[GB] Regulator Unable to Take Action Against Major Reduction in Children's Programmes

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Under the Communications Act 2003, the UK communications regulator Ofcom no longer has the power to set quotas of children's programmes to be provided by the commercial public service broadcasters. Instead, it must consider whether such broadcasters, taken together, offer 'a suitable quantity and range of high-quality and original programmes for children and young people'. Where a broadcaster proposes a significant change to its programme policy, it must consult Ofcom and take its opinions into account.

ITV1, the major commercial terrestrial channel, proposed to reduce the amount of children's programmes for 2008 from four hours per week (plus one hour of film) to two hours per week (plus one hour of film). Ofcom considered that this did amount to a significant change, especially as the equivalent provision in 2005 was ten hours per week, and remained of the view that the delivery of public service content for children is of primary importance. It acknowledged the market pressures on ITV, including those as a result of limits on the advertising of junk foods during children's programmes (see IRIS 2007-1: 11). Nevertheless, it informed ITV that it would be inappropriate to change the level of children's programmes from that in 2007. ITV stated that it had taken into account Ofcom's opinions and would increase its proposed provision to 2.5 hours per week (with a small reduction in proposals for children's films). Ofcom then asked for a further increase, but ITV declined to implement this. Ofcom concluded that ITV had 'taken account' of its opinions and that therefore the regulator could take no further action, even though it remained of the view that the reduction in output should not take place at all.

Ofcom, 'Ofcom Statement on Reduction in ITV Children's Programmes', 18 March 2008

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/reduction_itv/

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