

Renewal of Channel 3 licences: proposed changes to licensed area for Wales and West of England Licence and South West of England Licence

Why plurality is important

Plurality in media coverage in Wales is a fundamental cornerstone of the devolution settlement. Plurality is essential to ensure that the Assembly's work is accessible and transparent to as many citizens as possible. It also facilitates robust national debate on the issues that matter to our communities.

The need for plurality in Welsh media is made all the more important by a failure of the UK media to appreciate and relay the huge differences in approach to public policy, in devolved fields such as health and education, to its Welsh audiences. For example, research by Professor Anthony King and Cardiff University's School of Journalism has noted that some of our leading UK broadcasters and news outlets default to an Anglo-centric position where issues affecting England-only are reported as though they apply to the whole of UK.

The problem is compounded by the financial pressures faced by our indigenous Welsh national and regional press, which leaves many unable to resource comprehensive coverage of Assembly news.

Together, these issues are contributing to an ever increasing democratic deficit between the work of the National Assembly, and its communication to the people of Wales.

How a stand-alone Welsh licence for PSB provision on Channel 3 would help

I believe that a strong ITV presence covering national news and public life is vital to healthy democratic debate in Wales.

That is why, on behalf of the National Assembly for Wales, I would urge Ofcom to push ahead with its proposal for a stand-alone Wales licence for PSB provision on Channel 3.

I believe it would acknowledge the different governance arrangements, in terms of programming provision, in place for English regions and Wales, and address the need to promote a national public service agenda in Wales. It would also contribute significantly to the sustainability of media plurality which is vital to enable increasing civic engagement with the Assembly.

ITV Broadcasting Limited has indicated that it is happy to consent to separating the West of England region from Wales and attaching the West of England to the South West of England licence.

On a practical level, following conversations with Phil Henfrey, Head of News and Programmes at ITV Wales, I have been assured that the change would not make any difference to ITV Wales' operational set-up or result in any job losses.

I believe the creation of a Wales-only licence offers the opportunity to acknowledge the unique nature of Public Service Broadcasting provision in Wales and help strengthen the future of media plurality in Welsh broadcasting and public life.

In conclusion, I would also like to take the opportunity to thank ITV Wales for its ongoing commitment and interest in covering Welsh news, current affairs and politics. I believe a Wales licence would strengthen that commitment.

Rosemary Butler AM

Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales