

**Broadcasting Committee of the Church of Ireland**  
**Response to Ofcom Draft Annual Plan 2009/10 Consultation Document**  
**28<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

**1. What are your views on the continued relevance of OFCOM's three-year strategic framework for the proposed work programme in 2009/10?**

The Church of Ireland Broadcasting Committee supports Ofcom's intention to begin a new three-year strategic process, to respond effectively to the twin challenges of the digital switchover and the economic downturn. We commend the bringing forward of the 'Second Public Service Broadcasting Review' and indeed contributed our own submission in January 2009 to that process. Central to the Broadcasting Committee's concerns are changes and challenges to PSB, particularly faith-based, which is not referred to explicitly in the Draft Annual Plan 2009/10.

**2. What are your views on Ofcom's proposed policy work programme and top priority areas for 2009/10?**

The Broadcasting Committee commends Ofcom's proposals to address gaps in the provision of services, particularly in Northern Ireland, such as mobile and broadband services. We also commend Ofcom's commitment to address digital inclusion by supporting the evolution of radio, improving media literacy and access for older consumers, disabled people and those on lower incomes.

However we reiterate our concerns about the future of public broadcasting and religious programming, particularly in Northern Ireland. While we recognise the need for a new approach to delivering public service content for the digital age, we are keen that the recommendations of the 'Putting Viewers First' Statement, be approved by regional and National Government, so as to safeguard the diversity, quality and accessibility of faith-based PSB.

We support the BBC being at the heart of PSB and commend recommendations to identify a second PSB provider, however we believe that broadcasters such as ITV and Channel 5, should also be held to account for their failure to provide their licence requirement of sufficient diversity of PSB, such as children's and faith-based programming. We reiterate our disappointment that UTV fail to provide religious programming in Northern Ireland.

**3. What are your views on the elements which should be contained within Ofcom's new strategic framework?**

The implementation of the second Public Service Broadcasting Review, 'Putting Viewers First', should be made a key work area and priority. Of immediate concern is the long-term viability of PSB in a diverse and digital broadcasting landscape and against the backdrop of unsustainable financial investment. We would support proposals for Channel 3 and Channel 5 to serve as commercial networks with a limited public service

commitment, and that the potential for an alternative provider of PSB to the BBC, possibly through partnerships, joint ventures and mergers with Channel 4 be explored.

Submitted on behalf of the Broadcasting Committee of the Church of Ireland

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