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SUBMISSION
TO
THE HOUSE OF LORDS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS

The British film and television industries

By THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST

SUMMARY

1. The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) believes that digital broadcasting has unlimited potential to encourage understanding of the world around us.
2. If we do not support certain areas of broadcast content which are commercially unviable, it is IBT's view that we will lose a very precious national commodity.
3. In the UK we are connected to the rest of the world in an inter-dependent way because of Globalisation which means we will need to adapt in order to survive – economically, socially and culturally. Public Service Broadcasting can promote understanding of global issues and help us integrate better in the world; it can provide social cohesion and can help us understand multi-cultural Britain better.
4. IBT's research¹ provides evidence that traditional broadcasting isn't providing as much programming about the wider world as it used to and isn't engaging viewers with innovative content through which they can learn about the world around them, even though television is still the primary means by which most people find out about the wider world.
5. IBT believes that in order for the UK citizens of the future to be able to flourish in a globalised society, they need to be, as the Secretary of State, Andy Burnham, described in January this year, the '*best informed citizens in the world*'.² IBT believes we should use this as a moment of opportunity to put in place the means to achieve this admirable ambition.

¹ Screening the World, IBT, 2008

² Andy Burnham, Speech made to Oxford Media Convention, January 2009

6. It is clear that UK citizens need to be well-informed about what is going on internationally in order for them to play a full role as global citizens, yet there is evidence that the UK public's awareness of the wider world is very low.
7. IBT believes the contribution by the UK film and television industries to UK culture is potentially huge. In light of the impacts of Globalisation, IBT's argument is that the UK Film and TV industries should contribute more than ever to our culture by inspiring us to understand how the UK fits into the wider world, culturally, socially and economically.
8. Drama especially can engage audiences with events in the wider world, such as the recent film *Slumdog Millionaire*. IBT questions why television doesn't follow the lead of this and other successful films in recent years by presenting the wider world imaginatively and engagingly on our screens.
9. The contribution of the UK's film and TV industries would be enhanced if broadcasters and film-makers were able to take greater risks and be more innovative. In order for them to do this, there need to be incentives other than advertising revenue or success measured by ratings.
10. It is IBT's view that in an increasingly competitive marketplace all programmes which are deemed valuable by the public but are considered commercially unviable by broadcasters should be supported if possible. IBT believes that programming which explains what is going on in the wider world falls into this category. We are particularly concerned about programming for children and young people because they will be the next generation of British Global Citizens and are currently seriously underserved in programming which engages them with the wider world.
11. IBT believes the 'Tier 3' (non-news) commitments in the Communications Act 2003, which included general programmes about 'matters of international significance', are unenforceable. We would like to see some of the key 'Tier 3' commitments become compulsory for the commercial Public Service Broadcasters in return for discounted spectrum or other incentives, such as tax rebates in order for the Public Service Broadcasting ecology not to be undermined by the pressures of commercialisation.
12. With reference to regulation, IBT urges Ofcom to reassess its criteria for measuring whether Public Service Content about the wider world is being adequately delivered. IBT research demonstrates that it is not being properly delivered. This directly contradicts Ofcom's PSB Annual Report in 2008.
13. IBT believes that structural changes due to the digital revolution are already significantly impacting on the production and scheduling of UK-made original programming about the wider world.

14. The most significant of these changes thus far are the movement of programming about the wider world onto niche channels, a reduction in the number of programmes made about the wider world due to budgetary pressure, reduced risk-taking and innovation in programming about the wider world, the impact of the loss of serendipity because of the proliferation of channels.
15. These effects of the digital revolution are to a certain degree being offset by online content but there is less trust in online content; also its discoverability is controlled by commercial mechanisms rather than by regulation which uses criteria other than commercial gain as its measures of success.
16. In conclusion, the implications for television content creation in the 'digital future' are that programming which is more expensive and attracts fewer viewers will become increasingly scarce.
17. IBT believes that an institutional solution is required to solve this problem. If there were an institutional framework in place which allowed a second Public Service Broadcaster, for example, to measure success not only in terms of ratings and advertising revenue, then vulnerable areas of Public Service Content would be more secure.
18. We urge the House of Lords Communications Committee to take very seriously the threat to those genres of programming which could successfully tell us about the wider world in an engaging way – namely children's and young people's programming, drama, specialist factual and comedy. There is currently underprovision of content about the wider world in these areas and this trend is only likely to increase in the future digital age.

