

Summary: Advice for a future-proof public broadcasting service

Why this advice?

Independent and reliable public broadcasting – at national, regional and local level – is, according to the Council for Culture, a major asset. The programmes, websites and live streams that reach us through public broadcasting, portray and comment on the culture of the Netherlands. They connect population groups, they inform, teach and entertain us.

They enrich our lives. In other words: public broadcasting forms a supporting pillar under our constitutional democracy. And it will also need to serve this purpose in the future. This is no simple task, because changes take place constantly. Technological inventions keep on flooding in, media use changes right before our eyes. Five years ago HBO and Netflix were hardly known here. Hardly anyone followed the news primarily via smartphone and social media then. Meanwhile, we – consumer and producer – receive, create and share information and experiences everywhere, instantly and from any location. A modern and future-proof public media service must actively respond to and make use of these changes. The structure of this public media service must be set up in such a manner that it can handle these changes. Public broadcasting functions well in many aspects, but it is under pressure and is showing wear and tear. The technological changes and the international response to these changes from increasingly larger media conglomerates are an important factor. Reliable and independent media content is no longer self-evident. The public audience for traditional platforms such as television and radio is ageing, young target groups are harder to reach. The familiar political platform is eroding. The financing is drastically reduced. And the managerial pressure is considerable.

A change in how people regard public broadcasting is needed. Broadcasting which is focussed on radio and television must develop into a public media service which broadcasts on all platforms and cooperates with commercial parties and producers. The public media service will have to develop from a managerially complex into a creative network organisation in which the contents are the guiding principle. The Secretary of State for Education, Culture and Science has asked the Council for Culture for advice regarding the future of the public media establishment. His questions are, among other things, focused on the distinctive character of the programming, the encouragement of innovation and creative competition, on cultural and philosophical programming, the position of new media and mobile services, the role and organisation of the Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO), and on the possibilities of having new voices heard. This advice provides an answer to these questions. Sometimes these answers are far-reaching, because change is really necessary – but attention has also been paid to that which is good for and unique to the Netherlands and must therefore be retained.

How did this advice come into being?

The Council has asked a committee under the leadership of Inge Brakman to prepare the advice. The committee in addition comprised Pieter Broertjes, Petra ter Doest, Wim van de Donk, Pauline Krikke, Hans Laroës, Inge Ligthart, Paul Rutten, Peter Schrurs, Wim Vanseveren and Mathieu Weggeman. The committee was supported by Jaap Visser, Marleen Elshof and Martine Verweij.

In order to involve as much expertise as possible during the preparation of the advice, the Council formed four focus groups: Innovation, Organisation, Programming and Cooperation between broadcasting and press in the region. These groups worked under the chairmanship of, respectively, Erik van Heeswijk, Yvonne Zonderop, Gerard Dielessen and Allard Berends. These focus groups consisted of, among others, producers, journalists, and scientists. Their names can be found in the appendix to this advice.

The reports of the focus groups are published digitally on www.cultuur.nl. Additionally, the committee spoke with many experts and those involved in the field. An overview of these discussion partners is also included in the appendix.

The Council has asked Saskia Welschen to research the authorisation and task assignment of the public media service. Her findings are included in the appendix to this advice. In addition, the Council had Frank Huysmans conduct research into media use and media developments. His report 'Media, information and communication: trends and policy' is appended as a digital appendix to this advice. The committee has gratefully made use of both pieces of research.

The committee carried out its work in the period from September 2013 until February 2014. The efforts of the committee's members were intensive and conscientious; their brainpower and imagination were inspiring. The Council appreciates the work that they have achieved. It agrees with the findings of the committee and takes its advice on board.

What are the most important recommendations?

The advice from the committee results in the following recommendations:

1. Public broadcasting (public media service) must distinguish itself more clearly than presently by means of media content which is of public importance.

This public added value is presently measured according to established criteria such as independence, pluralism, reliability and cultural diversity. It is proposed to add innovative character, cooperation with third parties and participation by the public to these criteria. The public media assignment must be adjusted accordingly.

2. Public broadcasting is broad and for everyone, but does make clear choices regarding contents.

The priorities must be more clearly defined and better safeguarded. The priorities which are now the main focus in the

public broadcasting's programming (journalism, Dutch language drama & documentaries, children's programmes, knowledge & culture and events) form a good starting point. But they could change in the time to come. Not only the market share, but especially the reach is important.

There will be editors in chief who will bear ultimately responsibility for the contents of the complete offer. The basis is formed by a 'contract with society' in which public broadcasting describes what it will do and produce. The contract will be drawn up on the basis of broad consultation with the public, experts and producers.

