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BROADCASTING STANDARDS COUNCIL

The Home Secretary's proposals on the BSC's future role and statutory powers are fine in most respects but I think there are two points you need to challenge.

4 Codes of Practice

The BSC wish the BBC and the ITC to be required by law to accept its code of practice. The BBC and the ITC would clearly object to this and the Home Secretary supports them. His argument is that such an arrangement would (a) undermine the regulators' responsibility and (b) their codes range more widely than taste and decency.

Neither argument is very convincing. Far from undermining the regulators' responsibility it surely strengthen it. They will now have a legal requirement to make sure that the BSC code is not breached. It must surely make them even more vigilant in enforcing standards rather than the opposite.

On the second point, the fact that their codes are wider than taste and decency is irrelevant. Part of their codes will have a statutory backing and that is what is crucial. They will still be required to enforce other aspects of their codes in the usual way.

What is most definitely not good enough is simply to require the BBC and the ITC "to have regard to the BSC's code." That is a recipe for allowing them to do what they wish.

Recommendation

The BBC and ITC should be required by law to accept the BSC code of practice.

6 Publication of Findings

The Home Secretary suggests that the BSC should publish its findings in broadcast form but not printed form. This seems a particular restriction on the work of the BSC, for which once again there is no good reason. The BSC might find it necessary at times to explain the reason for a particular decision which might be better done through print than radio or TV. It should be allowed to do so.

Recommendation

Allow the BSC to publish its findings in printed and broadcast forms, as it judges best.



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