

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) meeting, 27 November 2006
Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Ric Bailey (BBC), Paul Chinnery (for part)(Five), Rhodri Talfan Davies (BBC Wales), Tim Hartley (S4C), David Jordan (BBC) (chair), Peter Lowe (BSkyB), Ian McBride (ITV), Lisa McLaughlin (BBC Scotland), Nick Powell (ITV Wales), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Rob Shepherd (for part)(BBC), Martin Stott (for part)(Five).

In attendance: John Glover (for part)(Ofcom), Tabby Karamat (BBC), Jaron Lewis (BBC), Steve Perkins (for part)(Ofcom), Stephen Rooney (Electoral Commission).

Apologies: Prash Naik (Channel 4), Derrick Thomson (SMG)

Venue: 28 Portland Place, London

1. MEETINGS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The group had invited representatives from the political parties in England, Scotland and Wales which were likely to qualify for a PEB during the May 2007 Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

The main purpose of the meeting was to canvas the views of the parties about how PEB slots should be allocated for the May elections and any other issues that the parties had about PEBs generally.

Meetings were held with the parties as follows:

1. The Labour Party (Tim Nuttall)
2. The Conservative Party (George Eustace and Michael Salter)
3. The Liberal Democrats (Lord Rennard)
4. SNP (Stephen Noon)
5. UKIP (Clive Page and John Bufton)
6. Socialist Labour Party (Ian Johnson and Liz Screen)
7. Scottish Socialist Party (Alan McCombes)
8. Solidarity (Hugh Kerr)
9. Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Party (David Thomson)

The following parties had been invited but did not attend: Plaid Cymru, Greens (England and Wales), Greens (Scotland) and Forward Wales.

At the start of each meeting, the Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear views from the parties about the PEB system generally and to discuss views on how they should be allocated in the forthcoming elections. Channel 4 and Five and commercial radio stations would not be carrying PEBs during these elections because they are only able to broadcast on a UK-wide basis. Details were provided of the PEB allocation for the equivalent elections four years ago.

Similar issues were raised by each of the parties.

- (a) **Allocation.** Two of the main parties asked for 4 PEBs instead of the 3 PEBs that had been provided previously. The other main parties did not ask for any increase. There was a discussion with the smaller parties about the criteria that should be applied when determining whether a party should receive a PEB and, if so, how many. One smaller party believed the thresholds to be discriminatory as they prevented the small parties from obtaining publicity.
- (b) **Duration.** One party asked that for future elections, the broadcasters consider the possibility of having much shorter durations for PEBs, but more of them. It was noted that for the commercial broadcasters this would require a change to the Broadcasting Code. A concern was raised that shorter PEBs might lead to problems for the audience which might confuse them for adverts or programming. It was agreed to keep this subject under review.
- (c) **Scheduling.** Most of the parties seemed happy that PEBs were now generally being broadcast during the early evening. Concern was raised by some smaller parties about late night scheduling which is sometimes necessary to ensure that all PEBs can be fitted in before an election.
- (d) **Radio.** Two parties said that more radio stations should carry PEBs, both in the commercial sector and the BBC.
- (e) **Digital Television Channels.** Some parties asked whether digital television channels should be compelled to carry PEBs/PPBs. It was noted that Sky broadcasts some PEBs voluntarily.
- (f) **Timing/Delivery to Broadcasters.** The group reiterated that parties needed to get PEBs to them at the start of the day before transmission. If a broadcaster delivers after this, it does so at its own risk because facilities might not be available within a broadcaster to make the necessary checks in advance of transmission. Parties were asked to provide a named contact in each Nation to assist with delivery problems in the future.

The broadcasters present had a discussion about the issues raised and agreed to consult their decision making bodies in order to agree provisional criteria for PEB allocation.

2. NEW CHAIR

Ric Bailey has replaced David Jordan as the BBC's Chief Adviser, Politics and so will take over responsibility for holding the future BLG meetings.

3. BROADCAST INTROS/OUTROS

The Electoral Commission had started a project to devise new introduction and end sequences for PEBs but this had not been progressed due to a lack of available funding. It was noted that if this project was to continue, agreement would have to be reached on what the intros/outros should include and how they were going to be paid for.

4. ELECTORAL COMMISSION PROPOSALS

It was noted that the Government had not yet responded to the Electoral Commission's proposals on PEBs.