

NvTv
Community
Television for
the Belfast area

NORTHERN VISIONS/NvTv

Response to Discussion Document Citizens, Communications and Convergence

Alistair Bridge,
Citizens, Communications and Convergence,
Ofcom,
Riverside House,
2a Southwark Bridge Road,
London, SE1 9HA .

October 7th 2008

Dear Alistair,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Citizens, Communications and Convergence Discussion Document.

For the sake of brevity I would direct you to various responses to the PSB Review from Northern Ireland. The links are appended at the end of this letter. I would also suggest that you consider the ULTV response to the PSB Review.

For your information I have also appended as a separate .pdf, the recent motion which was passed by the European Parliament on community media, which has relevance to this discussion document.

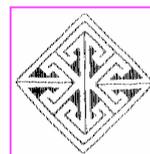
In replying to your discussion document, we suggest that the question to be asked should be centred around what difficulties the citizen may have with Ofcom's approach to media literacy.

Much of Ofcom's research has not been concerned with the citizen but rather with the consumer and the market, although in very recent times, we have been pleased to see slightly more recognition of the needs of citizens such as in Philip Graaf's "Putting the People First" speech (October 2nd).

We suggest that more attention is given to the benefits which accrue when individuals and groups are engaged as active participants - involved in accessing media services and resources and participating in film and television and its distribution.

Our view is that local public service television offers the best way forward for this to happen.

Furthermore, media literacy in the Communications Act 2003 offers a strong directive to Ofcom to enable the viewer, listener and subscriber to take greater and better informed control over 'choice'.



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(Section 11)

(1) It shall be the duty of OFCOM to take such steps, and to enter into such arrangements, as appear to them calculated

(a) to bring about, or to encourage others to bring about, a better public understanding of the nature and characteristics of material published by means of the electronic media;

and

(2) In this section, references to the publication of anything by means of the electronic media are references to its being—

(a) broadcast so as to be available for reception by members of the public or of a section of the public; or

(b) distributed by means of an electronic communications network to members of the public or of a section of the public.

This would suggest that media literacy is considered to be of a practical nature, requiring an understanding of the characteristics of broadcasting ‘electronic media’. Without ‘practice’ any media literacy would be like encouraging ‘reading’ without permitting ‘writing’.

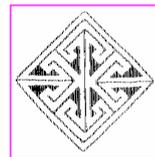
We have been disappointed that the views and aspirations of the citizen do not appear, as yet, to have been taken into account by Ofcom, most notably the overwhelming positive response to local television on Freeview.

Importance to you personally of services that could use digital dividend spectrum¹

Order of popularity	Application	Mean average score out of 10
1	Local TV on Freeview	6.3
2	Extra SD channels on Freeview	6.2
3	Better mobile phone coverage and mobile broadband	5.9
4	Wireless home networks	5.7
5	HD on Freeview	5.6
6	Mobile TV	3.3

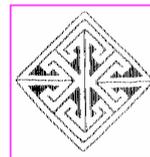
In our response in **2004 (Ofcom's Strategy and Priorities for the Promotion of Media Literacy)**, we put forward the following points, which we make again in this submission to you. In the intervening years, we believe our views in 2004 have stood the test of time and indeed, have been borne out by our experience as a local television broadcaster.

¹ Q8.3a “For each of these services please score each on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means extremely important and 0 means not at all important to you personally” (mean scores are shown). Source: Ipsos MORI survey 2007
Base: UK adults 1,049



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- With regard to the key role/s of media literacy in the UK, we believe it is important to provide greater opportunity for the general public (at whatever age), to access skills development/life long learning which will enable them to participate actively in media production. It is also important that the resulting films, programming and product has a distribution platform inclusive of the development of small scale/local broadcasting.
- With regard to the three proposed strands of work (Research, Connecting, Partnering & Signposting and Labeling), we agree that they address an important element of the media literacy landscape but believe that more emphasis should be placed on supporting conditions for media production. Currently there is the opportunity to reassess public service broadcasting with possibility to re-direct a portion of the license fee to small scale broadcasting, broadband, web, where services can include high levels of voluntary and community commitment.
- Other specific areas we consider a priority as part of media literacy work include a concern that the proposals from Ofcom are not as far reaching as required by the Act.
- The types and levels of media literacy skills necessary to enable citizens to effectively manage and enjoy the opportunities offered by the new communication technologies must have emphasis on access to the means of media production and skills development. It is no longer sufficient to think of the public as consumers and audience who enjoy the new communication technologies. Opportunities should include both access to and participation in the new communications technologies as well as a sense of ownership and authorship over the product ensuing from those opportunities.
- With regard to barriers to achieving appropriate levels of media literacy we would urge a more creative approach by Ofcom which included looking at informal ways of learning at grass roots level with media centres, youth clubs, community centres, particularly in areas of social need, where it may be considered that the formal education system has failed sections of the population. Media studies taught in schools are important, particularly where there are opportunities to put theories into practice.
- Priorities for Ofcom's media literacy work should include all those groups in society which are considered marginalized by the traditional media – e.g.: women, children, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, the unemployed and those on low incomes, interface communities etc. Media literacy allied to media production has the capacity to encourage active participation in output and promote the democratic use of information and communication technologies, develop new ways of expressing identity, promote voluntary activity and commitment and develop the capacity for communities to explore rights and responsibilities in a non-threatening environment. In our experience, promotion of the principles of equal opportunities is, of necessity, much more vocal in the production of programming within these communities and social groups, in that these principles are seen to have a direct relevance to the everyday lives which these people and communities lead.



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- Ofcom should be conducting research in order to inform its media literacy work to encourage a wider representation of views in the media. Elsewhere this is being explored in the realms of access and participation through Open Channels whereby citizens are allowed freedom of expression. Viewed from this perspective, media literacy has a vital role to play in creating a forum for intercultural understanding, developing networks and co-operation and contact between the generations. This will lessen the marginalization of those vulnerable groups cited by Ofcom.
- Key initiatives, projects or resources that Ofcom should have regard to in promoting media literacy should include the development of small-scale media, media access training and production centres. Distribution platforms are a key element to this. As a media access centre of some twenty+ years and a local television broadcaster, we would be happy to make available to Ofcom the benefits of our experience and research.
- Ofcom has an opportunity to provide for an approach to media literacy with an emphasis on learning through doing creative work. Engaging participants in doing creative work, is not only a more fulfilling and accessible experience but it also requires the development of creative thinking, an essential driver for the new communications technologies.

We wish you well in your deliberations of this hugely important area of Ofcom's programme of work.

Yours sincerely,

Marilyn Hyndman
Programmes Director

References

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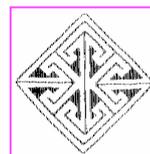
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ULTV Response

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb2_1/responses/ultv.pdf

Appended as separate .pdf

Community Media in Europe - adopted by Parliament
Thursday, 25 September 2008 - Brussels