

## **Ofcom's consultation on the Channel 3 and Channel 5: proposed programming obligations.**

**This response has been cleared by the Rt. Hon Carwyn Jones AM, the First Minister of Wales.**

The Welsh Government welcomes this opportunity to respond to Ofcom's consultation on the Channel 3 and Channel 5: proposed programming obligations.

### **Channel 3 licence – news and non-news provision**

Wales needs a strong independent voice in broadcasting to provide a counterbalance to the provision of BBC Wales and ITV Wales continues to have a vital role to play. The Welsh Government is fully aware of the importance of ensuring plurality of English language television in Wales in news and also general programming aimed at Welsh viewers on channel 3. The channel 3 news service should not be viewed as a 'regional news' service, but as an essential democratic national news service for the people of Wales.

The Welsh Government remains clear that protecting the existing coverage provision should be an absolute minimum condition for renewal of the Channel 3 licence. This view was set out in our response to the consultation on Ofcom's draft Annual Plan in February 2013 and we have continued to press this point in discussions with ITV Wales, Ofcom and in the context of the UK Government's Communications review.

However this does not mean that the Welsh Government views the existing level of provision as appropriate, or even adequate; it is a minimum standard that barely manages to deliver against very basic Public Service Broadcasting requirements. In our response to Ofcom's draft annual plan we also pointed out that the level of provision has been varied (downwards) over the period of the existing licence, primarily for commercial reasons and overriding the needs of the Welsh people. This relaxation of licence conditions has allowed the service in Wales to diminish, economically and in terms of Welsh content - in our view it is no longer sufficient.

A new licence represents an opportunity to redress this balance. Although the Welsh Government notes Ofcom's intention to protect the existing news and non-news provision on the Channel 3 licence in Wales, this does not go far enough; the opportunity should now be taken to restore a more appropriate level of provision and to protect that for the future. Proper consideration should be given to a level of provision that reflects the cultural diversity and richness of Wales and its people, and the Welsh Government should be involved in that discussion from the outset.

### **Network programme and production obligations – Channel 3 and Channel 5**

The Welsh Government has made clear the importance it attaches to appropriate coverage of Wales on the main television networks. We expect the BBC Trust and Audience Council for Wales to continue to implement the recommendations of the King report and we would point out that these recommendations are also relevant to ITV news (and Channel 4 news). It is vital that these channels appropriately reflect the devolved nations in their news and non-news provision. We urge Ofcom to reflect this in its analysis of PSB and in the relicensing of not just Channel 3, but also Channels 4 and 5.

Although this question is primarily about Channels 3 and 5, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our view that Channel 4 should be required to produce at least a population share of network commissions in the nations and regions if it is to be in receipt of public funding. We believe that this is fully in conformity with Channel 4's role in developing new talent throughout the UK.