

[GB] Second Stage of Review of Public Service Broadcasting

IRIS 2004-10:1/26

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The Office of Communications (Ofcom) has now issued the second phase of its review of public service broadcasting, as required by the Communications Act 2003 (for the first phase, see IRIS 2004-6: 12). Final conclusions will be issued after further consultation.

According to the Review, the move into the digital age will destroy the current balance of institutions, funding and regulation which has up to now supported public service broadcasting. The latter has depended on hidden subsidies through the free use of analogue spectrum which will become valueless; this should be replaced by explicit and transparent public funding.

The purposes of public service broadcasting should be to inform ourselves and others and to increase our understanding of the world; to stimulate interest in arts, science, history and other topics; to reflect and strengthen our cultural identity through original programming; and to make us aware of different cultures should be of high quality, original, innovative, challenging, engaging and widely available.

The BBC should remain the cornerstone of public service television, and should be properly funded by a TV licence fee, as at present, though in future this may be supplemented by limited subscription services. The proposal in the first phase review for some top-slicing of the proceeds to fund other broadcasters is now rejected. The BBC should strive to ensure that all its programmes reflect the purposes and characteristics of public service broadcasting. ITV1 will continue to be subject to public service obligations, but those relating to regional programmes will be relaxed except in relation to news, and a more flexible approach taken to content regulation. Channel 4 should continue to be a public service broadcaster, though after digital switchover it may not be able to provide the same range of public service programming as it does today. Channel Five will be expected to invest more in original programming in the run-up to switchover, but a more flexible approach will be taken to its other public service obligations.

In view of the loosening of obligations on the commercial channels, the BBC could become the only public service broadcaster of any scale. To provide a plurality of outlets for such broadcasting, a new Public Service Publisher should be established using public funds to commission and publish public service content.

The right to set up and run it would be awarded by competitive bidding, the only current broadcaster excluded from bidding being the BBC. Funding could come from tax revenues, an enhanced licence fee or a tax on other broadcasters.

Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting: Phase 2 - Meeting the Digital Challenge

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/current/psb2/psb_phase2.pdf?a=87101

