

**11TH REPORT FOR THE PROGRAMME ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR ENGLISH PROGRAMMES
(2005/2007)**

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1 This Report by the Programme Advisory Committee for English Programmes (PACE) covers the period of the Committee's term from 1 August 2005 to 31 July 2007. The Chairman and members of PACE are drawn from a wide section of society, comprising different ages, fields of interests and expertise, including the arts, sports, academia, non governmental organisations and the private sector.

2 They were appointed by the Minister of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) for a term of two years. There are 33 members in the Committee which is chaired by Prof Leo Tan (please refer to *Annex A* for the list of PACE members).

Role of the Committee and Tasks Performed

3 For the period under review, PACE held a total of 13 meetings. During the course of these meetings, the Committee also took the opportunity to meet with the programming staff of the various channels to gain a better understanding of the challenges in programming faced by the broadcasters as they balance the needs to remain relevant to viewers while watching their bottomline. PACE undertook the following tasks:

- Provided feedback and advice on the range and quality of broadcast programmes, and made recommendations for improvement;
- Provided feedback and advice on broadcasters' exercise of standards in programmes and advertisements;
- Gave advice on the validity of public complaints on programming; and
- Provided support and advice to MDA in the formulation of broadcast guidelines, gathering of programme feedback and public education.

4 In addition to the regular meetings held, PACE's views on programming standards were also sought through specially arranged viewing sessions as well as via email to obtain members' inputs on the drawing of guidelines and the suitability of programmes and advertisements for telecast.

5 The Committee, in representing public views, gave their advice on various programming issues including the depiction of gambling, and the suitability of having condom advertisements on TV and radio. In addition, they provided comments on MDA's content guidelines, including the sponsorship of TV and radio programmes to ensure that programmes are not overly commercialised.

6 The use of new media such as the Internet has enabled members to engage in virtual discussions on issues which extended beyond the time allocated for face-to-face meetings, and provided MDA with timely information and feedback on a range of topics and issues.

SECTION 2: RANGE AND QUALITY OF BROADCAST PROGRAMMES AND PACE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

a) General Issues

7 On the whole, PACE was generally satisfied with the attempts by broadcasters to come up with more innovative, quality local programming in order to engage viewers, programmes like *The Dance Floor*, *Parental Guidance* and *Random Acts*. Members also enjoyed quality acquired programmes offered by the channels, like *Super Nanny* on Arts Central and the *Documentary of the Week* series on CNA. However, it was observed that broadcasters still have the tendency to fill timeslots left vacant when a series ends with the same type of slapstick programming like *Mr Bean* and *Just for Laughs* which have been repeated many times over.

8 PACE is pleased to note that broadcasters have been somewhat receptive to calls for engaging youth programmes. In particular, members found the programme *The Arena* a commendable effort whereby the broadcaster worked with schools to involve youths in a programme. The traditional debate format was also revamped to make it more appealing and relevant to youths today and encouraged the participants to think on their feet. However, the number of quality programmes targeted at youths has remained small during the period of review as broadcasters continued to target either the younger age group or general audience in its programming.

9 On the issue of content standards, PACE noted that the number of breaches during the period of review has been stable over the two years and is in fact slightly lower than during the previous period. This is despite MDA receiving more feedback from the public. PACE is pleased to note that the public is becoming more proactive in highlighting concerns on programme content standards to MDA, even though, upon investigation, the cases may not lead to action taken against the broadcasters. Members however, expressed concern over the increased feedback on religious issues in programming both on free-to-air channels and cable, particularly those which capitalised on the controversy surrounding the release of the movie *The Da Vinci Code* in 2006. PACE urged broadcasters to exercise more discretion on what should and should not be shown, taking into account our multi-racial society. Members also noted that while the range of variety of programming available has increased, feedback from the public still tends to centre on free-to-air programming content, which shows that the main concern is still over content that is most accessible to the public.

10 The following section contains PACE's observations and recommendations on the range and quality of broadcast programmes by genre.

b) Children's Programmes

11 Members were generally pleased with the quality of local children's programmes like *Bring Your Toothbrush* and *Groom My Room Too* as these programmes were both entertaining and educational. Other programmes like the locally produced *Expedition: Thailand* were also found to be informative as they expanded children's view of the world by showcasing interesting places.

12 PACE felt that while popular cartoons like *Spongebob Squarepants* and *Clifford The Big Red Dog* could be offered to viewers to add variety to the range of programming available, these should not be excessive and should be balanced with

other types of programmes like children's dramas and documentaries which are wholesome and have educational value.

13 Members would like to stress the need to uphold the use of proper language in local programmes. Members found the dialogue in the children's drama series *Ubin Boy* to be "babyish", and in some instances proper language was not used. Members would like to encourage broadcasters to uphold the standards of spoken English in all local programmes, as these set the benchmark for young viewers on what is acceptable and what is not.

14 With regard to Kids Central's talent contest *One Minute of Fame*, while it was acknowledged that this contest had entertainment value and was well received by the public, members were concerned that many of the child contestants dressed up and performed as sexy adults. As the way in which children are portrayed (especially in local productions) conveys to viewers the impression how children would behave, PACE urges Kids Central not to send the wrong message that one has to dress or behave sexily/ provocatively in order to win a contest.

15 Members expressed their concern on the lack of programmes for children aged 8 to 12 years. Members felt that it is a common problem where children's programmes usually target a lower age group, hence neglecting those in the higher primary level. As a result, the 'tweenies' and early teens end up watching programmes catering more for adults, an issue that needs to be addressed.

