

# THE WATERSHED: PROVIDING A SAFE VIEWING ZONE

REPORT BY GILLIAN RAMSAY



# **The Watershed: Providing a Safe Viewing Zone**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A series of 18 Workshops explored people's awareness and understanding of the watershed on television and how useful they found it to be in the current media environment. In total, 109 participants were asked to describe their expectations regarding different types of programmes and content in the period leading up to the watershed and immediately following it. A follow up stage involved survey panels of 4,000 adults (the adult QUEST panel) and 1,500 children (the Young View QUEST panel). Survey respondents were asked similar questions to the Workshop participants to identify nationally representative views and behaviour. Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) audience data was used to investigate how children's viewing patterns change during the evening and whether children watch television alone or with others at different times in the evening.

### SUPPORT FOR THE WATERSHED

- There was strong support for the watershed from participants in the Workshops and respondents on the adult Quest panel. Most participants were in favour of maintaining the watershed at 9pm. Of adult respondents who had heard of the watershed on the Quest panel, 95% thought there should be a watershed to protect young people and 77% agreed that it was a must. Seventy-two per cent of children on the Young View Quest panel who had heard of the watershed thought that it was a good idea.
- The main issue for participants in the Workshops was that the broadcasters should adhere more closely to a gradual progression in content from suitable material for children earlier in the evening to less suitable material later in the evening. People's expectations of content at different times of the evening were just as important as the style and type of content shown.
- Some parents and carers expressed concern about losing the watershed because without it they believed that the degree of responsibility they would have to assume over their children's viewing would increase dramatically, becoming both impractical and onerous.
- The majority (78%) of adult respondents who had heard of the watershed thought that the watershed should apply to all channels. Two-thirds of respondents thought it should begin at 9pm on terrestrial channels and 57% thought it should start at 9pm on satellite or cable channels.

### AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WATERSHED

- Awareness of the watershed was high, with most participants in the Workshops describing it as a fixed point in the evening (9pm) between what was suitable viewing for children and what was not. Eighty-two per cent of all respondents on the adult Quest panel claimed they had heard of it, increasing to 92% among parents. Of the children on the Young View panel, 22% aged four to 15 years said they had heard of the watershed.
- Workshop participants identified three main purposes of the watershed:
  - Protection of children
  - Provision of a safe viewing zone
  - Restraint upon broadcasters
- There was low awareness in the Workshops of who implemented the watershed.

**HOW PEOPLE USE THE  
WATERSHED & REGULATING  
CHILDREN'S TELEVISION  
VIEWING**

- In terms of the scope of the watershed, most participants thought that it applied to all terrestrial channels. There was considerable uncertainty as to whether it applied to all satellite or cable channels. Their reasons for this uncertainty related to the nature of the programming and scheduling on such channels including foreign programming, different time zones because programmes were being transmitted from other countries, and niche programming.
- Similarly, there was uncertainty among respondents on the adult Quest panel regarding the application of the watershed on satellite or cable channels. Of those respondents who had heard of the watershed, 41% thought it applied to multi-channels while the majority thought it applied to all the terrestrial channels.
- Only 43% were aware that the watershed began at 9pm on these satellite or cable channels with 40% answering 'don't know'. In contrast, 93% knew it started at 9pm on the terrestrial channels.
- Generally, participants expected all programming on most channels to be subject to the watershed although some were unsure about news programmes and films.
- Very few participants claimed to use the watershed as a guide for their own viewing. They did use it to guide viewing when watching with other generations to avoid embarrassment and, of course, parents used it as a tool for regulating children's viewing.
- All parents in the Workshops exercised some form of parental control over their children's viewing. Eighty-seven per cent of adults living in households with children aged four to nine years on the Quest panel claimed there were rules about watching television in their households and 58% of adults living with children aged 10 to 15 years had rules. One in two children from the Young View panel acknowledged rules set by parents or other adults in their household.
- The children surveyed in this study ranged from four to 15 years. Their viewing behaviour and the restrictions on their viewing varied enormously according to their age. In general, the viewing of children under 12 years was much more regulated than that of older children.
- Participants in the Workshops believed that children aged between eight and 12 were at their most impressionable and vulnerable to influence from television content. Those aged under eight were thought to be at less risk – either because they were not available to view later than about 7.30pm, or because offensive or explicit material was thought to 'go over their heads'. By the time children reached their teens 'they knew it all already' and it was time to stop protecting them too much.
- The watershed played a crucial role for parents with children aged five to eight. All of the parents of younger children in the Workshops said that they were familiar with the programmes in the period after school and knew that their content was safe for young children. This trust in pre-watershed programming, particularly that leading up to 7.30pm, was an essential part of parents' regulation and control of children's viewing.

- The watershed was an important tool for regulating viewing amongst children aged eight to 12 years, but it was only one tool. Children in this age group generally stayed up later, often staying up to 9pm or later.
- While recognising that standards had changed over time, most participants were supportive of the watershed and few could cite any disadvantages associated with it. They expected and wanted the regulation of television to continue.

#### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WATERSHED

- In terms of the watershed's effectiveness, some participants did consider that some programming such as soap operas and dramas were 'pushing the boundaries' in the pre-watershed period. However, this underlined its importance and, as one participant noted, 'a Watershed's not perfect, but it's better than a free for all'.
- Participants in the Workshops recognised a progression in content throughout the day. There were mixed views about whether programmes that straddled the watershed should conform to it. Overall, people believed that if a programme did contain more explicit content, even if that explicit content was shown later in the programme and after 9pm, that programme should not begin before 9pm. A few assumed automatically that programmes ending after 9pm would contain stronger content (at least in the part which followed the watershed).

#### EXPECTATIONS REGARDING PRE AND POST-WATERSHED CONTENT

- Participants were asked to describe their expectations regarding the type of content such as nudity and sexual content, violence and language leading up to the watershed. Advertising was treated separately from other programming. While violence was the type of content which caused the most concern in the Workshops, adult respondents on the Quest panel were most likely to nominate programmes with sex and swearing as those they did not want their children to watch.
- Participants demonstrated an awareness of progression of content leading up to 9pm in the evening and expressed support for this progression. Equally, despite wide differences in taste and sensitivities – particularly with regard to use of language – it is clear that there is a broad consensus on what is acceptable or not before 9pm and after it. It is often the context and tone of the content that determines whether something is acceptable not.

#### APPLICATION OF THE WATERSHED IN A MULTIMEDIA ENVIRONMENT

- Both participants in the Workshops and adult respondents on The Quest Panel thought it appropriate to regulate television more than other media. Participants argued that television was central in homes in terms of its physical position and its role in people's lives. Sixty per cent of adult respondents thought it was appropriate to place restrictions on television when other media like radio or the internet do not have them. In general, both adults and children were more likely to identify rules or controls over children's television viewing than for most other activities.
- There was a call for more information in the printed television listings magazines and newspapers through Electronic Programme Guides (EPG) or equivalent systems, and more pre-programming or on-screen warnings. However, these were not considered to be replacements for the watershed but rather complementary mechanisms.

## BACKGROUND

While the Independent Television Commission (ITC), Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had previously commissioned a series of studies on issues relating to the watershed and Family Viewing Policy, it was considered timely, in early 2003, to further explore expectations of viewers surrounding the watershed and attempt to assess its importance in the current media environment. This study builds on the findings of previous reports including *Striking a Balance: the control of children's media consumption*<sup>1</sup>, *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy*<sup>2</sup>, *Soap Box or Soft Soap?: Audience Attitudes to the British Soap Opera*<sup>3</sup>, and *The Public's View 2002*<sup>4</sup>.

To distinguish this current study from previous reports, it explored the views of a wider viewing public than those directly concerned with caring for children, and engaged all viewers in a debate about the current and future status of the television watershed. The project also explored whether attitudes and expectations about the watershed differ for different broadcasting services and for different audiences and how well the audience thinks it is working.

By the end of 2003, the telecommunications regulators (Ofcom and the Radio communications Agency), and the content regulators (the BSC, ITC and RAU) will merge to form the Office of Communications (Ofcom). Under the duties placed upon it by the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom will be required to apply standards 'that provide adequate protection to members of the public from any offensive and harmful material'. There are also duties concerning the principle of the freedom of expression, the need to protect potentially vulnerable groups (children, the elderly etc are mentioned) and the desirability of preventing crime and disorder. Programme codes will continue to cover standards and fairness and privacy issues, and these include key areas such as impartiality and accuracy. At the same time, Ofcom has committed to a more deregulatory approach, offering 'appropriate regulation'.

In setting and revising any standards Ofcom (see Appendix A) must take into account:

- the likely size and composition of the potential audience for programmes; and
- the likely expectation of the audience as to the nature of a programme's content and the extent to which the nature of a programme's content can be brought to the attention of potential members of the audience.

The findings presented in this report will inform the current policies applied by the research parties as well as the revision or future development of codes and standards.

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<sup>1</sup> *Striking a Balance: the control of children's media consumption*, A report undertaken for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, and the Independent Television Commission, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy*, A report undertaken for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, and the Independent Television Commission, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Soap Box or Soft Soap?: Audience Attitudes to the British Soap Opera*, Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> *The Public's View 2002*, An Independent Television Commission and Broadcasting Standards Commission Publication, 2003.

## CURRENT CODES AND POLICIES ABOUT THE WATERSHED

### The Watershed

The ITC states that material unsuitable for children must not be transmitted at times when large numbers of children may be expected to be watching. However the ITC recognises that the majority of homes do not contain children (70%) and viewers have a right to expect a range of subject matter.

The necessary compromise is embodied in the ITC's Family Viewing Policy, which assumes a progressive decline throughout the evening in the proportion of children (usually referring to those aged 15 or under) viewing, matched by a progression towards material more suitable for adults. Within the progression, 9pm is normally considered as the time up to which licensees are responsible for ensuring that nothing is shown that is unsuitable for children. The earlier in the evening a programme is shown, the greater the care required.

According to the BBC's *Producers' Guidelines*, the BBC has a well-established policy of making 9pm the pivotal point of the evening's television. This watershed requires all programmes before 9pm to be suitable for a general audience including children. The earlier in the evening a programme is placed, the more suitable it is likely to be for children to view alone.

The BSC describes the watershed, which starts at 9pm and continues until 5.30 am, as a well established scheduling marker distinguishing clearly between programmes intended mainly for family viewing and those intended for adults.

The BSC and ITC's Codes state that all terrestrial, cable and satellite channels must adhere to the 9pm watershed. There are some exceptions, namely specialist channels to which viewers have specifically subscribed, such as the film channels. The decision to subscribe to a specialist channel available only to those who have specifically chosen it, carries with it an acceptance of a greater share of responsibility for what is viewed and the watershed on such channels is set at 8pm rather than 9pm watershed. Rules may be waived for Pay-Per-View Services, for which security mechanisms, such as a Personal Identification Number System (PIN) or equivalent, restrict access to films or programmes solely to those authorised to view. The European Union Directive on Transfrontier Broadcasting states that broadcasters are regulated only by the country in which they are based. Satellite or cable platforms can also carry services based elsewhere in Europe and which comply with the rules in those countries although those rules may differ from those in the United Kingdom.

The watershed guidelines apply to all programme genres, including news programmes, films, trailers and advertisements. There are some specific references made to different types of programmes, such as films, where the ITC requires, for instance, that '12' rated films are not transmitted before 8pm and '15' rated films are not to be transmitted before 9pm (or 8pm on premium rate subscription services).

The notion of a progression throughout the evening towards material more suitable for adults, assuming a progressive decline in the proportion of children viewing is described in the *Programming Code and Guidelines*. The ITC states care should be taken in the period immediately after the watershed and that there should be gradual transition. Similarly, the BSC states that the watershed should not be an abrupt change from family viewing to adult programming and that it is not a 'waterfall', but a signal to parents that they need to exercise increasing control over their children's viewing after 9pm. The BBC's *Producers' Guidelines* state that care should be taken in the period immediately after the watershed and advises its producers that 'adult material should never be positioned close to the watershed simply to attract audiences in a sensationalist way'.

## OBJECTIVES

The project aimed to explore many issues surrounding the watershed including:

### AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WATERSHED

- Awareness of the watershed and the time it applies
- Who determines the watershed?
- Which channels does the watershed apply to (terrestrial and multi-channel channels)?
- Does the watershed apply to all types of programmes, including advertising?
- Is pre-watershed material suitable for children to view alone or is it suitable for family viewing (although children may be of varying ages)?
- Do viewers understand that there is a progression in suitability of content across the evening, both before and after the watershed?
- Where does the responsibility ultimately lie for children's viewing – with the broadcaster or with the parent? Is the responsibility equal before and after the watershed?

### CURRENT USE AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE WATERSHED

- How do people use the watershed (especially parents)?
- Do adult viewers use it as a guide for their own viewing?
- Do adults think it restricts their viewing?
- Do viewers think the broadcasters are adhering to the watershed? Are there any particular types of programmes or types of content, which are not meeting audience expectations regarding the watershed?
- Do audience expectations differ between weekday and weekends or between term time and school holidays?
- What are viewers' expectations of particular types of programmes or content (swearing, nudity and sex, violence) leading up to the watershed and immediately after the watershed?
- What are people's attitudes to programmes that straddle the watershed? (Such programmes may show less suitable or more explicit material after 9pm although the programme began well before the watershed)

**APPLICATION OF THE  
WATERSHED IN A  
MULTIMEDIA  
ENVIRONMENT**

- Is regulation such as the watershed still appropriate for television in a multi-media environment?
- Do viewers think the watershed should be revoked, modified or strengthened?
- What do viewers think of techniques such as classification zones, labelling of content or warnings regarding content?
- Do attitudes differ according to whether viewers have access to terrestrial channels only compared with access to multi-channels?

**METHODOLOGY**

A combination of methodologies was utilised to answer this wide range of objectives. A series of 18 Viewer Workshops conducted by The Fuse Group explored viewers' perceptions, understanding and use of the watershed.<sup>5</sup> Some of the issues discussed and emerging from the Workshops were tested further on the Ipsos UK Ltd Adult and Young View Quest panels which involved much larger and nationally representative samples. The Young View panel provided the opportunity to explore the attitudes and behaviour of children (4 to 15 years), as the Workshops comprised adults only. An analysis of BARB audience data revealed viewing patterns during the evening of children viewing alone and with others.

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<sup>5</sup> For a full description of methodology see Appendix B

# 1

## AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WATERSHED

### AWARENESS OF THE WATERSHED

In line with other research carried out by the ITC and the BSC showing high public awareness of the watershed and the Family Viewing Policy on television (97%)<sup>6</sup>, the majority of participants in the Workshops claimed to have heard of the watershed, and to know what it was in broad terms.<sup>7</sup> Most thought of it as a demarcation, or “basic cut off point” on television, separating the times when programming suitable and unsuited for children could be shown.

For many participants, it was characterised in terms of what could be shown on television after the watershed came into effect, rather than what may not be shown earlier in the evening. As one participant described, it is the time in the evening when programmes were ‘*no longer suitable for children to watch on their own*’. There was little mention of family viewing in this context. More specifically, it was universally understood to be concerned with swearing, sexual content and nudity and violence.

*“Programmes after 9pm that may contain adult content”*  
(Female, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*“It’s when you might expect a degree of swearing and what you’d consider bad language....some sex too possibly”*  
(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

*“It begins at 9 o’clock at night and programmes after that are more likely to contain bad language, material and contents to give parents a chance to draw the line in regards to children watching TV in the house”*  
(Male, C1C2, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

The words and the language used to describe the watershed tended to be that of ‘drawing a line’, ‘a boundary between what is not suitable for children’, or ‘a fixed point in the evening’ – all of which suggested that viewers tended to see the watershed as a fixed starting point in the evening rather than a progression throughout the evening. When participants engaged in discussing the implementation of the watershed, however, there was a clear sense among many that there was a progressive introduction of certain types of content during the evening.

While the vast majority of participants had heard of the watershed and had a broad sense of what it was, a small minority (younger people who were not parents), had never heard of the term. However, even these individuals had a sense that there was a cut-off point on television but they were simply unfamiliar with the term.

*“I’ve never heard of it, nor me (three people agreeing). I think I know what you are talking about but I didn’t know it was called that”*  
(Males and Females, DE, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, Manchester)

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<sup>6</sup> *The Public’s View 2002*; Dr R. C. Towler; Independent Television Commission and Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> To denote those who took part in the Viewer Workshops ‘participants’ is used throughout the report. Those who took part in the surveys are referred to as ‘respondents’.

When survey respondents aged 16 years and over on the Adult Quest panel were asked whether they had heard of the watershed, 82% claimed they had. This increased amongst respondents who were parents or guardians to 92%. Those respondents who had heard of it were asked to describe what they thought it was. Many respondents described the watershed as a time when broadcasters could show programmes of a more adult nature or programmes for adult viewing, or when programmes were shown which may be unsuitable for younger viewers or children to watch.

Awareness of the watershed among respondents aged four to 15 years was explored on the Young View Quest panel. Overall, 22% of respondents in this age group said they had heard of the watershed. Awareness increased with age, with 23% of ten to 12 year olds, and 44% of 13 to 15 year olds claiming to have heard of it.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE WATERSHED?

Participants in the workshops identified three main purposes of the watershed:

##### **Protection of children**

Parents and non-parents alike identified the key advantages to restricting television content as protecting children from undesirable content, frequently characterised as sex scenes, violence and swearing or offensive language.

*“Well obviously you’ve got to protect kids. You don’t really want to come home and find them watching anything that could be on television”*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

In this sense, the watershed provided a period during which children could watch television unsupervised. This was both earlier in the evening, before parents themselves started to watch television, and – for those with younger children – towards 8pm or 8.30pm, when their children might watch alone in their bedrooms:

*“I think also it’s reassuring that, I don’t like my son to watch the TV all the time but I might put him in his room, you know, just before he goes to bed so he can have half an hour of TV and I know that that will be OK up until a certain point so, you know, that’s an advantage”*

(Male, C1C2, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Southampton)

*“Yeah, you’ve got children’s programmes, CITV and that, when they come home from school, and you know they’re okay”*

(Female, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

One of the most important issues relating to the watershed was establishing exactly where the responsibility lies in protecting children from viewing unsuitable material on television. The ITC states that while licensees are responsible in general for ensuring that nothing is shown that is unsuitable for children before 9pm, not all programming may be suitable for very young children and that the licensees should provide sufficient information (on-air advice or regular scheduling patterns) to assist parents in making viewing choices. The BBC’s *Producers’ Guidelines* state that ‘the BBC expects parents to share the responsibility for assessing whether or not individual programmes should be seen by younger viewers’. Similarly, the BSC states that broadcasters should provide sufficient information to assist parents and others to take the degree of responsibility they feel appropriate for the children in their care.

