

Response from the ACNI on PSB Review Consultation

ACNI discussed the PSB Review with team members on two occasions and some of the ACNI members were able to attend the Northern Ireland stakeholder consultation event on the PSB Review.

ACNI make the following additional observations and comments.

1. ACNI welcomed the NI Market Context and broadly agreed that it was a fair representation of the situation in NI. However they asked that further information be sought in relation to the creative industries and suggested DCAL, ILEX and Creative Skill set could help.
2. ACNI advised that the PSB Review should strive to ensure fair, reasonable and proportionate representation of the people in NI and advised that as the nature of NI changes this should in turn be better represented. ACNI recognised that this had to be proportionate and in the context of wider diversity.
3. ACNI and the wider stakeholder group were concerned to realise the potential for more network commissions from NI. Levels have increased since 2008 but could increase more. Current levels do not reflect the capabilities and skills of the production companies in NI, and some question whether without assistance the smaller companies can adequately compete? Others suggest this might represent market failure and therefore needs regulatory intervention.
4. There is a need to take into account the potential implications of the greater role for the devolved Governments in broadcasting matters. The proposals for the implementation of the Smith Commission Agreement would give the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament a formal consultative role in relation to the BBC and Ofcom. This sets a path for similar roles for the Welsh Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and their respective Assemblies.
5. BBC iPlayer – which was developed with “licence payers’ money” could be made available to commercial rivals, perhaps as a shared platform for delivering PSB related content - but not in a way that might discourage further innovation.
6. NI broadcasters have traditionally depended on heavy advertising spend from the public sector. This is now being reduced and a less robust advertising market in NI will impact the viability of some providers. Different formats of news provision now also threaten smaller press channels.
7. A key objective of the PSB is to enhance engagement and knowledge. With rapid changes of viewing habits, and the ever increasing number of sources of PSB content, it is essential that the review takes account of these potentially seismic changes and that new arrangements be future proofed in terms of how people access content whether DTT or online.
8. In light of the new forms of digital delivery, it will be important to ensure equality in access to effective broadband connections. Otherwise some consumers and citizens will be deprived of PSB content and the opportunities it provides.

Ofcom Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland (ACNI) response on PSB

9. ACNI is concerned about the funding for indigenous language broadcasting beyond the end of the current funding arrangements in 2015. This is also an issue for stakeholders responding to the PSB consultation.
10. ACNI have noted the changing landscape of linear broadcasting in Northern Ireland, particularly with plans by the Republic of Ireland broadcaster, RTÉ's, plan to offer NI opt-outs for its advertising and the impact that might have on competition, particularly for UTV.

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