CONTENT ABOUT THE WIDER WORLD & PSB IN A DIGITAL AGE

19. The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) believes that television, the internet and other digital platforms including radio have unlimited potential to encourage understanding of the world around us and influence public perception. We believe that if this power is effectively harnessed Public Service Content on UK television and online can be entertaining and engaging as well as informative which will help the UK flourish in the increasingly Globalised world.
20. The challenges we face in the current economic downturn are being faced by a multitude of other countries around the world. Because of Globalisation we in the UK are connected to the rest of the world in an inter-dependent way which means we will need to adapt in order to survive – economically, socially and

culturally. We will need to be able to communicate, respect and interact with people from all around the world in future in order to be able to do business on a global scale. Without an understanding of the wider world, how will we do this?

21. IBT believes that there is a significant opportunity in the current debate of the future of Public Service Broadcasting to reframe our content provision with all that the digital age offers us. If we do not successfully support certain areas of broadcasting which are under threat because they are not viewed as commercially viable, it is IBT's view that we will lose a very precious national commodity – broadcasting which serves the public through entertaining, engaging, educative content and which enables the public to be well-informed active Global Citizens.
22. One of the commonest reactions to Globalisation is to become more insular because this reinforces local cultural identity, providing a greater sense of personal security based on national identity. It is IBT's view that people in the UK can't afford to be inward-looking because this is likely to isolate us and lead to greater economic and social problems. We believe this trend towards isolationism is only likely to continue unless policy-makers address it and it is IBT's belief that Public Service Broadcasting Content can provide a solution to this problem if the right institutional framework is put in place.
23. IBT's 2008 research³ provides evidence that traditional broadcasting isn't tapping into the potential to engage and enable viewers by providing them with innovative, engaging content through which they can learn about the world around them, the world outside the UK. Television is still the primary means by which people access public service content.⁴ This research aligns with other recent research about television still being the public's primary source of information about the world outside the UK. 68% of people say that television news is still their main source of information for finding out about the world⁵ which contrasts strongly with only 6% who say the internet is their main source of information on the wider world.
24. Where is the new programming which reflects the shift that has taken place over the past ten years which is so apparent on the net? Already the net has been hugely enabling as a platform for citizens – providing access to information, services and social networking which we didn't imagine in the last century. Why has broadcasting not followed this example?

³ Screening the World, IBT, 2008

⁴ Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review, Phase 2, para 1.2

⁵ OfcomPSB Review survey: Q12: 2,260 interviews 16+, October-December 2007, results for TV on main channels and TV on digital channels combined under TV

25. IBT believes there is huge potential through broadcasting to provide people with the inspiration to adapt and engage in a globalised world, but there is equally the potential, if policymakers ignore this call, to ensure current trends continue which will lead to greater isolationism and insularity. We can cosset the population with predictable, comforting programmes which reinforce stereotypes, reassuring them that the UK is still the centre of the world and that the 'world outside' is a long way away and no threat.
26. IBT believes that in order for the UK citizens of the future to be able to flourish in a globalised society, they need to be, as the Secretary of State, Andy Burnham, described in January this year, the '*best informed citizens in the world*'.⁶ IBT believes we should use this as a moment of opportunity to put in place the means to achieve this admirable ambition.
27. In this submission we address questions 1, 6 and 7 in the Call for Evidence which focus on content provision because this is where IBT's expertise lies.
28. QUESTION 1: What do the UK film and television industries currently contribute to the UK economy and British culture? In what ways might this contribution be enhanced?
29. IBT believes the contribution by the UK film and television industries to UK culture is potentially huge. Film and TV are vehicles through which content can engage audiences in order to foster greater interest among the public in the world around us.
30. It is clear from recent events – whether they be the terrorist attacks in Mumbai or the events which led up to the current economic crisis - that UK citizens need to be well-informed about what is going on internationally in order for them to play a full role as global citizens. Yet there is evidence that the UK public's awareness of the wider world is very low:

*When asked to name countries currently experiencing conflict, while 69% and 65% of those questioned identified Iraq and Afghanistan respectively, less than 1% of respondents were able to identify other countries including Sudan, Somalia, and Central African Republic. Almost one in five (18%) were unable to name five countries in the world in conflict*⁷
31. There is also evidence that greater understanding of the wider world leads to increased social cohesion within the UK. Children questioned in a 2008 MORI poll⁸ showed a greater respect for their neighbours and for the multi-cultural

⁶ Andy Burnham, Speech made to Oxford Media Convention, January 2009

⁷ Poll of 2072 people across the UK, conducted by ICM on behalf of the British Red Cross, 2008

⁸ Our Global Future: How can education meet the challenge of change? An Ipsos MORI Research Study on behalf of DEA 2008

nature of UK society when they had been exposed to information about the wider world. The value of this type of social cohesion is clear as we are increasingly faced with the impacts of globalisation and a more fragmented society.