Parents in the Workshops did not rely solely on the watershed to regulate their children's viewing, but they did feel it played an important role in this regard. Moreover, participants who were non-parents also took this view, and often supported it by pointing out that not all parents were as responsible as others:

*"Even the minority, I think it's still important because... the younger ones are going to grow up and you know, it's their interest we should protect really"*  
(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

*"You get a lot of people who go to the pub two or three times a week and leave a kiddie of 17 looking after younger kiddies. The parents aren't there....you get these stopovers, where you have gangs staying at someone's house – the parents probably go out "*  
(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

Participants recognised that protecting the vulnerable was going to be imperfect and partial. However, in recognising the limits of protection, they were still largely in favour of maintaining the watershed.

### **Provision of a safe viewing zone**

Participants in the workshops considered that the watershed provided a safe viewing zone. While protection was important for children viewing alone, parents were equally keen that their children should be protected from inappropriate viewing when families were viewing together. In particular, they wanted to be protected from material which was disturbing or too explicit or which may raise issues which they were not ready to deal with. Young adults too wanted a safe zone in which they could watch programming with other generations (their parents or grandparents) without the worry of seeing programming which might embarrass or offend. And others simply considered that – as a matter of taste – certain types of programming content should not be shown earlier in the evening.

*"But it's not just that. It's not just children we're trying to protect here. I mean, at teatime, dinnertime, you don't wanna be seeing blood and guts"* (Female, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

### **Restraint upon broadcasters**

A third advantage which participants attributed to the watershed was that it constituted a necessary brake on broadcasters. There was a strongly articulated and almost universally held view that without controls, the broadcasters could not be trusted not to show unsuitable material at times when young children might be viewing. This view was fairly widespread, and seemed to reflect cynicism about broadcasters' desire to chase ratings and compete with one another. This perception was for many participants linked to what they perceived of as an increase in the explicit depiction of violence and swearing on television.

*"Broadcasters would probably make even worse programmes if they thought they could get away with it"*  
(Female, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

*"I think it would be a big problem, because all the programmes that we don't want the children to see that cover sex, violence, swearing...you know, they're going to get earlier and earlier because they're competing for air time and viewers"*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

Some participants thought that the BBC was less 'guilty' of this practice than the commercial channels, and that even without a watershed, the BBC would be more likely to adhere to higher standards, and have a greater sense of self-regulation than the other channels.

**WHEN DOES THE WATERSHED APPLY?**

Based on individual questionnaires collected in the Workshops, about two thirds of participants thought that the cut-off point between programming which was suitable and that which may be unsuitable for children was at 9pm in the evening while most of the remainder thought it started between 8pm and 10pm. A small number put it as late as 10.30pm or even 11pm.

Of respondents on the Adult Quest panel who had heard of the watershed, 93% knew that it began at 9pm on terrestrial channels. Only 43% thought it began at 9pm on satellite or cable channels with 40% of respondents answering 'don't know' to this question. This reflects general confusion regarding satellite or cable channels and whether they are subject to the watershed. Of respondents on the Young View panel who said they were aware of the watershed, 86% knew that it applied from 9pm.

While the 9pm cut-off point was widely known, there was less certainty among participants in the Workshops as to whether this time represented the starting point or the finishing point of the watershed, with some saying that it started at six in the morning and finished at 9pm. In general, it was thought that the watershed period ended at a point early in the morning, between 5am and 7am, however, few had thought about this before. *Programming Codes* referring to the watershed state that after 9pm and until 5am material more suitable for an adult audience may be shown.

Most participants believed correctly that the watershed started and finished at the same time throughout the year, including school holidays, weekends and public holidays. A few thought that the watershed might start an hour later at weekends, reflecting their view that family style programming continued later at the weekends.

**WHO DETERMINES THE WATERSHED?**

While the watershed on television was known about and widely accepted by participants in the Workshops, few had given the genesis of the policy much thought; nor had they speculated as to who might be responsible for monitoring and implementing it. This apparent lack of interest reflected the high levels of support which participants had for the policy overall, and the relatively low levels of criticism of its current implementation.

When probed to name the responsible body, suggestions included: The Government, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the ITC, the Broadcasting Council, the BBC and ITV together, a television authority of some kind, and a committee which included members of the public. In addition, a few people mentioned having seen a television announcement on behalf of a television authority, '*the ITC or IDT*' giving viewers an address to write to in the event of seeing offensive or disturbing material, including advertising. Those who were aware of this thought it a good idea, although none had in fact written in. Awareness and recall of this system may have been more top-of-mind at the time of the research than would otherwise be the case because of the recent and well publicised criticisms of a number of television commercials including the chewing gum 'dog breath' Wrigley's advertisement.

*“I think it’s like the ombudsman, isn’t it.....certain number of people watch and they make sure the TV channels follow the rules”*  
( Male, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

*“The BBC and ITV got together and decided themselves...Sky maybe...”*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

By contrast, one viewer complained that she had not seen such announcements, and did not know where to address complaints.

*“I think they should know what to expect from the regulator because, as it is, I haven’t really got any idea what the guidelines are. I know there’s a nine o’clock Watershed but I didn’t know it was supposed to be a gradual thing for example. But yes, I think, I think there should be more information on what you can expect. And also I wouldn’t have, if I was really offended by something, I wouldn’t have the first clue how to complain”*  
(Female, DE, 18-25, No children, Multi-channel, Southampton)

#### IS THE WATERSHED MANDATORY OR VOLUNTARY?

On balance, most participants in the Workshops were right to think that the watershed was mandatory.

*“There is an element of compulsion – programmes have to be vetted as to whether they’re after the watershed or before...”*  
(Male, C1C2, Parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

*“The channels probably volunteer”*  
(Male, AB, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

For some participants, this question raised a concern about those responsible for administering the watershed. Specifically, they wanted reassurance that the body making decisions about what the public may or may not see on television should be properly qualified or appropriately selected, and that it should not be left to a single individual.

In this connection, there were many spontaneous mentions of Mary Whitehouse. For some, she was seen as the founding figure or at least inspiration for the watershed policy, with some admiring her stance, and others criticising what they thought of as undue influence over what people could see on television.

#### THE SCOPE OF THE WATERSHED: CHANNELS & PROGRAMMES

There was considerable uncertainty expressed in the Workshops as to what the watershed covered and what – if anything – was exempt, first in relation to channels, and then in relation to programme genres. The issues were not easy to tease out – assessments were based on a mixture of perception and experience – in some cases based on knowledge of channels, but in others based purely in impressions of them gained through the media. Expectations in terms of content style and programmes did differ across different channels. BBC1 was expected to be the most conservative, Channel 4 and Five to be innovative or different and ITV to be more middle of the road.

*“BBC1 and ITV are aimed at everybody, whereas Channel 4 is aimed at a particular target group of people...sort of 18-35, and can be more daring, progressive”*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

### Terrestrial Channels

Most participants thought that the watershed covered all terrestrial channels, but there were some inconsistencies in the way in which it was thought to apply to those channels.

- The watershed was thought to apply in particular to BBC1 and 1TV1, those being the two family entertainment channels.
- The BBC was seen to be bound by the watershed across most of its output and some even went as far as suggesting that compliance with the watershed was part of the BBC licence fee agreement with the public.
- Most people knew that the watershed covered Channel 4, although their early evening programming was typically characterised as news and programming that would not appeal to the younger viewer.
- Most concluded that Five was covered by the watershed, because it was a terrestrial channel that “*comes with the television set*”. A minority, however, were unsure whether the watershed applied to Five. Their uncertainty was less to do with perceived breaches of the watershed and more to do with the late night content of programming on the channel, as well as the different strategies used by the channel to alert viewers as to content and film classification.

### Satellite or cable channels

Most participants thought that the watershed covered the majority of satellite or cable channels, although there was considerable uncertainty as illustrated in the quote below:

*“I wouldn’t have thought with Sky that there was any particular watershed. It’s just the terrestrial channels”*

(Female, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Multi-channel, Manchester)

This uncertainty was based on a number of perceptions about the content and origin of these channels, and of how they operated:

- Some cable/satellite channels were known to be foreign in origin and therefore not thought to be subject to Codes in the United Kingdom. For example, participants pointed out that if channels were being broadcast from abroad, their time zones would be different from those in the UK and this would inevitably mean that keeping to a watershed was impossible.

*“You can’t have it on Sky because of the time differences”*

(Female, C1C2, Single parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

- Other cable or satellite channels were seen to be dedicated to niche audiences (Nickelodeon, Disney, MTV) and were thought to stand outside the watershed (in the case of children’s channels, few would expect them to broadcast unsuitable material in any case). Other niche channels mentioned included The History Channel and Discovery.

*“Sky has kiddies programmes on all the time, like cartoons. There’s no point having a watershed on those”*

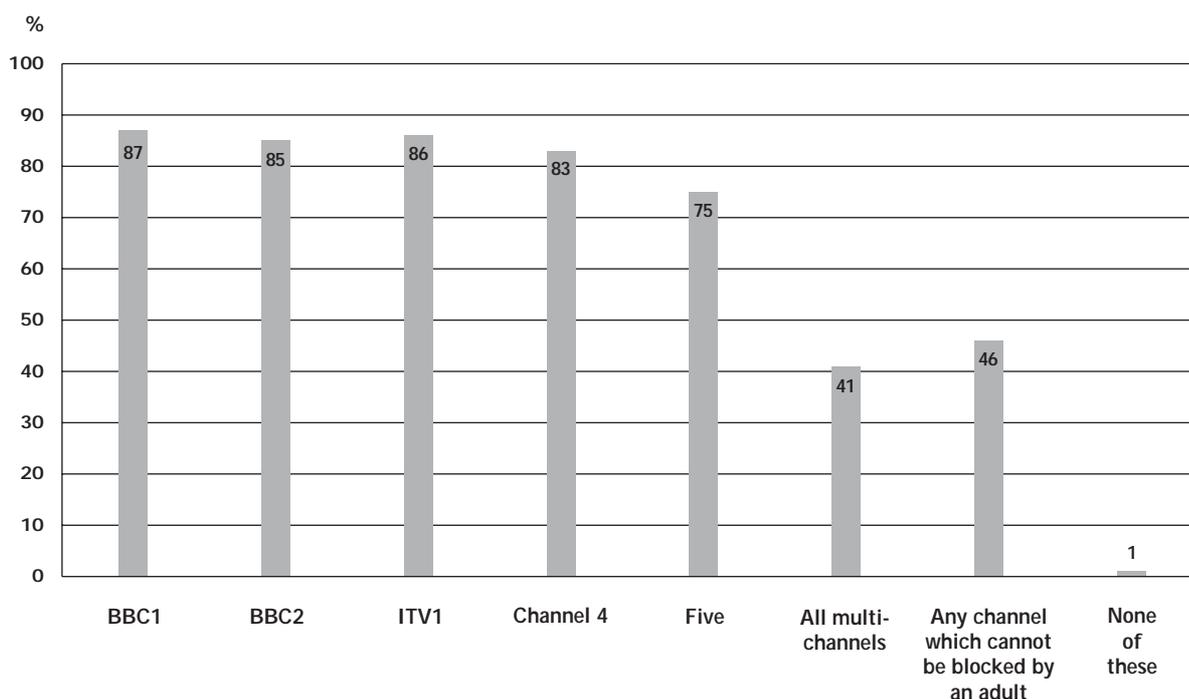
(Male, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Multi-channel, Manchester)

- Other cable/satellite channels re-run programmes originally shown later in the evening (UK Gold) at pre-watershed times which may suggest that these channels were not subject to the watershed rules.
- Film channels, adult channels or those available through special payments or PIN numbers were perceived as having different rules; a few were aware of the earlier watershed for the subscription film channels while others thought that these film channels did not have to adhere to the watershed because of their restricted access.

*“Parents have a lock on Sky, so there’s no need for a watershed”*  
 (Female, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

Respondents on the Adult Quest Panel who had heard of the watershed were asked to select from a list which channels they thought the watershed applied to (see chart below). While more than four in five thought it applied to BBC1, BBC2, ITV1 and C4, fewer thought it applied to Five. Only 41% thought it applied to multi-channels (satellite, cable or digital channels). This was higher amongst people in multi-channel homes (51%) compared with those in terrestrial only homes (31%).

CHART A CHANNELS THE WATERSHED APPLIES TO



Source: Adult Quest Panel

When asked if there were any channels it did not apply to, 27% of respondents who had heard of the watershed answered yes. The majority of these respondents mentioned satellite, cable or digital channels as those which were not subject to the watershed.

## Programmes

In general, participants in the Workshops thought that all programming on channels covered by the watershed would conform to the policy:

*“It sets a standard that they all have to abide by”*

(Male, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

As the discussions unfolded, however, participants in some Workshops suggested that they were unsure whether the watershed covered news programmes. Several described seeing scenes from September 11th, (including people jumping from the Twin Towers) the war in Afghanistan, coverage of Northern Ireland (the ambush and murder of two off-duty soldiers several years ago) and more recent coverage of the war in Iraq which they described as “*graphic*” and often disturbing. This suggested that many participants considered news to be different in some respect from other programming, and that it was – and should be – immune from any restrictions which might be interpreted as censorship.<sup>8</sup>

Films too were thought to be exempt from the watershed by a few participants because they had their own classification system which broadcasters would generally make use of in their scheduling decisions.

The majority of participants knew that advertising and sponsorship were covered by the watershed, and thought that they should be. As mentioned above, several respondents recalled seeing a telephone number that could be called if advertising was found offensive. No one in the Workshops had indeed called to make a complaint, but welcomed the fact that viewers could have their say and that if sufficient people objected to something, action would be taken.

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<sup>8</sup> *How Children Interpret Screen Violence*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; British Broadcasting Corporation, British Board of Film Classification, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2003.

## 2 HOW USEFUL DO VIEWERS FIND THE WATERSHED?

### THE WATERSHED AS A GUIDE FOR VIEWING

Very few participants in the Workshops claimed to actively use the watershed as a tool to guide their own viewing decisions. Only 8% of those who had heard of the watershed on the adult Quest panel said they used the watershed to guide their own viewing. In the Workshops, awareness of the watershed certainly had an impact on expectations vis-à-vis programming, but an individual's viewing choice was primarily based on appetite for and interest in particular programming.

*"We're adults, we can watch anything, can't we..."*

(Female, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Younger participants reported being interested in programmes such as *Sex in the City*, *Friends*, *Graham Norton*, *Eurotrash* as well as films. While most of these started later in the evening, few found this a problem because most did not start watching television until after 9pm in any case. They took no account of the watershed in their programming choices, and claimed only to be aware of it when they were unexpectedly surprised by some pre-watershed content:

*"I think the only time I think about it is like, when something does come on, blimey, that shouldn't be there, but otherwise you don't think about it, you know, you don't look at the clock and think, "oh, nine o'clock, juicy programmes"..."*

(Female, DE, 18-25, No children at home, Multi-channel, Southampton)

A few older participants (especially females aged 65+ years) did claim to note the time of programmes and to use their placement pre or post-watershed as a guide as to whether these programmes were likely to be acceptable to them or to contain content which was too strong or explicit. Finally, some participants (both with and without children at home) did comment that programming they were interested in watching started rather late after the watershed, but most accepted this was a small price to pay for having the watershed.

*"You do get tired, so if you want to watch something later on at night, you've got to get your matchsticks out just so you can watch something you want when the kiddies aren't around"*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

Although the watershed played virtually no part in guiding individual adult viewing, even those people who did not have children, or never watched with children, were generally in favour of retaining it.

*"The one thing I would say on TV it's like an accepted part of the family, you know, like a wrist watch...TV has been around for years and years and years, so I suppose this is why people want to have a watershed on TV..."*

(Male, C1C2, 40-55, No children, London)

*"It's up to you whether you are offended by it, whether you watch it, but you definitely need a guideline for children"*

(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children, London)

*“Is it not there to protect children who are not with parents who are bothered to look – so if they can control it till 9, then we’re actually protecting the child, protecting society a wee bit - good parents will always be there, but there are some children that are left alone.....”*

(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children at home, Glasgow)

#### VIEWING WITH OTHERS

Participants in the Workshops reported being more sensitive to programme content when watching with others, with the exception of adults watching with peers or partners. Parents or carers watching with children (of whatever age) or young adults watching with parents or grandchildren were all more sensitive when viewing in each other’s company. Offence and embarrassment spanned the ages, generations, social and attitude spectrum. As a result, the watershed was sometimes used to regulate viewing with other generations:

*“I watch TV with my grandfather, and I find that quite embarrassing; yes, I feel embarrassed.”*

(Male, C1C2, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

*“Yes, that is the time when you can sit with your granny and watch TV and you feel comfortable doing that.”*

(Male, DE, 18-25, No children, Multi-channel, Southampton)

*“Mine are 23 and 21 and they’re broadminded, but if I was watching a particularly heavy sex film with my children there, I’d get embarrassed, which, so there again, it’s a good guideline...”*

(Male, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

#### REGULATING CHILDREN’S VIEWING

All parents participating in the Workshops were in favour of exercising some form of parental control over their children’s viewing. Previous research conducted by the research partners also found that most parents do try to exercise some form of control over their children’s television viewing.<sup>9</sup> Some kind of regulation was the norm, though there were real practical problems encountered by families. For instance, parents in the Workshops sometimes found it difficult to stop or deny their children viewing programmes that their children’s friends watched, even if they considered these programmes to be unsuitable viewing.

It was somewhat harder in the holidays and weekends when children stayed up later, leading some parents to want a later watershed at these times.

