



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

19 July 1989

Dear Kenneth,

SCHOOLS BROADCASTS

Our Broadcasting White Paper indicated that the new Independent Television Commission (ITC) would have a duty to plan and arrange for the provision of schools programmes by the independent television sector. I am now writing to set out my detailed proposals for giving effect to this provision.

I propose that the ITC should:

- a. be required to ensure that a suitable proportion of schools programmes is provided;
- b. have the power to include in the licences for Channels 3, 4 and 5 a condition requiring licensees to finance, produce (or acquire) and show high quality schools broadcasts;
- c. have the power to require broadcasting of a proportion of these programmes within term time and within normal school hours;
- d. ensure that appropriate consultation takes place with those who commission and/or produce schools programmes and with persons or bodies with an interest in schools broadcasts.

The third of these duties might be considered as involving an element of scheduling on the part of the ITC, which would be able to determine in very broad terms the times at which such broadcasts should be made. But I do not think that cuts across the general proposition, endorsed by MISC 128, that the ITC should not be involved in detailed scheduling. I would hope

The Right Hon Kenneth Baker, MP.

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that in due course it might be possible for broadcasters to transmit schools programmes during the night for downloading onto video recorders. However, I understand that at present not all schools would have the facility to record programmes which had been transmitted overnight.

As you know, we intend that under the new arrangements ITC licensees should themselves determine how they plan to finance their broadcasting operations. They could use advertising, sponsorship or subscription or a combination of these. I did wonder whether it would be right for schools programmes to be supplied on a subscription basis. But my view is that we would be unwise to exempt schools programmes from the possibility of subscription funding, since this would be bound to lead to arguments for exempting other types of programming which should also be freely available to all. It seems likely that the ITC would almost certainly provide schools programming on Channel 4. If that were the case, I think it unlikely that Channel 4 would seek to encrypt their schools' transmissions.

If Channel 3 licensees were required to supply part or all of the schools programmes it is possible that each licensee would choose to supply his own set of schools programmes. There is no requirement for Channel 3 licensees to network any programmes other than the national news. In practice, I imagine that the commercial interests would dictate that schools programmes would be networked. But I do not think we could require such networking as a specific provision in the Bill. Once again such a requirement would open the door to pressure for statutory provision for other specific programme types to be networked, which is something we would want to avoid.

I should welcome any comments you may have on these proposals.

I am copying this letter to other members of MISC 128.

Yours,
Douglas