

Submission to:

Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review

Phase One: The Digital Opportunity

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The Executive Summary of Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review outlines the fact that 'the purposes of PSB are rooted in the citizen not the producer' and that the review is 'being conducted through the prism of audience needs'.

As Director of a scheme that aims to improve and increase coverage of the developing world and development issues on UK TV my response is from the specific perspective of public service broadcasting in relation to its key role in fulfilling UK audience 'needs' to have sufficient, relevant information to enable the public to 'make sense' of the world.

All citizens of the UK live in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world and as such, providing information about and insight into the wider world is a key public purpose. It is also noteworthy that all four stated purposes of public service broadcasting are related to enhancing the 'world view' of UK citizens. In Ofcom's own research for this Review, 84% of respondents highlighted that PSB TV 'helps me understand what's going on in the world' as the second most important purpose for PSB, indicating yet again that there is a real audience appetite for programming about the wider world.

Other UK media research [Public Perceptions of Poverty (Darnton 2007) & DFID's annual public attitudes towards development survey (DFID 2006)] also highlights the fact that most people in the UK continue to find out about the wider world from TV. The assertion in this Review that 'in general people still spend more time watching TV than using the internet.....' is supported by the BBC 'Daily Life' research conducted in 2006.

Not only do adults use TV to inform them about the wider world but childrens' programmes such as the BBC's Blue Peter and News Round continue to provide context to international issues for children and adults alike. It is therefore encouraging that Channel 4 plan to increase their output for young people in the near future and it is hoped that some of this will be on an international theme.

All the evidence clearly suggests that television still plays an essential role in the development of UK audiences as global citizens. This has been reflected in the new core remit of the BBC not only to 'Bring the UK to the World' but also to 'Bring the World to the UK'.

Although it is stated in this Review that "The growth of digital television and the internet has broken down geographic boundaries and allowed audiences to see much more of the world's *best* content", it is not clear who has defined 'best' and what that definition is based upon.

In the first century of television the UK emerged as the world leader in terms of high quality, well crafted programme production and audiences clearly continue to value UK-originated content that reflects UK cultures, values and identities. It is essential that any future funding of PSB's in the UK enables public service broadcasters to continue to offer UK audiences adequately funded, UK originated programmes that provide a 'window on the world' for the audiences they serve.

In terms of factual programming, two strands 'Storyville' on the BBC [BBC4 with some screenings on BBC2] and increasingly 'True Stories' on More 4 currently showcase 'international' documentaries but at present there is little international context, particularly drama, offered to compliment factual programmes. It is essential that any future funding models for UK PSB enable the BBC and Channel 4 to continue to provide funding for 'Storyville' and 'True Stories' together with strands such as 'Unreported World' and 'This World'. A greater emphasis on international drama should also be encouraged to contextualise current affairs coverage.

As stated in the Review, much of the international content screened on UK TV is acquired US programming which means that UK audiences are not only viewing less UK-originated programming but they are served a diet of programming produced from the perspective of one other nation only, ie. the US. Again this Review states (pg.4), "digital channels offer acquired programming with high production values, often from the US" but once again it is unclear who or what defines 'high production values' and there is no acknowledgement that these programmes offer audiences a US perspective on the world rather than a UK one.

In the case of documentary production, few programmes are produced with UK funding alone. Documentaries are increasingly co-produced and co-funded internationally with an historic and linguistic bias to US funded programming. International funding inevitably effects editorial content and this means that yet again UK audiences are delivered international programming that provides a 'US centric' view of the world.

For UK audiences to retain a UK perspective on their place in the world, funding should be secured for both more UK-originated *and* more diverse 'non-US' international programming.

In the light of these facts, the response to the suggestion in this Review that, "As access to the world's best [*again who has defined 'best'?*] content is widened by the growth of digital channels, it is worth considering whether this can complement or even replace some of the programming historically delivered by the UK PSB's" should clearly be a firm 'No'! Unless it is acceptable to all that UK citizens form their world view via a US prism?

Non UK content undoubtedly *could* "make a contribution to enhancing knowledge of subjects that have an important international dimension" [Review pg. 32] but there is no current evidence that it *is* doing so. An honestly diverse schedule of international programming would provide a very different range of world views to a UK audience, perhaps similar to that offered by YLE in Finland. The fact that diaspora and minority audiences are seeking programming that is relevant to their lives from 'non-terrestrials' may well be further evidence that UK public service broadcasters have already failed to offer such audiences a significant variety of 'international' programming.

In terms of international coverage, there has been a distinct and recent migration of programming from the terrestrial channels to digital channels such as BBC4 and More4. In a multi channel environment, these channels may well become established as offering international programming but this will only be the case if funding is available for UK originated and truly diverse 'international' programming for these channels. It is also important that as a key public purpose, global perspectives do not become 'ghettoised', all TV coverage should reflect the international lives that UK citizens now live.

