

Submission to Ofcom for the Second Public Service Review.

Lookaround started broadcasting in 1961 and has consistently been one of the most popular news programmes across the whole ITV network. We are frequently told it is a model for how local TV news should work in the community. Looking forward to a digital world, we believe our audiences will stay strong, but unfortunately we may not get the chance to prove it; ITV is planning to merge Tyne Tees with Border - a move which needs your regulatory approval.

Ever since it was announced that “Lookaround” could disappear we’ve been inundated by reaction from viewers. You already have thousands of signed cards, the number only limited by the time our Save Lookaround Campaign volunteers can spend collecting them. People simply can’t believe that the programme they watch every night is going to disappear and become a 6 minute “add on” to the news from the north-east, an area very few connect with.

Many of the points raised in support of local news relate to a quality of life argument that is hard to attach a monetary value to.

What are we saying about our society and democracy if we allow these plans to go ahead? We believe they will weaken our viewers’ eyes and ears in their local communities - not only in the Border region, but right across the UK. It’s not what they want. It’s not good for Cumbria, the Isle of Man or Southern Scotland. It’s not good for the UK as a whole.

As a countryside community we already suffer when it comes to provision of broadband services. This plan to subsume the Border news area into Tyne Tees will mean another valued service is threatened. It will erode the rights of the local rural population and further distort the picture of balance painted in the recent King report. Then there is the question of Scotland – how can a six minute opt adequately cover the news of a devolved country?

We accept that progress is bringing major changes to TV, but ITV bought this license knowing it had obligations. We would like them to honour these. As every school child knows, a strong independent media is a prerequisite of a strong, functioning, informed democracy. This is as true at local level as it is nationally. The price of not having one may be disengagement, particularly of the elderly and rural communities, erosion of our political and cultural structures, and a general loss of identity and social cohesion. Instead of asking how much money can be saved by closing our local news service, should we not ask, what is the cost to us all if we do?

Peter Howdle

BECTU Rep ITV Border for and on behalf of the Save Lookaround Campaign.

Question Responses

Section 3

- i) **Do you agree with Ofcom's assessment that television continues to have an essential role in delivering the purposes of public services broadcasting?**

Television is almost certain to remain the largest mass audience media for the foreseeable future. Public Service Broadcasting purposes like commercial advertising purposes require mass audiences for best impact.

As far as television news is concerned a diverse schedule that draws an audience for a variety of interests over an evening but contains news and programming that reflect PSB purposes will always be an efficient and valued service from the point of view of the consumer and the point of view of the political and cultural structures whose issues are reflected.

- ii) **Do you agree that UK-originated output is fundamental to the delivery of public service broadcasting purposes?**

It is difficult to conceive how none UK-originated output could achieve all the purposes of PSB. More specifically in news, the closer the origination of the output to the source of the news, the better the speed of response, accuracy and understanding of subtleties; for example historical or cultural context of developing stories and issues.

In terms of ITV news we think that regional and sub-regional news services are as important to the viewers as national and international news.

Section 4

- i) **Do you agree with Ofcom's conclusions about the way that other digital channels and interactive media contribute towards the public purposes?**

The prevailing view, it seems, is that the consumer has an inexhaustible train of new ways to receive, view, hear and read their chosen diet of news entertainment and information. While Ofcom must retain a long term view often the technology that Ofcom speaks of (paras 4.6 & 4.7) is not the reality on the ground across our region. We advise caution when assessing claims of planned technology innovations that might never materialise or whose roll-out may be limited and not include sparsely populated areas. While it is difficult for a campaign such as ours to refute statistics such as those in para 4.8, we doubt that these would hold true across our region.

Para 4.3 needs to be challenged. By quoting the statistic that 48% of 16-24 year olds would miss the Internet more than TV the implication is that this age group is meeting its needs for public service content, we doubt that this is the case. It must be

remembered that the Internet and a computer is a very flexible technology that holds users attention in many different ways, chat rooms, gaming, social networking, work related activities, study, and the list is endless. While some of these pastimes may fulfill some of the Public Service Broadcasting purposes the assertion that "...people are beginning to meet needs for public service content in other ways than broadcast media" is over stating the point and we need to consider the degree to which these potential viewers are disengaged from PSB. Further there are many communities that have poor broadband connectivity and many households that don't own a computer at all. It's worth noting that one of the fastest growing sectors in society is the elderly for whom a reliance on Internet delivered PSB would mean effective disengagement.

Section 5

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the implications of different economic scenarios for the UK TV market for the future prospects for delivery of the public purposes?**

- ii) Do you agree with Ofcom's analysis of the costs and benefits of PSB status?**

The analysis is thorough but it is difficult to comment on the accuracy of the figures presented. We assume they are correct. We note the risk posed to ITV regions in the short term and suggest there is a requirement for positive intervention.

Section 6

- i) Do you agree with Ofcom's vision for public service content?**

Broadly we agree with Ofcom's vision and assessment.

- ii) How important are plurality and competition for quality in delivering the purposes of public service broadcasting, and in what areas?**

Plurality of news supply adds significant richness to the viewer experience across the ITV Border region, chiefly because the region is not served well by the BBC news services from their metropolitan bases of Manchester, Newcastle or Glasgow. The best chance that viewers have to compliment national news with news relevant to their locality is to watch ITV Border's Lookaround programme and Border News bulletins.

