



# ACTO

local public service television directory

NATALIE WHITE: QUESTIONS  
ON THE FUTURE OF LOCAL  
TELEVISION

Tuesday 1st November

Ofcom's LOCAL TV DIGITAL  
FORUM in Manchester

DIARY OF EVENTS

LOCAL TV BOOK

**ACTO** is an advisory committee of local television organisations working alongside the Institute of Local Television. **ACTO**'s initial objective is to share information supporting the introduction of local digital terrestrial television as an independent form of local public service broadcasting.

**ACTO** was established in 2003 by local television members of the Community Media Association to focus on the introduction of local digital terrestrial television services - or 'local DTT'.

Through the Institute of Local Television **ACTO** is represented on **Open Channels for Europe!** the organisation representing European local and open channels in exchanging information on European practice and in negotiation with the European parliament on small-scale TV provision.

Personal and institutional affiliation to **ACTO** is by a small annual subscription (see page 9) entitling subscribers to copies of Institute of Local Television research and reports as well as to **ACTO** directories. Subscribers also receive early announcement of local TV conferences, forums, workshops and are offered networking and support with submissions to regulators and government as well as encouragement with local-tv related activities.

**ACTO - local public service television directory** - encourages local lines of research and documentation and promotes publications which support a wide public engagement with small-scale local TV.

This is the sixth edition of the **ACTO - local public service television directory**.

**ACTO back issues can be downloaded from [www.maccess.org.uk/members/ilt.html](http://www.maccess.org.uk/members/ilt.html)**

## **WEBSITES**

### **For information:**

on local and community TV in Europe: **[www.obs.int/db/persky/eu.html](http://www.obs.int/db/persky/eu.html)**

on community TV channels worldwide: **[www.openchannel.se/](http://www.openchannel.se/)**

UK's Community Media Association: **[www.commedia.org.uk/](http://www.commedia.org.uk/)**

UK examples of local and community TV programmes:

**[www.showcase.commedia.org.uk/](http://www.showcase.commedia.org.uk/)**

website of NvTv Belfast's Local TV Channel: **[www.nvtv.co.uk](http://www.nvtv.co.uk)**

Public Voice is the leading voluntary sector coalition campaigning for citizens' interests in communications policy and regulation:

**[www.politics.co.uk/campaignsite/public-voice-\\$3436683.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/campaignsite/public-voice-$3436683.htm)**

Ofcom - the UK's independent regulator and competition authority - site includes sections on codes, guidelines and consultations: **[www.ofcom.org.uk/](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/)**

..... provides an extensive catalogue of consultations and reports - for background to local TV look out the public service broadcasting consultations Phase 1-3 and you can join the Ofcom email list for updates on future consultations and publications

Institute of Local Television **[www.localtvonline.com/](http://www.localtvonline.com/)** .... shared with The Broadcasting Trust, website lists publications, provides background papers, illustrates local TV DVDs, 2.4 Ghz TV studies ....

## **NATALIE WHITE: QUESTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF LOCAL TELEVISION**

1. *Ofcom recently proposed three possible methods of spectrum allocation for the future delivery of local television. These were:*
  - *a seventh national multiplex specifically for local services, reaching around 75% of the UK;*
  - *a single UHF channel, only reaching around 50% of the UK;*
  - *a low capacity multiplex using an interleaved channel from the existing set of multiplexes.*

*Which, if any, of these methods might work, and if not, why not?*

**First a general point – Local TV has been lobbying since 1993 to be recognised as a public service broadcaster – to have Local TV universally available in all areas of the UK as well as universally accessible in each Local TV area.**

**So the current proposals - though long overdue - need to aim to achieve universal coverage, not on one digital platform but ideally (and probably necessarily) to launch in each area on the platform offering reach to the biggest minority if not the majority of local viewers.**

**Of the above proposals – two by definition do not aim to provide the coverage required. Remembering that by the time switchover is complete those taking their digital TV by DTT (also known as Freeview) will number only 60% or so of the population – so a Local TV service on DTT needs to reach 100% of these DTT viewers just to achieve that 60% reach.**

**Additional points:**

**The seventh multiplex is in a ‘bid’ to the Regional Radio Conference in 2006 – and if accepted it may not cover the south coast and possibly parts of the east coast.**

**The interleaved multiplex option if it does not use existing transmitters and antenna panels will be very expensive and if left till after DTT roll out will be hard to engineer to ensure that the local signal accesses the same households as other DTT signals from each transmitter.**

