

The Chartered Institute of Journalists

Submission to the Ofcom Review of Public Service Broadcasting

The Chartered Institute of Journalists and its sister organisation, the Institute of Journalists (Trade Union) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's Second Review of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB).

The Institute represents staff and freelance journalists in every sector of the industry, including television and radio news and public affairs programming.

While making this submission we are aware that this review is taking place against a backdrop of factors affecting the area of PSB. These include the cost to broadcasters of increased digitisation, multi-platform and multichannel distribution; the recent loss of revenue caused by discredited phone-in contests; the Government's ban on junk food advertisements to children and seepage of advertising revenue to less expensive sources which can deliver a mass or specialist audience.

We agree with the conclusions of Ofcom's first Review that one of the priorities of PSBs was to show national and international news, current affairs and regional news. We not only maintain this principle but would argue that professionally produced news, on which the public can rely, is paramount given inaccurate and misleading comments widely available and the unprecedented changes in society today.

We also stress the importance of free-to-air news programmes as part of the process of debate in the context of democracy at national and local levels. There is also the very important function of providing up-to-date and accurate information in times of emergency, whether it be in instances of terrorist outrages, such as the London transport bombings, or the local floods – as we experienced in 2007.

We would caution Ofcom of being lured by the siren song of the Internet as a prime source of news.

It should be noted that recent surveys have shown that 72% of the elderly do not have internet access and two-thirds of women are uncomfortable using the internet.

Consultation Questions

Section 3. How well are the public service broadcasters delivering public purposes

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's assessment that television continues to have an essential role in delivering the purposes of public service broadcasting?

Yes, and PSB should be the main provider of comprehensive news programming on a national, regional and local basis. Non-PSB stations should be seen as in addition to, and not instead of, news provision on the core BBC, ITV C4 networks.

- ii) Do you agree that UK-originated output is fundamental to the delivery of public service broadcasting purposes?

Yes, and provided by a mixture of London and regional originated programmes. While London is the main news centre for Britain many news and current affairs programmes can be produced in the regions. These programmes require staff to originate them and there is a wealth of journalistic talent in the provinces where the cost of living is generally lower and the standard of living (property prices, schools, recreation etc) is equal or higher.

Journalists and others involved in originating this type of programming should be able to obtain employment in areas other than London. In addition it is important to have locally based staff for their unique knowledge of the area and its population in order to develop local aspects of national stories and generate adequate local news – TV news should not become mere channels for official announcements and press releases.

Section 4. The changing market environment

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's conclusions about the way that other digital channels and interactive media contribute towards the public purposes?

Yes, insofar that digital television will soon become the norm, with the phasing out of analogue broadcasting, and Freeview should be the platform on which the standards are based. Cable, satellite and Internet are channels of choice, obtained at an extra cost, and should be treated as 'in addition to' services. The lowest common denominator is peoples' ability to afford. There should remain free-to-air main platform of news and current affairs – a large section of British society is in the low-

income sector, including pensioners, low income families, young people starting independent adult life with necessary high expenses (mortgages etc) for whom pay-TV is not an option.

Section 5. Prospects for the future delivery of public service content

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the implications of different economic scenarios for the UK TV market for the future prospects for delivery of the public purposes?

This is a leading question and frankly we stopped at what is meant by "public purpose". The consultation document itself moves from PSB to public service content and that is why they need primary legislation by 2011 and the end of analogue TV. Frankly, given the fast moving market place, it is virtually impossible to understand what this means.

- ii) Do you agree with Ofcom's analysis of the costs and benefits of PSB status?

PSB benefits should be seen as a privilege and removed if providers fail to meet up with responsibilities and service pledges. We agree that there are different platforms but we don't accept that the problems with commercial funding require the end of the content that is PSB. Frankly the benefits support additional funding and it is for the Government to find in recognition of the part PSB plays in Britain's democratic process.

Section 6. Meeting audience needs in a digital age

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's vision for public service content?

Yes, but based on free-to-air services with 'secondary' channels (ITV2, More4 etc) seen as back-up or 'in-depth' analysis platforms.

- ii) How important are plurality and competition for quality in delivering the purposes of public service broadcasting, and in what areas?

Exceptionally important – competition encourages speed of response, accuracy and impartiality. It also encourages different interpretations of presentation and gives viewers some additional choice of when they can see news programmes (e.g. YTV's Calendar, transmitted at 6pm, BBC's Look North, transmitted at 6.30pm) to fit in with

their movements.

- iii) In maximising reach and impact of public service content in the future, what roles can different platforms and services play?

Providing there is no impact on the core PSB news and current affairs provision, additional news channels, such as the Manchester Evening News/Guardian Channel M, or Trinity Mirror's postcode Internet should not be discouraged as fully-commercial ventures. Access to these is via the Internet and would not be available to all - Ofcom's own figures show only 28 per cent of over 65s have access to Internet, and only five per cent of those use it as their main source of news, leaving 72 per cent of pensioners without access and 95 per cent of Internet pensioners relying on other media as their main source of news, which hardly qualifies such services as 'public sector'.

- iv) Do you agree that the existing model for delivering public service broadcasting will not be sufficient to meet changing needs in future?

Not necessarily but some amendments to current practices, as well as additional funding, could help serve continuing public needs. Many 'public service' Internet sites, such as local council sites, tend to provide news with a bias towards improving the perception and image of the provider and should not be considered to be in the same league as unfettered and impartial public service news providers. PSB should be a 'spin-free' zone.