16 The following are PACE's suggestions for children's and youth programming:

- In order to get children involved in sports, Kids Central could explore having programmes for kids highlighting school sports, inter-school tournaments and brief updates on sport event for youths, which will also be a good way to promote sports among children.
- To educate children on Singapore's relations with the region, there could be News and Current Affairs programmes specially tailored for them
- For Kids Central to have short information segments/ interstitials to inform children about general knowledge in a fun, bite-sized matter.
- For there to be programmes that promote National Education from the perspective of children and youth (e.g. to use young presenters for the programmes to make it more appealing to viewers, and move away from the usual history lesson format).
- Broadcasters to consider going to schools, neighbourhoods, parks, etc to feature interesting programmes/ initiatives there as seen from a child's point of view. Children can be encouraged to write in to say what they like about these places. This will allow children to let viewers see things from their perspective and could be popular with primary school children.
- For broadcasters to consider having children's version of quality programmes like "*Against the Odds*" shown on Channel 5 which features individuals who make it through the hardship in battling their medical conditions.

c) Entertainment Programmes

17 In terms of the range and quality of entertainment programmes offered, PACE had mixed reviews. While members were pleased with programmes like *The Dance Floor*, *Singapore Idol*, *American Idol* and *The Amazing Race* which provided

wholesome entertainment for the family, as well as crime dramas like *Law & Order* and *CSI* which were well-scripted and had intriguing storylines, there were also other programmes which members felt left much to be desired. Programmes like *Extreme Gourmet* and *Fear Factor* were cited as programmes which members gave their thumbs down as they tried to attract viewers by being as off-putting as possible.

18 The Committee also noted that there should be more original programming of local content. It is felt that reality programmes on TV have become passé and that, in terms of viewing trends, there has been a shift back to drama.

19 The improvisational drama series *Do Not Disturb* about what transpired between seven couples behind closed doors came to mind as a refreshing change with its creative concept and production. At the same time, PACE emphasized that given some of its controversial themes, it is still important that content should be kept within the grounds of decency and morals.

20 PACE noted that generally the broadcasters have refrained from using Singlish in dramas and sitcoms, following PACE's advice to broadcasters to improve the standard of English in local sitcoms and dramas. Programmes which contained Singlish include *Police and Thief* and *My Sassy Neighbour* on Channel 5. It was observed that the storyline of one of the episodes of Season 3 of *Police and Thief* even glamorised and condoned Singlish and ungrammatical English as Mark Lee's character directed a play with bad English and yet received loud applause from the audience. The Committee is of the view that while Singlish is a local flavour of English that has its charm, there is a need to consider the excessive use of it as it could affect the younger viewers who had not mastered the English language.

21 While there was found to be little improvement in the scripting for sitcoms, members were also pleased to note that there were attempts in local dramas to move away from the slapstick, mass entertainment sitcom format in dramas like *Parental Guidance* and *After Hours*, which did not target the lowest denominator, but instead relied more on witty dialogue and quality directing to appeal to viewers. PACE also commends MediaCorp TV Channel 5's efforts to invite the public to submit scripts for *Phua Chu Kang* skits which not only gave the public the opportunity to play an active role in contributing content to the channel and use their creative juices, while giving the sitcom a worthy send-off after 10 seasons.

22 With regard to gag programmes like *Gotcha*, members are of the view that while there was nothing wrong with playing jokes on people for the sake of a good laugh, this should be done with discretion and not at the expense of the victims' wellbeing, whether they are members of the public or employees of the broadcaster. In the episode of *Gotcha* where MediaCorp Radio deejay Carrie Chong was scared into believing that she really saw ghosts, PACE felt that Carrie looked genuinely affected by the prank. Members are of the view that unlike another gag programme *Punked* which aimed to frustrate the victims and test their level of tolerance, *Gotcha* in this instance frightened people without their consent. The scene of the gag when Carrie was spooked which included using children as elements of the supernatural, when looked at in its entirety, had crossed the line of what was acceptable as a gag programme.

23 Members recognised that Arts Central wanted to offer viewers the option of non mainstream entertainment programmes that were not found on mass channels like Channel 5. However, they found the entertainment programmes on Arts Central like *Green Wing* and *Desert Punk* to be rather crude and sexually vulgar, and urged

the programming belt to differentiate itself from other channels by offering more quality programmes, rather than showing low-brow humour.

24 PACE makes the following recommendations for entertainment programmes:

- For broadcasters to exercise caution when trailing programmes which could be disturbing for children. Members suggested that the broadcaster consider cutting two versions of their trailers for programmes with horror or mature themes, one that will be suitable for family viewing, and another for after watershed hours and are pleased to note that MediaCorp TV Channel 5 has indicated that they are agreeable to the suggestion.
- Proper usage of English to be incorporated into programmes. For example, there could be a game show with re-enactments of wrong usage of English, and contestants have to identify instances where usage was wrong, which can illustrate how correct English should be used in those instances. Broadcasters should also ensure that artistes, especially those who are from Chinese-speaking backgrounds undergo the necessary language training before they are cast in English dramas and sitcoms.
- The Committee again notes that all production areas especially in the areas of performance and scriptwriting should be improved. Citing the example of *Seconds of Disaster*, a documentary-drama series with an investigative approach shown on National Geographic Channel, PACE recommended that more of such quality programmes could be outsourced to credible production houses and talents.

d) Arts and Culture Programmes

25 PACE were pleased that the quality of arts programmes on the channel had generally improved during the period of review. In terms of local programmes, members noticed that Arts Central had moved away from the conventional arts programme formats of straightforward profiling of personalities and reporting of arts events, to more slick and innovative programme formats with high production quality. In particular, members felt that *9 Lives* was a well-produced show with an interesting premise and they also liked the FilmArt series on Sunday evenings 9pm and the "Lifestyle" series on weekdays 9pm.

