

Nicky Morgan's speech to the Royal Television Society

Good afternoon everyone.

I am thrilled that my first major speech as Secretary of State is here at the Royal Television Society Conference.

The motto of the University of Cambridge, where we gather today, can be translated as "From this place, we gain enlightenment and precious knowledge".

I will let you be the judge of how much enlightenment and precious knowledge I deliver today...

But this ethos of enlightenment was certainly shared by the pioneers who shaped our television sector.

They had a vision for how the content and experiences offered by our broadcasters can fuel the discourse of our nation, help make us all more informed and more inspired, and support our cultural health and wellbeing.

And despite the myriad of changes we have seen since those early years, our television sector remains the envy of the world. But we must never be complacent.

Everyone with an interest in the future of our broadcasters, producers and creative talents must think carefully about what changes will be needed to ensure you continue to grow and develop in the years ahead.

How we can create the right conditions for the sector to thrive, but also how we can make sure its considerable benefits can be felt far and wide?

And that is what I wanted to talk about today. How we must all adapt, whatever role we play, to maintain the treasure that is our television sector.

And there are three areas I see as important here.

Broadcasters must adapt

First, our broadcasters.

We are rightly proud of the vibrant mix of broadcasters we have here in the UK.

And this Government is determined to see a strong and successful future for our public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters alike.

I really value the important contribution that they all make to our public

life, at a time when our civil discourse is increasingly under strain.

Disinformation, fuelled by hermetically sealed online echo chambers, is threatening the foundations of truth that we all rely on.

And the tenor of public conversations, especially those on social media, has become increasingly toxic and hostile.

We need to treasure and encourage the robust news and high quality content, and the programmes, that bring us together, provided by our PSBs and our commercial broadcasters.

I realise it is a challenging time for some of these long-established organisations.

New ways of producing and consuming content are emerging faster than ever before, and people are watching what they want, where they want, when they want.

No one can deny the benefits of an explosion of choice and a competitive market.

But British broadcasters are central pillars of our public life and their benefits are too great for them to be cast off as a victim of this revolution.

Just ask all the people who have transformed their use of plastic thanks to the persuasive and compelling storytelling of BBC's Planet Earth.

The four and a half thousand schools – that's over one million children – who have signed up to ITV's Daily Mile fitness campaign.

And the people all around the world living under repressive regimes who have turned to British news as a lifeline and a source of information.

Our mission is to retain all of these positive economic, cultural and soft power benefits at a time when the broadcasting landscape is changing like never before.

According to Ofcom, YouTube is now the first choice for video content for children over the age of 8.

And over half of us have a subscription to a video on demand service, each of which on average offers 22 million hours of content.

Our broadcasters must be as fleet-footed and as adaptable to change as their international rivals.

Because those that do not pool their resources and talent will find it difficult to succeed in this new age.

So it has been heartening to me to see our PSBs working together, across traditional boundaries, including on exciting new platforms – just as they

did with Freeview 17 years ago.

Britbox is a fantastic example of this, and I am looking forward to its launch in the coming months.

PSBs have also been increasingly working together with their commercial counterparts.

For example, Channel 4 and Sky have made a number of successful agreements recently, including joining forces so as many viewers as possible could see the thrilling Cricket World Cup Final this summer – captivating a whole new audience.

I am sure our PSBs and commercial broadcasters can continue to do more together in terms of producing content, working with advertisers, and innovating to reach audiences of all ages.

That is why Ofcom is undertaking a review to look at how well the BBC's news and current affairs output is adapting to the changing news environment.

And why I am delighted that ITV is launching an exciting news service on social media, targeted at younger audiences.

Because we all need to be constantly adapting if this sector is to remain sustainable and meet audience expectations.

Another way we can achieve these goals is through making sure our broadcasters represent the country they serve, both on and off screen.

I am sure this is not the first time you have heard a DCMS Secretary of State talk about diversity.

But this has been a real passion of mine for a long time now and I see it as fundamental to our future success as a nation.