*“It’s harder in the holidays, because they don’t go to bed as early, because they haven’t got to get up for school, so they do want to watch things.”*

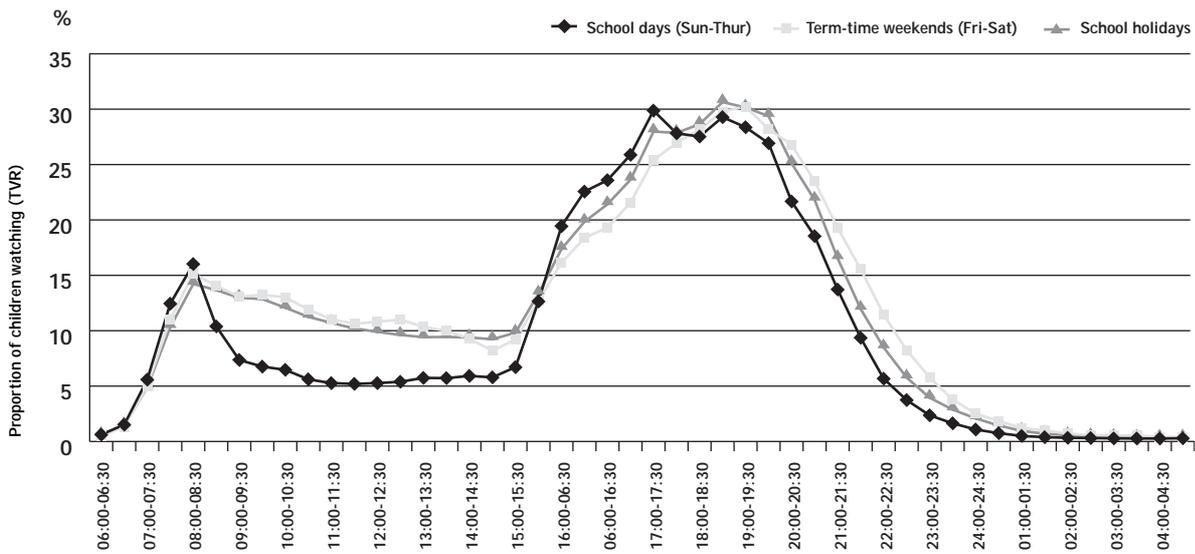
(Female, DE, Single parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

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<sup>9</sup> *Striking a Balance: the control of children’s media consumption*; edited by Pam Hanley; British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2002.

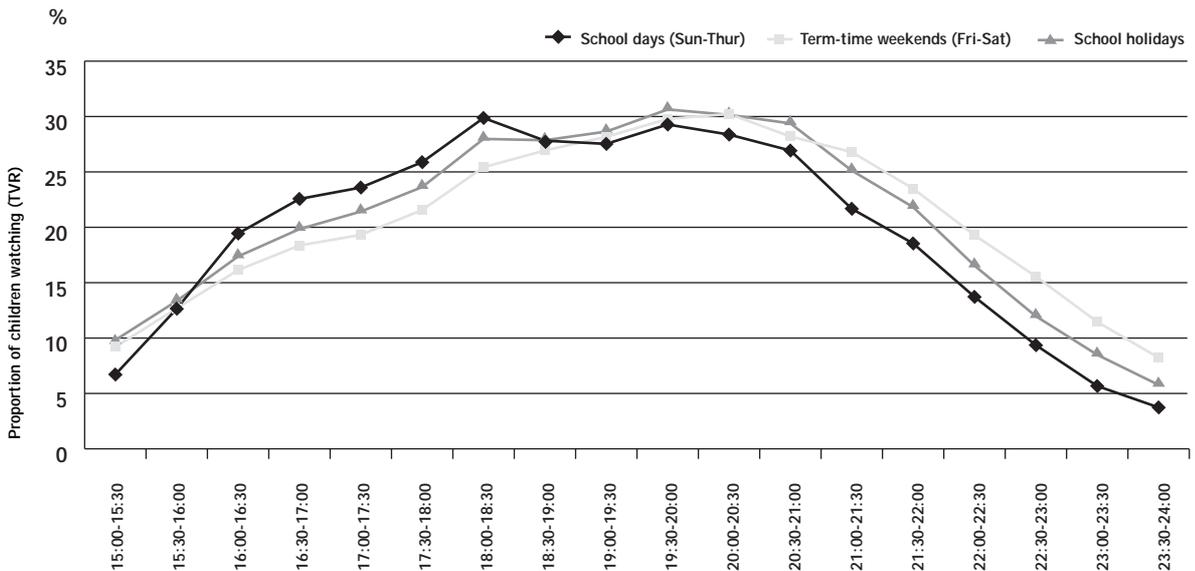
The charts below present BARB data showing children’s television viewing patterns throughout the day comparing school days, weekends and school holidays. Amongst children aged four to 15 years, viewing levels peak earlier on evenings preceding school days (at about 6pm) compared with either Friday or Saturday evenings or school holiday periods. In contrast, on Friday or Saturday evenings and during school holidays viewing levels peak between 7.30pm and 8pm. They are more likely to watch television on weekends and school holidays up to midnight compared with school days.

CHART B CHILDREN’S TELEVISION VIEWING BY 30 MINUTE SLOTS



Source: BARB School Days: Sun-Thurs 02/02/03-06/02/03, 09/02/03-13/02/03  
 Term time weekends: Fri-Sat 07/02/03-08/02/03, 14/02/03-15/02/03 School holidays: Mon-Sun 17/02/03-02/03/03

CHART C CHILDREN’S TELEVISION VIEWING BY 30 MINUTE SLOTS (3PM-MIDNIGHT)



Source: BARB School Days: Sun-Thurs 02/02/03-06/02/03, 09/02/03-13/02/03  
 Term time weekends: Fri-Sat 07/02/03-08/02/03, 14/02/03-15/02/03 School holidays: Mon-Sun 17/02/03-02/03/03

### Rules and routines about television viewing

Both adults and children on the Quest panels were asked about rules or routines affecting or controlling children's television viewing. On the adult Quest panel, 87% of respondents living in households with children aged four to nine years claimed there were rules about watching television in their households. In households with children aged 10 to 15 years, 58% of respondents said there were rules about television viewing in their households (see table O on p61).

Just over 50% of respondents aged four to 15 years acknowledged rules set by parents or other adults in their households regarding their television viewing. The youngest respondents were most likely to acknowledge rules. Sixty-two per cent of those aged seven to nine years on the Young View panel claimed that there were rules in their home about television viewing, falling to 45% amongst ten to 12 year olds, and just over a third of 13 to 15 year olds (Table P on p62). When describing examples of rules in their households, some children said they were not allowed to watch television after 9pm or 10pm. Others said they were not allowed to spend too much time watching television or were not allowed to watch it at certain times of the day.

When asked specifically whether their parents did NOT let them watch television after a certain time in the evening, a total of 57% claimed they were not allowed to watch television after 9pm on a Sunday to Thursday evening (see tables below). This fell to 24% on a Friday or Saturday evening. Amongst all age groups, children were allowed to watch television later on a Friday or Saturday evening compared to an evening preceding a school day. The tables show that as the age of the child increases they are allowed to watch television later in the evening throughout the week.

TABLE A WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT ALLOWED TO WATCH TELEVISION ON SUNDAY TO THURSDAY EVENING

	Total	4-6 yrs	7-9 yrs	10-12 yrs	13-15 yrs
	%	%	%	%	%
After 7pm	9	22	10	4	*
After 8pm	17	31	27	7	1
After 9pm	31	33	40	36	13
After 10pm	18	3	13	28	30
After 11pm	9	2	2	9	22
After midnight	3	-	2	3	6
I can watch TV whenever I want	14	8	6	13	28
Base	1355	355	347	320	333

Source: Young View Quest Panel

\* Less than 1%

**TABLE B WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT ALLOWED TO WATCH TELEVISION ON A FRIDAY OR SATURDAY EVENING**

	Total	4-6 yrs	7-9 yrs	10-12 yrs	13-15 yrs
	%	%	%	%	%
After 7pm	6	18	5	1	*
After 8pm	8	18	11	2	0
After 9pm	20	33	31	13	2
After 10pm	18	13	25	22	11
After 11pm	18	9	17	25	22
After midnight	9	0	4	13	19
I can watch TV whenever I want	21	10	7	23	46
Base	1340	344	343	315	338

Source: Young View Quest Panel

\* Less than 1%

### Bedtime

Another restriction on television viewing is determined by the time children go to bed. On a typical Sunday to Thursday evening, preceding a school day, 52% said they went to bed before 9pm. On a Friday or Saturday evening only 25% of young people go to bed by 9pm (see tables C & D). Children of all ages tend to go to bed later on Friday and Saturday evenings than other evenings. By the time children have reached about 10 years of age more than one in two go to bed after 9pm.

**TABLE C USUAL BEDTIME ON SUNDAY TO THURSDAY EVENING**

	Total	4-6 yrs	7-9 yrs	10-12 yrs	13-15 yrs
	%	%	%	%	%
Before 7pm	3	8	2	1	0
Between 7pm-8pm	28	64	34	8	1
Between 8pm-9pm	21	16	34	25	9
Between 9pm-10pm	29	4	18	46	49
Between 10pm-11pm	11	3	2	11	30
Between 11pm-midnight	2	0	0	1	6
After midnight	0	0	0	0	0
No answer	7	6	11	9	4
Base	1500	391	390	360	359

Source: Young View Quest Panel

TABLE D USUAL BEDTIME ON A FRIDAY OR SATURDAY EVENING

	Total	4-6 yrs	7-9 yrs	10-12 yrs	13-15 yrs
	%	%	%	%	%
Before 7pm	1	4	*	*	0
Between 7pm-8pm	7	18	8	2	*
Between 8pm-9pm	17	36	22	7	2
Between 9pm-10pm	23	20	34	25	13
Between 10pm-11pm	25	10	19	36	34
Between 11pm-midnight	13	3	6	15	28
After midnight	6	0	*	6	18
No answer	8	8	10	8	6
Base	1500	391	390	360	359

Source: Young View Quest Panel

\* Less than 1%

### Children viewing alone or with others

Another important consideration is whether children and young people are viewing alone or not which can be influenced by whether they have a television in their own room. As one parent stated in the Workshops:

*“You can’t regulate it, because they’ve all got televisions in their room – and if you’re not there 24 hours a day...they could be watching programmes you’ve told them they can’t watch, and as soon as they hear mum and dad coming up the stairs, they’ll change the channel.”*

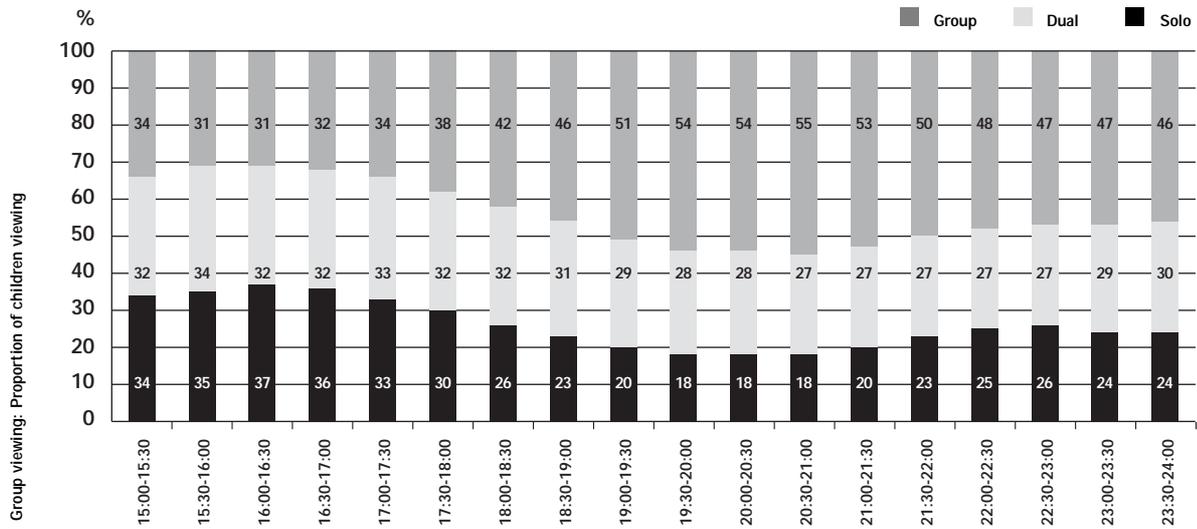
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

Firstly, 52% of parents or guardians said that there was a television in the bedroom of a child who was aged four to nine years while 13% said there was a television but it only played videos, DVDs or computer games (Adult Quest Panel). Of parents or guardians, 76% said there was a television in the bedroom of a child aged 10 to 15 years, while 13% said there was a television but it only played videos, DVDs or computer games (see table M on p60). Children and teenagers aged between four and 15 years on the Young View Panel were also asked about the media and communications equipment they had in their bedrooms. Seventy-one per cent said they had a television in their own room (see table N on p23). Older children were more likely to have a television in their own room. For instance 80% of 13 to 15 year olds have a television in their own room compared with 68% of seven to nine year olds.

BARB data can reveal the proportion of children aged four to 15 years who either view television alone, view with one other person or view in a group (the last two being described as ‘mutual viewing’). Chart D shows, as with the survey data, that mutual viewing is highest between 7pm and 9.30pm with at least 80% of children viewing television with another person present. As previously mentioned (see Chart B on p23), viewing amongst children generally peaks between 6pm and 9pm.

BARB data shows that younger children (4 to 9 years) are less likely to watch television alone compared with children aged 10 to 15 years.

CHART D GROUP VIEWING OF CHILDREN 4-15 YRS

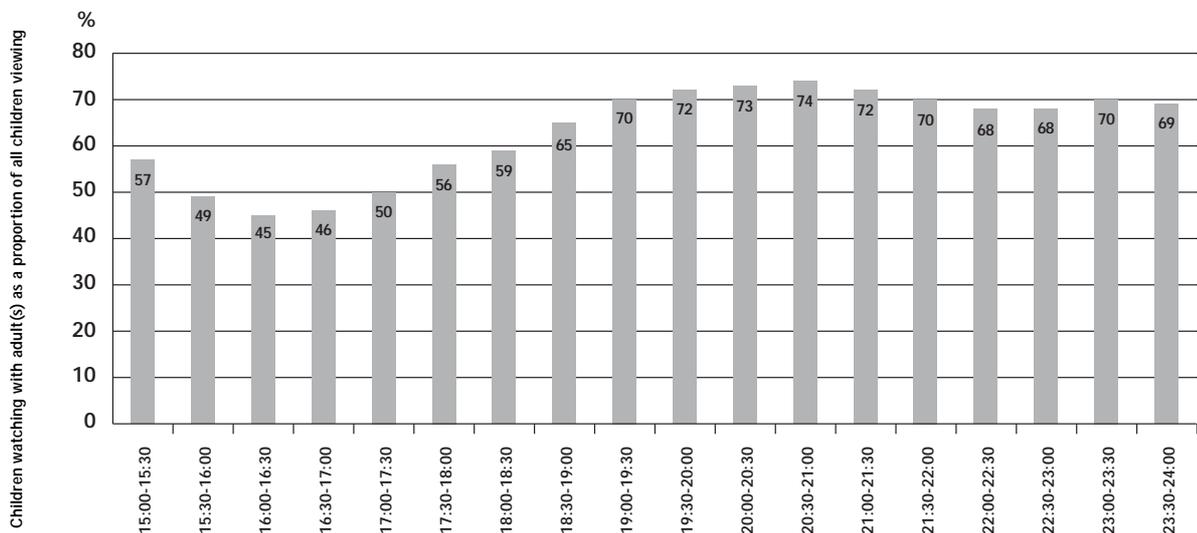


Source: BARB

Based on viewing during school nights (Sun-Thurs) between 02.02.03-13.02.03

The chart below shows the incidence of children viewing television with at least one unspecified adult. Between 3.30pm and 5.30pm less than 20% of children aged four to 15 years viewed television with an adult. There is a gradual increase in the percentage of children viewing with an adult during the early evening, peaking at 74% between 8.30pm and 9pm.

CHART E CHILDREN VIEWING WITH ADULTS: CHILDREN 4-15 YRS



Source: BARB

Based on viewing during school nights (Sun-Thurs) between 02.02.03-13.02.03

The youngest children were most likely to view television accompanied by an adult. After 7.30pm, about 81% of four to nine year olds watched television with an adult. In contrast, about 68% of 10 to 15 year olds watch television with an adult.

The tables below shows the incidence of children watching with others or alone as claimed by respondents in the Adult Quest Panel. On a Sunday to Thursday evening between 9pm and 11pm, 68% of children were not watching television, 28% were watching with an adult, 4% were watching with someone else aged under 15 years and 9% were viewing alone. On a Friday or Saturday evening, more children were viewing television between 9pm and 11pm. However there was only a small increase in the proportion of children viewing alone. Instead it was the proportion of children viewing with adults that increased significantly between 9pm and 11pm.

**TABLE E VIEWING BY CHILDREN AGED FOUR TO 15 YEARS ON A TYPICAL SUNDAY TO THURSDAY EVENING**

	Watch TV alone %	Watch with an adult %	Watch with someone 15 yrs or less %	They do not watch TV at this time %
4-5.30pm	62	19	24	18
5.30-7pm	35	51	21	17
7-9pm	18	74	13	17
9-11pm	9	28	4	68
11pm or later	2	2	*	97

*Source: Adult Quest Panel*  
*Base: 992*

**TABLE F VIEWING BY CHILDREN AGED FOUR TO 15 YEARS OR LESS ON A TYPICAL FRIDAY OR SATURDAY EVENING**

	Watch TV alone %	Watch with an adult %	Watch with someone 15 yrs or less %	They do not watch TV at this time %
4-5.30pm	51	22	19	29
5.30-7pm	36	53	22	16
7-9pm	22	75	18	13
9-11pm	13	44	9	47
11pm or later	6	10	4	86

*Source: Adult Quest Panel*  
*Base: 987*

Results from the Young View Panel (see tables G & H) indicate that on a Sunday to Thursday evening between 9pm and 11pm, 59% of children were not watching television, 14% are watching alone and 24% are watching with an adult. While the proportion of children viewing between 9pm and 11pm increased on a Friday or Saturday evening, the incidence of viewing alone did not seem to increase for Friday and Saturday evenings but children tended to view more in the company of adults resembling the trend found in the data from the Adult Quest Panel.