26 Members were also pleased that Arts Central had been somewhat receptive to the Committee's earlier concerns over the re-branding of Arts Central whereby more traditional arts were given less prominence on the belt. They had earlier felt that the "Critics' Pick" series on Arts Central was somewhat of a misnomer, as some of the dramas shown, such as the award-winning *Sopranos*, did not seem to go with the Arts Central branding of being the home of the arts. With the changes made to the Arts Central programming grid from April 2007, members were pleased that an arts performance belt has been introduced from Tuesdays to Fridays at 11pm, and Japanese anime previous shown from Wednesdays to Fridays at 11pm have been moved to a later timeslot of midnight on Mondays to Wednesdays.

27 Members also noted that with effect from April 2007, while Arts Central had increased its weekly transmission hours from 18 hours to 21 hours per week, this was due to the addition of post-midnight programming of Japanese anime on Mondays to Wednesdays. Members therefore were still concerned over the late transmission of arts programmes since the Arts Central belt only comes on from 9pm. While it was recognised that this was due to scheduling constraints as the belt shared the channel

with Vasantham and Kids Central, PACE was of the view that the late timeslots of programmes of this genre could hinder efforts to make the arts accessible to viewers, and efforts to showcase quality arts programmes could go to waste.

28 While other programmes like *Super Nanny* and *Planet Earth* were found to be of high quality and with much informational value, members felt that these seem more appropriate for other channels, and their presence diluted the amount of arts and cultural content on the programming belt. Members expressed that actual arts and culture should be the focus of programmes in Arts Central, and the move from what is right to what is popular should not be extreme. Niche programming should not be provided at the expense of arts programmes. Noting Arts Central's intentions to provide more varied programming to cater to the needs of its audiences and to brand itself as a channel that offers not only arts programmes but many other lifestyle programmes, PACE suggested that the Arts Central belt be renamed to reflect this.

29 **The following are PACE recommendations for arts programmes:**

- For other MediaCorp channels to carry programmes on arts and culture to enable Arts programmes to reach more viewers. In this aspect, members recognised CNA's efforts to include some Arts-related programming in the documentaries it schedules. These however, cannot be seen as a substitute for an arts belt as arts programmes on the former are scheduled on an ad hoc basis.
- For there to be more documentaries with arts as a theme. For example, Arts Central should consider airing documentaries on inspiring Arts teachers or on well-known writers of classics like Mark Twain.
- For arts programmes on Arts Central to be cross-promoted on other channels and mediums as and when possible to create greater awareness of them.

e) **News, Current Affairs and Info-educational Programmes**

30 Members were generally pleased with the overall quality of News reporting and current affairs programmes during the period of review. They were satisfied with the current balance between the coverage of international news, domestic news and regional news.

31 In terms of providing up-to-date news coverage, PACE is pleased to note that CNA's speed of getting and reporting breaking news had improved since the days of the Asian tsunami when the initial reports trailed behind those of other news channels. Its swift reporting and analysis of the Thai coup was cited as an example of a commendable effort to bring to viewers the latest developments in Asia, ahead of other news channels like CNN and BBC.

32 PACE also found CNA's efforts to bring in quality documentaries that were aired in its "Documentary of the Week" specials commendable. Members found the documentaries to be refreshing, interesting and adding to the programming variety on the channel while retaining its branding of a news and information channel.

33 PACE commended the various MediaCorp channels on their comprehensive coverage and special features that were shown in the days following the demise of Singapore's former foreign Minister Mr S Rajaratnam.

34 In line with CNA's series to feature distinguished personalities, the channel also won points for featuring distinguished Asians who are giving back to Third World Asian countries in programmes. This includes "Asians of the Year" which profiled unsung heroes in six categories spanning the environment, social causes, medicine/science, business, education and the arts.

35 It was however noted that the News file on CNA's weekend programming does not appear to be strong, as the channel shows a lot more lifestyle programmes. To bolster news content on weekends, it is suggested that there could be packaged news features that can be prepared ahead and shown on Saturdays and Sundays to complement the lifestyle programmes already on the channel.

36 While members recognised the need for CNA to rely somewhat on part-time newscasters to cover the regulars during times like weekends, it is observed that the part-timers have a range of accents (from American to Filipino) and appear quite raw in their news delivery. The use of tenses in their reporting is sometimes not even consistent. The Committee expressed concern over this as the English news channel is usually seen as setting the benchmark for the English language.

37 **PACE makes the following recommendations on news, current affairs and information programmes:**

News and Current Affairs Programmes

- Newscasters and reporters to undergo training to improve the delivery of the stories they bring to viewers before they are put on air
- Consider local interview series equivalent to CNBC's *Hard Talk* or CNN's *Larry King Show* which would allow issues to be discussed openly and frankly.
- Informative and well put-together local current affairs programmes devoted to making sense of hot topics ranging from the impact of global warming to bird flu to why Aids continues to be a big problem. These can be hard-hitting, well-researched pieces, with graphics and interviews with prominent experts to explore issues of concern in-depth.
- CNA to incorporate quality acquired news documentaries like *60 Minutes* and *Panorama* into its regular programming

Info-educational Programmes

- For there to be more documentaries on Singapore such as those on Singapore's history and heritage
- More local programmes on home décor and cooking to appeal to the segments of the population like homemakers and retirees
- More programmes like the Discovery Channel's *I Shouldn't Be Alive* should be shown on free-to-air platforms as the programme highlights and teaches youths to survive in various situations
- To extend the reach and benefits of quality documentaries, programmes previously shown on Arts Central (e.g. *the Walking with Monsters and Dinosaurs* series) at earlier timeslots during the Kids Central time belt in order to allow younger viewers to be able to catch these quality documentaries which would be of interest to them.

f) Sports Programmes

38 Members were pleased to note that MediaCorp as and when possible, made an effort to show “live” matches which Team Singapore had medal hopes in (e.g. during the coverage of Asian Games and Commonwealth Games), as this allowed viewers to support our athletes and follow the Games more closely. However, there continued to be little, media coverage of disability sports. With Singapore likely to win its first Paralympics Games medal in Beijing in 2008, this significant event is history in the making, and members urge the free-to-air channels to provide coverage so that local viewers can witness this.