Public service content may be available online but it needs to be watchable and capable of both attracting and engaging audiences. As this Review indicates, "audiences report some difficulties with finding and accessing content that meets their needs, both on digital TV and online". And so while the internet and interactive media will undoubtedly evolve to play an increasing part in contributing to global understanding for UK audiences, at present television is still essential for increasing and enhancing audience understanding of the world in which we live. In this Review [pg.27] "Figure 2 shows that statements relating to informing us emerged as the most important of all public service purposes. "Its news programmes were trustworthy" and "Helps me understand what's going on in the world" were the statements rated as most important by audiences".

Research indicates that most access to the internet is currently via the portals of 'trusted' broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel 4 and this provides such broadcasters with opportunities to contextualise and expand international coverage by providing both supportive and interactive material online. Both

broadcasters are already playing a key role here in developing their online services in ways that enhance international coverage.

Although continued convergence and advances in digital and online technologies will open new platforms for delivering PSB content, it should be noted that ratings highlight the fact that UK audiences still demonstrate an appetite for 'event' TV where the experience of watching programmes can be shared and debated.

The BBC has long been a cornerstone of UK, indeed global, PSB with a strong ethos of internationalism at its core. Any reviews of future funding models should therefore ensure that the BBC is able to not only continue but increase international coverage in line with its new core mission, "To bring the world to the UK". An opportunity that could be maximised by the BBC is further resourcing programme makers in the nations and regions in order that they can highlight local/regional links with other parts of the world. Such coverage engenders strong audience support and ratings with audiences but often lacks full funding and investment from the centre as it is not deemed 'local/regional'.

Being able to support a significant team of international correspondents is particularly important to the BBC although it should be highlighted that Channel 4 news delivers excellent international coverage with substantially less resources, an example of the benefits of media plurality in action. Channel 4 also continues to develop and expand its already strong track record in delivering a world view to its audiences with investment in and specifically promotion of strands such as 'True Stories'.

Ofcom has proposed a clear vision for PSB delivery and it is important that plurality and competition are enshrined in that vision. Plurality has always been central to the UK's global leadership in PSB delivery and should continue to be maintained and valued. Indeed, the UK Government and international media organisations set media plurality as a core aim for international public service broadcasters in order to assist media in developing nations play a part in establishing and sustaining democracies.

Media plurality ensures that audiences are delivered a range of voices and perspectives and broadens audience reach in terms of public service information. While the market alone would fail to either maintain or strengthen the quality of public service broadcasting in the UK, some competition remains a driver for high standards of content production.

Media research concurs that existing models for delivering public service broadcasting will not be sufficient to meet public purpose roles in the future. A fully considered rather than hasty approach to how current PSB funding models should change is welcomed as any sudden transformations are likely to be most damaging to PSB output.

The UK's publicly funded and established broadcasting institutions are an important UK 'brand' that has a global reach. The BBC is a known and respected world-wide 'brand' and in some measure because of its excellence in international coverage, Channel 4's international reputation continues to grow and is deserving of further support. Such broadcasting institutions are also fundamental for supporting and encouraging the development of UK media professionals and the creative industries as they offer training opportunities and enable young professionals to gain media experience in institutions which have a high professional benchmark.

To be able to adapt to future financial pressures and evolving audience needs funding to the BBC must remain flexible in order to continue delivering high quality PSB programming to UK audiences. Following the LEK report and Ofcom's own analysis, Channel 4 will clearly become financially unsustainable under the current funding model.

It is assumed that an appropriately and adequately funded independent BBC should continue to provide the cornerstone of public service funding in the UK but that further funding should be made available for provision of plurality beyond the BBC. In terms of a track record and established brand for delivering public service content, Channel 4 has undoubtedly proven that it is deserving of continued public support. Whilst other commercial players have continued to have a public service remit with the exclusion of Fives childrens output, no other commercial broadcasters with a PSB remit have made specific efforts to develop or even maintain international perspectives.

In this case Option 3 as suggested by this Review would be preferable in terms of maintaining and improving public service programme delivery in an evolving broadcasting landscape. If this model is considered in more detail then it should ensure that further funding for Channel 4 is not achieved by dilution of the BBC's funding base. Such funding might be achieved post digital switchover by using the non programme funding income of the BBC that has currently been allocated to funding digital switchover.

Reference has already been made to the role of national, local and regional coverage of international stories and links and provisions for this could be made a key part of any future competitive tender processes for regional licences. This would also ensure plurality for the BBC to deliver on bringing the world to the nations and regions.

Considering the role of TV and associated online output in maintaining and increasing children's global understanding, further emphasis on developing the role of the BBC in delivering childrens' content and Channel 4's proposed expansion in this area are to be encouraged. Five's continued commitment to UK originated children's programming should also be noted and supported.

Informed debate in relation to PSB is in itself a healthy sign of democracy in action and this Review has emphasised the importance of a continued focus on the role of PSB in the UK, as such is both timely and welcomed.