32. In light of the impacts of Globalisation, IBT's argument is that the UK Film and TV industries should contribute more than ever to our culture by inspiring us to understand how the UK fits into the wider world, culturally, socially and economically. They should do this in order to not only help us understand our own multi-cultural society, but also in order for us to relate better to people in countries outside the UK.
33. We would argue that this potential in Film and TV to connect us to the wider world is exemplified by the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, which has been enjoyed by millions across the country and proved a box office success. We believe this one film has done more to raise public awareness of everyday life in India than any content has ever done on television and question why it is that television cannot achieve the same impact.
34. It is IBT's view that the UK's TV and Film industries' contribution to the culture and economy of the UK would be enhanced if broadcasters and film-makers felt able to take more risks. This would require the introduction of a new set of criteria for Public Service Broadcasting which measure impact and success without relying upon ratings so heavily. We would also like to see indirect financial support, such as tax-breaks, for those areas of programming which are considered commercially unviable but valuable in terms of their contribution to the nation's understanding of the wider world.
35. QUESTION 6: How successful has the regulatory system been in supporting UK content in television? Are there particular types of programming, such as drama, children's or factual programming, for which more support is needed? Could more be done through regulation or incentives, for example, to encourage non-public service broadcasters to commission original UK content? Might financial measures, such as industry levies, be feasible and effective?
36. It is IBT's view that in an increasingly competitive marketplace brought about by a proliferation of channels, all programmes which are deemed valuable by the public but are considered commercially unviable by broadcasters should be supported if possible. Ofcom's research in 2008 showed two elements that IBT considers essential to public service broadcasting are also valued highly by viewers: *"statements relating to informing us" emerged as the most important of*

*all. "Its news programmes are trustworthy" and "Helps me understand what's going on in the world" were the statements rated as most important by audiences.*⁹

37. From this evidence, IBT believes that the public wants programmes which explain what is going on in the wider world. This content is under threat because it appears to get lower ratings than domestic programming, and thus is less commercially viable.
38. With reference to regulation, while IBT welcomed the inclusion of 'Tier 3' (non-news) commitments in the Communications Act 2003, which included general programmes about 'matters of international significance', it is clear from the demise of children's television on ITV1 that the Tier 3 commitments cannot be enforced, therefore they are in practice worthless. We would like to see some of the key 'Tier 3' commitments become compulsory for the commercial Public Service Broadcasters in return for discounted spectrum or other incentives, such as tax rebates.
39. The 'Tier 3' commitments which are under threat, as defined by Ofcom, but are crucial in order for adequate public service to be delivered are the following: children's and young people's programming (para 264.6.h)¹⁰; matters of international significance (264.6.f), cultural activity in the UK and its diversity... [across] drama, comedy and music (264.6.b); current affairs... from around the world (264.6.c); religion (264.6.g); programming that reflects the 'lives and concerns of different communities and cultural interests and traditions within the UK' (264.6.i).
40. With reference specifically to programmes about non-news 'matters of international significance', IBT's 2008 research clearly demonstrates that the Communications Act 2003 has failed to ensure delivery of programming of this type. There is no quantitative evidence that matters of international significance are being covered by commercial public service broadcasters. From IBT's recent research it is clear that there has been a reduction in the amount of 'Tier 3' programming about the wider world outside news and current affairs. This represents an erosion of a key element of PSB which was explicitly spelled out in the 2003 Communications Act.
41. Additionally, *Screening the World (IBT, 2008)* shows that the information we receive on television about the world outside the UK is oversimplified and reinforces stereotypes, rather than increasing our understanding. If current trends continue in mainstream television, instead of broadening understanding, television is likely to limit people's horizons. It is doing this by increasingly

⁹ Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review, Phase One: The Digital Opportunity (2008) page 26

¹⁰ Communications Act 2003, Chapter 21, Regulatory Provisions, The Public Service Remit for Television

reinforcing stereotypes about other countries and moving programmes about international affairs onto niche channels which attract far fewer viewers and smaller budgets.