39 The Committee continued to have concerns over the status of the coverage of local sports events on TV, especially on free-to-air channels. They observed that local sports events continued to receive little coverage, were sporadic in nature, and those which were eventually telecast were seldom trailed, hence there was a lack of viewer awareness and viewership. Recent successes at the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, FESPI (Games Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled) and ASEAN Football Cup have demonstrated our athletes’ abilities. The media can showcase our nation's talented sportsmen and sportswomen, and foster nation-building.

40 In line with the government's new initiative to position and establish Singapore as a regional Sports Hub and the recent establishment of a Sports School in Singapore, members urge the mass media to help to create the desired sports culture that would lead our sportsmen and women to sports excellence.

41 As for the FIFA World Cup event in 2006, members shared the public’s concerns on the limited number of matches available on free-to-air channels, though they recognised that SCV had obtained the exclusive telecast rights of the matches at a high price and was therefore unable to provide more matches to MediaCorp free-of-charge. The decision for SCV to show an additional four matches on its Preview Channel on top of the four matches on MediaCorp TV Channel 5 was welcomed as it made the FIFA World Cup a little more accessible to viewers. As the FIFA World Cup is the most-watched sports event in the world, PACE would like to urge broadcasters to work together to provide the public access to as many matches as possible in future FIFA World Cup events, bearing in mind the need to strike a balance between having a sound business case for telecasting the matches and the general public’s access to matches.

42 As SCV has secured the exclusive rights to broadcast English Premiere League (EPL) matches in Singapore for the seasons 2007 to 2010 and recently increased its subscription fees including those for the sports channels, PACE expressed concern over how this would affect viewers who have to pay to watch the matches and other sports.

43 PACE recommendations for sports programmes are:

- Continue to provide “live” coverage of our athletes in action as this would enable viewers to follow the sport and support our sportsman in real time, which has a greater impact on national bonding and social cohesion rather than simply hearing the reports of our athletes’ success after the event is over.
- There should be regular sports programmes, rather than programming that is sporadic in nature and riding on the euphoria of selected competitions. This can be in the form of a sports magazine programme or weekend sports show,

which can highlight the happenings in the local sports scene, as well as profile up-and-coming local athletes, teams, officials to further raise the awareness of professionals in these areas of sports.

- Inter-school tournaments especially the final rounds of track and field events as well as sports games be featured on TV to interest youths in sport.
- To engage the public to participate in sports programmes either via suggestions or voting for their favourite sports clips of the week, play of the week, personality of the week, news feature of the week etc
- Broadcasters to consider airing other forms of sports programmes rather than just 'live' telecasts or packaged highlights, e.g. programmes on sports development, documentaries on sports mega structures/ stadiums, athletes' profiles, lifestyle features, research and business. These would help fuel interest in sports in Singapore.
- Consider running old footages or programmes of past sports achievements, competition coverage, races, matches by Singaporeans. This can help fuel interest in sports, further inspire the young to reach for their goals and further promote sports as an industry and a vehicle for social integration and community bonding.

g) Programmes for the Elderly

44 While it was noted that there was some attempt to provide programmes for this age group (e.g. *Prime Candidates* on CNA and *Yang Sisters* on MediaCorp TV Channel 5), there was still a general dearth of English programmes catering for the elderly on the free-to-air channels. Members observed that there did not seem to be any channel which made any specific attempt to tailor its programming to cater to this age group as it was assumed that the elderly would simply watch what the other members of their family were watching. While MediaCorp TV Channel 5 does show some programmes on home improvement and cooking in the daytime on weekdays, PACE considers these as more general interest programmes for the non-working population rather than programmes targeted at the elderly and addressing issues that the elderly face. With the average lifespan increasing and Singapore having a rapidly greying population that has more spending power and being more educated as compared to their predecessors, PACE urges the broadcasters not to ignore this segment of the population in their programming as they would have an increasing impact on society.

45 The following are some suggestions for programming for the elderly:

- To have more programmes that address issues that the elderly face, e.g. health issues, retirement planning, empty nest syndrome, etc
- To have programmes showing how the elderly live fruitful lives whether it be in dramas or information programmes. Our local broadcasters can emulate what Hallmark Channel does – show movies featuring old age as the best time in one's life.

h) Radio Programmes

46 Members were generally satisfied with the efforts of programming on radio to cover a range of topics and attempts to reach out to various segments of listeners, ranging from the youths to working professionals and retirees.

47 They however, expressed concern over radio's continued ability to remain relevant to the youths of today who are more comfortable with podcasts and broadband which are better able to fit into their lifestyles. The Committee urged MediaCorp utilise its other media platforms like TV channels and its magazines to advertise its radio podcast (www.podcast.sg) in order to engage this segment of the population.

48 At the same time, PACE also cautioned that some radio DJs, including those on Class 95 and 987FM, have become too liberal with sensitive topics such sex on their programmes and that such programmes should be scheduled at later times for more mature listeners. The members also noted that experienced DJs have hit on the right formula on connecting with listeners without being offensive.

49 In terms of sports news on radio, members were pleased with the programmes *SportsZone* (dedicated sports programme) and *Sports Wrap* (sports updates) on 938LIVE. Sports Zone was commended for being more comprehensive in its sports content, as it highlights both local and international sports as well as features successful local athletes and upcoming sports events. With the introduction of *Sports Wrap*, the frequency of sports news has also increased on air. The Committee therefore applauds MediaCorp Radio for its attempts to promote sports and wishes TV will do the same.

50 With regard to the special interest radio stations, PACE was of the view that while Symphony 92.4 has niche appeal, it has established its own following by including radio programmes like interviews with artistes and performers as well as a music appreciation series in order to attract PMEB and young adult listeners. As for Lush 99.5 (under MediaCorp Radio) which replaced the former Passion 99.5 (by NAC), members noted that there were attempts to improve the station's programming from simply playing music throughout the day, to improving the variety of music offered by Lush in recent months and including more features on the local arts scene.