Section 7. Future models for funding and providing public service content

- i) What are your views of the high-level options for funding public service broadcasting in future?

We would support additional funding from government, directly or indirectly, so long as the transparency was maintained – in other words no government or political interference in the editorial independence. This should be a price the nation is prepared to pay for the continuation of a free and fair media. It is a cornerstone of democracy and we have seen what happens in nations like Russia or Zimbabwe where government has taken control of the broadcasting media and attached editorial controls with a consequent effect on democratic practices and principles.

We would not like to see any reduction to the BBC's funding, which would undoubtedly have a severe impact on the services it may deliver. The BBC is not only Britain's main provider of news but is also Britain's 'voice' to the world and as such provides immense benefits to the nation's reputation abroad – politically and economically – but we stress that, in our belief, the independent PSBs should receive government help.

This could happen by way of **government tax relief** on studios, equipment etc to help offset their cost of news and current affairs production. This would also have the advantage that all independent broadcasters could apply for the relief on their PSB output, which may also assist with coverage across the spectrum.

Similarly, the BBC's Internet services are a world resource and should receive aid by Government grant in a similar manner to BBC World radio on the grounds that they provide a unique 'voice' for the nation's international reputation and are a resource for the world's education

- ii) Are the proposed tests of effectiveness for future models for public service broadcasting the right ones?

Yes.

- iii) Of the four possible models for long term delivery of public service content, which, if any, do you consider the most appropriate and why? Are there any alternative models, or combination of models that could be more appropriate, and why?

Our primary aim would be to ensure the continuity of investment in, and production of, quality news and factual programming. We have outlined (**see previous answer**) a suggestion which would ensure extra funding for PSB and would hope that Ofcom would explore the potential benefits of this with the independent broadcasters to see if it would offer enough incentive and support.

Certainly we would oppose Models two and three.

Section 8. Options for the commercial PSBs

- ii) What do you think is the appropriate public service role for Channel 4 in the short, medium and long term? What do you think of Channel 4's proposed vision?

C4 should continue in its present form as a counter to the main stream channels by it being encouraged to continue to be 'different' in its aspects of coverage, and particularly in its 'in-depth' reputation for its examination of issues.

- ii) Which of the options set out for the commercial PSBs do you favour?

A range of UK-originated, audiovisual content across a range of platforms and delivered by more than one provider in high quality national and international news; news content reflecting issues and needs in the devolved nations; same for English audiences at regional and, where possible local level; factual programmes aimed at older children and teenagers; original factual content to stimulate knowledge of arts, science, history and others; and, content reflecting views of different communities of interest, ethnicity, life circumstances.

Section 9. Scenarios for the UK's nations, regions and localities

- i) To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the likely future long term issues as they apply to the nations, regions and localities of the UK?

Ofcom's own research shows public disappointment at reduced regional/local coverage and ITV's plans to reduce its regional programming from 27 to 9 should be resisted vigorously.

We suggest the possibility of jointly-produced local news programmes through the co-operation of regional TV and newspaper groups which, by use of the 'red button' technology, could provide news programmes tailored for specific conurbations.

- ii) Which model(s) do you think will be most appropriate in each of the nations and in the English regions in the long term, and why?

See previous answers.

- iii) What are your views on short/medium-term issues referred to, including the out-of-London Network production quotas?

Out-of-London production should be encouraged for its diversity of content and (as mentioned above) the employment prospects of news providers in the provinces.

iv) What are your initial views on the preliminary options set out relating to ITV plc's regional news proposal? (Please note that Ofcom will put forward firm options on these issues, and consult also on ITV plc's regional news proposal, in phase 2 of this Review.)

Totally against the proposal. ITV should not be allowed to reduce its regional output and diversity from its present levels. The proposals would leave the notion of local broadcasting without any real value whatsoever as the areas to be covered would be so large it would be impossible to give adequate coverage to issues of concern to specific localities and the main news coverage would be so 'region-wide' as it have little value or meaning to the viewer.

Section 10. Prospects for children's programming

i) Do you agree with our assessment of the possible short term options available relating to children's programming; are there any other options available?

Other than encouraging the continuation of quality programmes similar to Blue Peter and Newsround, we don't think the CIOJ need involve itself in children's programming.

Section 11. Timetable for implementing a new model

i) Do you agree that new legislation will need to be in place by 2011 in order to ensure continued delivery of the public purposes in the medium and long term?

Yes

Possible future options

Tax concessions

We would encourage and support Ofcom investigating the possibility of offering tax breaks to PSBs. A similar tax incentive to the one offered to the film industry could make a significant difference to the cost of producing all programmes that PSBs are mandated to make and air as part of their licence.

We have already written to DCMS asking that the possibility be looked in to, which would help with costs during the difficult and costly nature of the digital switchover

period.

Shared facilities

Also, Ofcom should investigate the possibility of local newspapers and local broadcast operations sharing news gathering facilities to produce local news bulletins and feature programmes in an effort to reduce their costs with both parties sharing advertising income generated by these programmes. By using 'red button' technology, news programmes produced along these lines could be tailored for specific geographical areas within a broadcast region and enhance the amount and quality of local news coverage.

ITV

With specific regard to the reduction of the ITV hubs from 27 down to nine we would point to the Passport Agency who have recently learned the lesson of reducing regional presence and have begun a programme of opening up new regional offices in order to get to know their customers.