**TABLE G VIEWING BY CHILDREN AGED FOUR TO 15 YEARS ON A TYPICAL SUNDAY TO THURSDAY EVENING**

	Watch TV alone	Watch with an adult	Watch with someone 15 yrs or less	I do not watch TV at this time
	%	%	%	%
4-5.30pm	31	13	40	15
5.30-7pm	16	43	24	17
7-9pm	12	64	8	16
9-11pm	14	24	4	59
11pm or later	6	3	*	90

*Source: Young View Quest Panel*

*Base: 1342*

*\* Less than 1%*

**TABLE H VIEWING BY CHILDREN AGED FOUR TO 15 YEARS ON A TYPICAL FRIDAY OR SATURDAY EVENING**

	Watch TV alone	Watch with an adult	Watch with someone 15 yrs or less	I do not watch TV at this time
	%	%	%	%
4-5.30pm	26	18	30	27
5.30-7pm	13	48	20	19
7-9pm	10	70	10	10
9-11pm	13	43	5	39
11pm or later	10	12	2	75

*Source: Young View Quest Panel*

*Base: 1339*

### **Children of different age groups**

Both the BARB data and survey results revealed differences in viewing behaviour according to the age of the child. Similarly, parents in the Workshops identified important differences in their approach to regulating the viewing of their children according to their age. Participants in the Workshops believed that children aged between eight and 12 were at their most impressionable and vulnerable to influence from television content. Those under eight were thought to be at less risk – either because they were not available to view later than about 7.30pm, or because offensive or explicit material was thought to ‘go over their heads’. The exception was swearing, which parents did not want younger children exposed to because of the risk of them imitating it. There was some feeling that by the time children reached their teens ‘they knew it all already’ and it was time to stop protecting them too much. As rules and routines vary according to the age of the child, more detail is provided from the Workshops for three key age groups below.

### Children five to eight years

Parents of children aged five to eight years participating in the Workshops claimed they used different techniques to regulate and control the viewing of their children. Children of this age went to bed around 7.30 pm. They did tend to stay up a little longer on weekends and school holidays, but parents said they were more likely to watch with their children at these times. The key methods of regulation and control used by parents of this age group were:

- *Parental presence:* Parents - and this tended to be mothers rather than fathers - said that they were around when the television was on after school from about 3.30pm to 6pm. They may not always be in the same room, actively watching the programmes that their children were watching, but their proximity gave them the impression that they knew and were in control of what their young children were watching. Furthermore, because children of this age group were regular viewers of certain programmes, parents felt they had a good knowledge of the type of content their children were viewing, and were satisfied that it was suitable for them. Detailed information about children's viewing habits can be found in the BSC and ITC report, *What Children Watch*.<sup>10</sup>

*"I find that they tend to watch the same programmes every week, so you do know the type of programme they are watching"*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 8 -15, Multi-channel, London)

- *The watershed:* The watershed played a crucial role in the post-school period. All of the parents of younger children in the Workshops said that they knew the programmes and their content were safe for young children at this time of day, and their trust in pre-watershed programming, particularly that leading up to 7.30pm, was an essential part of their regulation and control of children's viewing.

*"Obviously, I use the watershed for the oldest one...we'll sit together and if it's something I can see is going to affect him, he can go to bed and read a book."*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

- *Choice of channels:* Several parents and carers of younger children in multi-channel households said their children choose to watch niche children's channels, such as The Cartoon Channel. This gave them the security of knowing that whatever their children watched would be suitable.
- *Limited access to television/Parental lock/PIN numbers:* Both parents in terrestrial and multi-channel households, whose children had televisions in their rooms, talked about limiting access to television among this age group. Typically, younger children with personal televisions were either restricted to terrestrial channels, or had sets which were only used for DVDs or videos. In multi-channel homes there was often only one set which had access to non-terrestrial channels and this was often situated in the main living area. Parents often allowed their younger children to watch specific videos on their personal television before turning out their light.

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<sup>10</sup> *What Children Watch: An analysis of children's programming provision between 1997-2001, and Children's Views;* Kam Atwal, Andrea Millwood Hargrave and Jane Sancho with Leila Agyeman and Nicki Karet; the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, 2003.

*“They’ve got a parental control on Sky, you can put PIN codes. It’s the same as the telly she’s got in her bedroom. I put a PIN code into that and she can’t access telly at all.”*

(Female, DE, Single parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

The later period – 6pm until around 7.30pm – was a busy time in most households, and parents were likely to be engaged with preparing meals, supervising or caring for other children. In many households, viewing at this time was determined by other family members, who may elect to watch programmes such as *Hollyoaks*, *The Simpsons* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These were not always deemed suitable for younger children. This was a difficult time for some parents to exert control, although few expressed much real concern that their children were being exposed to unsuitable material. At this time in the evening, both partners (in two-parent households) would be home, and the extra presence of the additional parent was another means of controlling and protecting children.

### **Children eight to twelve years**

As previously mentioned this was acknowledged in the Workshops to be the most difficult and most sensitive age group to regulate, and parents took a very different view as to the amount of control that was either needed, or realistic to impose. Those with older children in the family tended to be more resigned to their children coming into contact with a certain amount of more adult content – through day-to-day life experiences as well as through their media consumption. Most children of this age group also had multiple media sources, including personal televisions in their bedrooms, access to computers and computer games, access to the internet, and use of games consoles. They were therefore exposed to many more media images than their younger counterparts.

Restrictions were being loosened at this stage; television programmes were still monitored and turned off or switched over if there was unsuitable content but parents considered most material shown before 8.30pm to be suitable. Parents themselves were watching by that time and therefore knew what their children were viewing.

Strategies for control and regulation of television viewing among this age group included:

- *Parental presence:* Parents set a great store by being near their children or actually in the room with them while they were viewing. This enabled them to make decisions about whether a programme was suitable to watch or not. Typically, this would be a decision about a programme in the half-hour before the watershed, or one which spanned the watershed.
- *The watershed:* The watershed was an important tool for regulating viewing among this age group, but only one tool. Children in this age group generally stayed up later, and often were up at least until 9pm. Therefore parents had to make decisions based on a case-by-case basis. This applied to both pre and post-watershed viewing.

*“Generally before eight or nine o’clock, you don’t need to [exercise control]. You can be relatively sure that there’ll be nothing on. I don’t think there’ll be anything on that’s going to affect them. I’m quite confident about that.”*

(Male, AB, Parent, children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

*“That’s where the watershed kicks in. If they’re up in the bed at 9, half past nine – you know that they’re not going to see anything too explicit”*  
(Female, DE, parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial)

- *Switching off:* Some parents claimed that they had turned programmes off or turned over, if unsuitable material (for example swearing) was aired. More commonly, however, if material which was deemed controversial (distressing images of the war, a drama featuring gay sexuality, for example) came on while parents were viewing with their children, they would use it to discuss the issues with their children.

*“Well, because I don’t like my children to know anything about anything, my son is ten and I don’t like him to know anything so I like to be able to control that, and I’ll teach him what I want when I want him to know it - and I often sit there with the mute button.”*  
(Female, C1C2, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Southampton)

*“I sometimes put things on that I’d like my eldest to watch for educating him, like drugs, because I think I need to make him aware of it. I know he’s only ten....I’d rather be open with him”*  
(Female, AB, Parent of children 5 -10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

- *Banning channels:* Some parents in multi-channel homes claimed to ban specific channels, such as music channels, though others felt that banning anything made it more desirable.

*“I was in bed at 9 o’clock last night and he (son) was still watching television at 2am, he was probably watching the music channels, he’s not allowed to watch it, he just does”*  
(Male, C1C2, Parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

*“When they’re 6, 7, in bed by half seven, eight o’clock, you’re happy with the nine o’clock watershed, but when they’re 11, 12, 13, staying up a bit later, you still don’t want them seeing that sort of thing.”*  
(Female, DE, Single parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

### **Children over 12 years**

By the time children were in their teens they were thought of as very much self-regulating. On the whole parents in the Workshops believed that they had done their job by then in terms of giving their children a good basis for future behaviour. They also acknowledged that children benefited from making their own decisions and not being overly protected.

*“My girls are 12 and 14 so they’re a little bit older and so they’re a little bit self-regulating...”*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*“When they get to 14, 15, they’re becoming young adults, aren’t they? They’re wanting to watch more adult nature things, and that’s where – should we let them watch or shall we restrain them...It’s a difficult age, isn’t it?”*  
(Female, C1C2, Single parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Some parents still prevented their early teenage children from watching certain material and there was some evidence that girls were protected more in this regard. Control strategies used for this age group included:

*Looking up programme information:* Some parents looked up programmes which their young teens (12 – 14 year olds) wanted to watch, in order to reassure themselves about the content. They made a decision based on the information given in the paper which might include a categorisation regarding language, sexual content or violence.

*Film classification:* Film classification would also be used as a guide to help parents make a decision as to what was suitable for their early teens to watch.

At this age, parental controls were used as much to protect the parents from embarrassment, as they were to protect the children. The usual strategy parents adopted if confronted with this situation was simply to leave the room.

*“My daughters are 13 and 15...but if a programme comes on at nine o’clock and finishes at half ten, what I do is, have a quick look at the paper and see what it is, I just have to assess it from the paper, and then I say okay you can stay up and watch this...but then again, there may be sex...and it’s just really my personal embarrassment...I just go and make a cup of tea.”*  
(Female, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

### **Advantages of the watershed**

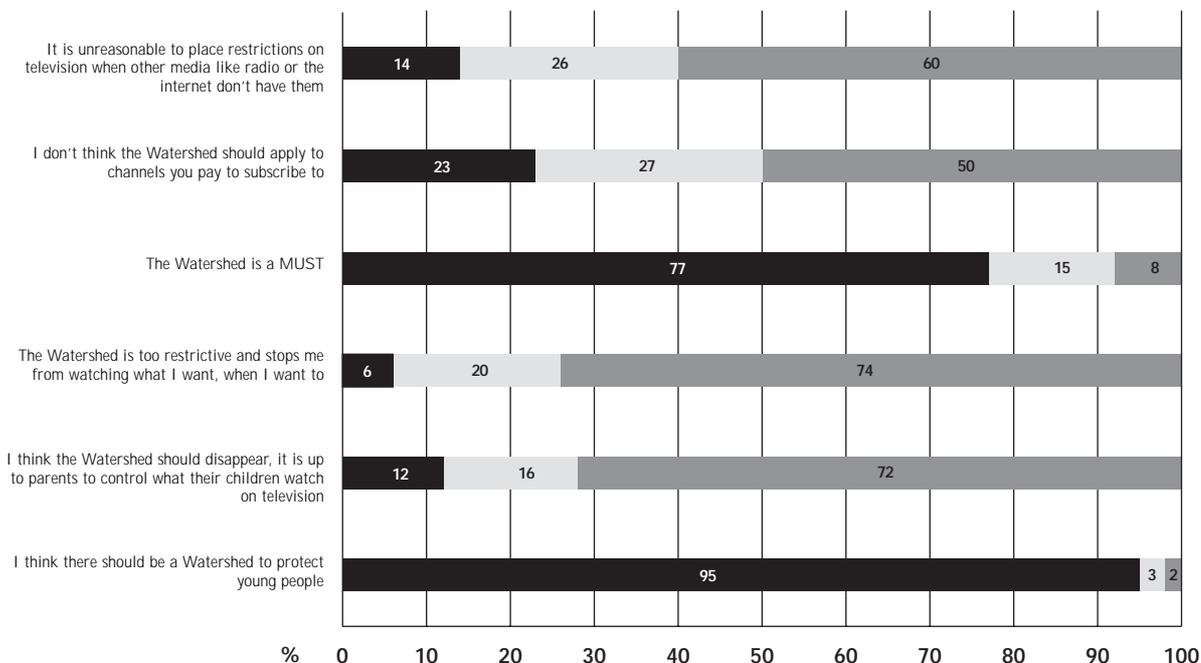
#### **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE WATERSHED**

A key aim of this research was to broaden the debate about the watershed among viewers for whom it might not be directly relevant - for example, groups of empty nesters, or people without children. There was an overwhelming majority in favour of the policy in the Workshops. They automatically thought as citizens when considering the value and rationale behind having a watershed, and considered their answers in relation to society as a whole. Participants across all social grades and ages, of both genders, and irrespective of whether they were from multi-channel or terrestrial homes, considered the benefits of having a Watershed to easily outweigh any disadvantages. Most participants expressed a high level of support for the three main purposes of the watershed that they identified: the protection of children, the provision of a safe viewing zone for adults, and the restraint of broadcasters.

Similarly, adult respondents on the Quest panel who had heard of the watershed were asked to state their level of agreement or disagreement with a number of statements about the watershed (see chart on p35). Generally respondents showed strong support for the watershed. Ninety-five per cent of respondents agreed that there should be a watershed to protect young people and 77% agreed that the ‘watershed is a must’. Only 12% agreed that it should disappear and that it was up to parents to control their children’s viewing. Almost three-quarters of respondents disagreed that it was too restrictive and stopped them from watching what and when they wanted to. Sixty per cent did not think it was unreasonable to place restrictions on television when other media like radio or the internet do not have them.

While one in two disagreed with the statement 'I don't think the watershed should apply to channels you pay to subscribe to', 23% did agree with this statement and 27% neither agreed or disagreed.

CHART F LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT THE WATERSHED



Source: Adult Quest Panel  
Base: 3218

### Disadvantages of the Watershed

Few could cite any disadvantages to having a watershed. While one or two complained that the watershed meant that programmes they wanted to watch were on too late, most thought that was a minor problem – and one easily overcome in this age of DVDs and video-recording. As mentioned above the majority of respondents on the Adult Quest Panel did not think that the watershed restricted their viewing. Those with some doubts about the watershed expressed in the Workshops generally framed these in terms of its lack of efficacy both in its own right (as evidenced by examples of broadcasters apparently stretching guidelines), and in the context of a world where children were subject to influences from multiple sources. A few participants did question the effectiveness or relevance of regulating children's television viewing:

*“If you try to stop young people viewing certain things, or doing certain things they just become more determined to do it. They'll just go upstairs and watch”*  
(Female, C1C2, Single parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

*“I've got my doubts about it frankly because you've got the internet; most children nowadays have access to the internet through one means or another and through the Internet they can be distorted in their views rather than the television”*  
(Male, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

IS THE WATERSHED  
WORKING?

While participants were supportive of the watershed overall, most claimed that standards on television, and in society, had altered over time. While some looked back nostalgically to programmes such as *The A Team* and *Dukes of Hazard* as programmes where “nobody ever dies” and where fighting never resulted in gory injuries, few expected broadcasters to live in the past. Nevertheless, a majority believed that broadcasters were pushing the boundaries in terms of what was aired before the watershed and mentioned language and violence in particular. For example, participants cited examples of violence and menacing behaviour in popular soap operas and dramas such as *EastEnders*, *The Bill*, *Coronation Street*, *Brookside* and *Casualty*. Other programmes such as *The Simpsons* were mentioned as being ‘borderline’ while teen programmes *Hollyoaks* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were thought to be ‘over the mark’ by one or two participants. Here are some opposing views:

*“Yeah, I’ve felt like, yeah all right then, they might know things but you don’t have to have it in your face. Like they’ve turned round to me and said, ‘what’s rape?’ And I wasn’t, at that time I didn’t really want to go into explaining about it ... And that was through Coronation Street and soaps. And drugs, they have that on there. And sometimes it can make them too aware”.*

(Female, DE, parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*“I’ve got an 8 year old boy and the girls (14 and 15) watch Hollyoaks and some of the things that go on are really quite outrageous for a programme that’s on at 6.30 in the evening.... Basically gay sex, lesbians, rape, it’s all been on...”*

(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*“So, you could argue and say that, well the soaps although they are in certain aspects a little bit graphic, it’s only nominal in comparison to you know, murder, rape of a graphic nature in a film all the time. At least we’re getting little snippets which is not giving them an overload. So there is another argument to that really, with regard to these soaps.”*

(Male, C1C2, Single parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Instances when broadcasters ‘pushed the boundaries’ reinforced the watershed’s importance for some participants, as one participant noted, ‘a watershed’s not perfect, but it’s better than a free for all’.

Older participants, in particular, often felt somewhat helpless in the face of what they perceived as a constant chipping away at standards in programmes before and after the watershed, although others accepted that times must move on:

*“It’s pushed down your throat, isn’t it? You’ve really no chance of altering it.”*

(Male, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, Manchester)

*“Times change all the time you know, we are more broadminded than we used to be and peoples’ tastes are different”*

(Male, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

Parents of older children expressed concern specifically about some music programmes, music videos and music channels on satellite/cable television. With regard to MTV and similar channels, there was some uncertainty as to whether these channels were outside the watershed or whether they were breaking the

provisions. There was certainly an undercurrent of concern about much popular music coverage aimed at older children and teenagers. In particular, about the overtly sexual performances from artistes such as Tatu, Christina Aguilera, disturbing or sexually explicit videos (Robbie Williams and Eminem) and some disturbing and explicit lyrics.

**DOES THE WATERSHED  
NEED TO CHANGE?**

Almost every participant in the Workshops was in favour of maintaining the watershed at 9pm while a few even suggested moving it to a later time. The main issue to participants was that the progressive nature of the content they viewed and expected on television during the evening should be more closely adhered to by broadcasters.

As mentioned previously, 95% of adults on the Quest panel thought there should be a watershed to protect young people and 78% thought it was a must. Similarly, most children who had heard of the watershed on the Quest panel thought that the watershed was a good idea (72%).

Participants were strongly in favour of a watershed which covered all terrestrial channels. While there were those who recognised and endorsed Five's content labelling system, the majority perceived such a system as an additional tool to guide people in their programme choices, rather than a replacement for the watershed. In their view, anything other than a 'one-size suits all' code for terrestrial channels had a number of disadvantages. Firstly, parents would have to monitor which channels their children were watching even in the pre-watershed period. Secondly, there were no appropriate tools to bar specific terrestrial channels. Even if there were such tools, having to limit access to a specific channel might only increase a child's appetite to view it.

Most participants believed that most satellite and cable channels should conform to the watershed in the same way as the terrestrial channels. Some parents who had access to satellite and cable channels did make a distinction between terrestrial channels and satellite channels with regard to controlling their children's viewing. A considerable number of participants limited their children's access to cable and satellite channels while giving them free access to terrestrial channels. Others, however, were less concerned about these channels because of features such as PIN numbers.

