[GB] Government Issues Consultation Paper on Regulating Communications and Convergence

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The UK Government has issued a Green Paper setting out options for the future regulatory structure for communications (including broadcasting and telecommunications) as convergence takes place. In part this is a response to a recent report of a Parliamentary Committee which strongly criticised current regulatory arrangements as far too complicated; no less than 14 different statutory and self-regulatory bodies exist for media and telecommunications. It also considered that the regulatory structures and law had failed to keep pace with technological development. The Committee recommended that a single ministry be established in http://services.obs.coe.int/en/index.htm the form of a Department of Communications with responsibility for broadcasting, media, telecommunications, Internet and electronic delivery of government services. All regulatory bodies should be absorbed into a single Communications Regulation Commission with internal sub-divisions for delivery and content. The current self-regulatory structure of the BBC should also be replaced with regulation by the new Commission. The Government Paper is less radical. It considers that the fact that technologies are converging does not mean that markets for different services will become indistinguishable, and a distinction between passive "leaning back" for broadcasting and "leaning forwards" for interactive services will remain. It thus proposes an evolutionary approach encouraging the various regulators to co-operate between themselves. Several models for possible changes to regulatory structures in the long-term are set out, including separate regulators for infrastructure and for content, separate regulators for economic and cultural questions or an integrated single regulator.

Views are requested by 30 November 1998 and a statement of the Government's conclusions will be published in early 1999.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department of Trade and Industry, Regulating Communications: Approaching Convergence in the Information Age, Cm 4022 (1998).

http://www.dti.gov.uk.converg

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