[GB] Regulating for Changing Values

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The new Broadcasting Standards Commission has published its first research report. The Commission was created out of the merger (under the Broadcasting Act 1996) of the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission on 1 April 1997.

The study looks at public attitudes to media regulation in a changing social climate. It was undertaken by the Commission as part of a wider consultation on its new role combining standards and fairness in broadcasting. The research based on two national surveys and 14 focus groups also addresses the issue of privacy. In general, the respondents aspired to tolerance but supported management of the culture through regulation. Three out of four responses were concerned with the common rather than the individual good (page 101). Looking at the effect of the media, the industry was thought to have an increasing influence, particularly on children, but was not seen as the primary cause of violence in society. Unemployment and personal background were thought to have more influence (page 108). The majority of the respondents would not transmit a programme considered harmful by `experts', but they would transmit a programme likely to cause offence, if it were toned down or a warning given (pages 120/121).

Responses showed that people had a right to privacy but this could be forfeited. Faced with individual scenarios, respondents in all the studies operated a hierarchy of protection for different types of people. The majority were clear that the young, the victims of crime and illness and the innocent deserved high levels of protection against invasions of privacy by television programme makers. But criminals such as shoplifters, drugdealers and rapists forfeited their rights. The rights of public figures were limited and dependent on their actions (pages 87/93).

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