

[GB] Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport

Fourth Report

IRIS 1998-7:1/21

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The Fourth Report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Session 1997-98, entitled The Multi-Media Revolution, was published on Thursday 21 May 1998. The Report arises from the Committee's inquiry entitled Audio-Visual Communications and the Regulation of Broadcasting (see IRIS 1998-3: 13). The Committee's report is focused mainly on changing technologies in the communications sector and the public policies required to harness their benefits while seeking to maintain the best characteristics of current provision. Concerning the structures required under statute and within Government to deliver these policies, the report concludes that "the current system composed as it is of numerous bodies with confusing and overlapping jurisdictions and powers often ill-fitted for digital technologies, is more reminiscent of a feudal State than a regulatory structure for the multi-media age. The case for change is unanswerable. Any new structure should have clarity and coherence, but recognise the distinctive nature of broadcasting provision. It is possible to establish a structure which combines these characteristics" (paragraph 157). The Committee therefore recommends the absorption of all current regulatory bodies into one Communications Regulation Commission with overall responsibility for statutory regulation of broadcasting, telecommunications and the communications infrastructure. Its duties should include: (i) regulation of access to communications platforms by both systems operators and service providers, including all issues relating to gateways, competition law, and cross-media ownership; (ii) the compilation of information and the duty to report to Government on policy issues; (iii) all regulatory actions in support of universal broadband provision; (iv) strong encouragement of the development of self-regulation by Internet service providers; and (v) oversight, for all broadcasters, including the BBC, of broadcast content regulation and the commercial activities of broadcasters, with direct oversight of their implementation. There should be a Chairman of the Commission who is a member of the Commission and not a statutory regulator. Two Deputy Chairmen should be responsible respectively for delivery and content. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairmen should be appointed by the Secretary of State subject to consultation with the appropriate departmental Select Committee and a public hearing of that Select Committee. Moreover, there should be the power, as exists at present for the ITC and the Radio Authority, to fine broadcasters. Finally, in order to ensure that all classes of broadcasters and narrowcasters are adequately administered the Committee

believes a sub-commission structure should be created to ensure proper fulfilment of the Commission's several functions. Each sub-commission must have its own small board and should have the power to publish its own reports and recommendations subject to approval of the Commission which shall not unreasonably be withheld.

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