**The last points on the interleaved multiplex apply to all three proposals - timing and DTT access is critical for Local TV.**

2. *The Institute of Local Television has also suggested a method known as the ‘add/drop’ solution. Do you believe this method to be a better solution to the problem of delivery, and if so, why?*

**Yes we do believe ‘add/drop’ is better than current proposals – it is feasible and has been looked at by the broadcast engineers at DTG – Digital Television Group – as well as by Ofcom’s engineers. Add/drop guarantees to offer Local DTT to every household getting a national DTT signal and without the phenomenal expense (and wastage) of separate transmitters and broadcast antennae.**

**Add/drop does not use extra or new frequencies – themselves becoming subject to a possible market in spectrum and hence to an unquantified further cost which will only serve to inhibit investment in start-up services.**

**Add/drop is the most efficient and elegant solution to get Local TV launched. Local multiplexes may be required as well after switchover to provide further**

'localness' - but only from some of the main transmitter sites and then subject to technical solutions being found to use existing transmitters as well as resolving frequency availability and pricing issues after both the 2006 RRC and switchover.

3. *It has also been suggested that local television could be distributed via broadband technology or using satellite television. Do you consider these methods of distribution a possibility, and if not, why not?*

**Broadband on TV – that is broadband capacity used to deliver programming to the TV – is a very attractive option, but it has (I think) just 0.02% of homes receiving it in the UK – so has a long way to go. Eventually broadband on TV – or IPTV – will provide a very useful supplement to a Local DTT signal – not only helping fill in the gaps but potentially offering satellite households an additional TV service – as an add on to telephone and computer broadband. This is possibly the only realistic way-in for Local TV to those homes otherwise occupied by satellite.**

**Satellite – although being considered in some areas (and Gaelic want to go this route) – is expensive and provides a signal reaching a large non-local audience: encouraging Local TV to address that non-local audience and to become less locally focused (notwithstanding the ways of denying set-top boxes access to households based on post-codes). But capacity from satellite to provide local services across the UK is doubtful as well as take up compared with DTT prospects.**

**In one way it would have been better had national TV moved onto satellite leaving terrestrial spectrum for local services from the UK's 81 main transmitter sites or 1152 relays and transmitters. These sites are all configured for the efficient delivery of local and regional TV - and wasteful for transmitting national channels. But of course, had national moved onto satellite - without Local TV in place on the terrestrial network - it's very unlikely the terrestrial network would be retained at all, given the various pressures on regional to shrink away after switchover.**

**In the end Local TV might possibly be the sole justification for retaining the terrestrial TV network - since all national signals are transmitted on local terrestrial frequencies anyway.**

**We might think of frequencies as a national asset but we do so only because they were collected for public service broadcasting and till now there hasn't been a national Local TV plan. While PSB objectives were national terrestrial spectrum is really local and regional frequencies loaned for the national good.**

4. *OFCOM has claimed that final decisions regarding frequency allocation for local television will not be made until at least May 2006. Do you think a decision is likely to be made next year, and if not, what are the implications for this?*

**The DCMS are hoping to have a Draft Order for Licence prepared for Summer 2006 – if the intervening research and consultations prove favourable.**

**The implications of not rolling out Local DTT with national DTT starting in 2008 would be catastrophic: vastly more expensive and not guaranteed to carry signals into each DTT home. So stepping back from 2008 – Local TV applicants need to be in place with channels for the Scottish Borders, South West and Wales by early 2007 – so yes, 2006 is 'the time'.**

5. *OFCOM and the DCMS are currently in the process of preparing a consultation on local television, expected to commence in December. What issues is the consultation likely to raise and how might this process aid the development of local television?*

**This one you'd better ask Ofcom – but I understand that as well as the nature of the Licence the consultation's main objective is to ascertain sustainability and financial options for Local TV.**

6. *Suggestions have been made regarding running local TV stations as public service broadcasters. Do you consider this to be a valid suggestion, and if so, how might this work?*

