



Independent Television Commission

Councillor E. Goodman
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25 April 2000

Dear Councillor Goodman

Taste and Decency

I am replying to your letter of 17 April concerning the ITC promotion. I am sorry that you consider it to be salacious though I assume that you are not suggesting that it should not have been shown. We have had one or two complaints about the promotion but the vast majority of viewers have taken it in the intended spirit.

I take your point that complaints should be spontaneous and in good faith but that does beg the question of how viewers are supposed to know to whom to complain. ITC promotions are intended to inform viewers about the ITC's role so that they know to whom to address relevant complaints and to ensure that they are not encouraged to complain about issues beyond our control.

The statement that British TV is regarded as the best in the world is surely an example of 'accepted wisdom' – it does not necessarily presuppose that it is true that our services are actually pre-eminent, though most would suspect some element of truth. Nor does it deny that our television is heavily regulated – this is certainly true.

The regulation of satellite broadcasting is subject to European legislation. Each country regulates those satellite services established within its boundaries but may proscribe any service based elsewhere if it is considered that its transmissions may seriously impair the mental, moral or physical development of minors. This power resides, not with the ITC, but with the Secretary of State at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The Broadcasting Act 1990 requires the ITC to report to the Secretary of State any service which breaches UK standards of taste and decency. It is for the Secretary of State to decide whether action is required.

An argument can certainly be made that encrypted material should be available to adults but it is not one currently accepted by the Government and there is no indication that the public as a whole would welcome a change of policy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Guy Phelps". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Guy" being particularly prominent.

Guy Phelps
Head of Drama, Entertainment and Religion