[GB] Regulator Decides on Paranormal Programming

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The Independent Television Commission, the British regulator of the commercial broadcasting sector, has decided that two programmes shown by Living TV, a small cable and satellite channel, breached the Commission's Programme Code, mainly because they were not presented as entertainment.

In the programmes, mediums purported to make contact with the spirits of the dead and to pass messages to members of the studio audience. The Code (section 1.10) provides that demonstrations of exorcisms and occult practices are not acceptable in factual programming except in the context of a legitimate investigation. They should not in any event be shown before the 9pm "watershed", which marks the commencement of the hours when material not suitable for children may be shown. Other psychic practices such as horoscopes and palmistry could also only be shown as entertainment or in the context of legitimate investigation; they should not include specific advice to contributors or viewers about health, medical matters or personal finance. Nor should they be shown when large numbers of children are expected to be watching.

The Commission found that the programmes were not clearly presented as entertainment and did not acknowledge differing opinions on the true nature of purported contact with the spirits of the dead.

Nevertheless, the broadcaster could continue to show such programmes if announcements approved by the regulator were included before and after each of the programmes. The Commission will also revise the Code to clarify the nature of programmes covered and the scheduling restrictions required to protect children.

"ITC Rules on Paranormal Programmes on Living TV", Independent Television Commission News Release 35/03, 30 May 2003

http://www.itc.org.uk/latest_news/press_releases/release.asp?release_id=710

ITC Programme Code

http://www.itc.org.uk/itc_publications/codes_guidance/programme_code/index.asp

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