*'The longitudinal element of this research reveals some striking trends. International factual programming on the four main terrestrial channels has now reached its lowest overall level since 1989-90. The increasing levels of output on BBC3, BBC4 and More4 point to the migration of international factual content to digital channels. And the collapse in recorded programme hours of international and developing country factual programming on ITV1 is striking.'*¹¹

And

*'Africa receives relatively little coverage and is dominated by wildlife programming whereas the Middle East is dominated by conflict and disaster programming. Europe and North America together make up 47% of all international factual output and are characterised by high levels of travel and crime programming respectively.'*¹²

42. IBT is very concerned that areas of 'Tier 3' programming which are under threat should be supported in the Digital Age in order for the UK's Public Service Broadcasting ecology not to be undermined by the pressures of commercialisation.
43. Additionally, with reference to regulation, IBT would like to see Ofcom reassess its criteria for measuring whether public service broadcasting content is being properly delivered. IBT has identified a failure in the method of measuring the delivery of the public service purposes as defined by Ofcom. Our 2008 research (*Screening the World*) presents evidence which contradicts that in Ofcom's PSB Annual Report 2008.
44. Ofcom defines the genres which should deliver Purpose 1, 'informing our understanding of the world' as news and current affairs.¹³ IBT argues that Purpose 1 should be delivered across all genres, attracting a wider audience than that which is engaged by news and current affairs. The very nature of news and current affairs reporting tends to focus on disasters and extraordinary events rather than the everyday life of people in other countries. This content about daily life may appear more mundane than 'disaster' news but in order to have a balanced understanding of the world, the public needs to be presented with engaging content which tells the other side of the story – across all genres of programming which should include children's, drama, specialist factual, and even entertainment.

¹¹ *Screening the World*, IBT, 2008

¹² *Screening the World*, IBT, 2008

¹³ Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review, Phase 2, para 2.17

45. Therefore IBT urges Ofcom to review its methods of measurement of the delivery of the PSB Purposes in order to better establish whether there is adequate provision of varied, high quality programming which tells us about the world outside the UK.
46. With reference to the BBC, IBT was delighted that the Global purpose, 'To Bring the UK to the World and the World to the UK', was instituted in the BBC Charter as one of the six purpose remits in 2006. While we do not believe the BBC is adequately delivering on this purpose across all genres and channels, we welcome the work done up until now in the BBC Trust's Service Reviews. In the recent Review into Children's Programming we welcome the recommendation made by the BBC Trust that CBeebies should 'contribute to the BBC's Global Purpose', one of IBT's key recommendations to the Trust in the Review.
47. QUESTION 7: How will the structural changes facing the UK television industry, and particularly the public service broadcasting component, affect UK originated television content? To what extent are these effects irreversible? To what extent are they being offset by changes elsewhere in the creative industries sector? What are the implications for television content creation of digital switchover and widespread broadband availability?
48. IBT believes that structural changes due to the digital revolution will significantly impact on the production and scheduling of UK-made original programming about the wider world.
49. The most significant of these changes thus far:
 - the movement of programming onto niche channels
 - a reduction in the number of programmes due to budgetary pressure
 - reduced risk-taking and innovation
 - the impact of the loss of serendipity
50. Movement of Programming about the wider world onto Niche Channels
As can be seen from IBT's 2008 research (*Screening the World*) there is a trend for programming about the wider world to be moved off mainstream, popular channels such as BBC1 onto niche channels such as More 4 and BBC4 where it receives a smaller budget and fewer viewers.
51. This migration is due to broadcasters believing that it is only certain, niche audiences which are interested in programming about the wider world. While this may be true for some programmes we would argue it isn't necessarily the case when innovation and creativity are employed and broadcasters are

prepared to take a risk. We believe that when broadcasters are creative, programmes about the wider world can attract much larger audiences. *No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* on BBC1 as a good example of a drama which focuses on Africa but following the transmission of a successful pilot has now been placed very much in the mainstream Sunday night schedule. In our opinion, unless broadcasters are imaginative and innovative and prepared to take risks, this trend of moving programmes about the wider world away from popular channels will only continue.

52. Budgetary pressures

There is also a perception that foreign filming is more expensive than domestic filming, so with increasing budgetary pressures, broadcasters are shying away from foreign filming. IBT would argue that with new technology (lighter cameras etc) crewing costs and filming costs have gone down significantly and in-country costs, especially in the developing world, tend to be less which can potentially outweigh any travel costs in getting there.

53. Reduced Risk-Taking and Lack of innovation

Due to the proliferation of channels and increased competition for viewers' attention, IBT believes that there is a growing tendency among broadcasters to play safe and avoid risk, thus reducing innovation at the commercial PSBs but also at the BBC. IBT's definition of original programming is that which is different and therefore it takes a risk. Without this type of innovation we will end up with homogenous programming and little diversity on our screens.

54. Loss of Serendipity

IBT strongly agrees with Ofcom that up until now "*serendipity*" has been an important "*feature of television*" and welcomes the point made by respondents in Ofcom's research for the Second Phase of the recent PSB Review, that people '*felt that when using the internet the likelihood of having their views challenged or their knowledge expanded by chance was minimal*'.¹⁴ With reference to programmes about the wider world, it is IBT's view that serendipity is an essential indirect motivator: where viewers may not proactively choose to watch a programme about the wider world, once watching there is the potential that they may become engaged and really enjoy it.

