

Response to Ofcom
PSB Review: Phase 2





Phase 2 of Ofcom PSB Review

Shed Media plc is one of the UK's leading independent producers of TV content and is the parent group of four major independent producers, Shed Productions, Ricochet, Twenty Twenty and Wall to Wall. Shed Media also owns its own international programme and format sales company, Outright Distribution.

Executives in Shed Media, including Eileen Gallagher, Alex Graham and Chris Bonney have for many years played a major role in media industry policy mainly through the trade association Pact, with the aim of ensuring the strength and viability of the UK production industry in general and the independent sector in particular.

Firstly, we welcome Ofcom's review, and especially the recognition that UK – originated content is fundamental to the delivery of public service broadcasting purposes. Shed Media totally supports Pact's submission and in particular that plurality in public service provision is key.

However there are a couple of key areas we would like to amplify:

We firmly believe that the existence of a wide range of quality UK programmes, made for UK viewers reflecting the variety of cultures around Britain is an essential part of the quality of life in the UK. The abundance of quality entertainment, drama, documentary, factual programming – made for the UK – should never be taken for granted. The provision of news that seeks to be impartial is of course essential to the health of the nation.

This may sound like a platitude but in the debate that gets complicated by the variety of new and exciting distribution platforms and methods of consuming content, there is the danger we forget that what matters to the consumer is *what* it is they are consuming – the content – and less so, *how* they are consuming it. Obviously in the digital age new forms of content will emerge with new opportunities for interaction. However in our view this should not be seen as in any way substitutional for the kind of content our citizens expect from their television whether the content educates us or simply amuses us.

Viewers of course will always have a love hate relationship with the TV services they receive. But the often ferocious debate that can emerge around television programmes we believe underlines the importance the UK population puts on television rather than any disillusionment with it in general. In short, regulators and legislators will not be forgiven for allowing the decline of this valued public asset.

The survival of our four public service broadcasters is far from guaranteed. We see the BBC as the centrepiece of the provision of public service television – across the whole spectrum of genres and support the licence fee as excellent value for money for viewers. However we believe it is critical that the BBC is not the only major provider of quality UK programming. To ensure we have competition for ideas and a variety of voices in the provision of our TV services we must not allow ITV, Channel 4 or Channel Five to undergo financial difficulties or to be allowed to give up their PSB obligation to commission quality UK production from around the nations and regions of the UK.

In particular we believe that it is urgent that additional funding is found to maintain a healthy Channel 4. Channel 4 is a crucial part of our television mix with a distinctive voice and supports innovative projects such as the TRC in Glasgow and 4ip. We believe strongly that it should retain its status as a publicly owned channel and is helped through its present financial crisis.

ITV has paid a high price for being allowed to consolidate its regional businesses with the punishing CCRC. An early release from this obligation is essential to allow the channel to continue being a major investor in UK programming and to once again challenge BBC 1 to the position of the UK's favourite channel.

Thanks to the insightful changes of the 2003 Communications Act, which gave rise to the Terms of Trade, the creative production sector is in relatively good shape and as the Pact submission makes clear, independent producers are major investors in UK originated programmes by leveraging contributions to UK budgets from a range of sources. We want to work in partnership with our broadcasters and not against them. We believe that any changes to the Terms of Trade or in any other way weakening the independent sector will not strengthen these broadcasters but ultimately weaken them by reducing competition between its programme suppliers and overall weakening the UK creative base. For that reason we welcome Ofcom's re-iteration of its support for the sector and the regulations it helped create that allow it to survive and thrive.

Notes to Editors

Major brands include: Waterloo Road, Supernanny, New Tricks, Who Do You Think You Are? The Choir, Extreme Dreams.