Respondents who had heard of the watershed on the Adult Quest Panel were asked which channels they thought the watershed should apply to. The majority (78%) thought that the watershed should apply to all channels. Two-thirds of adult respondents on the Quest panel who had heard of the watershed thought it should begin at 9pm on terrestrial channels, 11% thought it should begin earlier at 7pm and 14% thought it should begin later at 10pm. Parents or guardians were more likely to say it should start at 9pm.

Of those who had heard of the watershed, 57% thought it should start at 9pm on satellite or cable channels, 10% thought it should start at 8pm and 13% thought it should start at 10pm.

In general, participants in the Workshops thought that the start time for the watershed should be consistent throughout the year. Some parents did discuss whether a later starting time would be appropriate for weekends when more children stayed up later. However, others felt that broadcasters already offered more family style programming during the weekend evenings.

### 3 AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE WATERSHED

There is an implied contract between the viewer and the broadcaster about broadcasting material allowed in the home. Participants have expectations about what sort of material should be broadcast at a certain time of day, on a particular channel and within a certain type of programme and this particularly applies to programming leading up to the watershed. Such expectations were explored in depth both in the Workshops and via the surveys. The research partners were particularly interested in how these expectations change according to the time of day, the type of content (nudity, sex, language and violence) and the type of programme.

Views of participants were shaped by what already exists, and must therefore be interpreted with care. We do not know, for example, whether these expectations could, or would, be modified if the current broadcast output were to change in any significant way.

Participants in the workshops were unanimous in articulating their belief that it was the context and tone of voice, as well as programme genre or channel, which determined what is or is not acceptable. As the BBC *Producers' Guidelines* state, context is everything. Producers are advised that 'scheduling, relating to both the type of programme and the timeslot, is an important consideration affecting audience acceptance of material'. Similarly the ITC and the BSC recognise that audience expectations about material change according to the time of day it is broadcast, the channel it appears on and the type of programme it is.

#### PROGRESSION OF CONTENT

While most participants in the Workshops considered the watershed to be a fixed point in time, they recognised clearly that there was a progression in terms of content throughout the day on the terrestrial channels in particular. And while 9pm was the cut-off point between programming which was broadly suitable for children and that which was not, there was a clear understanding that scheduling was governed by who was watching as much as any other factor. These views were typical:

*"Children's programmes come on at 3 till about 4.30 – so it's suitable for kids coming home from school. That ends at 4.30 and then you have the news followed by soaps. More suitable for older children. After nine you'd expect to see things that you wouldn't have on before, sex, films and some violence"*  
(Male, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

*"Yeah, I think there is a transition. Up to six, it's cartoons, or whatever. then the soaps come on, and gradually lead up to nine o'clock, and when you get to nine o'clock, that's when you expect to see a bit more graphic stuff."*

*"Yeah, you've got the children's programmes, when they come home from school, like Blue Peter, then you've got the news programmes when people are coming home and having tea and that, and then you've got the soaps, and then you've got the hard stuff... so yeah, it does progress through the evening, definitely."*

(Male and female, AB, Parents of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

**PROGRAMMES WHICH  
STRADDLE THE  
WATERSHED**

There were mixed views in the Workshops on whether programmes which straddle the watershed should conform to it. The ITC Codes state that 'particular care should be taken over programmes of special appeal to children which may start before the watershed but run beyond that time'. Overall, participants believed that if a programme had explicit content it should not begin before 9pm even if the explicit material was shown after 9pm. These parents felt that it was up to the schedulers to ensure that this did not occur:

*"Well, that's bad planning, that's bad planning (on the part of the broadcasters)."*  
(Male, C1C2, Parents, children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Most parents felt that programmes which straddled the watershed made it harder for them to make sure their children watched suitable content:

*"If a kid started to watch that at 8.45, there's no way it's going to be turned off at 9 – you just can't stop kids watching all the way through once you've let them start to watch."*  
(Male, DE, Parent, children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

Others assumed automatically that programmes ending after 9pm would contain stronger content (at least in the part which followed the watershed). One participant said the following about programmes which straddled the watershed:

*"Then you could expect that they would have that content, that nine o'clock content. And it's not going to be intended for kids."*  
(Male, AB, Parent, children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

Others took a less relaxed approach, however:

*"There's absolutely no reason why it couldn't go on at 9pm rather than 8.30pm, you know."*  
(Male, C1C2, 65-75, No children, Terrestrial, London)

*"I just think they might as well observe the watershed because when you're a parent, if they start watching something, then a lot of times you let them finish, so I think if they're going to show something after that, I think it's less of a problem waiting until nine o'clock."*  
(Male, DE Parent, children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

**EXPECTATIONS OF  
CONTENT: PROGRAMME  
GENRES**

Policies and guidelines state that the watershed applies to all programme genres. It is, however, useful to explore participants' expectations of specific programme genres because their tolerance of different types of content can change according to the type of programme that content appears in.

Respondents on the Quest panel were asked if they had ever been concerned about any programme genres or types of programmes (from a pre-selected list) showing material that was not suitable for children before the watershed and immediately after it (see table below). Almost one in two respondents who lived in a household with children aged four to 15 years had been concerned about soap operas in the pre-watershed period. Films were the second most mentioned type of programme. Immediately after the watershed, films and police or crime dramas were mentioned by about a quarter of respondents as having caused

concern. Tables in appendix D present further information regarding the top reasons for this concern in terms of specific types of content (e.g. nudity, violence, swearing etc).

**TABLE 1 CONCERN ABOUT DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRAMMES SHOWING MATERIAL THAT IS NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN**

	Not suitable for children pre-watershed	Not suitable for children immediately post-watershed
	%	%
Soap Operas	47	15
Films	37	25
Hospital dramas	29	13
Real life crime programmes e.g. Crimewatch	29	16
Police/crime dramas	28	23
Comedies/Sitcoms	28	15
News/current affairs	27	7
Music programmes/music video clips	26	11
Chat Shows	23	11
Reality programmes e.g. The Salon, Driving School	21	13
Documentaries	11	8
Childrens programmes	10	3
Sport	6	4
Other	2	1

*Source: Adult Quest Panel*

*Base: 1046 (Respondents living in households with children 4-15 years)*

Some particular programme genres were mentioned spontaneously by participants in the Workshops.

### **News**

There were mixed expectations among participants in the Workshops with regard to news programming. Some – as described earlier – were not sure whether news programming was or should be covered by the watershed. According to the *ITC Programme Code*, all material in news programmes must take account of the likely composition of the audience and give appropriate warnings especially in relation to violent scenes.

While participants watched a wide range of news programmes and services (on terrestrial channels and multi-channels) they were able to articulate what they did and did not expect or want to see on the news. A summary of their expectations is provided below:

- Those with younger children were more likely to say that they did not want (or expect) to see powerful or ‘graphic’ depictions of violence or the effects of violence on early evening broadcasts.

- Older participants and parents of older children were more likely to say they wanted to see the news “as it was happening” and did not want images and pictures to be ‘doctored’ in any way.
- Older participants without children living with them at home often watched the early evening news (at either 6pm or 6.30pm) as their sole News programme and while some were adamant that they did not want to see anything different from what might be shown in the later bulletins, others were prepared to wait until a later bulletin for fuller coverage which they would expect to be more explicit.
- Parents of older children frequently said that they used the News as a springboard to discuss issues with their children that otherwise they might not talk about. They did not want their children to be protected from the ‘real world’ and felt that children, at least those aged nine or ten and older, should be made aware of what was going on around them and not over-protected.

### Soap Operas and Drama Series

Soap operas were the main cause of concern across all of the groups in the study. Participants were very conscious of ‘the battle for ratings’ and thought that the portrayal of sex and violence in soap operas was becoming more explicit and more hard-hitting all the time.

*“There seems to be a constant battle between ITV with Coronation Street and BBC1 with EastEnders for viewing figures and the content of those programmes leaves a lot to be desired because they are out to get viewing numbers and they’re not, I don’t think they’re really concerned about morals”*  
(Male, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

Although this particular quotation came from an older person, the sentiments were echoed across all of the groups. Soap operas were undoubtedly the most watched programmes and many were watched by children together with their parents. They aroused complex feelings among participants because of the importance they had within the viewing repertoire. Attitudes towards soap operas have been explored in detail in previous research.<sup>11</sup> Because of the relationship participants had with soap operas, it might be expected that participants showed a greater tolerance for violence or explicit content, and indeed a minority did express this view:

*“Whoever’s done that thing, will get punished. That’ll get seen by the kids...But on films, it’s different. The good guy can lose”*  
(Male, C1C2, Single parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

A greater number, however, considered that soap operas were going beyond what they expected or considered reasonable on a regular basis. Moreover, there was recognition that the serial nature of the genre made them particularly ‘addictive’ to their children, which increased their exposure to them:

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<sup>11</sup> *Soap Box or Soft Soap? Audience attitudes to the British soap opera*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave with Lucy Gatfield; Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002.

*"I get more annoyed about soaps. We have more debates and arguments over soaps than anything else 'cause I find soaps just so far away from anything that's going on. Because in a soap there is always a crisis every few minutes. If my kids...had their way they would come home at 4 and watch until 8 and they would watch soaps all that time."*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

*"The Bill, well that comes on at 8. The police deal with violence, last night they chopped off someone's ...it's horrible. He's on drugs, there's too much for a child – I have to send mine to bed"*

(Female, C1C2, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Manchester)

*"They show violence in there sometimes. Children pick up from that, youngsters 15, 16 years old, they pick up on that as well. Soaps....it seems like the, regulators should be more aware of things like that because they should try and improve morals."*

(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

The importance of role models in programmes accessible to children was a key one. Many participants – and especially parents of children aged from about eight to 13 – were concerned that viewing behaviours such as drug or alcohol-taking, fighting, gang membership and being disrespectful to parents or figures of authority might inspire imitation by their children. By showing such behaviours on television, there was a sense that they were 'normalised' if not glamorised, and they were concerned as to the effect this could potentially have.

Finally, there were clear differences in expectations between the British soap operas of post 7pm and the imported Australian soap operas, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, shown earlier. The Australian programmes were seen to be very much targeted at a young audience, featuring young people and their lifestyles with content, characterisations and plots appropriate for younger viewing. Teenagers holding hands, and 'messaging about' were all to be expected. Homosexuality, violence, swearing, drug taking, gang warfare and gratuitous cruelty were not expected in Australian soap operas.

### **Daytime chat-shows**

Participants had different expectations from US chat shows and their British equivalents. They expected to see extreme behaviour and circumstances from US chat shows like *Jenny Jones* and *Jerry Springer* but for many, this made such programming unacceptable viewing for terrestrial channels, even though they might expect to see such content on satellite or cable. This was largely because of the tone of voice of American chat shows, which participants felt to be aggressive and sensational. British chat shows like *Kilroy* were thought to tackle similar subjects, some of which were 'near the bone', but in a more serious and less exploitative way. These they felt were suitable and acceptable daytime and pre-watershed viewing and again in some families facilitated the discussion of difficult issues.

*"When my daughter was off sick, I did think... do I have to watch this, the things they were talking about on that Trisha"*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

### Films

The separate classifications that apply to films place them in a slightly different category from other programmes; viewer expectations in the Workshops were that the classifications would be applied throughout the day. The same expectations applied when it came to scheduling decisions. Those containing violence, scenes of a sexually explicit nature and swearing – all of which were expected to be more frequent and more explicit in many contemporary films – were expected to be shown after 9pm.

### VIEWER SENSITIVITY TO NUDITY, SEXUAL CONTENT, VIOLENCE AND LANGUAGE

Participants in the Workshops were asked which of the content areas under discussion were of most concern to them, as individuals. For a clear majority, violence was the key concern. Sexual content (though not nudity) and language were also of concern but to fewer participants overall.

In contrast, respondents living in households with children on the Adult Quest Panel were most likely to nominate programmes with sex and programmes with swearing as those that they did not want their children to watch (see table below). When asked what types of content sometimes upsets their children and makes them want to stop watching, 31% mentioned violence or fighting and 27% mentioned real life violence in news or factual programmes.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE J TYPES OF PROGRAMME CONTENT WHICH MAY CAUSE CONCERN

	Types of content parents/guardians do not want their children to watch	Sometimes upsets your children and makes them want to stop watching
	%	%
Programmes with sex	77	18
Programmes with swearing/offensive language	72	18
Programmes with violence/fighting	58	31
Programmes with nudity	46	13
Real life violence in the news or in factual programmes	25	27
Programmes with kissing	6	6
Other	8	12
Nothing	7	30
No answer	4	14

Source: *Adult Quest Panel*

Base: 988 (Parents/guardians living in households with children aged 4-15 years)

Children on the Young View Panel were also asked about different types of programme content that their parents did not want them to watch. Because children were involved the options were different and phrased in language that they could understand. Children were most likely to answer that they were not allowed to watch programmes with too much nudity, with too much swearing or too much violence or fighting. When asked about the types of content that upset

<sup>12</sup> *How Children Interpret Screen Violence*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; the BBC, the BBFC, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Independent Television Commission, 2003.

them and made them want to stop watching, 30% selected real life violence in the news or in factual programmes. A quarter of children also selected either programmes with swearing or offensive language or programmes with violence and fighting.

TABLE K TYPES OF PROGRAMME CONTENT WHICH MAY CAUSE CONCERN

	Types of content your parents do not want you to watch %	Sometimes upsets you and makes you want to stop watching %
Programmes with too much nudity	61	22
Programmes with swearing/offensive language	59	25
Programmes with too much violence/fighting	53	30
Programmes with too much kissing/cuddling	22	16
Real life violence in the news or in factual programmes	19	25
Other	6	7
No answer	21	40

Source: *Young View Quest Panel*  
Base: 1500

Participants in the Workshops discussed the levels of tolerance towards nudity, sexual content, violence, language and advertising, with two or three content categories covered in each Workshop.

For the purposes of this research, participants were asked to draw up their own guidelines or principles in relation to programmes broadcast in the period leading up to the watershed and immediately after it. These addressed issues such as context, programme genre, channel and tone.

Participants were prompted with a variety of stimulus material (see Appendix C), selected by the commissioning bodies in association with The Fuse Group. Each piece of stimulus material represented a particular 'watershed dilemma' containing material shown before 9pm or which some viewers had complained about. Participants were encouraged as much as possible to discuss issues beyond the specific stimulus material and to consider more generally what was acceptable in relation to the watershed in each content category.

Participants were asked to suggest appropriate times for material to be aired both on terrestrial and satellite and cable channels (for more information about the sticker exercise see Appendix B). For the majority of participants, these times were the same across all platforms. The small minority of participants who did think there should be a difference in broadcast times between the channels suggested a broadcast time of an average one-hour earlier for the satellite channels.

**NUDITY & SEXUAL CONTENT**

Although nudity and sexual content were not directly related, they were dealt with side by side in the Workshops. Sexual content in particular was of concern to a number of participants, especially parents of older children, nudity on the other hand was of far less concern. Material with sexual content as well as that with nudity was more likely to be difficult or embarrassing to watch with other generations, whether they be parents or children. This did not necessarily

translate into a desire to confine all such content to post-watershed – but it does speak to a desire among participants to know when and if this type of material is likely to appear on their screens.

### Sexual Content

Generally, there was a strong feeling that children need to be protected from seeing “too much, too soon”. Most people, however, claimed to be fairly tolerant of moderate sexual content on television, and few participants cited specific examples of pre-watershed material which had shocked in this respect. There was, rather, a general sense that there was too much ‘sexual innuendo’, although this was as likely to be a reference to advertising as it was to programme content.

While violence was the area of most concern overall to participants, sexual content was most likely to give rise to embarrassment when viewing with children or older parents, and therefore participants did want guidelines to restrain the amount and type of sexual content which can be shown pre-watershed.

Two clips were shown to stimulate discussion. The first was a clip from *Casualty*, originally broadcast after 8pm on BBC1, showing an extended kiss between two men. Nearly everyone found this clip unacceptable as pre-watershed viewing. It was felt to portray a mode of behaviour which, for the most part, is still not accepted as the norm. Younger participants, in their twenties and thirties were somewhat more accepting of this material than most other participants because they felt it was reflective of greater levels of tolerance in society towards homosexual displays of affection. However, they thought that 8pm was probably the earliest it should be shown. Most participants thought it not be shown before 9pm or even 10pm.

*“Josh is only five and I stopped watching Casualty because of that – I don’t mean forever – I just mean while all that was going on – it’s easier, if it’s a boy and a girl, it’s as simple as that.”*

(Male, DE, Single parent of children 8-15, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

*“I feel – why shouldn’t it be shown? I know some people find it offensive – they can look away. If my kid was to watch that and then, Mummy! Mummy! – What! I haven’t got a problem saying to them – I think it’s quite a good way to grasp a situation, to bring on a conversation with them.”*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 18-25, Multi-channel, Southampton)

Those who were uncomfortable with this material frequently attributed their feelings to concern for their children. The reasons they gave for this was that they felt such material could influence their children when they were at a vulnerable age. Others said that they did not believe their children would be ‘affected’ by seeing an expression of homosexuality, but they did not want the issue raised until they were ready to deal with it. By airing it at a time when their children would be viewing, the broadcasters were robbing them of the right to address a sensitive issue at a time of their choosing. Those who did not think it was suitable pre-watershed viewing were more concerned about the portrayal of homosexuality rather than the intensity of the kiss itself.

The second clip was from the US chat show, *Jenny Jones*, and was broadcast on Sky One at 3.55pm on a weekday. The theme of the programme was mothers who party with their teenage daughters. It focussed on one mother who described partying with her teenage daughters, participating in striptease parties, smoking cannabis and meeting men. The *Jenny Jones* clip was – for the most part – dismissed as either risible or horrible by turn. A combination of tone and content made the programme one which few thought had any value. In addition, some groups disliked the lifestyles portrayed by the guests on the show, and were adamant that it should not be shown during early part of the evening.

*“I’ve got 12 and 14 year old girls who are just getting into this world and ...that’s encouraging them to go and do whatever they like.”*

(Male, DE, parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*“It’s a shame that society finds that amusing and entertaining.”*

(Female, AB, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Glasgow)

Others were less concerned, however, pointing out that the American style of the programme was so over-dramatised that they were unable to take the content seriously. Many felt that this very American-style programme was what they might expect on Sky during the day and they would be shocked to find it on BBC1 or ITV.

