

SECTION 1: THE BBC’S EDITORIAL VALUES

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Audiences are at the heart of everything we do.

We are committed to giving them high-quality, original and at times challenging output. Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation.

Equally, we must give our audiences content made to the highest editorial and ethical standards. Their trust depends on it.

We must therefore balance our presumption of freedom of expression with our responsibilities, for example to respect privacy, to be fair, to avoid unjustifiable offence and to provide appropriate protection for our audiences from harm¹

We seek to uphold the BBC’s Editorial Values in all we do. They embody our freedoms and responsibilities and, like the Editorial Guidelines, apply to all our content, whether it is made by the BBC itself or by an independent company working for the BBC, and whether it is made for radio, television, online, mobile devices, interactive services or the printed word. What follows are challenging requirements, but they are essential to everything we do.

1.2 EDITORIAL VALUES

1.2.1 Trust

Trust is the foundation of the BBC: we are independent, impartial and honest. We are committed to achieving the highest standards of due accuracy and impartiality and strive to avoid knowingly and materially misleading our audiences.

1.2.2 Truth and Accuracy

We seek to establish the truth of what has happened and are committed to achieving due accuracy in all our output. Accuracy is not simply a matter of getting facts right; when necessary, we will weigh relevant facts and information to get at the truth. Our output, as appropriate to its subject and nature, will be well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in clear, precise language. We will strive to be honest and open about what we don’t know and avoid unfounded speculation.

¹ The Human Rights Act 1998 recognises the right to freedom of expression, which includes the audience’s right to receive creative material, information and ideas without interference, subject to restrictions in law. It also recognises the right to private and family life and to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

1.2.3 Impartiality

Impartiality lies at the core of the BBC’s commitment to its audiences. We will apply due impartiality to all our subject matter and will reflect a breadth and diversity of opinion across our output as a whole, over an appropriate period, so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under-represented. We will be fair and open-minded when examining evidence and weighing material facts.

1.2.4 Editorial Integrity and Independence

The BBC is independent of outside interests and arrangements that could undermine our editorial integrity. Our audiences should be confident that our decisions are not influenced by outside interests, political or commercial pressures, or any personal interests.

1.2.5 Harm and Offence

We aim to reflect the world as it is, including all aspects of the human experience and the realities of the natural world. But we balance our right to broadcast innovative and challenging content with our responsibility to protect the vulnerable from harm and avoid unjustifiable offence. We will be sensitive to, and keep in touch with, generally accepted standards as well as our audiences’ expectations of our content, particularly in relation to the protection of children.

1.2.6 Serving the Public Interest

We seek to report stories of significance to our audiences. We will be rigorous in establishing the truth of the story and well informed when explaining it. Our specialist expertise will bring authority and analysis to the complex world in which we live. We will ask searching questions of those who hold public office and others who are accountable, and provide a comprehensive forum for public debate.

1.2.7 Fairness

Our output will be based on fairness, openness, honesty and straight dealing. Contributors and audiences will be treated with respect.

1.2.8 Privacy

We will respect privacy and will not infringe it without good reason, wherever in the world we are operating. Private behaviour, information, correspondence and conversation will not be brought into the public domain unless there is a public interest that outweighs the expectation of privacy.

1.2.9 Children

We will always seek to safeguard the welfare of children and young people who contribute to and feature in our content, wherever in the world we operate. We

will preserve their right to speak out and participate, while ensuring their dignity and their physical and emotional welfare is protected during the making and broadcast of our output. Content which might be unsuitable for children will be scheduled appropriately.

1.2.10 Transparency

We will be transparent about the nature and provenance of the content we offer online. Where appropriate, we will identify who has created it and will use labelling to help online users make informed decisions about the suitability of content for themselves and their children.

1.2.11 Accountability

We are accountable to our audiences and will deal fairly and openly with them. Their continuing trust in the BBC is a crucial part of our relationship with them. We will be open in acknowledging mistakes when they are made and encourage a culture of willingness to learn from them.

1.3 BBC CHARTER AND AGREEMENT

1.3.1 The BBC’s Editorial Values, and the Editorial Guidelines, are rooted in the Royal Charter and the Agreement.

The Royal Charter guarantees the editorial independence of the BBC and sets out its Public Purposes². These are defined as:

- sustaining citizenship and civil society
- promoting education and learning
- stimulating creativity and cultural excellence
- representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities
- bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK
- in promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television.

1.3.2 The Agreement accompanying the BBC Charter specifies that we should do all we can “*to ensure that controversial subjects are treated with due accuracy and impartiality*”³ in our news and other output dealing with matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy. It also states that our output is forbidden from expressing the opinion of the BBC on current affairs or matters of public policy, other than broadcasting or the provision of online services. The

² Section 4, Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation, September 2006

³ Paragraph 44(1), Broadcasting: An Agreement Between Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation, July 2006

Accuracy, Impartiality and Politics, Public Policy and Polls sections of the Editorial Guidelines incorporate the BBC Trust's code as required under Paragraph 44 (5) of the Agreement, giving guidance as to the rules to be observed in connection with Paragraphs 44(1) to 44(4) of the Agreement.

1.3.3 In addition, the Agreement forbids any BBC service funded by the licence fee or grant-in-aid from carrying advertising or sponsored programmes. To protect editorial integrity and independence, the BBC has drawn up its own guidelines on standards for advertising and sponsorship for its commercial television and online services.