[IE] New Regulations on Taste and Decency

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The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) has introduced new regulations on taste and decency. These are contained in the Code of Programme Standards. The code came into effect on 10April 2007. The objectives of the code are to promote responsible broadcasting and reduce harm or offence to the audience. The code provides guidelines to the broadcaster and protects the viewer/listener by informing them of choices and standards to expect.

While restrictions already existed in the area, this is the first attempt to create regulatory guidelines, which apply to all Irish broadcasters, both public and private. The Broadcasting Act 2001 S.19 (1) required the Commission to prepare a code, which must be complied with, with respect to taste and decency. The requirement placed particular focus on the portrayal of violence and sexual conduct, but the Commission was not limited to this.

The development of the code was carried out in three phases (see IRIS 2005-10: 16). The first and second phase involved public consultation, including workshops for broadcasters. The final phase involved the publication of a draft code and the incorporation of the public's views and comments (see S.19 (5) of the Broadcasting Act 2001).

The code covers a range of topics, such as coarse language and portrayal of drugs/alcohol, which must be assessed in context. The context relates to the composition of the audience, programme scheduling and type of channel. The broadcaster must take due care not to offend the listener/viewer. They must use certain mechanisms to avoid this, for example the watershed (9 p.m.), classification and warnings.

Breaches of the code are dealt with by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC). Complaints which have been upheld in full or in part to date have concerned the stereotyping or stigmatising of people with disabilities, particularly mental illness, in a current affairs programme, a television "soap" and a comedy programme; also inappropriate content (nudity, without prior warning, in a promotion for a sexually explicit series) and protection of children (suicide of a character in a police drama series shown pre-watershed).

Code of Programme Standards

http://www.bci.ie/codes/taste_decency_code.html

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