51 On music radio stations, especially during drive time, members noted that radio deejays subtly promoted products on air and made their endorsement of the products appear as part of their banter. This made it difficult for listeners to distinguish between what is sponsored and what is not. It was also observed that the amount of live talk as compared to packaged ads has increased. While the using of this format for advertising where the disclaimers are only put at the end of the advertisements is popular with advertisers, PACE would like to remind radio broadcasters that advertisements should be identifiable at their beginning and end of each of these sponsored segments. This will allow listeners to differentiate advertising content from programming.

52 With regard to MediaCorp Radio's competitors, the Committee felt that SAFRA Radio's Power98 continues to give the other stations a run for their money with creative programming. Members found Power 98's deejays Maggie Lim and Hossan Leong on the morning show *Morning Jam* to be a good team who work well together. As sports also features strongly on SAFRA Radio's stations, this adds to the overall awareness of sports. As for SPH UnionWorks' 91.3FM, the Committee observed that its recent revamp made it more similar to MediaCorp's Radio's Class 95FM, making it more appealing to PMEBs to tune in.

53 **The following are some suggestions on radio programmes:**

- There should be a clear distinction on radio programmes between what is sponsored and what is not. Members suggested that to better demarcate what

is sponsored and what is not, the deejay on duty should not endorse the product, but have someone else do it

- Instead of centering on local news, discussion topics could be expanded to include international news that affect Singapore
- Better management of call-ins. Deejays should be selective in the call-ins they air, instead of airing whatever that gets through to their lines, some of which don't really deserve airtime.
- Stations to consider playing longer stretches of music with interruptions only for informative commentary

SECTION 3: PACE'S CHOICE OF PROGRAMMES

54 As in previous reports, PACE would like to highlight some programmes members found to be of high quality, and by doing so, would like to encourage broadcasters to produce and schedule more of such programmes. Details are at *Annex B*.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

55 In an era where viewers are spoiled for choice with regard to media options available, PACE would like to urge broadcasters on traditional platforms like TV and radio to air unique, quality programming in order to anchor and retain its viewers. Broadcasters can also remain relevant by offering local programmes with content that the public can identify with, as well as harness the power of new media by making their content available on platforms like podcasts or broadband TV (e.g. MOBTV). This will enable broadcasters to reach out to the more tech-savvy consumers which tend to be those in the demographics of young working adults and youths who tend to devote more time to the Net rather than to traditional media forms.

56 Members would also like to encourage broadcasters to provide more programmes to cater to demographic groups like the youths and the elderly, as these tend to not have many programmes targeted at them. While the youths can turn to other sources of media entertainment, the elderly have less media options. With a larger and more sophisticated elderly population in the coming years, PACE urges broadcasters not to underestimate the power and potential of this demographic group in terms of shaping societal tastes and viewing patterns and therefore should consider channelling more of its programming resources to them.

57 PACE would like to continue to support broadcasters' efforts to provide quality local and acquired programming in its bid to woo viewers, rather than resort to programmes that use slapstick/ low brow humour in order to be popular. This will help develop a more sophisticated taste among the public, and in turn, this would send a strong signal to the industry to produce programmes of international standards which can appeal to local viewers and travel beyond our shores.

58 MediaCorp's response to the above Report are attached at *Annex C*.

Committee Members

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PACE's Choice Programmes

As highlighted in previous PACE Reports, the Committee would like to applaud programmes of notable quality, in order to encourage broadcasters to produce and acquire more of such programmes. The list of programmes below is for the period of assessment August 2005 to July 2007. It is to be noted that the list is neither exhaustive nor listed in order of merit.

CHILDREN'S/ YOUTH PROGRAMMES

Local Productions

Bring Your Toothbrush (Season 2) - Kids Central
This programme which features cultural exchanges when two kids swap families for two days has continued to remain engaging by featuring lesser known cultures and including interesting challenges for the participants to go through in order to learn something new about their 'adopted' family.

The Arena - Channel 5
The traditional format of the debate was revamped in this programme to make it more appealing and relevant to youths of today. It encourages the participants to think on their feet. The issues discussed were current and the practice where a different guest judge joins the panel of judges each week also allows fresh insights and advice to be dispensed to the participants.

Groom My Room Too - Kids Central
This programme encourages children to be creative in the makeover of their rooms and to come up with entrepreneurial ways to raise funds to up the budgets of their rooms' makeovers. The host Melody Chen is lively and keeps the level of energy in the programme high, making it an engaging programme for children.

Spell Cast - Channel 5
The spelling competition for primary school children is done in a fun and entertaining way. The capable host and getting parents to participant in the spelling also makes this an enjoyable and educational programme.

Acquired Productions

Art Attack - Kids Central
This is a long-running art and craft programme which encourages creativity and gives useful tips to children on art by showing how every day items can be made into interesting works of art.

Dora the Explorer - Kids Central
This preschool programme teaches children problem-solving skills in an interactive manner, encouraging children to respond verbally and sometimes physically when watching TV. The character Dora is also a positive role model for children as she a problem solver who does not give up when faced with obstacles, a caring friend who is ready to stop and help someone in need, and she is an adventurer whose curiosity and spirit lead her to explore the world.

Blues Clues

- Kids Central

Blues Clues is another preschool programme where the storylines promote learning through participation. This innovative show challenges the active minds of kids while building their self-esteem. Each episode sees Kevin, the live action host, and his puppy Blue interact with viewers as they investigate, discover, solve puzzles and play games.

ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMES

Local Productions

The Dance Floor

- Channel 5

This dance reality programme gives a breath of fresh air to the local productions on television and provided high entertainment value as it is a great platform that showcased young dancing talents in Singapore, especially the dancers who did not go through formal training and mastered their dances on their own. The programme format of announcing the competition results only on the following day or week also kept the audiences captivated.

Parental Guidance

- Channel 5

This drama stars Adrian Pang and Jessica Hsuan which explore issues and anxieties faced by modern day parents who have to juggle careers with responsibilities in the home moves away from the slapstick humour and Singlish dialogue found in many other local programmes. The scripting for this series is refreshing and the chemistry between the two lead actors was found to be excellent.

Against All Odds

- Channel 5

The docu-drama series shows about how ordinary people cope with their medical conditions. Medical explanations are weaved in together with the engaging plots. A heartfelt series that showcases survivors who make it through their hardship to battle their illnesses, *Against All Odds* is also educational. PACE members encourage programmes on tales of courage on TV in inspiring viewers on true life depictions of determination and survival.

Random Acts

- Arts Central

An ensemble cast (Lim Kay Tong, Lim Kay Siu, Vernetta Lopez, Deana Yusoff, Nicholas Lee, etc) star in the series of stand-alone episodes. It explores a myriad of genres as well as universal themes and emotions in an experimental series.

Acquired Productions

Heroes

- Star World

Heroes is a serial saga about people all over the world discovering that they have superpowers and trying to deal with how this change affects their lives. With its novel approach of for crossing genres and introducing a new style of watching entertainment programmes, it suspends the usual stereotypes that people have about heroes and presents a lot of good role models. Shown on Star World, PACE recommends that MediaCorp TV Channel 5 consider acquiring this programme.

24

- Channel 5

This was an innovative thriller drama, where the entire season took place in one day. The series has garnered a huge following of viewers with its different concept through the usage of real-time element, gripping storyline and cutting-edge editing.

Ugly Betty

- Channel 5

An award-winning dramedy series, *Ugly Betty* followed the daily work and personal lives of Betty Suarez and her boss, Daniel Meade. Betty who is not thin and beautiful like her co-workers at Mode, the high-fashion magazine where she works, faces many challenges. However, her hard work and determination earns Daniel's respect as she helps him find his way through the shark infested waters of the fashion industry. The series is known to promote 'Ugly as the New Beautiful' and has a following of viewers around the world, including Singapore.

My Name is Earl

- Channel 5

The series is about Earl, a guy who discovers karma and sets out to correct all the wrong things that he has done to his past. A comedy series that has a voice and style of its own, *My Name is Earl* is an example of a quality sitcom that continues to entertain viewers with its second series.

The Biggest Loser

- Channel 5

The reality series where 14 overweight participants are given an opportunity to undergo a radical physical makeover without any plastic surgery. The series encourage oversized people to understand their bodies and where viewers gather positive, informational tips. The entertaining factor of its reality-game concept makes topics like health more motivating and fun to watch.

Family Law

- Hallmark Channel

A heart-rendering series of family court room drama showing the main characters (family lawyers) and their struggles to help out their clients. This programme is not only thought-driven entertainment but reflects the vulnerability of individuals and the values they learn in the process.

Commander In Chief

- Channel 5

Nominated for various awards, *Commander In Chief* gives an interesting take on the presidential administration and family of the first female President of the United States. The series had an intriguing central theme that focused on gender than the character's capability but was unfortunately canned.

INFO-EDUCATION AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

Local Productions

Get Rea!

- Channel News Asia

This series which was hosted by Diana Ser touched on many pertinent current issues affecting different segments of society, from foreign workers to retirees and animal activists. By bringing these issues to light and exploring and discussing them openly in the programme, it gives viewers food for thought. It is a very engaging programme recommended for both youths and adults.

INSIGHT

- Channel News Asia

A favourite among local viewers, this weekly Current Affairs programme discusses regional and highly topical issues, one of which included the tribute to Mr S Rajaratnam.

Heartland Getaways

- Channel 5

This is colourful magazine show hosted by Chua Enlai that features the history, culture, people, food, shopping and activities of Singapore's neighbourhoods, a blend of unique elements that are close to the heart for local viewers. Viewers do not only gain

knowledge on the various heartlands and communities in Singapore. The programme's fast-paced, vibrant links, visuals and soundbites captured from the energy of each neighbourhood makes *Heartland Getaways* entertaining to watch.

Living Treasures

- Channel News Asia

This is a documentary series on the rich and diverse marine ecosystems that thrive on the shores of Singapore. *Living Treasures* features exclusive footages of Singapore's marine habitats and many of Singapore's marine species that allow viewers to rediscover and appreciate Singapore's marine life.

Prime Candidates

- Channel News Asia

The programme is about mid-lifers who show that age is not an issue when it comes to pursuing active lifestyles, and leading fulfilling lives in their prime of life. A programme that takes a turn to feature the older generation, *Prime Candidates* is an inspiring series for the young and old alike.

Acquired Productions

History of Singapore

- Discovery Channel

This documentary that was produced by the Discovery Channel in commemoration of Singapore's 40th anniversary was objective in reporting Singapore's history and credible without losing focus on the subject. The high quality of this production in terms of scripting, research and presentation has set the standard for local broadcasters to strive for.

Escape to River Cottage

- Asian Food Channel

This programme which was shown on the Asian Food Channel features Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall who decided to quit the bustle of London and takes on the life of a smallholder at River Cottage, a former gamekeeper's cottage in Dorset. Its emphasis on clutter-free, clean living is its draw, as Hugh aims to live the simple life by being by growing his own vegetables and raise his own animals for food and being self-sufficient.

Super Nanny

- Arts Central

This programme features Jo Frost, a nanny who in each episode, helps a family with children who are uncontrollable or excessively naughty using a variety of methods to discipline their children. This is a good example of a programme that uses the reality format successfully to entertain viewers while staying informative and relevant to its audience.

