

Policy Network at the Annual MeCCSA Conference Bradford, 14/16 January 2009

Report on Policy Network

There were a number of panels at this year's MeCCSA conference at which Policy issues were addressed, either directly or indirectly. Most directly, there was the panel on Day 1 on Policy and Regulation at which Tom O'Malley, Paul Smith and Sylvia Harvey set current debates around the future of Public Service Broadcasting (Ofcom recommendations to be published on Wednesday 21st January) within broader historical and political contexts: Tom on the historical roots of the Peacock report, 1986, on the financing of the BBC; Paul addressing Ofcom's relationship with the BBC and Sylvia raising concerns about the role of the new BBC Trust in 'approving new BBC Services, 2004-6.' She used the unfortunate example of the cancellation of the BBC's Online Homework Service for 5-15 year olds, 'Jam', as a case study to explore the regulatory role of the Trust. On Day 2, a panel on the coverage of the 1984 Miners' Strike, with Julian Petley, Simon Pople, Michael Bailey and Granville Williams, also raised still topical policy issues – also highlighting the work of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. More details of these papers can be found from their authors. At the Plenary on Thursday evening given by Shearer West, the director of research at the AHRC, Shearer mentioned with approval the fact that MeCCSA has a Policy Network. Subsequently Jonathan Breckon, the AHRC's new director of Policy and Public Affairs, has joined the Meccsa Policy Network list: his details are at <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News/Latest/Pages/DirectorPPA.asp>

Network meeting

Network meetings are always scheduled at the very end of the conference, when people are rushing to catch trains and planes – so it was gratifying that a diverse and fairly nationally representative group was able to remain to discuss policy network issues. These were: Thomas Lyons and Sylvia Harvey, University of Lincoln; Julian Petley, Brunel; Andrea Essen, Southampton; Einar Thorsen, Teesside; Melanie Self and Lyn Whittaker, Glasgow; Salvatore Scifo, Westminster/Marmara (Istanbul)- Web Editor; and Máire Messenger Davies, University of Ulster. Arising from discussions about members' own research interests and ideas for future network activities, the group decided:

1. To urge network members to read and respond to two major reports to be published this week: Digital Britain, the report from Lord Steven Carter (formerly head of Ofcom) to be published on January 26th 2009; and the Ofcom recommendations, following its review of Public Service Broadcasting, to be published on Wednesday 21st January 2009. Thomas Lyons volunteered to provide brief headline summaries from these reports, to circulate to members of the policy network, to encourage discussion. Stop Press: Thomas has already unearthed a report on a leaked copy of Digital Britain in the Financial Times and has circulated an email giving brief headlines from it – and also provides a link: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/99c48e86-e34c-11dd-a5cf-0000779fd2ac.html>
2. To hold a network event (for which MeCCSA funding could be forthcoming) – possibly in Glasgow, possibly in June 2009. This could take the form of a symposium, with discussion papers being presented by pairs of individuals, opening up a more general conversation for all participants. Possible topics: the major reviews on PSB; European issues; the role of the media unions (NUJ, Bectu); regions and nations; children's broadcasting.
3. To propose to the organisers of the 2010 MeCCSA conference at LSE, that there is a major policy theme in it – possibly with keynote and/or other speakers from outside the academy, emphasising the importance of our relationship with civil society.
4. Máire M. Davies to explore the possibility of funding and the possibility of Glasgow hosting the event with Christine Geraghty, the MeCCSA chair, who is also Professor at Glasgow.

Thanks to all who attended the meeting, and also to other Policy members who were at the conference, and stimulated much lively policy debate, but couldn't make the meeting.

Máire Messenger Davies
Co-ordinator, MeCCSA Policy Network