Throughout my career, I have been banging the drum for fairer representation across all of our industries, and I was proud to serve as Minister for Women and Equalities for two years.

And representation is particularly important for our broadcasters.

Not just because it is right and just.

But because our broadcasters are most effective, and most relevant, when they channel the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds that make the country great.

And to achieve this aim, you need to hire people who can reflect this, and also make sure they are in the rooms where important decisions are made.

Today's Ofcom report shows that while progress has been made in some areas, including in senior management gender balance and minority ethnic representation, there remains more to do.

So I want to see all broadcasters working harder to promote diversity of all kinds, at all levels.

The Creative Industries Council's newly announced Diversity Charter is a strong statement of intent and includes a number of positive commitments.

Regional diversity is also vital and Channel 4 will soon be opening new offices in Leeds, Bristol and Glasgow as part of a commendable effort to increase its regional impact.

I also welcome the creative steps that commercial broadcasters have taken to promote a diverse industry and economy.

For example, Sky's Innovation Centre, which is providing girls of school leaving age the chance to learn coding for free.

I want to say to our commercial broadcasters – you too are central to our television sector.

Non PSB broadcasters are now investing more than 1.1 billion pounds a year in UK content.

This is a sector that delivers culturally and economically, and provides for all audiences.

So please, keep investing, keep finding new and diverse talent, and keep deepening the roots that you have developed in the UK.

Expectations are changing, not just around what and who we see on our screens but also around how these shows are produced.

In the digital age, the spotlight can be intense for those who take part in popular shows.

Viewers have easy access to participants via social media, and video clips can last forever online, meaning fame can be an overwhelming experience for many people.

And I am pleased that broadcasters have recognised this and are putting steps in place to reduce potential harm.

I welcome the Ofcom consultation in this area and the progress that our broadcasters have been making. And we will also look carefully at the DCMS Select Committee's findings when they report later this year.

Just as our broadcasters set a global standard in so many areas, I want to see them doing the same for how they treat their participants.

Regulators must adapt

The second area where we need to adapt is the support offered by the Government and regulators.

We need to make sure that regulations, some of which were developed in the analogue age, are fit for the new ways that people create and consume content.

While I welcome the growing role of video on demand services and the investment and consumer choice they bring, it is important that we have regulatory frameworks that reflect this new environment.

For example, whereas a programme airing on linear TV is subject to Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, and the audience protections it contains, a programme going out on most video on demand services is not subject to the same standards.

This does not provide the clarity and consistency that consumers would expect.

So I am interested in considering how regulation should change to reflect a changing sector.

And this is just one example.

Ofcom is beginning its PSB Review and I want Ofcom to think big.

In terms of what might be needed to ensure that the PSB system can meet audiences' needs...

find the best new talent...

and provide the critical mass of investment that is vital to drive UK television.

But this is not a zero-sum issue. A healthy PSB system should benefit, and not diminish, other parts of our sector.

And Ofcom's upcoming review will help us consider how regulation can ensure PSB continues to be the beating heart of our television landscape for years to come.

It is in this vein that I will consider the issue of 'prominence' that is so important for PSBs.

Ofcom has made its initial recommendations and my officials will be working with Ofcom and the industry to look at how to take them forward, with a view to legislation.

A further area where regulation may need to be updated is the PSB multiplex licences which underpin the Freeview platform.

These will expire in 2022 and I intend to consult in the new year on a range of options for these specific licences.

But I also want to emphasise that any regulation must be proportionate and evidence-based.

That is the approach I am taking with the recent consultation, on potential further advertising restrictions on food products that are high in fat, salt or sugar.

I understand broadcasters' concerns here, and I will consider the evidence submitted to the consultation carefully before any decisions are taken.

That is not to say that there is no role for broadcasters in tackling obesity, one of the great public health issues of our times.

Broadcasters already play a big part, including by inspiring people from all backgrounds to emulate their sporting heroes through their coverage of major sporting events.