Nigella

- Arts Central

A lifestyle programme that makes cooking fun, *Nigella* shares her array of culinary skills and teaches viewers how to entertain guests, family and friends with food. While Nigella herself engages the viewers with her personality, the fast-paced and reality concept makes this cooking programme entertaining and refreshing. *Nigella* remains as the top 5 programmes on the Arts Central charts.

Oliver's Twist

- Arts Central

Celebrity Chef Jamie Oliver returns with *Oliver's Twist*, another engaging series on cooking where Jamie goes for his shopping expeditions, shares tips and insights of his selection of ingredients for an unforgettable meal that he will cook for his family and friends. Jamie's refreshing concept of cooking programmes, where real food are made for real occasions, garnered a great following around the world including Singapore since *The Naked Chef* series, his first series.

Planet Earth

- Arts Central

Planet Earth is the first natural history series to be filmed entirely in high definition that showcases visuals of awe-inspiring landscapes from all across the globe and the creatures that live in these habitats. *Planet Earth* positions at Number 1 in the Arts Central charts and proves to be a favourite among viewers. PACE members recommend *Planet Earth* as a quality programme that allows local viewers to appreciate the environment.

ARTS AND CULTURE PROGRAMMES

Local Productions

Generation Next (Season 4)

- Arts Central

This programme provided a platform to feature up and coming young Singaporeans and their different passions in the fields of music, art, community work and environmental care. The new season's faster pace and departure from the usual format of being profile-based also injects more life into the programme, and can appeal to younger viewers.

Travelling Palette

- Arts Central

The show which featured a different painting medium each week takes the audience through the tutoring and creative process, like an arts class for the audience. By showing side-by-side and "evaluating" the works produced by the master and the apprentice, the audience can also learn more about arts appreciation. This series also emphasised that where art is concerned, it is never too late and one can start at any age.

S: PUR – Singapore: Places under Renaissance

- Arts Central

The programme repels skepticism and proves that Singapore is an oasis in a desert of artistic torpor as it shows various unlikely locations that serve as fodder for inspiration to create various artistic works. Each episode traces the experiences of artists from different artistic genres and the conception and creation of their works. The completed works are then shared with the public for critique. For example, the percussion ensemble, Wicked Aura seek inspirations from Chinatown to create a percussion soundtrack for a Wushu group.

Frequency of the City 2

- Arts Central

Two musicians from different music backgrounds record sounds from various parts of Singapore and come together to collaborate on an original music composition. The completed work is showcased in the form of a music video at the end of the programme.

Front

- Arts Central

The series which entered its second season in 2007, offers a weekly look at the local art scene. It presents the arts in a light-hearted and accessible way.

Acquired Productions

Film Art

- Arts Central

This belt on Arts Central showcases foreign language blockbusters which serve as a platform for film buffs to keep updated on various style and execution of filmmaking from other parts of the world.

Momentum

- Channel News Asia

The programme on different art forms is very well produced. It has a good mix of interviews interspersed with footages of training, the creative process, rehearsals and performances. The pains suffered during training, the euphoria of a good performance, and the passion, commitment and sacrifices of the artists are all shown within a well paced 30-minute.

Live from Abbey Road

- Arts Central

Each episode offers three famous artistes from different genres who come into Abbey Road's legendary studios' 1 and 2 to pay tribute to this studio, and contribute three tracks each with exclusive interviews. The programme also gives the viewer unprecedented access into the studio, something that is really rare to come.

MEDIACORP'S RESPONSE TO PACE'S FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some of the responses from MediaCorp to PACE's feedback and recommendations given in this report.

Observation of English Programmes

Children's Programmes

Kids Central was pleased that the Committee recognises its efforts to improve its local programmes, with credit given to *Groom My Room Too*, *Bring Your Toothbrush* and *Expedition Thailand*. The broadcaster noted the concerns about the use of appropriate language and assures the Committee that it will continue to uphold the standards of spoken English in its dramas.

Kids Central agreed with PACE's views that children participating in its *One Minute of Fame* which returns this year should not behave provocatively. The channel has made an effort at this year's auditions to get parents to change the outfits of kids who dressed too sexily. It also informed parents to change the choreography of performances which they felt were too suggestive for children, and will continue to uphold these standards for the rest of the contest.

With regard to the Committee's concerns over the lack of programmes for teens and early teens, Kids Central informed that it has launched a new programme belt called FLUX on 7 April 2007 which is shown every Saturday on its channel from 2pm to 4pm. According to Kids Central, this belt showcases acquired programmes that will have greater appeal to older children and is also fronted by two FLUX Cruisers who can act as role models for the teens. The FLUX Cruisers give the latest updates in areas that interest older children like fashion, friendship and technology. In order to promote a sense of belonging, viewers are encouraged to call themselves "FLUXsters" and do the FLUX move. The response to this belt has so far been good, and there are plans to enable FLUXsters to go online and interact with presenters and with each other on the FLUX blog.

Entertainment Programmes

Channel 5 agreed that the programmes *Extreme Gourmet* and *Fear Factor* relies on the discomfort factor to attract viewers. However, it feels that the saving grace for *Extreme Gourmet* was that the programme explored cultural curiosities in Asia and in this respect, had an information upside.

Arts Central expressed appreciation over the Committee's favourable views for its efforts to inject a new approach into series like *Do Not Disturb* and *Random Acts* and agrees that while continuing with this approach, it would keep in mind that any potentially controversial content should not challenge the lines of decency and morals.

Arts Programmes

Arts Central assured PACE that the channel has moved away from carrying programmes that were potentially crude like *Green Wing*. It was pleased that its efforts to showcase quality content has been viewed favourably by PACE and informed that it would continue to source for quality programmes for its Lifestyle belt and award-winning films for its FilmArt timeslot on Sundays.

