

**The Legislative Council
Bills Committee on Broadcasting Bill**

**English Programming Requirement on
Commercial Television Broadcasting Licensees**

Purpose

This paper explains the English programming requirements on commercial television broadcasting licensees.

Background

2. At the Bills Committee meeting on 25 May 2000, Members asked the Administration to provide a paper on the English language requirements currently imposed on the two commercial television broadcasting licensees.

English programming requirements

3. The two commercial television broadcasting licensees are each required to broadcast two channels, one in Cantonese and the other in English. Such requirements are stipulated in their respective licence conditions. The licensees may, however, apply to the Broadcasting Authority (BA) for approval to deviate from such requirements and each case will be considered on its merits.

4. The English language requirement was one of the subjects for public consultation during the 1998 Review of Television Policy. In view of the fact that English is a widely-used international language and one of the two official languages in Hong Kong, the Administration concluded that the two English programming channels should continue to be maintained. In addition to catering for the interest of and providing programming choices for the non-Cantonese speaking communities in Hong Kong, we believe that the English programming requirement would be conducive to maintaining Hong Kong's position as a cosmopolitan city as well as an international business centre.

Programming flexibility

5. We recognize that the two commercial television broadcasting licensees would require programming flexibility in response to changing market demands. In response to the appeal from the two licensees, the BA has agreed that the two licensees should be allowed to broadcast outside the prime time (i.e. 7:00 pm - 11:30 pm) up to 20% of their daily broadcasts in languages other than English and Cantonese in their English channels. Applications for broadcasting non-English programmes during the prime time would be considered by the BA on a case-by-case basis. We consider that the 20% should be an appropriate ceiling beyond which a programming channel may start to lose its language characteristics. Since January 1998, the BA has received a total of four applications from the two licensees for relaxing the 20% requirement and all these applications were approved.

6. It should also be noted that with the use of NICAM facilities, the two licensees may broadcast their programmes with more than one sound channels.

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Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau