

About 4 Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) meeting, 28 November 2005 Note of conclusions and action points

Minutes

Present

Eleanor Aitken (BBC Scotland), Paul Chinnery (Five), Emma Jones (S4C), David Jordan (BBC) (chair), Peter Lowe (BSkyB), Ian McBride (ITV), Prash Naik (Channel 4), Nick Powell (HTV), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Huw Roberts (BBC Wales), Rob Shepherd (BBC), Martin Stott (Five).

In attendance

Andrew Fraser (Electoral Commission), Tabby Karamat (BBC), Jaron Lewis (BBC), Steve Perkins (Ofcom), John Glover (Ofcom).

Apologies

Andrew Colman (BBC Northern Ireland), Rob Morrison (UTV), Derrick Thomson (SMG).

Venue

28 Portland Place, London

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1. BLG Website

There had been plans to create a group website which would provide a resource to political parties about each broadcaster's PEB policy and practice, including details of any allocation and eligibility criteria as well as technical and contact information. A domain name has been registered. It was agreed that work on the site would be suspended pending publication of the Government's response to the Electoral Commission's paper on the future of PEBs.

2. Broadcast Intros/Outros

Work on intros and outros will also be suspended pending publication of the Government's response. It was noted that the existing intros were only a few years old and that their replacement had only been considered at the suggestion of the Electoral Commission, which had initially agreed to pay for the costs of developing new versions. It was noted that the group would continue to give thought to whether new intros were viable, with financial projections to be circulated before the next meeting.

3. Government response to the electoral commission proposals on the future of PEBs

The group noted that this response had been due in the Autumn. The group's members will consider the response when it is published.

4. General election PEBs and Party Conference PPBs 2005

The following problems were noted from the last series of PEBs and PPBs.

- a) In Wales there had been difficulty finding sufficient slots for the number of parties that qualified for PEBs. This was because of the low qualification threshold, which the Welsh broadcasters thought needed to be looked at. One political party had admitted that it was only standing candidates in the election in Wales in order to get a PEB to give publicity to its cause.
- b) There had been problems with parties not submitting material for radio PEBs, despite having said that they would.

- c) A number of broadcasters reported problems with late delivery of materials by political parties. This had placed a financial and logistical burden on the broadcasters which could be problematic if repeated at future elections. Thought is to be given by each broadcaster to whether the delivery guidelines need to be more strictly enforced in the future.

- d) One political party had submitted a number of PEBs which were significantly shorter than the minimum duration. These had not been broadcast until they had been brought to the correct length.

- e) Most political parties had failed to provide music reporting details, which are necessary to allow broadcasters to comply with their own legal obligations.

- f) It was noted that delivery deadlines might need to be clarified to make clear that materials should arrive on the morning of the day before broadcast and not strictly 24 hours before the scheduled transmission time.

- g) There had been a legal challenge by the DUP in Northern Ireland. The DUP had included shots of its candidates against backgrounds which clearly depicted their constituencies. The High Court refused to grant the DUP leave to appeal and the challenge was rejected.

5. PEB Guidelines

There was a discussion about the PEB content guidelines. It was agreed that some minor clarifications were necessary to ensure that they were clear and unambiguous. A revised draft will be circulated to group members for comment.

6. English local elections 2006

The group considered election statistics for 2002. It was noted that in these elections, the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties each received three PEBs. The Green party had received one PEB as it was standing in one-sixth of seats.

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Each broadcaster that was planning to cover local election PEBs in 2006 confirmed that it was minded to adopt the same criteria as for 2002, with the three main parties receiving three PEBs and any party standing in one-sixth of seats receiving one PEB. It would be a matter for the political parties whether they wished to include any material in their PEBs that related to the mayoral elections.

It was noted that in Wales the scheduling of one of the Spring party conference PPBs would be affected by the Budget PPBs, if they fell in the same week. It was noted by the group that it was important to keep PPBs tied to specific political events.

7. Other matters

David Jordan confirmed that he had been appointed as the BBC's Controller of Editorial Policy. He will hand over his responsibilities with the group once his successor has been appointed.

JL