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the department for Enterprise

The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

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Dear David

BROADCASTING BILL: INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION

Thank you for copying to me your minute of 9 November to the Prime Minister. I have subsequently seen the Private Secretary reply of 14 November. *gap*

Your minute sought agreement to three proposals concerning the decision by MISC 128 to impose a statutory duty on the BBC in relation to programme production by independent producers. I am content with the first proposal, that the Broadcasting Bill should contain provisions broadly on the lines contained in the Annex to your minute.

On the second proposal, I agree that the target should be expressed in terms of transmission rather than commissions. I doubt, however, that as a consequence of this change we should postpone the target date from 1 January 1993 to 1 January 1994. The BBC will have had ample notice of the change and should be able to plan accordingly. We have previously announced that the current voluntary target is to be achieved by the end of 1992. If this has any real value I believe the BBC should be close to reaching the 25% target throughout 1992, not just in the last month or so. The commissions during and prior to 1992 should become transmissions during 1993, thus enabling the BBC to fulfil the proposed statutory requirement.

Your third proposal concerns the categories of programme to be included in the quota. It is striking that the exclusions you propose would reduce the total relevant output by 35-45%. This would in turn reduce the required independent production quota from 25% of total hours transmitted to just 15%. I recognise that we have previously announced certain exclusions but this was in relation to the present non-statutory target.



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I believe that the decision to move to a statutory requirement provides an opportunity to look at this again. My preference would be for news and news-related daily current affairs to be included in the total. To exclude them would not only diminish the value of the 25% quota but would mean that broadcasters would get no credit for including independently produced programmes in these categories. If, however, you would find this difficult then I would propose that the main exclusions should be national news and national news-related daily current affairs. Independent producers would seem well placed to provide local news programmes and should be encouraged to do so.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister and other members of MISC 128 and to Sir Robin Butler.

James
Minister