

[GB] Regulator Approves Public Service Proposals

IRIS 2005-5:1/14

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The Communications Act 2003 (see IRIS 2003-8: 10) introduced a form of “co-regulation” under which the commercial public service broadcasters became responsible for annual statements of programme policy setting out their plans for meeting their public service remit and reviewing their own performance against it. The regulator, the Office of Communications (Ofcom) provides guidance on how the self-assessment process should be conducted and has powers to intervene if the process is not effective and the remit has not been met. The commercial broadcasters (ITV, Channels 4 and Five) have now published their first statements of programme policy.

Ofcom concluded that each of the statements met the terms in its guidance in setting policies for the current year, although a further shift in balance towards stating strategy and purposes, rather than listing programmes to be transmitted, will be desirable in the future. It also considered that a more self-critical approach to reviews will be needed in the future, and the broadcasters must devise strategies for the effective evaluation of the delivery of the policy in 2005.

The Act also requires that, where there is a proposal for significant change in the statement of programme policy, Ofcom must be consulted in advance. It was consulted by ITV on proposals to reduce children's programming from around 11.5 hours per week in 2004 to at least 8 hours per week in future, and to reduce religious output from 2 hours to 1. Ofcom agree to accept these proposals in order to add flexibility to the delivery of public service obligations in line with its own Review of Public Service Broadcasting (IRIS 2005-4: 10). It noted a significant increase over the last five years in children's programmes on the digital channels, including a very substantial increase in volume of original UK programming. For religion, the new output would be the same as for Channels 4 and Five, and around the average for the BBC, and ITV remained committed to the maintenance of high quality religious factual programmes, including acts of worship shown in full.

“Ofcom accepts commercial public service broadcasters' proposals on Tier 3 obligations”, Ofcom News Release of 25 February 2005

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2005/02/nr_20050225

