Statement of Media Content Policy process. Channel 5 voluntarily commits to broadcasting a minimum amount of children's programmes each year over the course of its current licence.

We note in the report that the commercial PSBs' provision of UK children's programming varies:

- a) **ITV** showed 47 hours of children's programmes in 2017 from a high of 158 hours in 2006. CITV provides content aimed at 6-12-year olds but only a small proportion of the programmes shown in 2017 was new and UK-made.
- b) **Channel 4** showed 21 hours of programmes of appeal to older children in 2017, but did not show any new UK-made programmes specifically made for children.
- c) **Channel 5** has reduced the number of hours of new UK-made programmes primarily aimed at pre-school children from 150 in 2006 to 32 in 2017.

The Review has found that there is more for PSBs to do. We recognise that children are watching less traditional, broadcast TV. Time spent viewing traditional TV by children has dropped by over 40% in recent years. Brand recognition of PSBs amongst children sits below that of Netflix and YouTube. And 90% of older children are now watching YouTube. And these online platforms – which face lighter regulation – should be doing more to ensure that the material that children are watching is safe and appropriate for them.

We therefore think that the most effective way for PSBs to serve young audiences is by exploiting the internet through innovative ways, and that quotas – which would mandate a set number of programming hours on the main terrestrial PSB channel – have decreasing relevance in an online world. We also recognise that broadcasters are best placed to judge how to serve children more effectively, so that children have the option of high-quality original UK shows – available when and where they want to watch them – sitting alongside what the platforms are providing, which includes a lot of global and US material. It is also clearly in the long term commercial interest of the PSBs to develop reach amongst younger audiences.

We are therefore asking each commercial PSB to develop by end of March 2019 a robust plan for improving their offering to children, with a particular focus on UK-originated content, delivered across the full range of services and platforms (live TV, online or both). We will then report on the resilience of these plans alongside our next Media Nations report (summer 2019).

I look forward to discussing over the coming months.

yours sincerely


Sharon White
