

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

**Synopsis of major views and concerns on
“public service broadcasting”
raised at the special meeting held on 11 March 2006**

Issues	Views/concerns
Public service mandate	<p>In principle, there is general agreement that public service broadcasting (PSB) should serve the community, be accountable to the public and be free from political and commercial interests. The programming of a public service broadcaster should cater for a broad spectrum of audiences, including the needs of minority interest groups.</p> <p>On ATV’s view that PSB should also provide non-commentary and comprehensive introduction of the Government’s policies, some members and deputations caution that a public service broadcaster should not serve as the Government’s “mouthpiece” or a propaganda machine.</p>
Editorial independence and autonomy	<p>There is general agreement that editorial independence should be one of the core values of PSB. HKJA has specifically pointed out that the Framework Agreement between RTHK and the policy bureau is insufficient to safeguard the editorial independence of the broadcaster. To enable the public service broadcaster to operate with genuine independence, most of the deputations consider it necessary to put in place, by way of legislation, an appropriate institutional arrangement, governance structure and financial support. There is also the suggestion that the important principles of universality, diversity, distinctiveness and transparency of the broadcaster should also be enshrined in the legislation.</p>
Institutional arrangement	<p>Members and most deputations share the view that RTHK’s current status as a government department constrains its role as a public service broadcaster. While the future institutional arrangement should be subject to further consultation with the community and the existing staff of RTHK, the option of a publicly-funded statutory</p>

	<p>corporation is considered worth-exploring.</p> <p>Metro considers that the future public service broadcaster should be subject to the same regulatory oversight as commercial broadcasters.</p>
Governance	<p>Most of the deputations express the view that the governance of the future public service broadcaster should be vested with a management committee/governing board comprising members independent from the Government.</p> <p>The management committee/governing board should not interfere with the editorial policy of the broadcaster.</p>
Funding	<p>According to the CUHK Professors, Hong Kong is among the lowest in PSB expenditure when compared to other developed economies. They consider that the Government should first affirm the scope and objectives of PSB and make available the amount of resources necessary to fulfil these objectives.</p> <p>There is general agreement that PSB should mainly be publicly funded. Some deputations share RTHK's view that to provide a more stable source of funding, consideration may be given to appropriating funding to the public service broadcaster on a triennial or 5-yearly term to facilitate its planning and operation. There are suggestions that the public service broadcasters can generate additional revenue through sale of its programming content.</p> <p>The commercial broadcasters hold the view that the publicly-funded broadcaster (such as RTHK) should not seek advertising revenue and commercial sponsorship to fund its expenditure as this will pose unfair competition to the private sector. Some members however consider it acceptable to allow the publicly-funded broadcaster to seek a limited level of revenue through commercial activities.</p>

<p>Carriage platform</p>	<p>At present, RTHK does not have its own carriage platform to broadcast its TV productions. TVB and ATV's position is that a public service broadcaster should not use the spectrum and airtime of commercial free-to-air television licensees and should be provided with its own TV channel or group of channels. The Professors from CUHK also urge that there should be dedicated channels for public service broadcasting.</p> <p>PCCW considers that as pay television has become an increasingly pervasive medium and gains more household penetration, RTHK should step up its cooperation with pay television licensees to use the latter's platform to carry its programmes.</p>
<p>Respective roles of public service and commercial broadcasters</p>	<p>The commercial broadcasters express grave concern about unfair competition and take the view that a publicly-funded broadcaster should not compete with commercial broadcasters for advertising revenue, commercial sponsorship and ratings. In their opinion, a public service broadcaster should focus on alternative programming and produce programmes that are considered by commercial broadcasters as not commercially viable. Its programming should not duplicate the productions of commercial broadcasters.</p> <p>The Professors of CUHK, HKJA, Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor and some members however do not agree entirely that PSB is "a form of market intervention". They consider that competition between private and public broadcasters can serve a positive purpose of driving improvement and see no serious problem in a certain extent of overlap in the programme types. In their view, PSB programming can provide audiences with a different perspective and such programming should not be restricted to catering for minority or niche interests.</p> <p>TVB and Metro state that as PSB is primarily a responsibility of the Government, the existing licence conditions on commercial broadcasters to provide public</p>

	service programmes should be suitably relaxed.
Accessibility	Hong Kong Association of the Deaf urges that TV broadcasts of PSB programming such as media briefings by key government officials should be accompanied by subtitles and sign language to assist viewers with impaired hearing.
Digitization	<p>With the launch of digital terrestrial television in 2007, ATV and TVB urge that RTHK should make use of the digital platform to run its own channel, thus freeing them from the obligation to transmit RTHK programmes on their spectrum.</p> <p>Members and most of the deputations look forward to digitization of media technologies as an opportunity to provide a wider range of programming choice, with diverse audiences' needs better served.</p>
Community/public access channels	<p>Metro considers that existing broadcasters already provide a diversity of programmes and the need to set up public access channels is doubtful.</p> <p>Citizens' Radio, Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, HKJA, the Democratic Party, the Professors from CUHK and some members express strong support for the setting up of community channels so as to provide more platforms to cater for diversity of views and programming content.</p>

Abbreviations :

ATV	:	Asia Television Limited
HKJA	:	Hong Kong Journalists Association
RTHK	:	Radio Television Hong Kong
Metro	:	Metro Broadcast Corporation Limited
CUHK	:	The Chinese University of Hong Kong
TVB	:	Television Broadcasts Limited
PCCW	:	PCCW Media Limited