

Revision of the RTHK Producers' Guidelines

Purpose

This paper provides information on the revision of the Producers' Guidelines (PG) of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

Background

2. To codify well-tried and tested editorial practices, RTHK published the first PG in September 1998. The PG reflects not only RTHK's working principles but also the community's expectation with regard to social norms and standards. It enhances the transparency and accountability of the operation of RTHK while serving as internal guidelines on editorial principles and operational matters. The PG was subsequently updated in September 1999, September 2000 and June 2003.

Process of the Recent Revision Exercise

3. In 2010, Assistant Director of Broadcasting led an internal Working Group to review the present set of PG to cater for the latest operation of RTHK. The Working Group comprised staff from different sections/units who were members of the Development Task Force engaged in the internal Public Service Broadcasting Review exercise in 2006. Membership of the Working Group is voluntary and its role is to make recommendations to the Management on the PG revision.

4. The Working Group reported to the Management regularly on the progress of the revision exercise. In January 2013, a draft revised PG was circulated to all staff seeking their comments. Staff consultation lasted from 14 January 2013 to 19 April 2013. Membership of the Working Group was further expanded after the staff consultation period. Section heads were invited to nominate staff to join

the Working Group so that all sections are represented in the Working Group.

5. The Programme Staff Union submitted their views on the proposed amendments to the PG during the staff consultation on 7 March 2013 but subsequently withdrew their submission. A final submission was made by its newly elected Executive Committee on 17 June 2013. Besides the submission from the Programme Staff Union, comments from other sections and individual staff were also received. All the submissions were thoroughly reviewed and considered in a series of Working Group meetings since May 2013.

6. The Working Group presented a draft revised PG again to the Management at the Strategy Group Meeting (SGM) of RTHK on 24 September 2013¹. After deliberation, the Management asked the Working Group to review the draft having regard to the comments made during the meeting. The Working Group was specifically asked to provide justifications for incorporating certain text (i.e. “promotion of public values, in particular the values of freedom of expression, openness, expanding public spheres, pluralism, democratic and civic participation, and retain the trust of the community”) which were clearly beyond the UNESCO definition of public service broadcasting, i.e. universality, diversity, independence and distinctiveness of programming². This text had its origin in paragraph 4 of RTHK’s submission to the Review Committee on Public Service Broadcasting on 27 October 2006. It should be noted that the same text was not included in RTHK’s submission during the public consultation exercise and public hearing by the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting of the Legislative Council (ITB Panel) on new RTHK and RTHK Charter (the Charter)

¹ The RTHK Management deliberates on all important policy matters at the SGM. Meeting fortnightly, the SGM is chaired by the Director of Broadcasting with membership comprising directorate officers of RTHK. The Working Group was tasked to review the PG and make recommendation to the RTHK Management at the SGM. The Programme Staff Union is represented at the Working Group.

² **Universality, diversity and independence** remain today, like yesterday, essential goals for public broadcasting. To these three principles must be added a fourth, particularly important when the public broadcaster exists side by side with commercial broadcasters: **distinctiveness**. (Page 6 of the UNESCO paper: “Public Broadcasting: Why? How?” May 2000)

http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/18796/11144252115pb_why_how.pdf/pb_why_how.pdf

from late 2009 to mid-2010.

7. The Working Group conducted further discussions and submitted a revised draft PG to the SGM on 11 March 2014. After fully considered the amendments proposed by the Working Group, the Management agreed to all proposed amendments but ruled out the proposed addition on “promotion of public values” to the PG which goes beyond the UNESCO definition.

The Position of the Management

8. The PG is an important professional tool which provides guidelines to staff on day-to-day editorial and operational matters. In the last four years, both the staff and Management have been working under the consensus that only revisions absolutely necessary for the daily operation should be pursued. The proposed addition on “promotion of public values” for RTHK is a major departure from the aforesaid consensus.

9. After almost two years of internal discussion and full consultation with all staff, RTHK promulgated a Vision, Mission and Values Statement (VMVS) in 2000 (at **Annex A**). The Missions in the VMVS have been preserved in entirety in clause 5 (Mission) of the Charter promulgated in August 2010. The Values in VMVS have been fully incorporated and expanded into clause 4 (Public Purposes) and clauses 6 to 8 (Editorial Independence) in the Charter (at **Annex B**).

10. The Management is of the firm view that if the values of RTHK were to be repeated in the PG at all, they must track the wording of Public Purposes in the Charter to avoid any confusion. If RTHK were to adopt new values over and above those set out as Public Purposes in the Charter, the procedure set out in clause 37 of the Charter must be followed. It should be noted that before the Charter was drawn up in 2010, there was a three-month public consultation, consultation with and public hearing by ITB Panel and full consultation with all RTHK staff. It is inappropriate for an internal Working Group, or the Programme Staff Union, to unilaterally alter the Public Purposes of RTHK.

11. It will be regrettable if anyone were to suggest that the recent revision of the PG has any connection with freedom of expression which is a core value (Public Purposes) of RTHK. Clause 4(b) of the Charter provides that, as one of its Public Purposes, RTHK should “provide an open platform for the free exchange of views without fear and favour. This involves the provision of a wide range of programmes for public participation and expression of views, and provision of a platform to support and facilitate community participation in broadcasting, including the administration of a Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund.” In the last few years, RTHK has launched new public affairs programmes including “Voices from the Hall” and “Face to Face” which provide additional platforms for the public to express their views on a wide range of public policy issues. In addition, over 60 individuals and organizations have successfully applied and granted air time to air their own radio programmes under the pilot Community Involvement Broadcasting Service.

