[GB] Minister Approves New BBC Digital Channel Subject to Strict Conditions

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In September 2001, the British Culture Secretary approved three new BBC digital channels; however, she asked for a further proposal for a new youth channel to be revised and re-submitted because it did not have a distinctive character and similar services are offered by private broadcasters (see IRIS 2001-9: 10). The new youth channel, BBC3, has now been approved subject to stringent conditions. Ministerial consent is required for new services under the Agreement with the Secretary of State which defines the powers of the BBC. The channel will be funded by the licence fee rather than by advertising or subscription, which has led to serious fears of unfair competition by commercial broadcasters; it will have a substantial annual programme budget of GBP 97 million.

The minister stated that she was satisfied that, under the new proposals and after hard negotiations with the BBC, the channel would be "genuinely distinctive, genuinely public service and genuinely innovative". Twelve conditions have been attached to the approval in order to ensure that this standard is met. These include "high general standards in all respects (and in particular in respect of content, quality and editorial integrity)". The new service is to deliver a mixed schedule of programmes embracing drama, entertainment, news, current affairs, education, music, the arts, science and coverage of international issues. Quality programming must not be at the expense of programmes for the same audience in the more widely-available BBC1 and BBC 2. More specific requirements include the following:

- 25% of output must be commissioned from the independent sector;

- 90% of time must be allocated to programmes made in the EEA, for first showing in the UK; such programmes will also represent 90% of programme expenditure;

- 80% of output must consist of programmes specially commissioned for BBC3 and genuinely new to television.

A review of the channel will be undertaken after two years, including an independent assessment of its impact on the broadcasting market, to satisfy the minister that the conditions and assurances made during the approval process are met.

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"Tessa Jowell Gives Approval to BBC3", Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Press Release 175/02 of 17 September 2002

http://www.culture.gov.uk/creative/search.asp?Name=/pressreleases/creative/2002/dcms175

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