

Children should be seen and heard

Children's Express reports from the Children on Screen conference where young people's TV programming is rubbished.

The top names in British television gathered last week to hear viewers condemn children's programming as stale and out of touch. Children's Express was there.

Children's television is patronising, unrepresentative and exploitative, Childhood has changed since the days of the people that are making these programmes. according to disgruntled viewers who put their views directly to programme makers last week.

The British just stick with the same things over and over again, 12-year-old Sam Brown from Belfast told the Children on Screen conference, held at the National Film Theatre in London.

We've had Woof for as long as I can remember, and Blue Peter. We need a bit of variety. Childhood has changed since the days of the people that are making these programmes. We have different opinions, different views, and want to see different things.

Sam was one of 15 young people aged between 10 and 15 sitting on the children's council, which brought together youngsters from all over Britain to discuss the state of children's television. Also attending were producers, broadcasters and writers of children's programmes, including the BBC's director of programmes, Alan Yentob, and Andrea Wonfor, joint managing director at Granada. The event was organised by Channel 4 and the British Film Institute.

Children should probably watch less TV, said 12-year-old Lucy Mason from London, "because you don't see as many children hanging out on the streets any more, or going out and getting exercise. But it's not as safe as it used to be outside, so television is just an easy option. The problem is that adults don't know what children want to watch.

The children's council's high expectations included the need for proper representation of minority groups and less stereotyping. Television should give you an idea of what you're going to see in the real world, but in the real world disabled people get treated like another species, because we're not seen or heard about, said Lucy, who uses a wheelchair. Unless you're white, able-bodied and middle class, you're very under-represented in any type of television.

Another council member, 13-year-old Lucy Lloyd from Glamorgan, complained that she had had enough of watching Pingu and things like that. I want to see programmes for our age group. The programme makers should ask us what we like and then try and make something we do actually want.

She added: They don't really want us here, because they just want to make money and that's it. Hopefully their perspectives will be better for the future.

Echoing the thoughts of the council, a panel comprising reporters from Children's Express argued that ratings matter more than quality and innovation in the cosy world of children's television.

All producers have to do is make money, said Moynul Mustafa, 15. That's their job. Blue Peter has been going on for about 25 years, and we're still watching it because we're having to watch it. If the producers don't want to change anything, they don't have to.

Television ratings were not considered to be an accurate indicator of a programme's worth. Blue Peter came in for particular criticism as a programme that would gain good ratings because there's nothing else on.

Each channel should get its own panel of children to come in once a month and talk about what they've seen on TV, said Daniel Blackwood, 15. And then they can sit down, talk to the people in charge and explain that, even though the ratings are high, no one likes it.

Although the conference itself was seen as a step in the right direction, the children involved were not confident that their contributions would lead to any changes.

The industry would no doubt point to the International Charter on Children's Television as a positive sign. First presented at the World Summit on Children and Television, which took place in Melbourne in March 1995, the charter proffers a set of benchmark principles to help protect quality children's television. These call for programmes which allow children to develop physically, mentally and socially, and to express themselves, their culture, language and experiences.

The Children on Screen conference identified several elements that are missing from the charter, notably a lack of any ongoing consultation with children about what they want. It is clear from the conference that there is still a considerable gulf between the programme makers and their target audience.

About the team

Report by: Daniel Blackwood, 15, Moynul Mustafa, 15, Erica Rutherford, 15, Kim Ijolah, 11 and Michelle Ijolah, 9. It was published in the [Times Educational Supplement](#).

0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)