



**Management's forcible deletion of working group's recommendations on
Producers' Guidelines condemned**

A working group was set up last year to review RTHK's Producers' Guidelines, or PG, which has not been reviewed since 2003. Representatives from different departments were appointed to express their views on behalf of their own departments. More than 10 meetings were held to discuss how to amend the PG since May 2013. A more controversial amendment involved the first chapter of PG on public service broadcasting and a consensus was finally reached at the end of last year. Here was the original proposal:

1. RTHK AS A PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTER

As a public service broadcaster, RTHK pledges to uphold the core values of editorial independence and impartiality. We take public interest as the basis of our work. We share the values and missions of public broadcasters around the world, namely universality, diversity, independence and distinctiveness of programming. *We promote freedom of expression, open and democratic society, civic participation and a caring community. We also pledge to serve the people, produce quality programmes, nurture talent, monitor any infringement of public interest, and retain the trust that the community has placed in us.*

The working group was notified that the management felt that the sentence “**We promote freedom of expression, open and democratic society, civic participation and a caring community**” was not the definition of UNESCO on public service broadcasting, and asked the working group to discuss it again. Subsequently, three meetings were held and members of the working groups studied documents of international organisations such as the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, the UNESCO, the European Broadcasting Union to see what their elaborations on public service broadcasting are. Core values such as supporting freedom of expression, open and democratic society, civic participation were found embedded in these organisations' documents and were in line with the knowledge and belief on public service broadcasting of the international community. Therefore, the working group **unanimously** decided to keep its original proposal.

However, during a Strategic Group meeting, which included the DB and eight directorate grade staff, on March 11 this year, DB Roy Tang proposed to delete “*We promote freedom of expression, open and democratic society, civic participation and a caring community. We also pledge to serve the people, produce quality programmes, nurture talent, monitor any infringement of public interest, and retain the trust that the community has placed in us.*”

A number of reasons were raised by DB, including: these values were not directly quoted from UNESCO, the PG is for operational only, these values shouldn't be written into the PG but the Charter. (*Staff were never consulted on the content of the Charter)

Some members of the management and working group believed the sentence should be preserved and argued that the PG is not only a document for operational only as it also reflects RTHK's commitment to these core values. Moreover the sentence concerned was the result of numerous discussions and references were made to international organisations' documents. A member of the working group added that the values mentioned could also be found in an open document submitted by RTHK to the Public Service Broadcasting Review Committee in 2006.

A member of the management, who also headed the working group, supported to keep the original proposal and suggested to change "We promote" to "We believe in". But DB did not comment on the suggestion specifically. Another member of the working group also pointed out that the proposal was highly representative since it's the results of staff from across the departments, even if DB was against it, the proposal should be returned to the working group for re-discussion. However, the DB turned a deaf ear to the suggestion and asked the members of the Strategic Group to express their stands. In the end, six members of the group said they did not support the working group proposal.

Members of the working group questioned how and why the management unilaterally rejected the revised PG that has been discussed for a long time? The management stressed however the role of the working group was to submit views only, and the management had the final decision making power. In the end, the DB gave only two options before the SGM voting took place: 1. Delete the whole paragraph. 2. Only delete: ***We promote freedom of expression, open and democratic society, civic participation and a caring community. We also pledge to serve the people, produce quality programmes, nurture talent, monitor any infringement of public interest, and retain the trust that the community has placed in us.***

But the working group's chairman's suggestion to use "We believe in"; to keep the original amendment were not included as an option. One member of the management also proposed to preserve the sentence "*We also pledge to serve the people, produce quality programmes, nurture talent, monitor any infringement of public interest, and retain the trust that the community has placed in us.*" However, the DB ignored the suggestion. A member of the working group then requested to speak, but DB said working group members could express their views, but it's not necessary for the management to draw reference on and asked them to express their views after the vote. At the end, the matter was put to a vote in a rush manner, and the management unanimously voted for option two. The whole discussion lasted for 15 minutes.

The stance of the Union

We try to show here how unreasonable the decision making process was by detailing to you what had happened. We believe the working group was highly representative, since members from different departments were included in the group. Their proposal was the result after a thorough discussion and it also reflected the core values that RTHK staff recognised, they were also our belief and mission in carrying out public service broadcasting. But unfortunately, the DB turned a blind eye on the working group's effort and used his power as the head of RTHK to delete an important sentence in the PG.

The sentence represents values that staff uphold, but now it was deleted forcibly without our consent, nor thorough discussion and certainly no consultation. It frustrates and angers us how unjust the mechanism is! DB cited the power of the Strategic Group and disregarded the wishes of the working group and turned it into a rubber stamp. It should also be noted that the unanimous decision by the nine members of the management to delete the sentence was the result after screening.

We are very concerned this incident is only the tip of the iceberg. We are also concerned that in the future when the management discusses the development of RTHK, they would use exactly the same authoritarian-like way to pass a proposal and disregard views expressed by staff.

The Strategic Group had now endorsed the PG, and the management would next table the PG to the Editorial Meeting for approval. We understand that most of the colleague did not engage in the revision of the PG, and therefore we are trying to let you know what had happened and appeal all of you to express your views to your representative in the working group as well as your union representative in a bid to reverse the decision.

RTHK Programme Staff Union

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Attachment: The original proposal of the working group on PG