55. The question is, how can policy ensure serendipity? It is IBT's view that in order to support this element of serendipity in broadcasting, we need a content provider which has reach and ambition, has a duty to take risks and surprise us with programming we don't anticipate or expect. We need a broadcaster which is prepared to market programming which is on its first run or is 'out of the ordinary', to give that output a chance of being discovered. No broadcaster will do this in a commercially competitive marketplace unless an institutional

¹⁴ Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review, Phase 2, para 3.100

framework is in place whereby measures of success do not focus solely on ratings.

56. IBT believes all these effects will be irreversible unless action is taken by the Government to support the Public Service Broadcasting system in the future. We believe that the creation of a new Public Service Broadcaster which is being considered currently by the Digital Britain Team to provide plurality to the BBC could address many of the structural and content challenges we face but it will need an institutional framework and constitution which will guarantee the provision of those areas of programming which are currently most at risk.
57. These effects of the digital revolution are to a certain degree being offset by the proliferation of material which is available online but there is little regulation of this material and therefore less trust in online content; also its discoverability is controlled by commercial mechanisms (preferential positioning in search engine results etc) rather than by any regulation which uses criteria other than commercial gain as its measures of success.
58. In conclusion, the implications for television content creation in the 'digital future' are that programming which is more expensive and attracts fewer viewers will become increasingly scarce. Our programming diet will become increasingly limited and schedules more homogenous. Even for Public Service Broadcasters like the BBC the need to justify the licence fee places huge pressure on commissioners to attract large audiences, leading to less risk-taking and innovation. IBT views this threat to public service content as real and already apparent. For example, *Screening The World (IBT 2008)* showed a deplorable lack of programming for younger people and children about the wider world and virtually no drama. This trend is only likely to increase as commercial pressures increase.
59. In tough economic times it is more tempting than ever for content providers to cut back on programming which is perceived to attract lower ratings, such as international programming, in an effort to maintain income from advertising. IBT believes it is apparent that an institutional solution is required to solve this problem. If there were an institutional framework in place which allowed a second Public Service Broadcaster, for example, to measure success not only in terms of ratings and advertising revenue, then vulnerable areas of Public Service Content would be more secure. Additionally, this would put a greater onus on the content provider to originate innovative and engaging solutions to the problem of how to attract an audience to such areas of programming instead of simply dropping them.
60. We urge the House of Lords Communications Committee to take very seriously the threat to those genres of programming which could successfully tell us about the wider world in an engaging way – namely children's

programming, drama, specialist factual and comedy. There is currently underprovision of content about the wider world in these areas and this trend is only likely to increase in the future digital age.

Background: IBT

61. The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) is an amalgamation of two sister organisations: the former Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE) and former International Broadcasting Trust (IBT). The new IBT is a charity which seeks to promote high quality television and new media coverage of matters of international significance. In the past, 3WE has been active in this area and this submission fully reflects 3WE's long history of campaigning on these issues and arguing that international coverage on television is a necessary tool in informing us all, as global citizens.
62. IBT represents a coalition of international charities. Its members include: ActionAid, Amnesty International, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care UK, Christian Aid, Comic Relief, Concern UK, Friends of the Earth, Merlin, Oxfam, Plan UK, Practical Action, Progressio, RSPB, Save the Children, Sightsavers International, Skillshare International, Tearfund, TVE, UNA UK, UNICEF UK, VSO, the World Association for Christian Communication and World Vision. IBT is a registered charity, number 326150.
63. The views in this submission reflect the concerns of IBT's member agencies regarding adequate common understanding of the world in which we live. These concerns are shared by millions of UK supporters of our organisations. IBT's members, being intimately and operationally concerned with the effects of 'globalisation' on communities and environments around the world, and with communicating across the world, welcome the advent of the global information society.
64. IBT's argument, reflected in all our policy work since 1997, is that television coverage of the developing world should not just focus on images of suffering which is more often than not what is presented in news coverage. It is IBT's view that an international dimension should be an integral part of all programming.

This submission was written by Sophie Chalk, Director of Campaigns, on behalf of the International Broadcasting Trust. It is a corporate submission. March 23rd 2009.

Contact details

Sophie Chalk

Telephone: 020 8892 7297/mobile 07973 408 243

Address: IBT Campaign Office, 23 The Embankment, Twickenham, TW1 3DU

Email: sophie.chalk@btinternet.com

