

**For discussion
on 12 December 2011**

**Legislative Council Panel on
Information Technology and Broadcasting**

**Adjustments to the “phone-in” programmes
of Radio Television Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members of the adjustments to be made to the “phone-in” programmes of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

Background

2. The RTHK Charter states that RTHK should fulfill the public purpose of providing an open platform for the public to freely exchange their views without fear or favour. In line with the editorial principles set out in the Charter, RTHK should be impartial in the views it reflects and even-handed with the public who seek to express their views via its platform; immune from commercial, political and/or other influences; and uphold the highest professional standards of journalism.

3. RTHK pioneered the production of public affairs “phone-in” programmes in the 1970s by providing a platform for the public to voice their views. During the past three decades, RTHK had regularly reviewed the format of these programmes, with changes in programme hosts, contents, emphases and styles from time to time. At present, the two major public affairs “phone-in” programmes on RTHK’s Chinese channels during weekdays are “*Talkabout*” and “*Open Line Open View*”, which are broadcast in the morning and evening respectively. The format of both programmes has remained unchanged for over ten years.

4. In September 2010, the Public Affairs Unit (PAU) conducted an internal review of its existing programmes, and concluded that

listeners were looking for more detailed background information on current affairs, a wider variety of analyses, and more time for listeners to voice their views. Pursuant to the review, the PAU proceeded to consider options in adjusting the programme format.

5. At about the same time, the PAU production team has experimented with a number of new programme ideas. These include special features for topical issues (e.g. the Policy Address, minimum wage legislation, replacement mechanism for vacancies in the Legislative Council and poverty relief), “outreach interview” to tap the views of the public on social issues at the scene, inviting political parties to debate on public policies in “*The Five Flagposts*”; and establishing a dedicated public affairs webpage to facilitate extended discussions on public affairs. The listeners have responded to these new elements positively.

6. In view of these developments, the PAU decided on the broad framework of the new programme format in mid-2011. With the support of the management, the PAU proceeded with the preparatory work for implementing the new programme format with effect from 2 January 2012.

7. When the new Director of Broadcasting (DoB) assumed office in September 2011, the management and PAU briefed him on the impending changes. DoB supported the decision of the PAU on the new programme format, which is in line with the editorial independence of RTHK.

The new programme format

8. Under the new programme format, we will introduce new elements to “*Talkabout*” and “*Open Line Open View*”, including –

- (a) introduction of “outreach interview” to tap the public views of listeners on social issues at the scene;
- (b) more participation by post-secondary students (especially those who are interested in joining the media profession) in producing special programmes on current affairs;

- (c) simplification of the hosting arrangement by having a single host so as to allow more time for listeners to voice their opinions;
- (d) production of special features on topical issues; and
- (e) invitation of experts and opinion leaders from all sectors to provide in-depth commentaries and analyses.

9. At present, two co-hosts in a “phone-in” programme would chitchat with each other to stimulate discussion. Under the new programme format, there will be one single host stimulating discussion through researched background materials, on-site feedback and expert commentaries. RTHK has notified the five guest hosts of “*Talkabout*” and “*Open Line Open View*” of the new programme format. RTHK is very grateful for their valuable contributions and welcomes them to participate in the future as commentators.

10. The host will continue to ensure that the public have ample time to air their views. The host will definitely not be merely a passive on-air telephone operator. The host will continue to abide by the principle of the RTHK Producers’ Guidelines which states that:

“on-air personalities are expected to contribute to the discussion in phone-in programmes. Using their journalistic knowledge and judgement, they may question, comment, challenge or criticize to stimulate the debate, bring out new insights, and generally encourage the widest possible airing of views. There is no place, however, for personal bias or prejudice. Programme hosts must always treat the subject matter and their callers fairly.”

11. The PAU production team will continue to ensure that the platform will be open to all. RTHK will continue to invite experienced media professionals and experts from all walks of life to provide quality commentaries, with a view to providing listeners with a wide range of information and opinions. RTHK will also actively introduce and

nurture a new generation of public affairs programme hosts. RTHK will closely monitor the performance of the revamped programmes, and looks to the public for support.

Conclusion

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Radio Television Hong Kong
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