

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) meeting, 12 November 2007
Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Ric Bailey (BBC), Alistair Bonnington (BBC Scotland), Michael Cairns (BBC *Northern Ireland*), Peter Lowe (BSkyB), Rob Morrison (UTV), Prash Naik (Channel 4) Nick Powell (ITV Wales), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Rob Shepherd (BBC), Martin Stott (Five).

In attendance: Sarah Jones (BBC) Tabby Karamat (BBC), Steve Perkins (Ofcom), Stephen Rooney (Electoral Commission).

Apologies: Paul Chinnery (Five), Andrew Colman (BBC), Gordon Macmillan (SMG), Ian McBride (ITV), Huw Rossiter(S4C), Rhodri Talfan-Davies (BBC Wales)

Venue: 28 Portland Place, London

1. NOTES OF LAST MEETING

These had been circulated to the meeting and were approved for publication. They do not purport to be a full record but merely a note of the conclusions and action points. It was further noted that

- There had been a decision taken to keep the duration of electoral broadcasts under review.
- The position re intros/outros was the same as at the date of the last meeting.
- DCMS had still not responded to the Electoral Commission's consultation on PEBs from 2004.

2. MATTERS ARISING

- It was noted that the BLG website was up and running and was a useful source of information on the allocation criteria for PEBs and production guidelines. It was agreed that the members of the BLG should review the site in order to provide any feedback to the BBC adviser who maintains the site and provide additional information, for instance on PEB scheduling.

- Autumn General Election Speculation. There was a general discussion about the allocation criteria proposed for the next general election. It was agreed that these should be an agenda item at the BLG meeting for November 2008 and should be a standing item at all meetings to ensure a state of readiness for surprise elections.
- There was also a discussion about the problems associated with the parties delivering election broadcasts and party broadcasts on time. It was agreed that there was a need to emphasise the importance of doing this to the parties and also pointing out that the potential costs of failing to meet delivery timetables or rebooking edit suites would be passed on to them. It was agreed that the delivery guidelines should be re-circulated to the parties at the next suitable opportunity.

3. MARCH/MAY 2007 PEBs

- The meeting agreed that these had been relatively incident free.
- There was a discussion about the allocation criteria and the fact that parties could qualify very easily for broadcasts in Northern Ireland and Wales in particular because of the low threshold criteria that applied there.

4. PPBs

It was noted that Plaid Cymru had decided not to supply a Party Political Broadcast for the Party Conference or the Queen's Speech.

5. LOCAL ELECTIONS (INCLUDING LONDON MAYORAL ELECTIONS) 2008

The wording of the last equivalent elections, in June 2004 (though combined, then, with European Elections) was tabled and discussed. It was agreed that there was some ambiguity in the drafting in relation to the elections and that further clarification was needed in relation to the circumstances in which broadcasters could elect *to* split broadcasts as between the mayoral election in London and the local elections.

It was agreed that Ric Bailey would re-draft the proposed criteria and circulate them on the following lines: the main parties (3 in England, 4 in Wales) will each be offered three PEBs during the campaign. Where broadcasters can split their transmission regionally, qualifying parties may choose to produce PEBs specific to elections in London instead of the PEBs showing in the rest of England.

The proposed allocation criteria will be placed on the BLG website with a link provided to each political party.

6. REPRESENTATIONS FROM PARTIES

Ric Bailey reported that he, Michael Cairns and Rob Morrison had met the parties in Northern Ireland to see if it would be possible to align the criteria for allocation in Northern Ireland with other nations. It also provided an opportunity for the political parties to pass on their views. Interestingly the views were principally focussed on general coverage (particularly conference coverage) rather than Party Political broadcasts. BBC Northern Ireland and Ulster TV each intend to propose that the four main parties in Northern Ireland should each be allocated an annual Party Political Broadcast, around the time of their respective party conferences and in line with the situation since devolution in Scotland and Wales. Ric Bailey will take the process forward with the parties and in discussions involving the Electoral Commission, with a view to beginning a cycle of PPBs in Northern Ireland from September 08.

7. **2008 PPBSs** It was noted that there would be no change in the pattern of Party Political Broadcasts (with the exception of Northern Ireland as above) across Spring and Autumn party conferences and the Queen's Speech.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- DCMS review of party political broadcasting: it was pointed out that the lapse of time since the Electoral Commission's proposals mean that any response from DCMS would be likely to be out of date. The Electoral Commission was planning to chase the DCMS.
- It was agreed that the BLG should meet in November 2008 and then meet the parties on the same day.