[GB] Final Stage of Review of Public Service Broadcasting

IRIS 2005-4:1/16

Tony Prosser
University of Bristol Law School

The British communications regulator, the Office of Communications (Ofcom) has now issued the third and final stage of its review of public service broadcasting (for the earlier stages see IRIS 2004-6: 12 and IRIS 2004-10: 12). This stage builds on the previous two and the consultations undertaken on them, and sets out proposals in greater detail.

According to the review, we are facing the end of the old model of public service broadcasting because of the growth of competition for advertising revenue and the decline in the scarcity value of the analogue spectrum. Both of these developments will make it impossible to ensure the delivery of a wide range of obligations by commercial public service broadcasters, as has been part of the British system in the past. A new definition of public service broadcasting is developed for a commercial marketplace, its purposes being informing ourselves through news and analysis of current events and ideas; stimulating interest in arts, science and history; reflecting cultural identity through original programming, and making us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints. The characteristics of such broadcasting will be that it is of high quality, original, innovative, challenging, engaging and widely available.

Current levels of public funding for public service broadcasting should be maintained at least in the short term. Delivery should be for a range of providers, especially the BBC but also through limited obligations on commercial broadcasters and through a new Public Service Publisher. However, obligations requiring commercial broadcasters to provide non-news regional programming will be reduced, initially to 1.5 hours per week and at switchover to 0.5 hours. Regional news obligations will be retained.

The Public Service Publisher will provide a free-to-air content service of high-quality drama, quality and factual content, and local and communities services. Its purpose will be to provide competition with the BBC for public service provision, so the BBC will be prohibited from bidding for it, although it may be linked to Channel 4. Establishment of the Publisher will of course depend on funding decisions to be taken by the government.

The review also comments on the regulation of the BBC, although this is largely outside Ofcom's remit. The latter does not seek to take over governance and

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

oversight of the BBC, but recommends common competition rules across the sector and that impact on assessments of new BBC services should be carried out by Ofcom rather than the government. The position of the BBC is further discussed in IRIS 2005-4: 11 in the context of the Green Paper on the review of its charter.

Office of Communications, "Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting: Phase 3 - Competition for Quality", February 2005

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb3/psb3.pdf

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026