

UK Film Council

Response to

Consultation by the BBC Trust on an
application from the BBC Executive to define
and promote an IP television standard
('Project Canvas')

April 2009

1. Executive Summary

The UK Film Council strongly welcomes the proposal to create Project Canvas. In particular, we believe that it potentially provides a platform for audiences to access innovative services offering access to cultural content (and other forms of content) in new ways.

By delivering a rich mix of video content to the living room, Canvas will help to encourage the creation of new legal services of all kinds offering audiences opportunities to engage with on-demand content in many new ways. This should also help to drive take-up of broadband and build Digital Britain.

2. Introduction

The UK Film Council is the Government-backed lead agency for film in the UK. Our goal is to help make the UK a global hub for film in the digital age, with the world's most imaginative, diverse and vibrant film culture, underpinned by a flourishing, competitive film industry.

The UK Film Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the BBC Trust's Consultation on Canvas.

3. Response to Trust consultation questions

We have confined ourselves to commenting on the questions set out in the section on public value. We have no comments on the Market Impact section of the consultation as we do not currently operate products and services upon which there would be a relevant impact.

- 1. Do you think the Executive's proposal for Canvas is attractive from a consumer point of view? Do you think Canvas would be a good use of licence fee money?*

Yes on both counts. We think that the delivery of video content from the internet to the living room, as made possible by Canvas, is an extremely important and very attractive and proposition. The ability to watch such content on a television set rather than a computer will help drive the take-up of new services, since many people are resistant to watching video content, particularly long-

form content, on a computer.

It will enhance the range of content available to audiences, and drive innovation in the way that such content is used. However, this is not just of benefit to people as consumers but also just as importantly to citizens since it will contribute to education, learning and cultural diversity. We therefore think that Canvas is a good use of licence fee money as it will help the BBC to enhance its delivery of a number of its public purposes (see answer to Question 7).

However, it will be important to ensure that citizens and consumers can easily find services that they looking for and that major services do not unduly dominate Canvas simply by virtue of their prominence on the equivalent of any Electronic Programme Guide. This makes it very important that search technology is optimized to ensure that users are able to navigate easily to whatever content and services they desire.

2. How important is it that the BBC improves access to its on-demand and online video content in the run-up to digital switchover and the launch of terrestrial HD television?

Do you think the proposals for Canvas will help to achieve this?

We believe that BBC services have an important role to play in contributing to the development of Digital Britain in the run-up to digital switchover. A good deal of BBC online content is already highly valued by citizens. However, as the Government's recent work on Digital Britain has made clear, more than 30% of households in the UK are not yet online.

Canvas, by making internet video content more easily accessible in the home, and to the benefit of several people rather than one - since it will be make content available on the television set rather than the computer - should help to drive interest in broadband among those who have not yet understood the benefits of signing-up to such services.

3. In what ways do you believe these proposals are different from other services or facilities available (or anticipated soon to be available) in the wider market?

The UK Film Council does not have detailed information about other similar services or proposals for such services. However, with the BBC at its heart, and with ITV as a public service broadcaster also as a shareholder, Project Canvas will serve specific public purposes and the citizen interest more generally in contrast to other services and facilities which are necessarily focused solely on the interests of shareholders.

4. *What effect, if any, do you think Canvas will have on consumption of on-demand television and radio content (including content that is currently only available through subscription based or paid-for services)?*

The UK Film Council believes that Canvas will have a very positive effect on such consumption.

By easing access to broadband content and services it will thereby encourage take-up of all kinds of services offering content by legal means - including subscription-based, transaction-based and advertising supported services as well as ones which provide free access to public service content (e.g. Directgov).

By encouraging take-up of such legal services, Canvas will help to stem online copyright theft and infringement which is currently widespread in relation to digital content, including films and other audiovisual material. We believe it will be necessary however to have rigorous technological measures in place to prevent people from accessing material which infringes copyright.

Canvas is also likely to have a very positive impact on the development of on-demand services for audiences, making available content in new ways. For example, Canvas could be the means by which it becomes possible to view, on-demand, thousands of hours of film material from national and local archives, to watch plays from anywhere in the UK, to call up moving image content about art exhibitions of every size and shape across the UK all with supporting editorial content and context. Alongside such content audiences could be encouraged to comment and supply their own context via wikis and blogs.

As such Canvas is very likely to encourage the development of new video services for the benefit of audiences either by existing organisations or new entrants. For example, the British Film Institute, which is funded by the UK Film Council to advance its cultural and educational purposes, and other cultural organisations such as the Tate and the Royal Opera House have rights to both new and archive content which they may wish to make available via Canvas.

The ability that Canvas potentially offers to organisations content available to audiences of a potentially significant size and using a single set of standards is extremely attractive. The advent of broadband provides a "once in generation" opportunity to massively expand public access to culture. Canvas could be used to enable creative talent and publically owned cultural institutions to better connect their existing work with audiences in ways that were simply not possible in the analogue age.

5. *Is Canvas likely to be valuable, attractive and accessible to all licence fee payers? Does Canvas have a particular appeal to certain groups of people? Are there any groups who are likely to be excluded from enjoying any benefits of Canvas?*

The key determinant as regards the accessibility of Canvas to licence fee payers will be the price of the set-top boxes which carry the service. The UK Film Council believes that the BBC, as a key shareholder, and as a public organisation, has an important role to play in making sure that the price of a basic box is affordable to most households. Consideration should be given to subsidising the costs of boxes for low income households.

It is important that the content and services offered by Canvas are as accessible as possible to all licence fee payers, including those with disabilities.

6. *One of the stated objectives of Canvas is to drive take-up of broadband services in households with Freeview or Freesat which do not currently subscribe to a broadband connection. To what extent do you believe the proposal will achieve this objective?*

See answer to Question 2.

7. *The BBC's role is defined by six 'public purposes', these are:*

1. *Representing the UK's nations, regions and communities*
2. *Sustaining citizenship and civil society*
3. *Promoting education and learning*
4. *Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence*
5. *Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK*
6. *Helping to deliver digital Britain.*

The Canvas proposal aims to make a significant contribution to the delivery of the sixth purpose, which includes:

Making engaging digital content and services available on a wide range of digital platforms and devices: the BBC will offer interesting and enjoyable programmes and services that can be received through many different devices such as digital television, digital radio, mobile phones and the internet.

To what extent do you believe the proposal, as outlined, will contribute to this public purpose?

We believe that Project Canvas could make a major contribution to this purpose for the reasons already set out in this paper.

8. Are there any other issues regarding the public value assessment of the Canvas proposals you would like the Trust to consider?

No.