

Waddell Media – response to Ofcom’s PSB Review in Northern Ireland

In our opinion Model Three is the best option - the BBC, a strong, publicly owned Channel 4 and if possible limited contestable funding, with certain PSB requirements being retained for ITV. However, there are particular complex issues facing the Nations and Regions and in the case for Northern Ireland the following has to be taken into account.

- Since the broadcasters constantly refuse to commission from the Province we believe the only way forward is for meaningful production quotas to be established.
- A mechanism must be found to compel the broadcasters to adhere to these set quotas.
- The broadcasters and its commissioners must be convinced that Northern Ireland already has the skill and talent base to deliver network programming.
- Northern Ireland independent producers want to provide content that accurately reflects life in the Province to audiences elsewhere in the UK.
- We aspire to produce programmes with a diversity of content and plurality of viewpoints that serves all communities in NI.

- There is a need for an appropriate level of content in indigenous languages – Irish and Ulster Scots - with guaranteed public funding.

‘Out of London’ production and portrayal at network level are major issues for Northern Ireland. Representing the devolved nations is an invaluable part of public service broadcasting. So how is it to be achieved?

Large-scale network commissions allow production companies to develop their businesses on a long-term basis. Commissions, such as returning series, would generate confidence in the ‘Out of London’ sector to invest in local skills and infrastructure. The lack of network commissioning means that independents are forced to seek commissions with multi-channel broadcasters, and are therefore unable to retain exploitation rights under the terms of trade incorporated in the Communications Act. This means that they lose IP rights to their programming and that effects business development. Network commissioning under the new terms of trade is key to creating sustainable, creative clusters and must be seriously addressed by both the regulators and the broadcasters.

Out of all the nations, Northern Ireland independent producers take little comfort from the fact that they have recorded the worst year-on-year performance for programme production at network level.

Channel 4

It is encouraging to see Channel 4's recent development in its 'Out of London' activities via its 4IP initiative. However, the broadcaster needs to look carefully at expanding its programme commissioning within the Nations & Regions. Channel Four has suggested a doubling of its hours in the nations – in the case of Northern Ireland, starting from a zero base will have no impact whatsoever. Channel 4 needs to engage in a constructive way with the sector creating meaningful quotas to fulfil.

BBC

The BBC's commitment to a 17% target for programmes commissioned in the Nations is welcome. However we feel that Northern Ireland might be dealt a hard blow if we do not get a clearer commitment from the BBC Trust about the breakdown of this 17%. We must put pressure on the BBC to follow the Scottish example where the proportion of network programming would be equivalent to its share of the UK population. If this is not secured the independent sector in Northern Ireland faces a very bleak future.