



Commonwealth Broadcasting Association
Innovating for quality broadcasting

Submission for the Ofcom PSB Review

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As Public Service Broadcasting was first developed in the UK and subsequently spread to many parts of the English-speaking world and Europe it would be very sad indeed if the will in the UK to continue to support and develop PSB now faded. From the internationalist perspective that my role as Secretary General of the CBA brings, it should also be noted that any failure to continue to support PSB in the UK would have serious repercussions throughout the world.

Although clear challenges arise for the future funding of PSB in the UK, digitalisation and new media also offer many new opportunities for increased choice and plurality and the opportunities created by these new platforms should be grasped as a way to ensure the UK's role in innovating PSB.

Any review on public service broadcasting must take care not to diminish the important role performed by the BBC which must continue to be adequately funded for meeting its public service purposes. It must also be enabled to develop its content so that it can be accessed in new and innovative ways.

It is also important to ensure that Channel 4 can develop its unique PSB role and that ITV should also have certain PSB requirements, particularly in regard to the provision of regional news.

Ofcom's own audience research highlights that programming which informs international understanding is of increasing value to UK audiences, (75% think TV should help promote understanding of different religions, cultures and lifestyles, PSB Review survey 2007. Comparison of 2003 and 2007 research indicates there has been a growth in valuing this role).

It is therefore encouraging that one of the new core missions enshrined in the BBC charter is to: **Bring the UK to the world and the world to the UK.** The BBC certainly supports the UK's

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global role by being the world's most trusted provider of international news and information, and by showcasing the best of British culture to a global audience i.e. it takes the UK to the World via the BBC World Service, BBC World and the international Sales of BBC Worldwide. When it comes to "taking the world to the UK" the situation in the UK is not quite so good. "Screening the World" published by IBT in June 2008, shows that the international factual output of the four main terrestrial channels in 2007 was the lowest since 1989/90. This data illustrates the migration of international factual content to digital channels, which now offer 24% of the total.

Of the terrestrial channels, BBC 2 was found to have the highest amount of both international and developing world factual output, followed closely by Channel 4. ITV had almost no developing country factual output in 2007 and the lowest since 1989/90. This indicates a lost opportunity by ITV to add to the diversity and interest of their programmes by tapping into the rich content available from other parts of the world.

Choice is not choice if all that is on offer is more of the same. Because of the exposure advantages for terrestrial broadcasters, and their current prime positions in the lists of digital programmes on offer, ITV companies are most unlikely to hand back their licenses in 2011. As the Executive Summary of the Second Ofcom PSB Review says: "all the commercially funded PSBs will need clarity about their long-term roles by 2011 at the very latest, when for some the costs of their public service broadcasting commitments may outweigh the benefits and for all the potential end of their existing broadcasting licenses will be only three years away. This will enable them to plan confidently for the future whether as public service institutions or as purely commercial businesses." It is essential not to be defeatist about PSB on ITV but to require them to include a commitment to a certain proportion of diversity in their output. If more advertising income will soon be available via the internet than to terrestrial broadcasters, then the broadcasters can devise ways to maximise their advertising through linkages between the internet and the TV screen. This would not be hard – or expensive - for them to achieve and would strengthen the appeal and variety of their programming.

The other areas where comparable requirements should be considered are in children's programming and in regional programming for the UK. The "Screening the World" report makes it clear that North America dominates international children's programming on the terrestrial channels, with 46%. Of the 19 digital channels investigated, only 7 had any developing world programming. North America was the source of 79% of all international children's programming. BBC children's programming stood out as greater and more varied than ITV, Channel 4 or FIVE in 2007. This is also an area where some PSB requirements for ITV, so that they show diverse world programming to children, and commit to cultural diversity, would be helpful.

We have to take into account the new digital, inter-active and multi-media environment. The task is to ensure that new platforms can provide elements of PSB, for the benefit of society. It is commendable that the BBC is committed to

partnerships in this area, and to innovative ways of developing access to their output, and to interactivity with their audiences.

The Ofcom analysis is that Channel 4 will face a funding shortfall in the next few years. Any public funding to support PSB from Channel 4 has to be done in such a way that it does not damage the the BBC and the delivery of its core activities. One option which could ensure the continuation of high quality PSB programmes by Channel 4 is the one which identifies the extra funding currently allocated to the BBC to pay for the Digital Switchover, and, once this is complete, transfers this to Channel 4 for Public Service Programming.