*“I imagine that’s the sort of thing you get on Sky, just stupid people, stupid Americans”*

(Female, C1C2, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

In summary:

- *Heterosexual content:* Kissing was felt to be acceptable at most times during the day by nearly everyone. It was generally felt that dramas should not portray a sexual act which goes further than kissing – for example, if the woman is undressed to the waist or reveals her breasts, in a drama, this was thought unsuited to pre-watershed viewing times. Equally unacceptable pre watershed were men and women touching each other in a sexually suggestive way and close up shots of ‘sexual’ parts of the body.
- *Homosexual content:* Homosexual relationships were an area of great sensitivity for many participants. Many were concerned about giving the wrong message to children, who are perceived as ‘vulnerable’ in the area of sexuality. Other participants – particularly men – found viewing acts of male homosexuality distasteful in their own right. There was, however, a groundswell of opinion – most often expressed by female participants (including parents) that it was both acceptable and sometimes useful to portray a homosexual relationship within a drama. However, it was thought to be unnecessary to display such relationships in any more explicit a way than through cuddling or holding hands. Anything more explicit should be after 9pm and – for many participants – after 10pm. Several had seen dramas such as *Queer as Folk* – and enjoyed them – but did not consider them suitable for children.

- *Sexuality and Alternative Lifestyles:* These were issues which were often discussed on chat shows. Most participants were dismissive of the US-style shows and did not take them very seriously; most would not, therefore, be averse to them being aired during the daytime, although for some, they should be confined to satellite or cable channels. British chat shows also touched on territory which was difficult or controversial. Overall, these were thought to do a valuable job in raising difficult issues and discussing them in a balanced way. Some, however, felt that such programmes should not be shown during the school holidays, although others argued that most younger children would not be interested in such programming in any case.

### **Nudity**

Nudity was generally not raised as an issue that concerns people and most claim to be reasonably tolerant of seeing naked bodies on television. As with all the issues discussed, it is the context which defines what is or is not accepted by participants during the pre-watershed period.

A clip from the reality programme, *The Salon*, originally broadcast at 6pm on Channel 4, showed a woman lying on a sun bed with obviously surgically enhanced breasts. Her nipples had been digitally blurred.

The majority of the groups considered *The Salon* amusing entertainment. Almost a third of those doing this exercise thought *The Salon* should not have been aired before 9pm, with considerable numbers thinking that 10pm was a better starting time. Others, however, were happier with an earlier time. Some participants felt if the woman's nipples had not been 'blurred out' then they would have voted for a later time. Others, however, thought the 'blurring' was unnecessary and made little impact on the scene.

The polarised response was not primarily because of the nudity, but because the woman in the clip had (unusually large) surgically enhanced breasts. While many male participants found this amusing, many women disliked this aspect of the programme. Their concern was focused on programmes which appeared to promote or at least endorse the practice of enhancing or altering one's body for cosmetic purposes. It was felt that such practices provide a poor example for young teenagers, especially girls.

*"Trying to be outrageous – it's cheap outrageousness, yeah."*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*"So thin everywhere else and then – just abnormal..."*  
(Female, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

An additional point made by one parent was that she appreciated the fact that some reality programmes such as this were shown either with 'blur-out' or with words beeped out when they are screened at an earlier time. This ensures that their children can keep up with programmes which might be very topical at school, without being exposed to unsuitable content.

In summary:

- *Nudity was more acceptable where it occurred 'naturally', and where it was not included "for titillation":* Some examples given included:

Documentaries featuring people having surgery, or in a sauna, or general medical/biological information e.g. *The Human Body* (narrated by Lord Winston)

Historical reconstructions (e.g. *Walking with Cavemen*) – though some felt such programmes would benefit from a pre-programme warning

Travel programmes (e.g. featuring people sunbathing topless on a beach)

News reports (e.g. showing naked people walking up an escalator – a recent art event at Selfridges, or coverage of native naked dancers on a royal tour to Africa)

- Participants were less likely to tolerate nudity if they disapproved of the lifestyle being portrayed: Portraying a poor role model meant that nudity was less considered less suitable. For instance, a hypothetical travel programme showing teenage girls topless and having a wild time in Ibiza was provided by participants as an example of how the context can tip the balance between acceptable and unacceptable. Participants would deem this unacceptable – not because of the nudity but because of the poor role model which it presented.

*“You look for role models for your children – you don’t want to portray that to them as normal”*

(Female, C1C2, Parent of children 5-10 Multi-channel, Glasgow)

- *Women were sensitive to programming, which might undermine girls’ views of what constitutes ‘normal’ anatomy:* While female nudity per se might be acceptable, many participants had problems with documentaries which featured young women who were having plastic surgery, or who had had such surgery. The issue here was not the nudity itself, but the possible effect on pre-teen and early teens (especially girls) on their own self-image.
- *Female nudity was more acceptable than male nudity:* However, in certain situations, male nudity was acceptable also. One example was given of a man having his testicles examined on *This Morning* in a health item. This was felt to be ‘justified’ because the context was ‘educational’.
- *Nudity in dramas needs to be treated with more caution than nudity in reality programming:* Given the importance of any pre-watershed nudity occurring ‘naturally’, it follows that participants feel nudity within dramas needed to be treated with more caution than nudity in documentaries or reality programmes. In a drama, nudity was not perceived as a ‘natural’ occurrence, in the sense that although it may appear natural within the framework of the plot, that plot itself has been contrived by the producers of the programme. It was also true that nudity in drama is very often connected with sexual relationships. And – as described above – it is generally felt that sexual relationships need not (and should not) go to this level at least until after 9pm.
- *Semi-nudity or semi-nakedness which was overtly sexual was a very different issue from nudity in factual reports:* There was widespread concern about music videos – both those shown on the music channels and on

mainstream television. Interestingly, many of these remarks come from younger participants. Many participants were surprised that these videos were allowed to be shown, and for some, they were adequate evidence that the watershed was not imposed on some of the satellite or cable music channels. The issue was not about nudity but the sexual undertone of the material.

*“Christina Aguilera, that’s disgusting. It’s on the music channel and that’s on all day. I don’t think there’s anything on there to stop it going on all day...it’s basically sex at that time of the day.”*

(Male, C1C2, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

## VIOLENCE

Violence was the area of most concern to participants and most often mentioned as the area in which they considered broadcasters to exceed the standards they expected on pre-watershed television. There was a perception that there were more scenes of violence on television before the watershed – and this is often linked to violent storylines in soap operas and dramas such as *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *The Bill*. Participants had a sophisticated attitude towards the portrayal and representation of onscreen violence. They understood and accepted that violence was and always has been portrayed in programming aimed at children and families, but they did feel that there has been a shift towards portraying violence more frequently, and in ways which are more realistic (because of production values) or more disturbing. To what extent these portrayals impacted on children was cause for much debate, both among parents and other participants. Some argued that children have always been able to distinguish between what is real and what is not, and that where it was clearly fictional (e.g. *Tom & Jerry*), there was less impact.

The discussion on violence embraced both acts of aggression and personal violence, as well as the detailed representation of scenes of surgery or of the results of violence. It can be argued that surgery scenes are not examples of violence and more an issue of taste, however they are included under the violence section because they can be graphic in terms of showing blood. *Programme Codes* and *Guidelines* provide detailed information on what is acceptable regarding different types of violence and according to the type of programme containing it.

The clips chosen for this section were taken from *Coronation Street* and *Children’s Hospital*, *Brookside* and *Crimewatch*.

### Violence by Genres: Soap Operas or Drama Programmes

The Workshops were shown two clips from soap operas. The first clip from *Coronation Street* (starting at 8pm on ITV1) showed some of the main characters, Gail Hillman and her children, restrained inside a car being driven by her estranged husband, Richard. The clip ends when Richard drives the car into a canal and an underwater shot shows the characters struggling to get out of it.

This material was thought to be within the limits of pre-watershed material by most, with at least one third thinking that a start time of 8pm was appropriate. Nevertheless, a significant minority, particularly the parents of younger children, believed that it should not have been shown until later in the evening. What evoked most concern was the act of driving into the canal and the underwater shots of the passengers struggling to get out of the car.

*"My grandson watched that and he was really quite upset...I think it should have been left to your imagination."*

(Female, C1C2, 40-45, No children living at home, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

The majority, however, felt that the material in the clip was no worse than you might see in an afternoon film, and that a time slot of around 7.30pm – 8pm was appropriate. There were two reasons why they found this clip tolerable; first, because they knew that the main characters were going to escape, and second, because the huge amount of pre-publicity meant that they knew about the storyline and could therefore make an informed choice about viewing it.

*"I don't think it affects the children...they like Coronation Street and they were all waiting for that to happen because they knew it was gong to happen. Because it's nearly always in the paper beforehand..."*

(Female, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Their knowledge of and familiarity with, the main characters was put forward as another reason why it was less frightening, and therefore more tolerated, than other material. There was also a strong belief among participants that in soap operas bad behaviour and nasty people were not tolerated for long, they get their 'come uppance' and that makes it more acceptable.

This familiarity with the plotline and characters, in conjunction with the production techniques, make *Coronation Street* feel "less real" than some other programmes, such as *The Bill* – and this contributes to participants' greater tolerance for the violence in it.

*"I would say it's not particularly nice, but it's not done in such a graphical way that it should be after the watershed."*

(Male, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

The second clip, from *Brookside* (8pm on Channel 4), showed two teenage girls taken hostage by an armed man who is part of a drug gang threatening them. There is an element of sexual threat and both girls seem very frightened and one of them is physically sick. The *Brookside* clip was thought to be far more disturbing than the extract from *Coronation Street*, and by far the majority thought it should not be shown until after 9pm. The elements which made it unacceptable for early evening viewing included the implied threat to the girls (suggestions of sexual violence), the presence of the gun, and the realistic way in which it was acted.

*"I guessed it was a soap. I went for 9 because the guns were so visible and the sheer intent of the physical side of the rape"*

(Female, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

*"Very well done and quite frightening."*

(Female, DE, 18-25, No children, Multi-channel, Southampton)

Women found the threat towards the girls disturbing, while men seemed less disturbed by this. A couple of the men commented that it felt unrealistic, with one commenting that his children's Playstation games were more violent than this.

While most felt concerned about the degree of violence and implied violence, others were also disturbed by the dangers of having storylines which offer poor role models for youngsters, saying that such behaviour could give the impression that:

*“It’s cool to act like this and throw women around and speak to them like that.”*  
(Male, DE, Single parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

In general, there was a sense that some soap operas and drama series increasingly had violent plotlines, and that these were becoming less acceptable as pre-watershed viewing. While there was some inconsistency in responses, it was clear that a number of factors come together to make a particular episode or storyline unacceptable:<sup>13</sup>

*The degree to which the violence appears random or gratuitous:* random or gratuitous violence should be treated with greater caution by programmers and rarely included before 8.30pm.

*“I think you can take a little bit of violence, as long as it’s not too graphic. You can see violent scenes in a play or a drama, and you can get the idea of what’s happened, but some of them can have too much blood and too much graphic display that it will affect them, especially the younger ones...”*  
(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

Some participants thought that the use of guns in dramas before 9pm should be severely limited or banned altogether. Others thought that all violence and aggression towards women and minors should be used sparingly. Similarly, implied or actual sexual aggression should be strictly limited, if not banned completely, before 9pm.

*The overall storyline:* Participants are concerned that those who perpetrate violence or aggression should be punished – that there should be a ‘moral’ outcome. And while most feel that soap operas do generally contain such an outcome, it is often only played out in the long term, which is not satisfactory for those watching with children. Programme makers need to take this on board.

*Unexpected levels of violence when there had not been enough advance warning:* Some plotlines have been heavily publicised and this gives participants a chance to make a real choice. However, where this is not the case, participants can easily be taken aback by programme content. This is particularly important for soap operas, which are generally appointment-to-view programmes, which participants would be unlikely to look up in a listings guide.

*Balance within the overall plotline of a soap:* Participants accepted a level of violent or aggression within storylines, but there was a strong perception that at present this level is being exceeded, and that it is becoming unbalanced. In general, it is felt that murders or acts of violence should not

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<sup>13</sup> *How Children Interpret Screen Violence*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; British Broadcasting Corporation, British Board of Film Classification, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2003.

occur in a soap opera or drama much more frequently than in real life. This was more pertinent for soap operas, which purport to portray ordinary domestic lives, than it was for police dramas, e.g. *The Bill*.

*“Soaps should portray real life and real life doesn’t have something like that going on every week”*  
(Female, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

*Domestic violence:* This is somewhat polarising when it appears in soap operas. A recent storyline in *EastEnders* was thought to be inappropriate for pre-watershed viewing by some, but others praised the BBC’s way of handling it, and felt it was an issue which deserved to be covered.

*“The random stuff is worse because you don’t get the chance to understand what’s going on. It just comes out of nowhere. But when they did the domestic violence storyline in EastEnders, they did a season of documentaries on BBC1 at the same time, which I think they handled really well.”*  
(Female, DE, 18-25, No children, Multi-channel, Southampton)

*Factors which increase the impact of violence:* Production techniques which make content seem ‘real’ increase the impact of any violent scenes – and participants argued that this should be taken on board when a programme is scheduled. They also thought that the characters’ responses to violence – e.g. through their level of fear – also increased the impact of any violent scenes – again, this type of scene is thought by most to be unsuited to television before 8.30pm.<sup>14</sup>

### **Violence by genres: News, Reality or Factual Programming**

Real life depictions of violence – or the depiction of violence in reality or factual programmes – were more complicated issues than the depiction of violence in drama. Participants were torn between opposing and contradictory impulses: on the one hand, they did not wish their children (or themselves) to be wrapped in cotton wool, or to be protected from seeing real-life events; on the other, they did not want them to be disturbed by graphically violent images. This might include war coverage, or acts of terrorism, such as September 11th on the news. Most came down on the side of compromise; early evening bulletins should in general show less detail and rely more on commentary and narration. People always have the option to watch later. Participants argued that early evening news should limit the degree of graphic detail shown especially scenes with blood and dead bodies.

*“You can tell people about it during the day when kids are about but you don’t have to show them the pictures, very upsetting and disturbing.”*  
(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

The first clip shown to provoke discussion was taken from *Children’s Hospital* (broadcast at 7pm on BBC1) showing scenes of surgery. It began with a doctor discussing an X-ray of a child’s skull and then the unconscious child is brought in for surgery and the medical team drills into his skull, exposing a section of fractured skull.

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<sup>14</sup> *Defining Violence: The Search for Understanding*; David E Morrison et al; University of Luton, 1999.

This clip polarised response. Many participants found it difficult to view because of personal squeamishness, and this also affected the time they felt it suitable to air. Men were somewhat more likely than women to respond in this way.

About half of those who watched this clip thought it interesting, informative, and potentially educational for children – particularly those aged over eight or nine. However, few parents and carers would expect children to choose to watch such material on their own, which again, makes it less of a concern.

The second clip was taken from *Crimewatch*, broadcast at 8pm on BBC1. It showed an extended reconstruction of a man who comes upon a group of youths. The man is beaten with a bar, and the youths attempt to drive over him and attack him with a chainsaw. The reconstruction is intercut with an interview with the real-life victim, who describes the event. Most participants thought that 9pm was the earliest time this should have been shown, while a third thought it should be shown after 10pm.

Some female participants claimed to generally dislike *Crimewatch* and chose not to watch it because they felt it engendered fear by conveying the impression that there were many violent or predatory criminals ‘out there’.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the crime actually happened made the reconstruction more disturbing. A minority thought that it would be appropriate earlier in the evening, so that they could watch it with their children (11 or 12 year olds) and use it as the springboard for conversations about crime and criminals.

Most participants believed that reconstructions of this type should be handled subtly, and that excessive (graphic) details were not appropriate or desirable.

*“Crimewatch is real. Someone gets shot, someone gets hurt, that’s what worries me about the violence.”*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

Factual programmes like *Crimewatch* which reconstructed crimes generated conflicting responses. On the one hand it reported real crimes committed (and provided a socially justified service by assisting in catching criminals), but on the other hand, the effect of its dramatic reconstructions was to engender more fear. This is particularly true when the event being reported on or reconstructed is an apparently random act of violence. This type of crime was most feared by participants, particularly women, and they were most sensitive to its portrayal on pre-watershed television. It is the very fact of its being real which makes it more frightening.<sup>15</sup>

#### LANGUAGE

Although previous research has shown that swearing was a frequent source of viewer complaint, these Workshops found it was of less concern to most participants than violence. Irrespective of whether participants had a strict code about the use of swear words for themselves or their children, there was an understanding – almost an acceptance – that swearing and offensive language were in widespread use at all levels of society in contemporary Britain. The most often repeated phrase during this part of the discussion was “kids hear worse than that at school”. More than 70% of parents and carers on the Quest panel

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<sup>15</sup> *Women Viewing Violence: How Women Interpret Violence on Television*; Professor P. Schlesinger, Professor R. Dobash, Dr. R. Dobash, K. Weaver; British Film Institute, 1992.

said they did not want their children watching programmes with swearing and offensive language. Programmes with swearing and offensive language were also nominated by 59% of children on the Young View Panel as content that their parents did not want them to watch.

Language was an area where personal opinions vary widely, depending on upbringing, personal convictions and taste. One person barely tolerates 'drat' as acceptable before the watershed, while another watches 15 classified videos with his nine-year-old son without bothering about the language content. However, there were some areas of consensus. In general, most expected minimal use of swearing before the watershed. No one would tolerate the use of 'fuck' or other strong swear words before 9pm – and many would not expect to hear these words until much later at night (or, for some participants, not at all). Similarly, another study found that respondents generally did not accept the use of swear words and terms of abuse before the watershed at 9pm, as they expected children to be in the audience.<sup>16</sup>

*“If it’s before nine, it’s got to be fairly mild language, I would say. You’d have to, really, to get down to it, you’d have to list the words, and get a vote on each one, because there’s so many different ones, there’s so much variation of words you could construe as ‘swearing’, but the range from mild to strong..”*  
(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Manchester).

Some of this sensitivity is because participants (especially older ones) were intolerant of swearing overall. Parents were more likely to be worried about the potential influence of swearing on their children, even though most acknowledged that television is only one of the many sources impacting on them in this way. But even a phrase like “*the sodding dog*” would be unacceptable to most parents if repeated back to them by their five-year-old.

