

Channel 4 submission for Seminar Five of the Convergence Think Tank

Media literacy

Channel 4 welcomes the opportunity to provide its views on media literacy ahead of the fifth seminar of the Convergence Think Tank (CTT). As a publicly-owned, commercially-funded public service broadcaster, Channel 4 is a leading provider of innovative, creative public service content and has a clear vision for how it will continue to provide this type of content in a converged environment. In order to help audiences engage with this content, Channel 4 also makes a major contribution to developing media literacy in the UK.

Convergence enables public service content to be delivered on a range of platforms

Channel 4's submission for the CTT's fourth seminar, on universal access to high quality public service content, highlighted the importance of delivering public service content across a range of platforms. It set out how Channel 4 is expanding its portfolio of services to deliver public purposes beyond the core channel and, in particular, to remain engaged with younger audiences. For example, projects such as 4oD, Channel 4's video on-demand service, and channel4.com demonstrate how new media and new platforms can facilitate greater engagement with audiences and deliver greater public value.

Channel 4 Education has already created a slate of cross-platform projects for 14 to 19 year olds, recognising the need to reach this audience on the platforms they are most likely to use. Ofcom has recognised Channel 4 Education's contribution to public service content online in the Phase 2 document of its second public service broadcasting review.

Channel 4 hopes to build further on these successes in future. In *Next on 4*, Channel 4 set out its ambition to become a "public service network"—delivering public value across a range of platforms. As part of this, Channel 4 is launching 4IP, a £50 million fund for projects that offer public service content on digital media platforms.

Media providers can help audiences access content safely and effectively

In this context, Channel 4 believes that media literacy is a major issue for the digital future. While the rapid penetration of online technology and distribution has enabled the delivery of content on a range of platforms, it may also pose challenges for some audiences. Older audiences, for example, have not migrated to new platforms and new media as quickly as younger audiences. In addition, concerns have been expressed about children's engagement with new media and exposure to potentially harmful content.

It will therefore be important for the Government and media providers to strike a balance between enabling audiences to get the most out of the opportunities provided by convergence, and ensuring that they understand the media and have the tools to use it safely. Media literacy initiatives, alongside a flexible, industry-led regulatory system, will become increasingly important to enable all audiences to access public service content on a range of platforms.

For example, in relation to children, while there is already a range of mechanisms in place to help protect viewers under 18 years of age in linear broadcasting, such as the established 2100 watershed, these measures do not necessarily apply to content accessed in an on-demand, non-linear environment. To address concerns in relation to new media, Channel 4 is a member of the Association for Television On-Demand (ATVOD) and is committed to compliance with the ATVOD code in relation to 4oD. This code mirrors as far as possible the standards applied under Ofcom's Broadcasting Code for linear television, and places a particular emphasis on child protection.

Channel 4 also operates rigorous access controls to ensure that children are protected from inappropriate content and that all on-demand users, including parents and children, are given the information and tools to ensure that they can make informed choices about viewing. For example, a PIN protection system is promoted and available on the 4oD platform, which enables parents to control and restrict their children's viewing. In addition, along with the other main public service broadcasters, Channel 4 has adopted a 'G' symbol to indicate those programmes which carry text-based guidance. This guidance is analogous to the warnings and other announcements transmitted ahead of linear television broadcasts of programmes containing challenging content.

However, these measures are likely to be more effective if audiences have a sound understanding of the media. Channel 4's submission ahead of the first CTT seminar called on the CTT to consider whether the UK is providing children with the right skills to get the most out of new communications services, and signalled a willingness to explore how the role of the public service broadcasters (primarily the BBC and Channel 4) might evolve to further facilitate engagement with the digital economy.

The remainder of this submission sets out Channel 4's contribution to developing media literacy and how it enables audiences to make informed choices.

