

Ofcom: Small Screen: Big Debate

Public service broadcasters and the UK production sector

Evidence from the TUC Yorkshire and Humber Creative and Leisure Industries Committee

The TUC Yorkshire and Humber Creative and Leisure Industries Committee (CLIC) seeks to bring together unions representing workers in these sectors to advocate common collective policies, promote trade union recognition and improvements in pay, working conditions and employment practice and boost sectors that already contribute greatly to the region's economy and social health.

Those involved so far include Artists' Union England, the BECTU sector of Prospect, Equity, the Musicians' Union (MU), NASUWT, National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and UNISON.

Context

The sector depends entirely on individual workers "at the bottom of the creative food chain". Often, these individuals are overlooked entirely by corporate and policy-making interests and others; their voices are not heard and they generally lack the resources or time available to engage in the policy-making process.

Recognition of the value and rights of the fundamental (human) resources without which the sector would cease to function should be a key requirement of for all public service media.

News and current affairs

Maintaining the current PSB remit for impartial, regulated broadcast news services is increasingly urgent. As the viability of regional print and online news outlets remains threatened by internet giants, the need for public service regional news increases and output should be expanded accordingly. Public service media should be required to make a commitment to guarantee the provision of regional news and current affairs.

The Committee CLIC believes that in this era of increasing on-demand and internet viewing, that regional news programming remains of paramount importance. Streaming services may produce drama in the UK nations and regions but they do not produce or broadcast regional or local news.

Regional variations in the prevalence of Covid-19 and the relationship between demographics, socio-economic conditions, industrial activity and public health measures since February 2020 are a forceful reminder of the very nature of *public service* broadcasting and media.

Regional (and sub-regional) news programming must be adequately resourced, with a long-term commitment to the development of necessary skills and expertise, particularly through investment in training, the retention of workers (both staff and freelance) and contracts of employment and engagement that are not time-limited or integral to specific commissions.

Public service media should be required to guarantee the nurturing of future talent across the creative sector (in partnership with existing educational establishments, the trades unions and other agencies).

Wherever possible, regional broadcasters should be required to recruit locally and maintain pre- and post-production facilities locally, using local labour.

The cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the Yorkshire and Humber region is exciting and dynamic but is also exceedingly vulnerable to political exploitation. It is vital that existing fairness standards are maintained as the arrival of “opinionated” news and current affairs broadcasting and media may be seriously detrimental to social cohesiveness that has taken generations to achieve.

Drama

Ofcom's Regional TV Production and Programming Guidance must be further amended so that on-screen talent is included in the criteria for a production to qualify as regional (including those “badged” as produced in one of the UK's nations). Public service media should be required to ensure casting and rehearsing close to the actual production base, regardless of the nominal corporate address. Local performers should be considered for and participate in work made in their respective UK nations and regions. If casting or rehearsals take place elsewhere, travel and subsistence expenses must be paid to ensure appropriate commitments to local economies and communities.

Employment

Far too often, the creative and leisure industries are blighted by poor working conditions, pay levels below government minima, harassment and bullying. Public service media must be required to have transparent and serviceable policies and procedures to prevent this and must ensure these principles are enshrined in all commission arrangements.

The TUC Yorkshire & the Humber 2021 *Cultural Manifesto* calls for local workers to be employed in the construction, development and maintenance of the cultural infrastructure (such as public sector media).

Many workers in the sector are freelance or self-employed, with fewer legal rights than employees. Like employees however, such workers deserve decent pay and conditions and dignity and respect at work. Creative individuals should be free to choose and pursue freelance or staff career paths sure of equitable remuneration and employment rights. Public service media should be required to ensure that freelancers and others, such as students on work experience, are guaranteed parity with staff working conditions.

Royalties for performers and creators from streaming are woefully inadequate. Any extension of the public service media remit to streaming and on-demand services should include a requirement that media organisations (work with the industry and trades unions to) agree an equitable, sustainable and transparent model for royalty distribution.

Equality, fairness and diversity

Creators and the media – especially public service media - should reflect a society where people do not face discrimination under any of the protected characteristics stated in the Equality Act 2010.

Public service media should be required to improve the diversity of the sector's workforce.

Public service media should also be required to liaise formally with secondary, further and higher education in each nation and region to promote the take-up of sector-relevant subjects at GCSE and promote the study of creative, artistic and technical subjects at A level and in further and higher education.