### Context

One of the clips shown illustrated the importance of context. Participants in the Workshops were shown a clip from the sitcom, *My Family* with Robert Lindsay in a state of frustration shouting ‘*bollocks*’ and ‘*next door’s sodding dog has crapped on the sodding doorstep again*’. This programme is usually broadcast on 8.30pm but is sometimes repeated at 4.30pm on the weekend.

Few people were offended by this example. Most found it ‘tame’ and the majority suggested it would be appropriate to air the programme before 9pm, with a substantial number relaxed to see the programme on between 6pm and 7.30pm. However, many felt that 4.30pm on Sunday afternoon (a time when the programme was often repeated) was too early for this type of language.

For most people, the swear words used in the clip were ones that they would not be offended by and might even use themselves. Scottish participants observed that ‘*bollocks*’ is an English word, and not commonly used in Scotland, therefore it probably had even less impact there than in other parts of the country.

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<sup>16</sup> *Delete Expletives?*; Andrea Millwood Hargrave; Advertising Standards Authority, British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission, 2000.

*My Family* is a comedy, which mitigates the impact of the language used. Key to this is that it was seen by participants as reflecting 'real life' as many families experience it; the language was a momentary outburst or slippage which most participants recognised.

*"That show there is a comedy and what he said wasn't used in malice, wasn't, it was used as a joke, you know, I didn't find it offensive, you know, it's a word he used or two but they're common and you hear them every day, you know, them sort of thing and you know, well, it's, people do find them offensive... and maybe 4.30 is a wrong time to put it on, I would say 8.30 was OK but 4.30 is probably a bit early, you know, for but that's all, it's a comedy"*  
(Male, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

Where a programme was humorous, occasional swearing was more likely to be tolerated; however, regular swearing on a programme – one viewer cited *Bottom* – may become unacceptable.

*"... I mean, the guy's obviously annoyed because he's stood in some dog poo or whatever, but if they're just sitting at the dinner table, having a civilised – you wouldn't be expecting them to just be coming out with 'sodding this' and 'sodding that' or whatever the case may be. So again, it's purely context."*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

- Swearing on reality programmes did not emerge as much of an issue for the groups, although some women pointed out that an earlier edition of *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here!* had included some swearing, which was disliked. Again, the way in which such swearing occurred affected viewer opinion of how acceptable it was:

*"If it is said in the same way as we say it at home, like you said that word, 'oh shit!'...I've done things, dropped something, and you go oh, shh...but you do 'oh shit' quietly – I do that and if it's done like that in the right circumstances it would be okay."*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

- In drama, there was more sensitivity to abusive or offensive language, in particular if it is used against another individual.
- Some participants accepted that they had double standards but felt that swearing directed towards women was worse. Others were less tolerant of women swearing than they were of men. For example, a number of men and women mentioned that they were quite shocked by the language used in *Sex and the City*, and several women said they were reluctant to let their teenage daughters watch such programmes.

*"Whatever the word, if it's used against a female, or someone's sexuality or colour then I hate it."*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

- There is concern about the language used in some music videos – these are considered to be potentially more influential than other genres – particularly for young teens.

### Authenticity

Swearing in dramas seeks to reflect the language which most people used. Participants appreciated this and accepted that authenticity was a key ingredient of certain types of drama (e.g. *Bad Girls*). Importantly, however, they did not value authenticity to the point where they would be prepared to let the guidelines on swearing and offensive language slip. Indeed, several considered that dramas in the same vein as *Bad Girls* and *Sex and the City* should be on well after the watershed, not starting until at least 9.30pm.

### Racial Abuse

A clip from the drama programme, *A&E* showed an injured white man being attended by a black nurse. He starts to become abusive towards her making a number of insulting comments, including calling her a 'kaffir' and telling her to go back to where she came from. A male doctor intervenes by the end of the clip. This programme premiered at 9pm on ITV1 but was repeated at 8pm on ITV2.

For the majority of participants, it was not appropriate to show this programme earlier than 9pm, although a sizeable number felt that 8pm was late enough.

As with the previous example, there were two key issues – the language used and the context in which it was used.

The language used was thought to be offensive – in particular the word "bitch" and the racially abusive language, including the word "kaffir". The use of "kaffir" was thought particularly offensive by some, although others claimed that they had not heard of the word. In addition, the tone of the piece – the man doing the abusing was threatening and aggressive – was felt to make it far more unsuited to early evening viewing.

*"I've seen that programme a couple of times and I tend to turn it off, 'cause I don't think that racial abuse like that is something I want to teach my kids."*  
(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

*"You actually get fined in South Africa for it now, for using that word...and that's why I'm shocked that they have used it on telly, 'cause it's a very old fashioned word. And it will raise awareness that it's a word ..."*  
(Female, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

While participants agreed that programme makers should be allowed to portray characters who are abusive, including racially abusive, they clearly felt that this cannot be too hard-hitting for pre-watershed programmes. Once again, participants were looking for a moral code to be exercised here – abusive characters should not be allowed to air their views without there being an opposing view being expressed.

*"The idea is right where they're trying to sort of get over you shouldn't be racial, you shouldn't abuse people and swear at people or anything like that, the trouble is, they stretch it, they put it on TV and this is the problem you've got, how, how you regulate it I don't know."*  
(Male, C1C2, 40-45, No children, Multi-channel, London)

Unsurprisingly, those from ethnic minorities were particularly sensitive to racial abuse in programming. *Love Thy Neighbour* and *Till Death Us Do Part* were mentioned by participants as programmes which had a negative impact on them during their youth, because of the influence they had on schoolyard insults: “*I had to go through a lot because of those programmes,*” as one woman said. Most participants thought that similar programmes would not be acceptable today.

As with the use of swear words, participants recognised that programme makers might legitimately want to portray characters who might be homophobic or racist, but they wanted a balance between raising issues and replicating abuse which could be copied by children. Pre-watershed programmes which portrayed characters who were racially abusive should, therefore, take particular care to ensure that language used by such characters was not excessively inflammatory and that the character’s position was seen to be firmly rebutted by other characters.

### **Bleeping out**

The practice of bleeping out swear words on certain programmes was generally thought to be a positive practice – in particular, it allowed children to watch programmes (e.g. *I’m a Celebrity...*) which parents might otherwise not want them to view. Equally, however, some participants disliked this practice when it was continued for programmes which were shown later in the evening, or on niche channels such as E4.

## **ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONAL TRAILERS**

Advertising and promotional trailers have been treated separately to other programming, as they comprise unplanned viewing. Overall, neither advertising nor promotional trailers emerged as a top-of-mind concern for most participants. When they were mentioned, however, many of the issues that emerged were similar to those discussed with regard to programming content.

Most of the Workshops were shown one particular advertisement – for Carling Black Label beer, with some of the groups discussing the advertisement after a verbal description of it only. The advertisement showed a woman teasing a man who wants a Carling beer. She taunts him by dribbling a trail of beer over the flat – the floors, surfaces and even the toilet. The man follows the trail, licking up the beer from all the surfaces. Finally, the trail takes him to the bedroom, where the woman sits provocatively on the bed, wearing a bra and pants. Just as she thinks he is going to lick the beer off her, she shakes the can, which is now empty.

The majority of participants found the Carling advertisement funny rather than outrageous, although over half thought that it was not appropriate for airing before 8pm. Two reasons were given for this: the first was that for some, the degree of sexual innuendo was too much for earlier in the evening. Although many conceded that their younger children would not ‘understand’ what was going on, they felt that they would be embarrassed watching it with their children present.

*"It's very suggestive, and I don't like that big tongue at all. If I was sitting with my daughter watching that, I would feel embarrassed."*

(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children living at home, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

*"But I think to a child, that would go over a child's head."*

(Female, DE, Parent of children 5-10, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

A second reason – and more significant for some – was that the advertisement was for alcohol, and many felt that advertising for alcoholic drinks should not be shown until later in the evening.

There was little sense in this research that participants had particular concern with advertising or promotional trailers. One reason for the lack of concern, perhaps, was that few adverts were thought either to be violent or to contain bad language. There were exceptions – for example, the Wrigley's 'dog-breath' advertisement, which was thought to be 'scary' for some children, but even here, those who took that view were in the minority, with others saying that the special effects were no more extreme than those found on children's programming. Advertisements were also thought to be monitored closely by "*their own regulatory body*".

Overall, participants' main concern with advertising derives from the degree of sexual content and innuendo used. Some felt that sexual content or innuendo was used too widely to sell products:

*"Advertising recently has got a bit more outrageous...it's becoming more and some of it is shown quite early...the other day there was an advert, I think it's a car, it's a Renault, where all these girls are shaking their bums and it's really quite a sexy theme...but it boils down to the primary school children, it's in your face."*

(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

### Promotional Trailers

Few made any spontaneous comments about promotional trailers. However, one or two people mentioned their dislike of the BBC promotional trailer which showed people 'pulling off masks'. While they find it unpleasant, however, they do not feel strongly enough about it to say that it should be confined to post-watershed viewing times. In addition, the point was made that trailers can encourage interest in programmes which then turn out to be inappropriate:

*"Going back to "At Home With the Braithwaites", that's really comical and that, but I think my eldest wanted to watch that, because the snippets you saw, they were quite funny, and then you get into the programme, and that lesbian daughter, she was effin' and blinding and you think, whoa, that wasn't in part of the snippet. But that was on after nine o'clock, and apart from the language, there wasn't much else in it."*

(Female, AB, Parent of children 5-10, Terrestrial, Manchester)

In this example, the viewer felt that inadequate information was given about the content of the programme. She did not expect to see examples of the swearing in the trailer itself, but felt that the trailer should either have been aired post-watershed, or have given some indication about the level of language – even though the programme itself was on after 9pm.

In summary, just as for programming, it is the context of or treatment within an advertisement or trailer which defines how acceptable it is to participants:

- Where nudity occurs naturally, it is more acceptable. In general, different types of content are more acceptable when portrayed in a humorous way.

*“You can get away with more...the advert with the man in the bear suit and a man hits him is very funny, and there’s violence in it, but because it’s very funny it seems okay.”*

(Male, C1C2, 18-25, No children, Terrestrial, Cardiff)

- Several participants are offended by advertisements which they believe are tasteless or embarrassing. These are generally advertisements for intimate or health-related products. For a minority (mainly older participants), advertisements for products such as tampons and sanitary towels or earwax treatments should only be shown post-watershed, or preferably, not at all.
- Pre-watershed advertising should not contain too much sexual innuendo or ‘gratuitous’ nudity.
- Alcohol should not be advertised pre-watershed (this was felt strongly in Scotland)
- Pre-watershed trailers should only trail post-watershed programmes if there is some indication of the content of those programmes.

#### SUMMARY OF ACCEPTABLE CONTENT BY TIMESLOT

Participants demonstrated an awareness of progression of content leading up to 9pm in the evening and expressed support for this progression. Equally, despite wide differences in taste and sensitivities – particularly with regard to use of language – it is clear that there is a broad consensus on what is acceptable or not before 9pm and after it. It is often the context and tone of the content which determines whether something is acceptable or not. It is less easy for participants to define and explain what is acceptable or not across the evening, hour by hour. For the most part, few have thought about these issues in this type of detail before. The following grid should be seen as illustrative only and attempts to summarise the levels of content which participants would expect and want to see at each stage of the evening leading up to the watershed and immediately following it.

**TABLE L ACCEPTABLE CONTENT DURING THE EVENING**

Time	What is acceptable across dayparts
6pm-7.30pm	<p>No swearing, even mild            Cautious use of terms such as 'shut up!'            No nudity or sexual content            Fantasy/cartoon violence is acceptable within children's programming            Very limited violence on children's programming – especially any violence/aggression which might be copied, such as 'kicking' or 'spitting'            No 'graphic' violence – scenes where the harm being inflicted is shown clearly            No blood            More tolerance of some depiction of violence (its results) on early evening news, but not to the same degree as on later news            In-programme news alerts are valued</p>
7.30pm-8.30pm	<p>Occasional cursing if used in a 'traffic jam' way (a slippage of language when in a difficult or frustrating situation)            Very limited swearing where one person is being aggressive to another            Minimal sexual contact – implied not shown (except kissing)            8pm is the time that many feel is safe to start showing advertising with more sexual innuendo            Issues (e.g. domestic violence) can be raised, but in a restrained, responsible way. Acting and production techniques may intensify the realism and therefore make such scenes less acceptable</p>
8.30pm-9pm	<p>For most participants there is somewhat greater tolerance at 8pm.            Participants expect and tolerate nudity in reality context at this time, but some still want pre-programme warnings at this time            Programmes starting at 8.30pm should conform to family viewing guidelines, even if extending past 9pm</p>
9pm-10pm	<p>Most expect more explicit content and tolerate some 'bad' language, BUT habitual or very aggressive swearing should be post 10pm for many            Unexpected violence, sexual content or language is not well tolerated – participants want warnings or more information about content in advance, especially when the context of the programme gives no clues</p>
10pm onwards	<p>Those available to view at this time would like a greater relaxation of guidelines to balance the restraints earlier in the evening especially in relation to films            No use of bleeps            News coverage can be more explicit than earlier in the evening, although there is no desire for more 'graphic' coverage than is shown at present</p>

# 4 APPLICATION OF THE WATERSHED IN A MULTIMEDIA ENVIRONMENT

## REGULATING TELEVISION IN A MULTIMEDIA WORLD

Participants in the Workshops were asked to comment on whether they thought it appropriate for television to be regulated in today's multi-media environment. Their opinions were remarkably consistent and can be summed up by one phrase: "Yes, more than ever." Results from the adult panel found that 60% of respondents disagreed that it was 'unreasonable to place restrictions on television when other media like radio or the Internet do not have them'. Only 14% agreed with the statement and 26% neither agreed or disagreed.

As mentioned previously, a majority of children have a television in their own room, as revealed in findings from both the Adult and Young View Panel. Many older children also had access to other media in their room (see tables M & N) such as radios, and tape or CD players. Thirteen per cent of children aged ten to 15 years had access to the Internet in their room according to the Young View Panel.

TABLE M LOCATION OF MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT IN THE HOME

	Main living area	Kitchen/dining room	Adults' bedroom	Child's bedroom (4-9 yrs)	Child's bedroom (10-15 yrs)
	%	%	%	%	%
TV	99	41	73	51	75
TV/TV Monitor only#	17	6	10	12	22
Radio	71	83	70	48	68
CD/tape player	66	47	34	55	62
DVD/Video	75	10	29	32	43
Computer without internet connection	8	6	14	8	18
Computer with internet connection	18	11	19	5	13
Games console	13	3	11	24	45
Multi-channel TV	46	4	7	3	3
PVR	6	*	2	1	3
Base	3863	2651	3249	618	778

Source: Adult Quest Panel

# Only plays videos/DVDs or computer games.

\* Less than 1%

TABLE N EQUIPMENT CHILDREN HAVE IN THEIR OWN ROOM

	Total	Children aged 4 to 9 yrs	Children aged 10 to 15 yrs
	%	%	%
Television	71	63	68
Radio	74	62	75
Cassette/tape player	79	76	71
DVD/Video	49	45	46
Computer without internet connection	14	9	16
Computer with internet connection	10	6	13
Games console	51	40	54
Multi-channel TV	8	6	8
Base	1325	655	670

Source: *Young View Quest Panel*

Parents in the Workshops also acknowledged the widespread use of videos, DVDs, CDs, games consoles, Internet and to a lesser extent radio among their children, but they placed the use of television in a category of its own. Television takes a central position in many households, both in terms of its location in the home and its role in their lives. Quite simply, “everybody has their dinner in front of the television”. It is also the one medium that people share, watch together and talk about. In terms of control, regulation and standards it occupies a considerably more important place in our culture and family life than any other media.

The table below shows television is the children’s activity most likely to be controlled or subject to rules set by parents or guardians. Eighty-seven per cent of parents or guardians in households with children aged four to nine years set rules or controls on television and 58% set rules in households with children aged ten to 15 years.

TABLE O RULES OR CONTROLS PLACED ON DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AGED 4-15 YEARS

	Households with children 4-9 yrs	Households with children 10-15 yrs
	%	%
Watching TV	87	58
Going out with friends	60	75
Watching videos or DVDs	58	48
Playing computer games	51	44
Using the internet	47	57
Using email or instant messaging	29	37
Listening to own music/tapes/CDs	20	16
Listening to the radio	8	8
Not answered	8	15
Base	582	685

Source: *Adult Quest Panel*

Amongst all children aged four to 15 years, television is the most likely activity to be controlled by parents or guardians (see table P). Amongst younger children aged four to nine years, 62% claimed there were rules about watching television but this falls to 39% of ten to 15 year olds. A greater proportion of ten to 15 year olds (43%) claimed there were rules about using the Internet.

TABLE P RULES OR CONTROLS PLACED ON CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

	Total	Children aged 4 to 9 yrs	Children aged 10 to 15 yrs
	%	%	%
Watching TV	51	62	39
Going out with friends	49	44	55
Playing computer games	42	49	35
Using the internet	40	37	43
Watching videos or DVDs	34	44	24
Listening to your own music/tapes/CDs	25	25	25
Listening to the radio	16	16	15
Instant messaging	12	11	14
Not answered	23	21	25
Base	1500	781	719

Source: Young View Quest Panel

Videos, DVDs and computer/console games all have guidance and classification which parents in the Workshops were aware of and tried to use as means of controlling access, although they acknowledged that this could be difficult both within their own homes and especially, outside the home.

Likewise, the Internet was a source of worry to participants because of the difficulty of controlling access to what is effectively an unregulated medium. However, the very existence of this medium was a reminder to parents of what television might be like if unregulated, and it in no way made them feel that a 'lighter touch' regulation was required for television. In short, the Internet and indeed other less highly regulated media should learn from television rather than the other way around.

*"The question is the wrong way round. The Internet could easily be more regulated, so could games, they shouldn't be used to reduce restrictions on TV."*  
(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multichannel, Cardiff)

Radio was also an area which caused some concern, although it was mentioned less often than the Internet, and was clearly less top-of-mind as a problem. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, lyrics and language on the radio, particularly music radio stations, could be an issue. Radio One, Kiss FM and DJs such as Dr. Fox and Chris Moyles were all mentioned critically in this respect.