Channel 4's contribution to media literacy

Channel 4 believes that media literacy will continue to play a key role in helping citizens and consumers to access, understand and create communications. Channel 4 has been a strong supporter of a range of media literacy initiatives, including as a member of the Broadband Stakeholder Group, and played an active part in the work recently to publish good practice principles for audiovisual content online.¹

Channel 4 was a founding member of the Media Literacy Task Force, which was established to promote media literacy, and hosted the Media Literacy Task Force Summit in November 2007. It is also a signatory of the Charter for Media Literacy, which sets out a range of aims and principles for advocating and developing media literacy in the UK. In particular, the Charter advocates "the importance of media literacy in the development of educational, cultural, political, social and economic policy" and supports the principle that "every UK citizen of any age should have opportunities, in both formal and informal education, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their enjoyment, understanding and exploration of the media".²

¹ <http://www.audiovisualcontent.org/audiovisualcontent.pdf>

² <http://www.medialiteracy.org.uk/usr/downloads/charterformedialiteracy.pdf>

Channel 4 also has a track record of helping to develop media literacy, especially for young people. Among the existing public service broadcasters, Channel 4's brand resonates particularly strongly with younger audiences and the organisation speaks with an authenticity of voice which is not easily replicated by other public institutions. Channel 4 believes that this makes it well placed to act as a trusted guide to help younger audiences access and participate in the media.

In 2007, Channel 4 Education made a major contribution to media literacy with 12 hours of programmes for the morning schedule, which were also available on 4oD. This included the *Media Unmasked* season, with programmes such as *TV Is Dead?*—about the rapid changes underway in media consumption—Greg Dyke's *Get Me the Producer*, and *Who Really Rules the World?*, about media conspiracy theories.

Since 2005, Channel 4's *Breaking the News* project has been encouraging and stimulating young people's media literacy, specifically in relation to television news. It started with a *Breaking the News* day, when a group of 14–19 year old school and college students worked in parallel with the *Channel 4 News* production team to produce their own bulletin from a fully equipped newsroom. The bulletin was promoted on that evening's edition of *Channel 4 News* and streamed online. It demonstrated how media literacy can be realised as a lively, enjoyable and illuminating hands-on experience.

The *Breaking The News* website makes available the information and tools behind that day, including cutting-edge online video editing software designed to be highly accessible and easy-to-use. The website enables institutions across the country to run their own news simulations, while footage of the original day is used in Continuing Professional Development programmes for teachers, the result of a co-production with Teachers' TV.

Channel 4 also makes a contribution to digital media literacy. For example, the 2008 education project *Year Dot* looks at how social networking can help young people achieve their ambitions, and also addresses digital literacy issues such as online privacy and cyber-bullying. The project started on 30 June 2008 and follows a group of 15 young people as they go through what they hope will be a life-changing year. The participants update their stories through blogs, messages and videos, inviting people to give them advice and share their own experiences. In addition, the *Battlefront* project follows 19 teenagers who want to change the world, teaming them up with mentors who can help them build their individual campaigns on different platforms and reach new audiences. This project builds on the social engagement of today's teens, helping them understand the potential of new media in engaging new communities.

Channel 4 Education's projects have been tested with teachers as well as teenagers. Educators have responded very positively to Channel 4's efforts, as they are keen to find new resources for media studies, citizenship and personal development, as well as for the Diploma in Creative and Media. Media literacy is increasingly informing all aspects of education, and Channel 4 is happy to be engaged in the discussions about what resources are most useful to both students and teachers.

Channel 4's initiatives have helped a wide range of individuals to access, understand and create communications across a range of media. In future, digital media literacy

skills will become increasingly important as more and more audiovisual content, public service or otherwise, is delivered over new media and new platforms.

This submission has sought to highlight briefly some of the ways in which media literacy can help increase access to, and engagement with, digital content in a converged world. Public service broadcasters have made a substantial contribution to the development of media literacy and Channel 4 looks forward to working with the CTT to address this and other policy issues as the Government works towards a new model for public service content delivery.

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