

The February issue of *ABA Update* provided information about children's programs classified in 1996. In this article, Nadia Mencinsky and Belinda Mullen of the ABA's Children's Television subsection, discuss the process by which programs receive a children's (C or P) classification.

How children's programs are classified



A provisional classification is for a proposed programs or those in the initial production stages. Programs with provisional classification cannot be broadcast as C or P programs, but the classification may be useful when obtaining pre-sale agreements or funding.

If a program is granted a provisional classification, another application must be lodged to gain full classification, either at pre-production stage or when the program is completed.

A commercial television station or program maker may therefore lodge an application for a program classification at different stages of development.

Criteria for classification

All programs, whether at provisional or full C and P stage must meet all of the criteria set out at CTS 2 to receive

The ABA's Children's Television subsection is responsible for administering the children's television standards, including the classification of children's programs: C: children's, P: preschool and CAD: C Australian drama. These programs are specifically made for a child (not a general G) audience, and have to be entertaining, well produced and likely to enhance a child's experience. C and P programs must be classified by the ABA before broadcast, whereas all other programs are classified G, PG, M or MA by the licensees.

- Provisional P; and
- P classification.

Classification categories

The classification categories are:

- Provisional C;
- C classification;
- C Australian drama (CAD);
- C Australian drama at pre-production stage;

The objective of the Children's Television Standards is:

Children should have access to a variety of quality television programs made specifically for them, including Australian drama and non-drama.

The Children's Television Standards (CTS) were developed after a public inquiry carried out by the (former) Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. They were adopted by the ABA in 1992 and amended in 1996.

Although the the regulation of program content under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* is by industry developed codes of practice, Parliament considered it necessary to continue regulation through compulsory standards in two areas: children's television and Australian content on free-to-air television.

The CTS require each commercial television licensee to show a minimum of 390 hours of pre-classified children's programs per year. Of these, 260 hours must be classified C, 50 per cent of which must be first release Australian programming. In addition, the 260 hours must include 28 hours of Australian children's drama (CAD) in 1997, increasing to 32 hours per year in 1998 under the new Australian Content Standard adopted in 1996. Licensee must also broadcast 130 hours of P classified programming. P programs must be 100 per cent Australian.

The CTS also contain standards which relate to the amount and type of advertising allowed during children's programs, prize giving, competitions and unsuitable material during the broadcast of C or P programs.

classification. CTS2 states that a children's program is one which:

- a) is made specifically for children or groups of children within the preschool or the primary school age range;
- b) is entertaining;
- c) is well produced using sufficient resources to ensure a high standard of script, cast, direction, editing, shooting, sound and other production elements,
- d) enhances a child's understanding and experience; and
- e) is appropriate for Australian children.

The ABA has extensive background information available on how to apply these criteria, in particular:

- what makes a program specifically relevant to a child audience as opposed to a general G audience;
- what is expected from a 'well produced' program; and
- how it is anticipated a child's understanding and experience would be enhanced through such programming.

Assessment procedures

The assessment procedure for classification is based on staff assessment and the use of independent specialist consultants. The final decision is made by a Member of the ABA. In cases when further advice is necessary, the ABA requests specialist advice from independent 'peer' consultants. These include production industry and child

development experts who have a range of different industry backgrounds.

Applications are initially assessed by officers of the Children's Television subsection. These officers either recommend the program be granted the classification sought by the applicant or seek further advice.

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

Program classification is then granted or refused by the ABA Member, on the basis of the advice received.

All programs submitted for Provisional P and P classification are sent to specialist consultants before staff assessment. In this case, they are usually two early childhood/child development experts and, on occasion, either production or script assessment experts.

Programs which meet the CTS 2 criteria are granted the classification for five years.

If a program is refused classification, the ABA provides the applicant with a statement of reasons on its decision. The statement sets out, against the CTS 2 criteria, those areas where the program failed to meet the criteria. The consultants' assessment reports are not released to the applicant.

Programs refused classification can be resubmitted but the applicant must make a genuine effort to address the reasons the program failed CTS 2 as set out in the statement.

Assessments can take a maximum of 60 days for more complex assessments (i.e. when referred to consultants), with less complex assessments usually being turned around within 30 days.

Consultation

The staff of the Children's Television subsection are available to meet prospective applicants at any time to discuss program proposals. Indeed, it is advisable to make contact in the early stages of development to ensure the requirements for classification are likely to be met. There is a wide range of information available to assist producers seeking to make an application – from information about the CTS 2 criteria and how the ABA interprets these criteria, to information about the type of material required for an application.

The staff of the Children's Television subsection are: Liz Gilchrist, Nadia Mencinsky, Belinda Mullen and Lachlan Habgood.

For more information, for copies of the Children's Television Standards, the Australian Content Standard and application forms, or to speak to the staff of the Children's Television subsection, call the ABA on (02) 9334 7700.

Programs granted C or P classification

Programs granted C or P classification between 13 January and 11 February 1997. Producers interested in submitting programs for classification should contact Liz Gilchrist on (02) 9334 7840.

Title	Origin	Class.	New/Renewal	Decision date	Applicant
JACK HANNA'S ANIMAL ADVENTURES (Series 3)	USA	C	new	15-1-97	Effie Holdings Pty Ltd
SCROOGE KOALA'S CHRISTMAS	Australia	CAD	new	7-2-97	Energiee Entertainment
THE MUSIC SHOP	Australia	P	new	30-1-97	Banksia Productions Pty Ltd

C - children's program CAD - C Australian drama P - pre-school program Class. - classification