**Touched on this above. We think it is the only way – valid for several reasons:**

- **regional public service ITV is in retreat – and the regions are felt to be too big for the type of TV service the viewers want**
- **local news has been identified in countless studies as the USP of Local TV – this can't be delivered on a bigger scale, and local is county, city, town, borough (or smaller scale too) - local new like national news on TV**
- **the use of spectrum should fulfil public service requirements first – spectrum was gathered together for public services and through add/drop offers local universal PSB in order to realise local (economic and social) value**
- **the understanding is that public service broadcasting does embrace commercial, municipal and community ownership – PSB is about the core elements of the service and its responsibilities (not who owns it)**
- **councils have been able to hold broadcasting licences since 2003 – and a council-size scale of Local TV offers synergies with civic engagement, community partnerships etc - councils could also be an important new stakeholder in TV – tying channels in with local training and skills courses, local media enterprise, cultural industries, helping rebalance UK TV production activity as well as supporting their own social inclusion objectives.**

**How it might work ...**

- **a local public service network allows for programming to be made and seen by communities of interest – on top of purely local programming made just for local viewers (news, weather, what's on). The gathering together of several locals into many configurations enables carriage of advertising that targets different communities of interest – so offering a more effective way of reaching a particular portion of the population than national TV**
- **The 'local network channel operator' (from the add/drop solution) plays the role of broker in engaging with the Local TV channels, with production companies servicing communities of interest and the advertising agencies – so the form of the Local TV service overall is public/trust-like in character - so here too the service fits the PSB objectives. Each channel is a distinctive independent commercial, community or municipal entity while the network is at the service of Local TV: not as the conduit or Trojan Horse for the network to enter local or regional air-space (as we will find with regional TV when it has no 'regional' role - except accessing viewers on behalf of ITV network)**
- **Thirdly the support for rolling out Local TV – providing the 'local network channel' within the national mux – also has a PSB character through which to demonstrate how Local TV has been started and to offer programming tools for new starts – a sort of Local TV Open University – for those areas of the country awaiting switch-over and therefore still receiving the local**

network channel. The objective is to encourage migration onto Local TV. This too is a 'public' role – not a commercial role: the local network channel evaporates when the work is done.

7. *It has been proposed that local television could be funded by a Community Media Fund or by the proposed Public Service Publisher. How do you envisage local stations being funded in the future?*

The PSP is only an idea – so far. But it does need to be either made good or ditched before the consultation on Local TV. Those consulted need clarity and a positive plan of what is envisaged structurally.

The Institute suggested to Ofcom in November 2004 that £200m of the PSP fund go for Local TV and other local media. This wasn't knocked back and subsequently the PSP has been seen by Ofcom as providing for both national PSB and the Local as well as the 'interactive' element. Though lumping interactive with local is a mistake: it is a mistake or it is a diversion. Interactive is no more related to local TV than it is to national TV and smacks of 'left-overs' thinking.

The community owned stations might be funded through the Community Media Fund – because they will need start-up finance as well as on-going programme making funds; Municipal – funded by councils and local enterprise companies, Commercial – financed by investors, bigger companies. Other local media might join either the municipal or commercial options - so the leadership on getting Local TV launched will probably vary from one area to the next.

All three - commercial, community and municipal - approaches could draw on the PSP to fund key PSB programming – and the community of interest programme producers could seek PSP to support programmes that reach particular viewing communities stretched across several Local TV channel areas, communities but otherwise poorly served by national TV.

So – PSP could have a role to play in several ways: but until either PSP or a slice of the Licence Fee is committed this is not a key subject of debate.

Probably the important issue to resolve soon is whether Local TV should be charged for broadcast spectrum – the answer should be 'no', but if it is 'yes' (at some point after switchover) then on a mortgage basis tilted towards payment as reach and advertising etc are consolidated and the services have become available throughout the UK.

Local TV requires many local channels to be on-air to build up quality through shared community of interest programming supported by advertising. Advertising and sponsorship also lies beyond the immediately local, but only when Local TV can satisfy BARB research on viewing figures and hence show the advertisers that there is a range of collective audiences to be reached through a variety of channels focused on specific demographics and interests.

8. *At the current moment in time, how do you envisage the local television market following digital switchover? What issues do you think need to be resolved in order for local television to be a success in the future?*

- We've probably covered this – but vitally important now is a national Local TV plan: for without that few will sign up to the idea or be engaged by the consultation. Stakeholders need to know where they might broadcast, how big an area and the likely reach on DTT as well as understand transmission rent or capex and any other costs such as spectrum.

Most of these costs can be estimated fairly accurately with the vadd/drop solution for Local DTT - except spectrum costs and ownership.

- Finally, Local TV is as important for the development of public service broadcasting as BBC2 or Channel Four were in their time – and the Ministers need to get behind Local TV very soon or the DTT window will be closed.