*"I've heard quite outrageous stuff on the radio in early mornings. Which lots of kids listen to, especially Radio 1. I mean, the kind of sly drug references that are sometimes made by DJs about their nights out...that's another important aspect."*  
(Male, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

**PREFERRED CONTROL MECHANISMS AND INFORMATION REGARDING PROGRAMME CONTENT**

Participants in the Workshops were asked to consider whether or not they had felt they had sufficient information on programme content information as the system currently stands, and what additional types of information or systems they might want. The majority of parents and carers claimed that the watershed still served a useful purpose in providing them with reassurance about content before 9pm. However, there was a sense that greater vigilance was needed, especially in the period between 8pm-9pm. This was largely due to concern regarding particular soap operas and dramas broadcast before 9pm which sometimes 'pushed the boundaries' beyond what was considered suitable pre-Watershed content (see Expectations of Content by Programme Genres chapter). Other information sources were, therefore, used to help them make programming choices.

In general, respondents on the Adult Quest Panel wanted pre-programme on-screen announcements about the content of programmes (72% wanted these). Fifty-nine per cent wanted magazine or newspaper TV listings to provide information about the content of programmes and 45% were content with the watershed as it stands.

**TABLE Q TYPES OF INFORMATION RESPONDENTS WOULD LIKE ABOUT CONTENT OF PROGRAMMES SUCH AS SWEARING, SEX, NUDDITY OR VIOLENCE**

	Total %
Pre-programme on-screen announcements	72
TV listings magazines/newspaper TV listings	59
The Watershed as it stands	45
Classification zones	36
Symbols within programmes	31
Time zones	14
EPG – i button	11

*Source: Adult Quest Panel  
Base: 3286*

- *Television guides/listings* were the main sources of information about programme content, with many people turning to their daily newspaper for information about programmes. These were considered to be sufficient for most purposes – some participants pointed out that not only did the guides clearly denote the watershed but had rating information, grading programmes for the amount of sexual content, violence and swearing.

*“You usually get wee boxes saying, sex, violence and bad language – that gives you an idea.”*

(Male, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, Glasgow)

Those who used guides/listings without such gradings sometimes complained that there was not enough information about content; for them, the time of transmission was a better indicator than the information about the programme content.

*“You know, I think if there was adequate sign posting on the listings, that would be enough for me.”*

(Male, AB, 26-39, No children, Terrestrial, London)

- Those who used the Electronic Programme Guide (EPG) spoke highly of it and claimed to use it regularly to find out on what is on and more about particular programmes. Some parents considered the EPG to be a valuable control mechanism and had become less reliant on the watershed because they could easily access information about the content of programmes to make suitable viewing choices for their children.

*“On cable, with the movie channels – you can select and they will tell you a bit about what the film is going to be – I think they should do something like that for the normal television...”*

(Female, C1C2, 40-55, No children, Multi-channel, London)

*“(On the EPG).. You can find out what it covers, a description, and if it contains scenes of violence, language, sex and the number of scenes...”*

(Male, AB, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, Cardiff)

Fewer participants used or were even aware that the teletext service available to terrestrial only households carries warnings and advice about the content of programmes.

- However, for soap operas and other long running drama series, few ‘looked up’ the programmes in the paper, because they knew what time they are broadcast. Sometimes this left participants feeling insufficiently prepared for the types of content which was in these programmes. To some extent, this was counterbalanced by the huge amount of pre-publicity which unusual storylines generated in the press. This was generally thought of as giving people information which they could use to control viewing. It was, however, something of a double-edged sword, because such publicity made the programmes more compelling viewing for children, and much harder to exercise control over. Additionally, regular participants said that they could tell from the storylines and characters themselves that the plots were building up to something out of the ordinary. Participants claimed that it was rare for the on-going soap operas to spring something on the audience totally ‘out of the blue’. Examples of such programmes that had done so include *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*.

This was less true for the dramas like *The Bill* and *Casualty*, where the content was generally expected to be somewhat more difficult because the programmes themselves had altered viewer expectations gradually over time. Participants said that there was currently not enough information and not enough warning given to alert them to potentially offensive material in these programmes.

- Many claimed that they had become more aware of the on-screen warnings, particularly in news programmes, dramas and films that started on or around 9pm. Five was praised for its frequent pre-programme on-screen warnings and the BBC was seen to have been more active in recent months. These alerts were welcome to participants overall, and most would like to see more of them as a way of increasing their ability to control viewing.

*“In a soap, people don’t need to be told beforehand, because for weeks beforehand they’re saying, next week, it’s going to...so you don’t really need anything before. But programmes that you don’t actually know anything that’s going to happen, what the programme’s about or anything, then yes, I think you should begin something like that.”*

(Female, AB, 65-75, Empty nesters, Multi-channel, Manchester)

Apart from these developments, there were suggestions to grade television programmes in a similar way to films, so that every single programme or episode of a programme would have a PG certification.

*“Yes, I think every programme should have a grading and it should be clear on the TV as well what the gradings are so that people know, in each page in fact if necessary, so they could give it different colours and things like that.”*

(Male, C1C2, 65-75, Empty nester, Terrestrial, London)

This was a rather more popular approach among younger people who did not have children. For parents, however, it appeared that relying on such certificates alone without the watershed would be time-consuming and burdensome. Many emphasised the enormously busy lives they led, and pointed out that monitoring their children’s viewing in this way would be an additional burden. They supported additional information which would help them make more informed choices, but not one which required them to take a more proactive stance in regulating their children’s viewing.

Other methods of control discussed were PIN numbers and classification or time zones which might be colour coded to indicate age group suitability. But again for parents these were considered to be labour intensive methods, that they would have to learn and keep abreast of on a daily basis. PIN numbers were already used by some of those with access to multi-channel television and considered worthwhile. Another option raised was time zones, although participants were not always clear about the form these would take, nor whether they would allow enough flexibility in scheduling programming for different age groups.

*“No, because there’s so many different people, age groups watching at different times of day.”*

(Female, DE, 18-25, No children, Multi-channel, Southampton)

On-screen announcements and/or a symbol in the corner of the screen to indicate that there may be some more adult material in the programme also received considerable support. The display of the symbol came in for some discussion – it would need to be subtle so as not to interfere with the picture or annoy participants, while at the same time be sufficiently prominent so that it would not be over-looked. An on-screen symbol would be useful for participants who might miss pre-programme announcements. Most participants were more concerned to emphasise the importance of getting more information from broadcasters – they were happier to leave the mode of getting it to others to decide.

All methods, regardless of what they might be and how they might be communicated, were seen as additional to the watershed, not as a replacement. The comfort zone that surrounds the existing system was too great for people to contemplate it being replaced by something that they would have to be more vigilant about on a daily basis.

*“I’ve noticed recently, after a programme’s finished, the next three programmes are indicated on the screen. Now that would be an ideal time to indicate the various levels of censorship to give people an indication..”*  
(Male, AB, 65-75, Empty nester, Multi-channel, Manchester)

#### USE OF PERSONAL VIDEO RECORDERS

A Personal Video Recorder (PVR) uses a computer hard disk to record programmes digitally without a tape. With a PVR you can take a break from watching a broadcast programme and then return to it later without missing anything. The use of PVRs has implications on the way people view television because their viewing is no longer tied to the timing of the broadcasters’ schedules, although currently, ownership levels are very low.

A small minority of participants had Personal Video Recorders, mainly Sky Plus, and considered them to be easy and flexible to use. Some described how they enabled a programme to be recorded at the press of a button if it turned out that it is inappropriate for children to view. Certain types have an inbuilt control mechanism (a PIN number) so children could not access recorded programmes which you would not want them to see.

*“With the kids about, if I find I’m watching something that I don’t think is suitable, one button, change the channel, it records it and I can watch it later, when I fancy it. So it is perfect for that. If I’m watching a film or something and I don’t think the kids should watch it, just hit the button; it records the rest of the film, watch whatever they wanna watch until they’ve gone to bed or whatever...”*

(Male, DE, Parent of children 8-15, Multi-channel, London)

While those participants with PVRs endorsed them, they did point out, that they were in no way chosen to aid control and regulation – this was simply a fortunate by-product.

## APPENDICIES

### APPENDIX A COMMUNICATIONS BILL

Section 309 of the Communications Bill describes Ofcom's role in setting, reviewing and revising standards (in the form of codes) for the content of programmes to be included in television and radio services.

The relevant standards objectives include:

- That persons under the age of eighteen are protected;
- That material likely to encourage or to incite the commission of crime or to lead to disorder is not included in television and radio services;
- That generally accepted standards are applied to the contents of television and radio services so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion in such services of offensive and harmful material;
- That the inclusion of unsuitable advertising in television and radio services is prevented.

In setting and revising any standards Ofcom must take into account:

- the likely size and composition of the potential audience for programmes
- the likely expectation of the audience as to the nature of a programme's content and the extent to which the nature of a programme's content can be brought to the attention of potential members of the audience.

### APPENDIX B DETAILS OF METHODOLOGY

#### Viewer Workshops

Kathy Lines and Vivien Marles from The Fuse Group were commissioned to conduct the qualitative stage of the project involving 18 Workshops held in five locations – Glasgow, Cardiff, Manchester, London and Southampton. A total of 109 participants took part in the Workshops.

Sharing many of the advantages of traditional focus groups, the Workshops were ideally suited to explore the attitudes and needs of adult viewers, to encourage debate and to foster some degree of consensus where that was possible. An average of six participants attended each 1.45 hour Workshop which lasted nearly two hours, allowing ample time for individual views to be aired. The Workshops were structured and presented so that the discussions would extend beyond an individual response ("me as a consumer") to one where participants were encouraged to respond to and debate issues as responsible members of the community ("me as a citizen"). This approach was particularly valuable when discussing policy-related issues which affected people both on a personal level and as members of society.

The group structure was designed to reflect the diversity of the viewing population, both in terms of location, ethnicity, socio-economic status, television ownership, household and family structure and age. The full structure of the groups is detailed in the table overleaf.

## FINAL SAMPLE STRUCTURE/ROTATION

	Location	Social grade	Type	Age	Television ownership	Group yield
1	Glasgow	C1C2	Parents	Children 5-10	Multi-channel	6: 4 female, 2 male
2	Glasgow	AB	No children	18-25	Terrestrial	6: 4 female, 2 male
3	Glasgow	C1C2	No children	40-55	M/ channel	7: 3 female, 4 male
4	Glasgow	DE	Parents	Children 8-15	Terrestrial	7: 3 female, 4 male
5	Manchester	AB	Parents	Children 5-10	Terrestrial	6: 3 female, 3 male
6	Manchester	AB	No children	65-75	M/ channel	6: 3 female, 3 male
7	Manchester	C1C2	Parents	Children 8-15	M/ channel	6: 3 female, 3 male
8	Manchester	DE	No children	26-39	Terrestrial	5: 3 female, 2 male
9	Cardiff	AB	Parents	Children 8-15	M/ channel	6: 3 female, 3 male
10	Cardiff	C1C2	No children	18-25	Terrestrial	6: 4 female, 2 male
11	Cardiff	DE	Parents	Children 5-10	M/ channel	4: 2 female, 2 male
12	Cardiff	DE	No children	65-75	Terrestrial	7: 3 female, 4 male
13	London	C1C2	No children	40-55	M/channel	6: 4 female, 2 male
14	London	C1C2	No children	65-75	Terrestrial	6: 3 female, 3 male
15	London	DE	Parents	Children 8-15	M/channel	6: 4 female, 2 male
16	London	AB	No children	26-39	Terrestrial	7: 3 female, 4 male
17	Southampton	C1C2	Parents	Children 5-10	Terrestrial	7: 4 female, 3 male
18	Southampton	DE	No children	18-25	M/channel	5: 3 female, 2 male

*Rotation of stimuli: A = language, B = Sexual content & Nudity, C = Violence  
Advertising stimulus was shown or discussed in all groups and therefore not included in the rotation*

To avoid the possible influence of 'group think', Workshop participants were asked to give their individual opinions as to the value of the watershed in a brief self-completion questionnaire before and during each workshop.

Participants were prompted with a variety of stimulus material (see Appendix C), selected by the commissioning bodies in association with The Fuse Group. Each piece of stimulus material represented a particular "watershed dilemma" containing material shown before 9pm or which some viewers had complained about. However, each tape was shown to a variety of group types, with the minimum number of exposures being six and the maximum, twelve.

A sticker exercise was also devised as a means of providing a useful graphic display of viewer response to the material shown. After viewing each piece of stimulus, the participants were asked to write on a sticker the earliest appropriate time at which they believed the material should be broadcast a) on the terrestrial channels and b) on satellite and cable channels. They then placed these stickers on a board, so the whole group could view and discuss the results.

Importantly, while doing this exercise, participants were asked to place themselves into the role of regulating on behalf of their fellow citizens. This was not intended to be solely a personal response to how they felt about the material shown – although inevitably, individuals’ feelings strongly colour their response – but a measured choice based on what they felt might be appropriate to the viewing public at large.

A third feature of the exercise was that participants were asked to first write the time they chose as appropriate on the stickers and only then to place the stickers on the board. Again, this ensured that responses were genuine and not influenced by others in the group.

When the stickers were all placed on the board, a discussion was held first to explore why people had chosen the times they had, and then – using the stimuli as a jumping off point – to examine the level of tolerance to different types of content within the same category.

By giving participants specific stimuli to react to, it was possible to garner far more detailed responses to types of material that is or is not considered appropriate pre-watershed, and, more importantly, to understand something about why that is so. A note of caution must be added here, however: Inevitably the ‘examples’ which were posited to participants were limited either to those raised by participants in the group themselves or to responses to specific prompts given by the moderators.

### **Survey Data**

Questions were placed on the IPSOS UK Ltd Quest Adult Panel and the Young View Panel. The Adult Panel is a continuous nationally representative panel of 4000 adults (16+). The Young View Panel is a continuous panel of 1500 children aged between 4-15 years. This is a wide age range, so it is useful to compare different age breakdowns where relevant.

### **BARB Data**

An analysis of Broadcaster’s Audience Research Board (BARB) audience data to explore children’s viewing patterns and their incidence of viewing television alone or with other people has been included.

APPENDIX C  
DETAILS ABOUT STIMULUS  
MATERIAL

Some of these programmes generated complaints or were considered to contain material that was unacceptable for the pre-watershed period following investigation.

**Sex and Nudity**

*Casualty*

BBC1, 29th January 2003, 8pm

It showed an extended kiss between two male characters in the programme.

*Jenny Jones*

Sky One, 10th January 2003, 3.55 pm

A five-minute promotion, edited down from a full-length *Jenny Jones* programme, *I Party with My Little Girl*, features a mother and her two teenage daughters. They described their drug-taking, drinking and sexual activity.

*The Salon*

C4, 29th January 2003, 6pm

It showed a woman lying on a sun bed with obviously surgically enhanced breasts. Her nipples had been digitally blurred.

**Violence**

*Coronation Street*

ITV1, 12th March 2003, 8pm

It showed some of the main characters, Gail Hillman and her children restrained in a car being driven by her estranged husband, Richard. The clip ends when Richard drives the car into a canal and an underwater shot shows the characters struggling to get out of the car.

*Brookside*

C4, 7th November 2002, 8pm and repeated on 9th November, 2002, 12pm

Involved a siege of Brookside Close by four armed bank robbers holding residents hostage after a police chase. One of the gunmen, under the influence of drugs, threatens two terrified girls. Even though no sexual assault is shown there is an undertone of sexual threat.

*Children's Hospital*

BBC1, 26th January, 2003, 7pm

It began with a doctor discussing an X-ray of a child's skull and then the unconscious child is brought in for surgery and the medical team drills into his skull, exposing a section of fractured skull.

*Crimewatch*

BBC1, 27 November 2002, 8pm

It showed an extended reconstruction of a crime against a man who walks upon a group of youths attempting to steal something. The man is beaten with a bar, and the youths attempt to drive over him and attack him with a chainsaw which is pushed into his stomach. The reconstruction is intercut with an interview with the real-life victim, who describes the event.

## Swearing or Offensive Language

### *My Family*

BBC1, 7th and 9th October 2001, 8.30pm and 4.30pm

The clip showed Robert Lindsay in a state of frustration on the doorstep of his home shouting '*bollocks*' and '*next door's sodding dog has crapped on the sodding doorstep again*'.

### *A&E*

ITV2, 31 July 2002, 8pm

This was a repeat of the programme first shown on ITV1 at 9pm. It showed an injured white man being attended to by a black nurse. He starts to become abusive towards the female nurse making a number of insulting comments, including calling her a '*kaffir*' and telling her to go back to where she came from. A male doctor intervenes by the end of the clip.

## Advertising

### *Carling Frustrating Advertisement*

The advertisement showed a woman teasing a man who wants a Carling beer. She taunts him by dribbling a trail of beer over the flat – the floors, surfaces and even the toilet. The man follows the trail, licking up the beer from all the surfaces. Finally, the trail takes him to the bedroom, where the woman sits provocatively on the bed, wearing a bra and pants. Just as she thinks he is going to lick the beer off her, she shakes the can, which is now empty.

**APPENDIX D:  
TABLES SHOWING  
CONCERN ABOUT  
DIFFERENT TYPES OF  
CONTENT**

	Total mentions %	Top three reasons
Soap Operas	47	Adult themes/topics, violence, swearing/offensive language
Films	37	Swearing/offensive language, sex, violence
Hospital dramas	29	Adult themes/topics, violence, sex
Real life crime programmes e.g. Crimewatch	29	Adult themes/topics, violence
Police/crime dramas	28	Violence, adult themes/topics, swearing/offensive language
Comedies/Sitcoms	28	Swearing/offensive language, adult themes/topics, bad taste
News/current affairs	27	Violence, swearing/offensive language, adult themes/topics
Music programmes/music video clips	26	Sex, swearing/offensive language, nudity
Chat Shows	23	Adult themes/topics, swearing/offensive language, bad taste
Reality programmes e.g. The Salon, Driving School	21	Swearing/offensive language, bad taste, adult themes/topics,
Documentaries	11	Adult themes/topics, swearing/offensive language, violence
Children's programmes	10	Violence, bad taste, swearing/offensive language
Sport	6	Swearing/offensive language, violence, swearing/offensive language
Other	2	

*Source: Adult Quest Panel*

*Base: 1046 (Respondents who lived in a household with children aged 4-15 years)*