3. The media establishment will also be opened up to parties other than the broadcasting associations.

Producers, media companies, and independent workers without employees with creative and innovative ideas can directly offer their programmes to the Netherlands Public Broadcasting. Because of this a renewed, open and versatile system arises with on the one hand broadcasting associations and on the other hand free media producers. This way new ideas and trends can obtain fast access to the public media service and the media establishment will become dynamic and modern. The advice is to open the 'strengthening budget for programmes', which is now 50% in accordance with the Media Act, also to outsiders. In practice the broadcasting associations as well as parties outside the media establishment will deliver programmes which are financed by these resources.

4. Public broadcasting programmes for all platforms; in addition to television and radio, also for new media and mobile platforms.

It is the contents that count. Not the platform, not the broadcaster – but programmes, productions, information. Distribution of content through public networks, now and in the future, no longer appears to guarantee that this will also be found when searched for. That is the reason why the public media can only effectively exercise its function if it knows how to reach the public and target groups on all platforms.

5. Public broadcasting has a guiding function.

Cable companies, telecommunication companies such as Google and YouTube are increasingly determining what the screen (on TV, PC, tablet, mobile, etc.) looks like and what one gets to see and hear. To keep public media content available and findable also in the future, it is of importance that the media user can properly find their way through the overwhelming quantity of information which is (inter)nationally available. Public broadcasting must therefore also be a 'guide'. For example, a portal (a kind of 'Catch-up +++'), however the technological developments arrive so quickly that in a number of years this provision will perhaps have an entirely different form. It is important that this provision is accompanied by context: explanation and indication about where the content originated from, by whom it was produced and why it was produced.

6. The Netherlands Public Broadcasting is given another updated role and organisation structure.

The Netherlands Public Broadcasting must increasingly assume the position of a network organisation, which cooperates with its public and offers access to citizens and other media organisations rather than only to the present players. To increase its recognisability, public broadcasting must change its focus from 'representation of' to 'relationship with' the public. This sets new requirements for the organisation and setup of the Netherlands

Public Broadcasting: it requires a media organisation with a creative heart, which is manoeuvrable and innovative and for which the producers are central. And which at the same time is stronger managerially and organisationally unambiguous. The Netherlands Public Broadcasting becomes a licensed broadcaster. This advice makes specific proposals for the setup of such an organisation.

7. The broadcasting organisations focus more on specific public groups and themes.

The broadcasting organisations give form to their identity by focusing on the public. Instead of representing them, they focus on the relationship with and participation by the public. Society demands new forms of connection and the associations can fill a role in this pre-eminently. The associations and the Netherlands Public Broadcasting are inspected every five years by a review committee. Connection with the public, quality and cooperation with other broadcasters and organisations are several of the aspects on which they are assessed. Connection with the public can be demonstrated in various ways, which is the reason why the membership criterion lapses as concrete requirement. Every five years new organisations have the continued possibility to join the broadcasting establishment, subject to the condition that there is a demonstrable link with public groups and added value. This way there continues to be room in the establishment for new voices and trends.

8. Cultural and philosophical programming is pre-eminently public and deserves extra safeguards and a broad public reach.

The Media Fund lapses. The tasks and function of this fund can be implemented in conformity with the plans of the Netherlands Public Broadcasting subject to the condition that resources will also be deployed for youth, games and development of talent. Proposals for production of content, exactly as is the case presently with the Media Fund, will be subjected to an independent qualitative inspection. The earmarked amount for cultural media productions must be increased by the budget of the Co-production Fund National Broadcasting. Because from January 1st, 2016, the '2.42 –broadcasters' will cease to exist, the ideologies of world religions in public broadcasting must in the future be safeguarded in another manner.

The cooperation between EO and IKON, KRO/NCRV and RKK, VPRO and possibly Human take care of a part of those ideologies. The programming about other world religions and/or philosophical schools such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism forms part of the task assignment of the NTR.

The NTR also receives the assignment to fill in the blanks in the field of cultural programming.

9. An open establishment is desirable at regional level, in which public and private news organisations can pool their resources. In particular in the field of the provision of news and information there must be room for experiments and joint ventures between the private and the public sector, between daily papers and broadsheets and regional broadcasters. This is possible for example in the form of cooperation by means of which content is

delivered by a joint venture to broadcasters, newspapers and broadsheets, and also to new journalistic initiatives. National and regional broadcasters must start to cooperate in a more programmed manner in order to reach public provision of news and cultural programming as effectively as possible.

The managerial directing of the regional media provision must take place by an independent management which is appointed by regional parties.

In conclusion

Since the situation of regional journalism is worrying, the Council will detail recommendation number 9 in a supplementary advice about the future of regional journalism. The Council will also elaborately address the position and diversity of the public radio broadcasters in an advice still to come. The Council sees opportunities here to strengthen the informative position of public broadcasting by scheduling more airtime for background information, philosophy and art and culture.

The Council for Culture advises the Secretary of State and parties in the media field to take the findings and conclusions of the committee to heart. Use this advice to continue offering 17 million Dutch citizens qualitatively high-grade, relevant and beautiful productions and programmes. This is the time to implement changes.