## DIARY OF EVENTS

November 1



### Agenda

**Ofcom seminar on local content and interactive services**

**Manchester Town Hall Tuesday 1 November 2005**

- 10.30am:       **Registration & tea and coffee**
- 11.00am:       **Introduction from Chair**  
                    Tim Suter, Partner, Content & Standards, Ofcom
- 11.05am:       **Keynote Speaker**  
                    James Purnell MP, Minister for Creative Industries & Tourism
- 12noon:        **Local TV – 8 Perspectives (in order of presentation)**  
                    Gary Porter - Channel 9  
                    Hugh Williams – Homechoice  
                    Paul Topping - Solent TV  
                    Rick Smith - Carpenters Connect  
                    Lindsay Charlton - ITV  
                    Daniel Cass - Channel 6  
                    Andy Hudson - Codeworks  
                    Mark Dodson - Channel M
- 12.45pm:       **Lunch**
- 1.30pm:         **Q&A on Perspectives for Local TV**
- 2.00pm:         **BBC Local TV**  
                    Andy Griffee, BBC Controller of English Regions
- 2.30pm:         **Technical Options for Local TV**  
                    Greg Bensberg, Principal Advisor Broadcasting, Ofcom
- 3.15pm:         **Closing remarks**

# Invitation to the Berlin European Media Literacy Conference IV

Media and Social Intervention

November 11 - 13

Location: Offener Kanal Berlin, Voltastr. 5, 13355 Berlin Contact: linke@okb.de

## General aim

An increasing number of media initiatives across Europe show a wide range of different content, contexts, audience groups and local media output. This Media Literacy Conference invites people from these initiatives to develop a better expertise in the approach and results of their media work and to deepen democratic and direct media impetus in Europe.

The topic of "*Media and Social Intervention*" focuses on methods and examples which helped people to develop their own critical voice through the use of independent media.

The Media Literacy Conference IV would like to continue the dialogue which was started three years ago. Project presentations, workshops and open discussions will contribute to develop our coalition of European partners supporting media literacy within the wider framework of the new organisation "Open Channels for Europe!".

## BOOKS, REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

*LOCAL TELEVISION RENEWED: essays on local television 1994-2005* published by School Press for the Institute of Local Television, August 2005. 112 pages, available in pdf format at £7.00 from 5th August or as a softback book at £13.50 inc p&p from 30th August 2005.

*LOCAL TELEVISION RENEWED* provides a vigorous critique of the political impact of public service broadcasting since 1990 and argues for two hundred plus independent local, community and municipal television channels in line with developments under way across Europe. *LOCAL TELEVISION RENEWED* outlines how these proposals for local TV channels can be introduced as part of digital switchover from 2008 and expanded via broadband.

*LOCAL TELEVISION RENEWED: essays on local television 1994-2005*, ISBN:1 899405 03 8 Dave Rushton, published by School Press (2005) £13.50 inc p&p 112 pgs Softback (or £7.00 for single copies in pdf format downloaded to your email address.) Preamble; Introduction; Technical Background; Virtual Reality; Vicarious and Experiential TV News; A General Theory of Spectrum; Defining the Social Geography of Local News Identity; Assessing opportunities for local digital TV across Europe; Add/Drop and the Local Network Channel. APPENDICES: A Local Television Reader; Scottish Local TV Forum Report; Some pointers for filming local TV news and short documentaries

Personal cheques for books and/or the pdf version of Local Television Renewed should be made payable to 'Institute of Local Television' and sent to

Institute of Local Television 13 Bellevue Place Edinburgh EH7 4BS Official orders and further enquiries can be sent to the address above or to [local.tv@virgin.net](mailto:local.tv@virgin.net).

## BECOME A SUBSCRIBER

YOU CAN BECOME AN INSTITUTE OF LOCAL TELEVISION SUBSCRIBER, RECEIVE ACTO - the local public service television directory - and other publications for £30.00 per year (or free if you can make the case!)

### AND FINALLY .....

request a copy of the local TV logo - will be sent to you as a small jpg file and pdf file to cut and paste into newsletters, letters, emails and publicity .....

Local 



To contribute to ACTO - offering further reasons for local TV in your area, examples of local TV activity, expressions of interest in local TV, forums, research, events etc - email to [local.tv@virgin.net](mailto:local.tv@virgin.net)

To be removed from the ACTO electronic mailing list please advise [local.tv@virgin.net](mailto:local.tv@virgin.net)