- iii) In maximising reach and impact of public service content in the future, what roles can different platforms and services play?**

Convergence will continue but linear TV and radio are the only mediums that can reliably deliver the mass audience reach necessary to achieve the purposes of PSB and therefore should remain at its core. Increasingly diverse methods of transmission like DTT, satellite, cable, broadband or 3G and increasingly sophisticated ways to consume like listen again services, mobile phones, YouTube and Sky Plus will not

change the requirement for first class linear Free to Air TV services. What needs to be addressed here is the ability for broadcasters to collect income from their content so that the rights holders receive appropriate payment and future production of content is safeguarded.

From a regional news perspective we believe that a programme like Lookaround provides an audience with a diet of news, information and entertainment that is difficult to replicate online. Who for instance will check to see what court cases are running locally, find out the details of the charges and outcomes? Who would go to a web site of a local council to see what policies have been discussed today and every day? How many people would approach the emergency services to find out trends and statistics regarding types of injuries or crimes? A select few might catch the YouTube video about the cat stuck up their particular tree in their particular community but the rest of these stories while not crucial to our everyday existence reflect our culture, inform us about our local trends and help us in our civic understanding.

The presence of the Internet and new media presents opportunities to present information but does not replace an effective news gathering operation. It can provide much detail after an issue has the attention of the viewer. Local TV with supportive Internet or red button services is surely the way forward for PSB news.

iv) Do you agree that the existing model for delivering public service broadcasting will not be sufficient to meet changing needs in future?

As described in paragraphs 6.58 the model does appear to be broken, a reality made all too clear to employees of ITV regions. The Save Lookaround Campaign sympathises with ITV's economic realities and recognises that they are likely to get worse as D.S.O. progresses. However this statement should not be taken as an excuse to throw the baby out with the bath water. We look to primary legislative solutions expected in 2011 to establish a new funding structure compact and reassert regional PSB requirements going forward. In the mean time we expect Ofcom to protect the public interest via direct intervention. This could take the form of an immediate reduction or scrapping of licence fees paid by the ITV network with a quid pro quo agreement from ITV that the regions remain untouched until the outcome of the 2011 legislation is apparent.

Section 7

- i) What are your views of the high-level options for funding PSB in the future?**
- ii) Are the proposed tests of effectiveness for future models for public service broadcasting the right ones?**
- iii) Of the four possible models for long term delivery of public service content, which, if any, do you consider the most appropriate and why? Are there any alternative models, or combination of models that could be**

more appropriate, and why?

This section of the Ofcom report is perhaps the most disturbing from the point of view of the Save Lookaround Campaign. There is little mention at all of news in the regions in any of the models proposed. From this we might assume that Model 1. is the only option if plurality is to be maintained in the regions and if ITV is to remain a Public Service Broadcaster. Yet Model 1 is effectively what we have now.

Model 1.

In our opinion ITV's proposed evolution will erode localism by imposing huge regional transmission areas. It will wipe out the Border TV News Region and the much valued Lookaround programme with it. We cannot say that this is welcomed by anyone. In fact we ask Ofcom to intervene as best it can to prevent what may be irreversible changes to the ITV infrastructure before the outcome of 2011 legislation.

All other models have ITV dropping its public service remit.

Model 2

This is not really a positive option given Ofcom's own reasoning in paras 1.5, 1.25-1.27. The notion that **the market will provide** is incorrect, we all know that in this case it won't. Public Service Television is expensive, regional news even more so. PLC directors are virtually legally bound to put financial returns ahead of unquantifiable quality of life arguments like the plurality of news supply or the cultural and democratic value of an informed participative society.

Model 3.

From the regional perspective, could the output of channel 4 produce regional news? What are the transferable funding agreements talked about in paragraph 7.51? How would these be regulated? We are short of important information here.

Model 4.

Again from a regional perspective, who else has the transmission capability on DTT to provide a regional service other than ITV?

Section 8

- i) What do you think is the appropriate public service role for channel 4 in the short, medium and long term? What do you think of Channel 4's proposed vision?**
- ii) Which of the options set out for the commercial PSB's do you favour?**

Please see response to section 7

Section 9

- i) To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the likely future long term issues as they apply to the nations, regions and localities of the UK?**

We do not know the persuasion of the government nor the changes or recommendations they may make in 2011.

- ii) Which model(s) do you think will be most appropriate in each of the nations and in the English regions in the long term, and why?**

See section 7 response.

- iii) What are your views on short/medium-term issues referred to, including the out-of-London network production quotas?**

- iv) What are your initial views on the preliminary options set out relating to ITV plc's regional news proposal? (Please note Ofcom will put forward firm options on these issues, and consult also on ITV plc's regional news proposal, in phase 2 of this Review).**

As already stated, ITV's proposed evolution will, in our opinion, erode localism, impose huge unwieldy transmission areas and make irreversible changes to the ITV Border News Region. It is not welcome. Audiences want to see their locality, hear their accents from presenters and programme participants while they deliver their stories. The scale of the proposed news region will lead to disengagement and undermine viewer loyalty. What could be left behind is a programme with low viewing figures that further struggles to justify its existence. What we may well end up with are separate ITN services for Scotland, N. Ireland, Wales, England North and England South and the concept of local news left to other media and market forces.

We ask Ofcom to intervene, as best it can, to prevent this and we look to the outcome of the 2011 legislation when the way PSB is funded could be radically altered. If Ofcom do not intervene the government of the day in 2011 may inherit a fait accompli.

Section 11

- i) Do you agree that new legislation will need to be in place by 2011 in order to ensure continued delivery of the public purposes in the medium and long term?**

Yes