

# BBC and Channel 4: a marriage made in heaven or hell?

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2008-6-24

The BBC and Channel 4 are dancing around each other but it's more of a *hakka* than a *waltz*. As I have reported before there is a Battle of Britain in the UK over the future of Public Sector Broadcasting. And toes are being stepped upon.

The BBC has now published it's response to the PSB review consultation currently being conducted by UK regulator Ofcom. It is partly a response to Channel 4's vision of the future, *Next On 4*. It has boiled down to this.

Channel 4 wants public subsidy in the near future to plug its impending funding gap. The BBC currently gets £150 million to help with the digital switchover that completes in 2012. Channel 4 would quite like that 'surplus' government money. It's a way of 'top-slicing' the licence fee.

The BBC is flatly opposed to that for the obvious reason that it means it has to give up some dosh to a rival. The BBC is now proposing that instead it helps Channel 4 with various bits of assistance such as sharing its expertise in digital production to bring down costs for independent producers.

I used to work both at the BBC and at ITN's Channel 4 News so I know both organisations from the inside. Or at least their news services. This does not feel like a natural fit. I know that arranged marriages can work but this kind of ad hoc sharing feels like creating a strained relationship.

These two organisations work best in competition. And I think Channel 4 has most to lose if the competition is compromised. It exists because it is different and it employs different people. This would be an unequal partnership between two very contrasting cultures.

In the end I think that Ofcom has to come up with a way of supporting Channel 4 directly. Or it has to extract resource from the BBC and put it in a place that everyone can access without having to get in bed with this attractive, but rather domineering spouse.

Polis will be looking at the PSB process again in the autumn. Put our evening with Ed Richards in your diary: November 12th, 6.30pm. Reserve a seat via [polis@lse.ac.uk](mailto:polis@lse.ac.uk)

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