Assessment Procedures for C and P Classification

The Children’s Television Standards

The Children’s Television Standards (CTS) require commercial television licensees to broadcast minimum annual quotas of children’s programming. All C (children’s) and P (preschool) programs must be classified by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) before broadcast on free-to-air commercial television.

The objectives of the CTS are to ensure that children have access to a variety of quality television programs made specifically for them, including Australian drama and non-drama programs, and to provide for the protection of children from possible harmful effects of television.

Program makers must lodge applications for C or P classification of drama or non-drama programs with the ACMA. Classification decisions are made on completed programs or on proposed programs, including proposed Children’s drama programs at pre-production stage.

Classification categories are:
- Provisional C
- C classification
- C Drama at pre-production stage
- C Drama
- Provisional P
- P classification

Program classification is based on criteria contained in the Children’s Television Standards (CTS) and the Australian Content Standard. The Australian Content Standard includes specific criteria which a C, P, or C drama program must meet in order to qualify as an Australian program. These standards are available from the ACMA’s Sydney office or the ACMA’s website at www.acma.gov.au

The criteria against which the ACMA assesses applications for C and P classification are set out at CTS 6. All programs, whether at provisional or full C or P stage, must meet all the CTS 6 criteria. CTS 6 states that a children’s program is one which:

(a) is made specifically for children or groups of children; and
(b) is entertaining; and
(c) is well produced using sufficient resources to ensure a high standard of script, cast, direction, editing, shooting, sound and other production elements; and
(d) enhances a child’s understanding and experience; and
(e) is appropriate for Australian children.
For a more detailed discussion of the ACMA’s interpretation of these criteria see the companion document ‘Criteria for a Children’s Program’. This document explains the CTS 6 criteria and in particular:

- what makes a program specifically relevant to a child audience as opposed to a G (general) classified program;
- what is expected from a ‘well-produced’ program; and
- how the child audience’s understanding and experience would be enhanced by the program.

Programs that meet the CTS 6 criteria are granted classification for five years.

The assessment process

In its assessment of programs the ACMA does not necessarily focus on specific points within a program in determining whether or not classification should be granted. Rather, the ACMA considers whether the program as a whole deals with themes and issues in a manner appropriate to the target audience.

Applications for C or P classification are initially assessed by staff of the Broadcasting Standards Section of the ACMA. These officers either recommend the program be granted the classification sought by the applicant or seek further advice from external consultants.

The final decision about classification is made by the ACMA or by a delegated Member or officer of the ACMA, taking into account the advice received.

Referral to consultants

In cases where further advice is necessary, the ACMA requests specialist advice from independent ‘peer’ consultants from the production industry and/or child development consultants.

If the staff assessment raises queries about the program’s suitability for classification, the program is given to specialist consultants for assessment. The number of consultants’ reports requested depends on the program and the reasons why assessment is considered to be problematic.

All new programs submitted for Provisional P and P classification are sent to a minimum of two specialist consultants before final staff assessment. These consultants are usually early childhood/child development experts and, on occasion either production or script assessment experts.

The register of consultants

The ACMA has established a register of consultants from which it requests specialist advice on programs where queries are raised by the staff assessment or when a program is received for P classification. The register includes ‘peer’ consultants from the production industry with a range of different backgrounds, for example scriptwriting, production and editing. The register also includes consultants with expertise in child development and early childhood development, human learning and curriculum.

In order that the processes adopted by the ACMA for classifying programs under the Children’s Television Standards are made as transparent and open as possible, a copy of the register is published in the ACMA’s annual report.
The register was established to provide the Authority with expertise it may otherwise lack in regard to the child audience. The register of consultants is regularly reviewed, in consultation with relevant industry groups.

The ACMA does not disclose the identity of individual consultants engaged in connection with a program sent for assessment. Extracts of consultant’s reports incorporated into the ACMA’s report to the applicant will not contain identification details.

**What happens if classification is refused?**

If a program is refused classification, the ACMA provides the applicant with a statement of reasons for its decision. The statement sets out those areas where the program failed to meet the criteria against CTS 6. The consultants’ assessment reports are not released to the applicant.

The statement of reasons provides an overview of the grounds on which a program has been refused classification rather than setting out detailed reasons accompanied by specific examples from the program in question. In addition, staff of the Broadcasting Standards Section are happy to meet with applicants to discuss the outcome of their application.

Programs refused classification can be resubmitted but the applicant must make a genuine effort to address the reasons the program failed CTS 6, as set out in the statement of reasons.

**Consultation with the ACMA**

There are a number of stages within the formal application and assessment process where the ACMA and the applicant may discuss specific aspects of a program.

Many program producers seek feedback from the ACMA about storylines and script issues prior to submitting their application. Staff of the Broadcasting Standards Section are happy to make time available to discuss the application process in general terms with prospective applicants.

However, the ACMA is not resourced to provide detailed feedback on current or future projects outside the formal application process. The Provisional C or P classification category is designed to allow properly constructed feedback from the ACMA at an early point in the production process.

The ACMA will, when possible, discuss its preliminary assessment of a program with the program producer in an effort to resolve any perceived problems. This is particularly true when applications are incomplete or when the scripts submitted are still at a preliminary drafting stage.

However, the role of the ACMA is to assess programs against the criteria for classification, and to grant or refuse classification as appropriate. The role of the ACMA does not include acting as a script editor or as a child development consultant on a project. While the ACMA staff endeavour to provide useful feedback in a timely manner it is not feasible for the ACMA to provide detailed script-by-script advice before a final decision is made.
How long does classification take?
Assessments can take a maximum of 60 days for more complex assessments (particularly if the application has been referred to consultants), depending on the Broadcasting Standards Section’s workload.

The ACMA will endeavour to classify programs as quickly as possible once a complete application has been received. Incomplete applications cannot be assessed.

Required application materials
Applications for classification of children’s programs are made on Form ACMA B13. Copies of the form are available from the ACMA’s Sydney office or on the ACMA’s website at www.acma.gov.au

For more information about the material which should be submitted with an application please read the document ‘Application Requirements for C and P Classification’.

Review of decision
If an applicant wishes to seek review of an ACMA decision, a mechanism is available through the Federal Court under the provisions of the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977.

Further information
Further information about applications for C and P classification can be obtained from the ACMA’s website at www.acma.gov.au or the Broadcasting Standards Section in the ACMA Sydney Office on 02 9334 7700.

Contacting the ACMA
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