[GB] Report on Controlling Children's Media Consumption

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The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) have jointly published a report entitled "Striking a balance: the control of children's media consumption".

The Report was driven by the UK Government's White Paper on Communications, "A New Future for Communications" (see IRIS 2001-1: 8), which proposed an investigation into the various mechanisms for exercising control over children's media consumption. It was commissioned to draw together information and evidence on "attitudes, behaviour and feasibility in relation to mechanisms, primarily those designed to be used by parents and other adults [...]".

The Report covers both television and the internet. Broadly speaking, parents feel that the former is under reasonably effective control, and that the regulatory guidelines (eg., the 9pm Watershed, mechanism for controlling children's television - broadcasters agree not to show programmes that are unsuitable for children before a certain time) are effective. The level of concern increases both in relation to the internet and the trend of proliferation of television channels and services.

For the future, what is wanted, according to the findings of the Report, are: "better information about programme content"; "improved awareness and understanding of the various technological aids available" and a solution to the "wrong balance between complexity and ease of set up" of technological mechanisms.

Finally, the Report highlights the view that whilst parental control mechanisms "have a valuable part to play in the control of children's media consumption", they need to be "easy to use and targeted in the right way", notably to emphasise "[...] the positive, empowering aspects" enabling users to "explore family-friendly offerings with confidence".

"Striking a balance: the control of children's media consumption", Pam Hanley (Ed.), the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, September 2002, available at: http://www.bsc.org.uk/publications.htm

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