

Submission for A Future for Public Service Television Inquiry

Dr. Bernard J. Mulholland

The loss of our sole remaining indigenous television broadcaster (u.tv) and the persistent failure of the BBC to invest in Northern Ireland (NI) places the film and television industry here at a considerable disadvantage to other regions of the United Kingdom.

There is a strong case to be made that the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) should collect the television license in NI and use these monies to set up our own indigenous NI state broadcaster.

We know that RTE in the Irish Republic derives its income from two sources, i.e. TV license and commercial revenue have a 50:50 ratio, which provide them with some 370 million Euro in total.

With this income they fund RTE 1 (61 million Euro cost), RTE 2 (36 million Euro cost) and all the radio stations (26.63 million Euro cost).

There appears no sound reason why an indigenous NI state broadcaster could not replicate this funding model.

Statistics from the Department of Finance and Personnel indicate that there are 779,000 households in NI and the annual TV license costs £145.50.

This suggests that the NIA could potentially collect an annual income of circa £113,344,500.00, or with a 50:50 commercial to license ratio more like £227 million.

Even allowing for those receiving a free license (i.e. those aged over 75 or those who otherwise don't pay) this means that we could fund a local broadcaster with over £200 million per annum.

I can see no reason why the NIA would not wish to establish a NI broadcasting company to create well-paid local jobs for the tens of thousands of unemployed

in NI and the newly-minted graduates languishing on the dole.

I am sure that no-one would argue that our own graduates are of a lesser quality than those employed by the BBC.

The NIA should take this opportunity to signal to Westminster that the BBC is no longer fit for purpose and that we will collect our own TV license to create and broadcast our own programmes, just as our neighbours in the south do on a regular basis.

The BBC's Charter is up for renewal in 2016 and the NIA should set in motion the necessary legislative process needed to establish a local broadcaster.