



Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales

Response to Ofcom consultation

Renewal of the Channel 4 Licence

Closing date 10th October

General

We welcome the consultation set out by Ofcom regarding the renewal of the Channel 4 Licence.

As the summary document states this consultation only refers to Channel 4, and not to C4C's portfolio of channels or online services. As broadcasting services increasingly move towards a digital platform, we believe that this is an area that the UK Government and Ofcom need to consider in ensuring fulfilment of public service obligations and ensuring that all of the nations of the UK are adequately reflected on public service broadcasting in the future.

Duration of the licence

In order to ensure sufficient time and stability for Channel 4 we believe that it is appropriate that the Channel 4 licence period is extended for a ten-year period.

The remit

We believe that Channel 4's remit should be reviewed to take into consideration the changes across the UK since devolution. C4C has specific public service remit to, among other aims;

Appeal to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society

Plaid Cymru believes that this needs to be amended to ensure that the public service remit reflects the cultural diversity of the four nations of the UK. There are substantial cultural differences between the nations and we believe that Channel 4, as a public sector broadcaster needs to adequately consider these cultural differences as part of their wider remit.

Portrayal

Ofcom's research indicates that whereas 36% of Channel 4's viewers consider that the Channel '*portrays my region/nation fairly to rest of UK*', this contrasts with the 55% that consider the Channel to '*show different kinds of cultures within the UK*'. This suggests that the present remit does not take enough account of the UK's national and regional diversity.

Whilst a quota gives reasonable protection and justice to the economic interests of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, it is a poor proxy for the representation of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In light of this Plaid Cymru believes that Channel 4 should consider the introduction of soft targets on portrayal as part of the wider public service obligations.

Out of England quota

We welcome the consultation on increasing the out of England quota on the licence conditions for Channel 4. The current requirements on Channel 4 to commission programmes from outside England are 3% in spend and 3% volume of programme which we believe are disappointingly low targets.

Channel 4 currently exceed this quota and last year the out of England spend in programming was 5.4% and volume 7%, which also adds to the confusion of why such a low target was set initially as part of the licence requirements.

Channel 4 have stated that they would like to see a quota of 9% of out of England spend and volume. We believe that it is worth taking into account that Channel 4 have current exceeded the low target of 3% and the increase from the current 7% volume to their proposed 9% by 2020 remains an inadequately low level of quota to place as a condition of the licence.

In 2012 the level of production from Wales was only 1.7% in volume and 3.5% in spend. We are disappointed with this low level of commissioning from Wales.

Plaid Cymru believe an out of England quota of at least 15% should be set for next Channel 4 license period for the following reasons.

- Quotas shape activity. Plaid Cymru believes that it is imperative that Ofcom use this tool to try and ensure that public service broadcasting properly achieves the aim of
"..reflect(ing) the lives and concerns of different communities and cultural interests and traditions within the United Kingdom, and locally in different parts of the United Kingdom."
The current low level of production from Wales means that the current obligations are simply not being met.

- Wales has a thriving and successful independent broadcasting sector and a base to develop upon. Ensuring that more programmes are commissioned outside of England would not mean a determination of quality, creativeness or value.
- Channel 4 does not produce programmes and use external production sources, this makes it possible to look at commissioning more for various parts of the UK as opposed to the restrictions other PSB providers have of using core staff based at a specific location.
- According to the 2011 Census, 16.1% of the population of the UK lives in the nations outside of England, and although this is a simplistic comparison, we believe that there should be an element of ambition in the target set.