



Rhona Parry,  
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30<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Dear Rhona Parry,

**Re: Community Arts Forum response to the consultation:**

**Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review - Phase One: The Digital Opportunity consultation**

The Community Arts Forum (CAF) is the umbrella and networking organisation for the community arts sector across Northern Ireland. Formed in 1993, CAF aims to support and develop the sector through development, training, advocacy, networking, advice, information and publications. CAF has a membership of over 130 groups and individual artists. These members represent a range of art forms and interest groups.

Northern Visions/NvTv is a long standing member of CAF. The two organisations have worked closely on many projects and campaigns over the last fifteen years. CAF is committed to community film and video. CAF supported Northern Vision's Access Radio and had a regular weekly slot. It fully supports the development of a local public service television in Northern Ireland and believes this will give a strong voice to those most marginalised communities, which would not normally have access to the media.

CAF is very excited by the ongoing development of one the region's first community television stations designed by, for and about local people, reflecting local concerns and issues and showcasing local talent, NvTv. The channel has the potential to reflect the lives of people in communities of disadvantage across Northern Ireland and give a realistic and empathetic portrayal of individuals and communities living in these areas. In addition,

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people from these areas will be trained in media skills, a very important set of skills in an increasingly media driven society. If the evolving NvTv is to develop to its full potential, it is essential that it is recognised as a local public service broadcaster.

We support community media and arts initiatives and media literacy, not as a passive understanding but as participatory, particularly in areas of social need. "Ordinary" people becoming providers of content and creating media about local issues does constitute a public service. Citizenship is served when the local community is brought creatively together through community media production with distribution via local public service television.

During the passage of the Communications Act, Northern Irish MPs supported "the important contribution community media can make to social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal, citizens' participation, local democracy and lifelong learning and called on the Government to include specific measures for the further growth and development of community media which would include distinct licensing arrangements based on clear public service obligations, reservation of broadcast spectrum, guaranteed access to cable channels and the establishment of a community media fund to help finance start up, development and operating costs". In February 2008, local representatives from the main political parties in Northern Ireland supported an Early Day Motion calling on the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to introduce a licence for the provision of local public service television during the rollout of digital switchover.

Digital television presents the prospect of a vast array of highly specialized community of interest and geographic channels, answering local, educational, cultural and community needs. Given Ofcom's duty to foster plurality and informed citizenship, we suggest that for the longer-term development of local digital broadcasting the principle of subsidiarity in broadcasting is explored and the devolution of responsibility for broadcasting policy to those living directly within the footprint or cabled reach of the channel's reception.

Central funding provisions have been made in the Communications Act for community radio and local digital television. Ofcom should consider a fund, which might possibly be drawn from the licence fee and from top-slicing commercial broadcasting licences or other government sources.

Regarding aspects of work required to bring about a UK map of local and community television following analogue TV switch-off post 2010, we would request your assurance that no planning, at this stage, precludes a network of local digital multiplexes.

In relation to the development of local television in Belfast, we should be grateful if Ofcom would support NvTv being carried on Freeview as a local public service broadcaster. Such a development would ensure that everyone in the city has access to a valuable local service and would support the efforts of the community arts and media sector to nurture the city's cultural and creative assets and talent. We would respectfully request Ofcom to add its moral weight in support of NvTv also being carried by Virgin Media. Such a development would ensure that those citizens who receive their television exclusively via cable have access to this local service.

Yours sincerely

Heather Floyd  
Director