



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Oli Bird
Content, Consumer and External Affairs
Ofcom
Riverside House
2A Southwark Bridge Road
London
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Ref: C109/13

28 March 2013

Dear Oli

Channel 3 and Channel 5: proposed programming obligations

At its meeting on 28 February 2013, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure agreed to respond to Ofcom's consultation *Channel 3 and Channel 5: proposed programming obligations* as it has a vested interest in regional programming in Northern Ireland.

1. UTV proposal to reduce its regional non-news obligation

The Committee notes UTV's proposal to reduce its regional non-news obligation by half an hour a week to bring the regional programming obligations in line with those in Wales and central and northern Scotland.

However, in line with its stance that BBC NI should expand local content in its output, the Committee is therefore **opposed** to UTV's proposal to reduce its regional non-news obligation by half an hour per week.

The Committee is aware of UTV's reasons for the proposal, however it is also mindful of Northern Ireland local audience needs, which are strong for a host of cultural, historical and political reasons. Therefore the Committee believes that

local identity must be retained and that there should be a local dimension to programmes and output to satisfy the requirements of the Northern Ireland audience.

The Committee is also aware of the positive benefits that local TV production brings to our creative industries. That is why the Committee, in its Report on its Inquiry on Maximising the Potential of the Creative Industries, recommended that BBC NI *increase* its level of commissioning of local content and output.

The Committee cannot, therefore, support a reduction in local non-news programmes from UTV. Indeed, the Committee would suggest that an obligation is placed on UTV as part of the Franchise process of the renewal of its licence to produce and commission drama within Northern Ireland.

2. Proposal to Extend Peak Time

The Committee notes the proposal by UTV to extend peak time from the current 6.30pm to 10.30pm slot to 6.30pm to 11pm, so that they could meet some of their regional peak-time obligations by showing programmes between 10.30pm to 11pm.

While the Committee has no objection, in principle, to extend peak time to 11pm, it is concerned that this will negatively impact on UTV's obligations toward regional programmes, particularly if its obligation was reduced from 2 hours per week to 1 hour 30 minutes. The Committee notes UTV's commitment to retain its late evening current affairs programme for the first five years of a new licence period. However this proposal may result in fewer regional programmes on UTV during peak time.

If Ofcom is minded to extend peak time, it may also wish to consider amending UTV's obligation to deliver regional non-news programmes as a percentage of overall programmes broadcast during peak time.

3. Conclusion

The Committee wishes to seek more local content on our screens, and therefore is opposed to the reduction in non-news regional programmes, whether through a change in UTV's obligations or, by default, through the extension of peak time hours. The Committee would suggest that an obligation is placed on UTV to produce and commission drama within Northern Ireland.

As Chairperson of the Committee, I would ask that Ofcom take our views into account when considering the consultation responses.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle McIlveen

Miss Michelle McIlveen
Chairperson
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Cc Mr Jonathan Rose, Ofcom's Director for Northern Ireland
Ms Sinéad Lee, Ofcom's Regulatory Affairs Manager for Northern Ireland