

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) Meeting – 16 September 2015
Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Ric Bailey (BBC), Emily Barber (Channel 4), Joan Darroch (STV), Angharad Evans (S4C), Jessica George (BBC), Chris Hagan (UTV), Tabby Karamat (BBC), Peter Lowe (Sky), Alasdair MacLeod (BBC Scotland), Jacqueline McIntyre (BBC NI), Valerie Nazareth (BBC), Nick Powell (ITV Wales), Warren Seddon (Electoral Commission), Rob Shepherd (BBC), Martin Stott (Channel Five), Chris Wissun (ITV)

Apologies: Jimmy Buckland (TalkSport), Kathleen Carragher (BBC NI), Dan Cass (Local TV Network), Rhys Evans (BBC Wales), Martin Forward (BBC Wales), Darren Henley (Classic FM), Gordon Macmillan (STV), Alex Robertson (Electoral Commission), Paul Sylvester (Absolute Radio), Jo Verrill (Classic FM (Global))

Venue: 28 Portland Place, London, W1

1 NOTES OF LAST MEETING

These were reviewed, having been circulated and approved for publication in advance of the meeting. They do not purport to be a full record but merely a note of the conclusions and action points.

2 MATTERS ARISING

It was noted that Ofcom were invited to present a session at this meeting but were unable to attend due to timing reasons.

PEBs and PPBs in 2015

PEBs

- Members noted that early delivery has been helpful as has digital delivery.
- The issue of rights is still causing problems with some broadcasts.
- Members agreed it would be helpful to remind the parties to read the instructions that are provided and also that it is the parties responsibility to ensure compliance, not the production houses.
- Members noted that some parties have chosen to repeat the same PEB rather than submit a new one.

PPBs

Members were advised that the BBC Trust were likely to hold a public consultation on changes to the allocation criteria in the Autumn with a decision anticipated in December. A discussion on qualification criteria followed.

PEBs FOR INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

The Electoral Commission has written to the Government to ask them to consider a change in the law to clarify that Independent Candidates should be entitled to be considered for an election broadcast. The change could be dealt with in the Local Govt Bill and the EC have requested that any change is made prior to the London Mayoral elections. The matter is receiving consideration, but no response has been received yet. The EC will update the BLG in due course.

3 ELECTORAL COMMISSION - GENERAL UPDATE

Members were advised that there is still no timetable for the Referendum, so currently they are working on the possibility of April, June and September. If the Referendum is in April or June it will overlap with other elections. The designation and referendum periods would ideally be 16 weeks (6 for designation, 10 for the referendum period), but it is possible to go straight to the Referendum Period. The EC will publish criteria for designation once the Bill is passed.

There followed a discussion about RCBs; both the scheduling of these and the number of RCB's.

Members agreed to hold a BLG meeting to consider issues to do with the Referendum at a later date.

4 REPRESENTATIONS FROM POLITICAL PARTIES ON PEB CRITERIA FOR 2016

The BLG had invited written representations from political parties in the UK on the PPB and PEB allocation criteria.

Written representations were received from the following parties:

- (i) English Democrats;
- (ii) CPA
- (iii) TUSC;
- (iv) UKIP NI; and,
- (v) Liberal Democrats.

The BLG noted and discussed the parties' submissions. Some of the parties set out their evidence of past and current electoral support, which they asked the BLG to take into account when applying the criteria to determine their allocation of broadcasts..

Some of the parties made a number of suggestions about the applicable criteria for allocating PEBs:

- One party proposed that for the GLA Elections a minimum of 11 candidates should be substituted for the "full list" of candidates.
- One party proposed that in the GLA elections even if a party did not stand a Mayoral candidate they should be able to get a PEB and proposed the following alternative criteria: (i) a full slate of GLA candidates or candidates for list seats and (ii) qualifying for a PEB in the local elections in England
- One party said that opinion polls should not carry much weight and that in the Welsh Assembly elections they proposed that to get an additional PEB a party should stand candidates in every constituency and regional seat in Wales .
- One party queried whether a PEB would be given for the Police and Crime Commissioners elections.
- One party said that they were responding with their position on PPBs. They said that imposing a limit of one PPB on parties discriminated financially against smaller parties as it was as expensive to produce a PPB for one broadcast as it was for 4. They also said that in NI parties standing nine or more candidates should get 3 broadcasts and larger parties should get an additional broadcasts

5 LOOKING FORWARD TO 2016/17

On May 5TH 2016 Elections will take place for

- The Scottish Parliament
- The National Assembly of Wales
- The Northern Ireland Assembly
- The Greater London Authority
- Local government in parts of England
- Police and Crime Commissioners (for parts of the UK)

Members were informed about the proposed change to the qualification criteria for a PEB in Northern Ireland which the BBC Trust was expected to consult on in the Autumn.

Members discussed elections with regard to the timing of the Referendum. If the Referendum is in April or June the Referendum Period will overlap with these elections.

Members noted there could be difficult issues around scheduling both PEBs and Referendum Campaign Broadcasts given this overlap.

It was agreed that a further meeting to discuss Referendum issues would be useful.

There was discussion about the timing and numbers of RCBs.

6. CLEARANCE OF RIGHTS, PERMISSIONS ETC

The importance of the three day rule was emphasised.

7. PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

All members would review these prior to the BLG meeting to discuss Referendum coverage.

8. BLG WEBSITE

The BLG website has been revamped. Members were requested to send material for inclusion on the website.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

John Whittingdale had written to the Broadcasters regarding handling of complaints about coverage during the Referendum Campaign. His suggestion that they be decided within 24 hours is not considered workable. It was noted that during election periods Ofcom requires broadcasters to deal with complaints in an expedited manner.

The BLG will meet to discuss Referendum coverage