The role of the Board of Advisors (BoA)

12. The functions of BoA and the working relationship between the Director of Broadcasting (DB) and BoA are set out in Clauses 13 and 16 of the Charter. Clause 13 provides that BoA may advise DB on all matters pertaining to editorial principles, programming standards and quality of RTHK programming. Clause 16 provides that DB, as the head of RTHK, may seek advice of BoA on matters pertaining to editorial principles, programming standards, quality of RTHK programming and community participation in broadcasting, and should give due weight and consideration to all advice provided by BoA. DB shall report and explain to BoA the reasons for not following the advice of BoA.

13. PG is an important professional tool in guiding the programme staff. Under Clause 8 of the Charter, DB as the Editor-in-chief is responsible for ensuring that a system of editorial control in accordance with PG is in place to provide accurate, impartial and objective news, public affairs and general programming that inform, educate and entertain the public. The latest revisions are mainly related to the updating of internal administrative practices and programme content

regulations issued by the Communications Authority.

14. According to Clause 9 of the Charter, DB is responsible for making the final editorial decisions in RTHK and is accountable for editorial decisions taken by RTHK programme producers. All the proposed revisions of PG by the Working Group had been endorsed by the Management, except the paragraph on the roles of Public Service Broadcaster. Under Clause 13 of the Charter, BoA may advise on editorial principles. Nonetheless, it is up to DB to take a view on whether he will accept such advice as Editor-in-chief of RTHK. The system of editorial control and the PG may be revised to the extent which DB takes BoA's advice on board.

Advice Sought

15. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Radio Television Hong Kong
May 2014**

RTHK Vision, Mission and Values Statement

Vision

To be a leading public broadcaster in the new media environment.

Mission

To inform, educate and entertain our audiences through multi-media programming;

To provide timely, impartial coverage of local and global events and issues;

To deliver programming which contributes to the openness and cultural diversity of Hong Kong;

To provide a platform for free and unfettered expression of views;

To serve a broad spectrum of audiences and cater to the needs of minority interest groups.

Values

Editorial Independence

Impartiality

Serving the Public

Competitiveness

Quality Production

Development of Talent

CHARTER OF RADIO TELEVISION HONG KONG

B. PUBLIC PURPOSES AND MISSION

4. As the public service broadcaster in Hong Kong, RTHK is to fulfill the following purposes –
 - (a) sustain citizenship and civil society. This involves –
 - (i) promoting understanding of our community, our nation and the world through accurate and impartial news, information, perspectives and analyses;
 - (ii) promoting understanding of the concept of “One Country, Two Systems” and its implementation in Hong Kong; and
 - (iii) engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity through programmes that contribute to the understanding of our community and nation;
 - (b) provide an open platform for the free exchange of views without fear or favour. This involves the provision of a wide range of programmes for public participation and expression of views, and provision of a platform to support and facilitate community participation in broadcasting, including the administration of a Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund;
 - (c) encourage social inclusion and pluralism. This involves the provision of programmes with diversity of programming coverage, universality of reach and sensitivity to the pluralistic nature of Hong Kong and the world. The objective is to enhance public understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity both in the local community and beyond;

- (d) promote education and learning. This involves stimulating interest in a wide range of subjects, and providing information and resources to facilitate lifelong learning at all levels and for all ages; and
 - (e) stimulate creativity and excellence to enrich the multi-cultural life of Hong Kong people. This involves the production, commission and acquisition of distinctive and original content for public broadcast. There should be active promotion of public interest, engagement and participation in cultural activities, and its programming and other corporate policies and practices should foster creativity and nurture talent.
5. RTHK will provide to Hong Kong people editorially independent, professional and high-quality radio, television and new media services. Specifically, the mission of RTHK is to:
- (a) inform, educate and entertain members of the public through multi-media programming;
 - (b) provide timely, impartial coverage of local, national and global events and issues;
 - (c) deliver programming which contributes to the openness and cultural diversity of Hong Kong;
 - (d) provide a platform for the Government and the community to discuss public policies and express views thereon without fear or favour; and
 - (e) serve a broad spectrum of audiences and cater to the needs of minority interest groups.

C. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

6. RTHK is editorially independent.
7. RTHK will adhere to the following editorial principles –
 - (a) be accurate and authoritative in the information that it disseminates;
 - (b) be impartial in the views it reflects, and even-handed with all those who seek to express their views via the public service broadcasting platform;
 - (c) be immune from commercial, political and/or other influences; and
 - (d) uphold the highest professional standards of journalism.
8. The Director of Broadcasting (the Director) as the Editor-in-chief is responsible for ensuring that a system of editorial control in accordance with RTHK's Producers' Guidelines is in place to provide accurate, impartial and objective news, public affairs and general programming that inform, educate and entertain the public.
9. As the Editor-in-chief, the Director is responsible for making the final editorial decisions in RTHK and is accountable for editorial decisions taken by RTHK programme producers.