[GB] Regulator Reviews Public Service Broadcasting after Digital Switchover

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Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, has issued a paper on the future of public service broadcasting (PSB) after digital switchover takes place in 2008. This supplements its earlier three-stage review of public service broadcasting (see IRIS 2004-6: 12, IRIS 2004-10: 12 and IRIS 2005-4: 10) and prepares the way for the second PSB review required by 2009 under the Communications Act 2003.

The paper notes that the British system of PSB has worked on the basis of increasing the number of PSB providers. However, the move to fragmented markets after digitalisation may mean that it is no longer realistic to expect commercial broadcasters to deliver significant PSB obligations, especially as digital take-up has been well in excess of that forecast in the earlier review. From 2014, it is proposed that broadcasters will be charged for spectrum (see IRIS 2006-8: 15). As a result of these changes, it will be necessary to "re-imagine the delivery of PSB for a post-switchover world".

The paper concentrates on three major issues related to these developments. The first is that of new media forms of PSB provision, and in particular the possible establishment of a new Public Service Publisher to compete with the BBC in creating content for delivery over a wide range of systems, including broadcasting. The second is that of the future of news; what services will be provided after switchover, and what are the implications of developing markets for ensuring plurality of news provision and/or maintaining its quality. The third issue is that of the continuing viability of Channel 4, which has played a key role in providing plurality in PSB provision since 1982. The regulator is to conduct a full financial review of the Channel. These three issues will be Ofcom's main focus, although other important issues include the potential risk to arts and children's programmes on public service channels.

Ofcom, "Digital PSB: Public Service Broadcasting Post Digital Switchover", Issues Paper, 27 July 2006

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/psb_review/digitalpsb/digitalpsb.pdf

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