Arts Central added that it would continue to develop strong local arts content with a focus on making them more appealing to a wider audience. Series like *Travelling Palette* and *Front* which had been commended by PACE would be returning for new seasons.

News, Current Affairs and Info-educational Programmes

CNA informed that the current weekend programming was arrived at to achieve a good mix of news and documentaries, such as lifestyle and business programmes which was in line with its “there is something for everyone” approach. The documentaries were meant to enrich and expose its viewers to different cultures, pursuits and in-depth issues. With a total of 13 news bulletins each on Saturdays and Sundays, this is comparable to weekdays where there are 16 news bulletins daily.

Sports Programmes

Channel 5 informed that it has always looked at ways to showcase and promote the various components of the local sporting arena and has been developing a programme which would feature our disabled athletes. The programme is scheduled for telecast in mid 2008 in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics.

With regard to the coverage of local sports events, Channel 5 highlighted that it covers key events like the Singapore Open, the FIVB (Federation Internationale De Volley-Ball) Beach Volleyball and the S League. Over the months, the ratings for S League had been generally low except for key matches played by the top four clubs. At the national level, the SEA Games will be covered extensively this December. Besides the coverage of key sports during the Games, there are plans to give viewers daily highlights of key events and a medal tally.

Channel 5 said that it was always within its plans to cover mass appeal international sports events such as the FIFA World Cup. However, due to recent intense competition, sports rights had become so inordinately expensive that it was not commercially viable for a free-to-air broadcaster to bid for them. Invariably, the rights would be won by other operators such as SCV or regional cable channels that hold different business models and objectives. MediaCorp always engages them in discussions to explore viable models that would enable carriage of these events on its channels. However, the broadcaster notes that free market forces would continue to dictate the success of such negotiations.

Radio Programmes

MediaCorp Radio agreed that the youths of today have many more media options at their disposal. However, it felt that radio still continues to fit into their lifestyle as FM receivers are included in many new gadgets like mobile phones and MP3 players. According to the Nielsen Radio Diary Survey conducted in 2007, radio remains a regular pastime among nine out of ten young people aged between 15 and 24, and MediaCorp Radio’s 987FM and Class 95FM were the most popular stations for this age group.

MediaCorp was of the view that by and large, its radio stations abides by the Radio Programming Code in the treatment of sensitive and sex-related topics. It will continue to monitor feedback from listeners, PACE and the community, and adjust programming and content as needed.

On Lush 99.5FM, MediaCorp Radio was pleased to inform that since April 2007, the station has further expanded its arts offering from two to four hours daily, with a new weekday morning programme from 6am to 10am which provides updates on the local arts scene, spanning areas such as dance, literary, music, theatre and visual arts, through interviews with arts practitioners, administrators, educators and personalities.

Key Recommendations

Children's Programmes

Kids Central is currently developing a sports-related drama to help promote sports among children. In line with promoting National Education, it recently launched the NEmation contest, which is a joint effort with the Ministry of Defence. In this nationwide campaign; children are encouraged to use their creativity via digital medium to showcase themes of resilience. Kids Central also produced an interstitial series called *School Groove* which encouraged students to write in about their schools and these are featured on the channel. There are plans for the return of *School Groove* and Kids Central will explore the possibility of extending it to children to write in about their neighbourhoods.

Kids Central had noted PACE's recommendations to promote children's interest in current affairs and for programmes profiling exemplary children. It will work toward producing such content.

Arts Programmes

Arts Central would explore PACE's recommendation to have more arts content in its documentaries. It assured the Committee that the proliferation of arts remains a paramount priority on the channel and will continue to seek new ways of making arts accessible to the general viewer. It agreed that its arts programmes should be cross promoted on other channels.

News and Current Affairs Programmes

CNA informed that its newscasters were all full-time staff and it had a dedicated team of weekend presenters. CNA explained that its presenters speak in a wide range of accents as it had consciously built a team consisting of people from across Asia. All of them are tasked with achieving a high standard of spoken English that is clear, comprehensible and without affectation, and trained by a professional trainer and assessed by a panel of senior staff before they are allowed to go on air. They are also monitored, and refresher courses are provided regularly.

In response to PACE's request to conduct local interview series, CNA informed that it had produced and aired the *In Conversation* series 1 in 2006. The second series was scheduled to debut in late July 2007. CNA has also just begun airing a locally produced monthly interview programme entitled *The Interview*.

CNA highlighted its weekly current affairs programme *Insight* as one which focuses on a topic of the week and involves studio guests and in-depth analysis of issues. It had also produced documentaries such as *Flu 1, 2, 3* a three-part series on the avian flu. In addition, it had aired international documentaries on global warming, the avian flu and AIDS on its weekend documentary belt.

CNA will continue to acquire news documentaries from various sources if they are on topics of interest to Asia.

Info-Educational Programmes

Arts Central informed that the programme *I Shouldn't Be Alive* which the Committee mentioned as a programme which highlights and teaches youth to survive in various situations will be soon shown on one of its documentary belts.

Kids Central indicated that it had been showing documentaries suitable for children since 2001 and aired *Walking with Dinosaurs* on Kids Central in September 2006. It will continue to schedule documentaries suitable for children on its channel.

Sports Programmes

Channel 5 had been seriously exploring the possibility of producing a weekly sports programme that highlights the local sports scene and local athletes and had been working with the relevant authorities to introduce the series. It agreed that there was scope for more local sports programmes and was looking into it.

Radio Programmes

As to the perception that there is no clear distinction between "live talk" and advertisements, MediaCorp had taken note of the earlier feedback on this issue. Since April 2006, its stations had demarcated such sponsored 'live' talk segments clearly at the beginning and the end of each segment.

It thanked the Committee for noticing its efforts to make an impact with uniquely formatted stations like 938LIVE, Symphony 92.4FM and Lush 99.5FM, which complemented its English music stations Class 95FM, Gold 90FM and 987FM.