

BBC Children's news and first-run UK originations

Response to Ofcom from the Commercial On-Demand and Broadcasting Association (COBA)

December 2019



A VOICE FOR COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS IN THE UK

Introduction

1. The Commercial On-Demand and Broadcasting Association (COBA) is the UK industry body for multichannel broadcasters and on-demand services. COBA members operate a wide variety of channels, including news, factual, children's, music, arts, entertainment, sports and comedy. Their content is available on free-to-air and pay-TV platforms, as well as on-demand.
2. COBA members are arguably the fastest growing part of the UK television industry, and are increasing their investment in jobs, UK content and infrastructure, largely without public support, direct or indirect.
 - Scale: In the last decade, the sector has increased its turnover by 30% to more than £5 billion a year. This is rapidly approaching half of the UK broadcasting sector's total annual turnover, helping establish the UK as a leading global television hub.¹
 - Employment: As part of this growth, the multichannel sector has doubled direct employment over the last decade.²
 - UK production: In addition, the sector has increased investment in UK television content to a record £725m per annum, up nearly 50% on 2009 levels.³

¹ Ofcom International Broadcasting Market Report 2013

² Skillset, Television Sector – Labour Market Intelligence Profile

³ COBA 2014 Census, Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates for COBA

Response to consultation

- 1) During Ofcom's recent consultation on changes to its EPG Code, the BBC argued that it required additional prominence for its linear children's channels due to competition. The BBC's response to Ofcom stated:

'Even on linear listings, PSB children's programming is increasingly competing for prominence with well-funded multi-national content commissioners.'⁴

- 2) The BBC's rationale for this was based in large part on its high levels of commissions from UK producers and range of content, including news for children.
- 3) It is regrettable therefore that, a few months after securing additional prominence concessions from Ofcom, the BBC now proposes to reduce the amount of first-run content and news on one of the main channels that will benefit. News is a key public service genre, arguably the most important, while first-run content is a core part of CBBC's appeal to audiences. The proposals therefore have a clear impact on the range of content being offered to children in linear.
- 4) We therefore ask that Ofcom review its decision to give CBBC automatic page one prominence in light of these new proposals. As Ofcom is aware, moving CBBC to page one will inevitably harm revenues, and therefore content investment, for those commercial children's channels that are displaced.
- 5) In addition, we stress that this proposed reduction in first-run hours is in our view likely to make CBBC less attractive to viewers, potentially leading to a fall in audiences. It is important to state for the record that such a decline in audiences would not be the result of increased competition, but rather due to the BBC's own policy to prioritise the iPlayer over its linear services. We ask Ofcom to bear this in mind if and when the BBC next asks for further support for its linear children's channels.

⁴ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/131178/BBC.pdf