And the Government can help to support these twin ambitions – of participation and representation – through the Listed Events regime.

We have no intention to undertake a full review of this regime, but we do want to give equal recognition to disabled and women's sport.

Firstly, this nation has a long-standing commitment to para-sport.

The UK hosted what is widely considered the first ever Paralympic Games in 1948.

And the London 2012 Paralympics was widely considered the greatest of all time – supported of course by Channel 4's groundbreaking coverage.

And now just like the Olympics, we are consulting on adding the Paralympic Games to the Listed Events regime.

Secondly, the recent Women's World Cup showed the energy and passion that women's sport can generate.

A record-breaking 28.1 million people tuned into the BBC's coverage of the tournament, on TV and online.

I want to build on this momentum and make sure future generations of female sporting talent can be inspired by who they see on their screens.

So today I can announce that I have written to the relevant rights holders to seek their views about adding women's sporting events to the Listed Events regime.

So where a men's event is listed, the women's equivalent would be too.

I believe that this would be an important step in giving female sporting talent the coverage they deserve and putting men's and women's sport on an equal footing at last.

Production environment must adapt

I have set out how I believe broadcasters must adapt to the changing market,

and how government and regulators can also support this change.

And the third area I wanted to talk about today is the UK's production sector.

There is a lengthy and talented supply chain that sits behind everything we see on our screens.

From producers to editors to designers, we have forged a reputation as a world-class destination to create and produce content, with an attractive tax landscape and a truly vibrant creative skills base.

And this has led to substantial infrastructure investment at Warner Brothers Studios Leavesden and Pinewood, with further developments in the pipeline at Elstree and elsewhere.

The investment from commercial broadcasters and streaming giants, combined with the continued investment from PSBs, has created unprecedented opportunities for our production sector.

I warmly welcome this vote of confidence in the UK, and the results have been exceptional.

Overall, film inward investment in the UK has grown by 92 per cent in the last five years and high-end television by 162 per cent.

And spending from all areas, including significant growth from the international on-demand services, has helped revenue for the UK TV production sector now reach three billion pounds.

I am delighted that we have the CEOs of Netflix and Discovery here this week, among many others – a great endorsement of the breadth of the UK's offering.

I hope to see these new players growing and expanding across the UK and taking advantage of our thriving regional creative economies.

As a Government, we will be looking closely at the barriers to growth that I know concern all producers.

Our creative sector tax reliefs have already supported nearly 15 billion pounds of production expenditure, as well as stimulating increased tourism across the UK.

But we cannot rest on our laurels, particularly at a time of intense international competition.

And so to stay on top, we are working to give ourselves the studio space and the skilled workers we need so that the UK remains at the forefront of global screen production.

Conclusion

This is a pivotal moment for our country and we all have a part to play in setting out the right path; broadcasters, policymakers, regulators, and producers.

At a time when it feels as if our society is getting more polarised and more tribal, the content we watch can bring us together through creating moments of shared enjoyment and inspiration.

And you – our broadcasters, producers and creative talent – help us to project our creativity and ingenuity beyond our shores.

You represent our great country at its best.

The captivating drama that enthralles so many people and offers them a glimpse of the beauty and history of our nation.

The award winning documentaries which have changed attitudes and driven lasting change all across the world.

And the bravery and fearlessness shown by so many of our broadcast journalists, often in the most perilous of circumstances overseas.

So I am proud to be representing this sector in Westminster and Whitehall. A sector which is steeped in heritage and achievement, and that is constantly breaking new ground in terms of new formats and new technology.

A sector which not only makes an important cultural and social contribution to our lives, but is also a driving force for our economy.

Throughout history, you have shown the ability to adapt to the world around it, and I have no doubt that it will do so in the years ahead.

A healthy media is the sign of a healthy civil society and a thriving nation.

And I want to work side by side with you all to make sure this industry remains sustainable, relevant and open to everyone.

It is one of the great challenges of our age, but together, it can be done.

Thank you very much.