

Finding of the Editorial Standards Committee of the BBC Trust

What's the point of... the Met Office?

BBC Radio 4 5 August 2015

Finding of 4 December 2015

Summary

“*What’s the Point of...?*” is a Radio 4 programme that is now in its seventh series and is presented by the journalist and sketch writer Quentin Letts. It usually takes British institutions, organisations and people and queries what purpose they serve in a tone that is humorous and mildly provocative. It considers a wide range of subjects – such as Formula 1, the Archbishop of Canterbury and libraries.

This edition considered the Met Office and included a number of references to climate change and the Met Office’s work in this area. It indicated the Met Office’s position on climate change was controversial and did not make clear that its work – which used evidence-based observations alongside computer modelling – was in line with prevailing scientific thought. Criticisms made included that it was involved in political lobbying, failed to be impartial and that its claims about climate change were alarmist. The programme included contributors who spoke from a particular perspective on the subject, yet this perspective was not made clear to audiences. A representative from the Met Office was interviewed, but her contribution in the programme as broadcast did not adequately address the criticisms that had been made.

The Executive reported the output as being in breach of the Editorial Guidelines to the Editorial Standards Committee on Thursday, 10 September 2015. ESC Trustees accepted there had been a breach and requested a written report. Trustees noted that the breach had arisen despite the work that had been done by both the BBC Trust and the Executive on how climate change should be reported in order to be duly accurate and impartial. They noted there had been significant weaknesses throughout the production process:

- An early decision that the programme should not include discussion of climate change was not adequately recorded. The programme was then treated as if nothing in it were contentious.
- Editorial oversight of the programme was limited as a result of heavy workload. The production team did not make sufficient editorial checks or exert adequate control to ensure due impartiality and due accuracy.
- The contentious nature of some content was not recognised either by the producer or by a more senior editorial figure prior to broadcast.

The Committee considered this was a serious breach of the Editorial Guidelines for Impartiality and Accuracy.

Trustees acknowledged that the BBC should not stifle discussion and that the Editorial Guidelines included specific protection to ensure that no particular perspective was excluded from BBC output. They considered this was a very significant safeguard in the interests of open debate.

Trustees also noted that the programme related, in part, to a subject which had been the focus of a good deal of scientific study and debate and on which most scientific opinion was in agreement - this was not made clear to

audiences. They noted too that contributors were not always introduced with sufficient information to allow audiences to be aware of the perspective they were speaking from and to understand their views accordingly.

Trustees noted that the **Met Office** was criticised for promoting a “climate change theory”, that significant doubt was cast on that theory during the programme, and that it was described as a “fiction”. The **Met Office** was criticised for making claims that were alarmist and for political lobbying. Trustees considered that the programme had failed to make clear that the **Met Office’s** underlying views on climate change science were supported by the majority of scientists.

Trustees considered it was of the greatest importance that audiences should be able to trust the **BBC** and should be given enough information to make their own assessments of **BBC** output. They considered audiences were not given sufficient information about prevailing scientific opinion to allow them to assess the position of the **Met Office** and the **Met Office** position on these criticisms was not adequately included in the programme.

Executive Report

The Executive noted, generally, that “*What’s the Point of...?*” was in its seventh series and reflected the personal views of its presenter, Quentin Letts. They considered it added breadth to the portfolio of personal view programmes on Radio 4. It was supplied to Radio 4 by the Religion and Ethics Department in Salford and, while this was currently part of the Television division, the radio section was due to become part of Production in the Radio division.

Senior management at Radio 4, in the Radio division and in Religion and Ethics, had recognised that the programme had not met the required standards of due accuracy and impartiality in the elements of the output that addressed climate change science. They considered that it had not reflected the weight of scientific opinion or where the balance of the argument lay. They considered too that it had failed to make clear that the Met Office’s underlying views on climate change science were supported by the majority of scientists.

They noted that where people had complained about the output, these failings had been acknowledged in their initial responses, which had been sent in mid-August.

In terms of the circumstances around the breach, they made the following points:

- As an established programme, “*What’s the Point of...?*” required only low-level involvement from Radio 4, such that Radio 4’s Commissioning Editor agreed to the subjects for each programme in advance of the new series.
- The programme subjects had been discussed and agreed by Radio 4’s Commissioning Editor and by the Head of Radio, Religion and Ethics. At that point it was agreed that the programme about the Met Office would not feature challenge to the majority scientific view on climate change.
- It had not been possible to make the series during its usual production period of April and May because of the presenter’s other commitments during the General Election period, therefore production began in June.
- The production department had inquired about delaying the transmission dates – however this had not been possible because the series was scheduled to be broadcast when another programme was in its summer break.
- This edition was produced by an individual who was experienced but who had not previously worked on this series. He was overseen by an experienced Series Producer who had overseen all of the earlier series.
- At the time of production, the Series Producer was either overseeing or producing a total of 24 programmes across seven different strands. The Series Producer was also overseeing a separate weekly programme for another network which was suffering staff shortages.

- The decision that the programme should not include challenge to the prevailing scientific view about climate change was mentioned at a meeting between the Head of Radio, Religion and Ethics and the Series Producer. Thereafter, the Head of Radio, Religion and Ethics did not anticipate the programme would include any contentious elements and so did not arrange for any further conversations about the episode and nor did the Series Producer raise concerns about the programme on this subject.
- The task of casting contributors was shared by the Producer and the Presenter. The Producer was unaware that the two MPs who featured in the programme were known for their strong views on climate change.
- There was a misunderstanding that the requirement for due impartiality was met by including one Conservative MP and one Labour MP and a failure to recognise that divergent opinions about climate science cross party lines.
- While a draft script for the programme was seen by the production team, the contentious nature of the output relating to climate science was not recognised.
- The interview with the Met Office representative was the last contribution to be recorded in order that criticisms of the Met Office could be put to her. However, as the contentious nature of some parts of the programme had not been recognised, those points were not fully put to her.
- The compliance form was signed in accordance with the procedure, however as the contentious nature of some of the output had not been recognised, it was not flagged up in the compliance form.
- Radio maintains a risk list of programmes that carry potentially significant reputational risk. The list is reviewed weekly by Radio 4 and by the appropriate division so that proper consideration can be given to those programmes.
- In general, a programme that is intended to challenge the prevailing scientific view about climate change is normally on the risk list from the point when it is commissioned. However, because this was not expected to be an element of content – and had not subsequently been recognised as contentious material – the programme was not put on the risk list.
- Following the BBC Trust’s review of the impartiality and accuracy of the BBC’s science reporting, nearly 200 news staff received additional training. Additionally, training was also provided for some non-News staff in Radio division. However, as they were not expected to deal with science issues, none of the staff in the Religion and Ethics radio department had attended these sessions.

Following the transmission, the Executive reported that it had taken the following actions:

- Complainants had been sent a statement from Radio 4 which acknowledged the shortcomings in the output and made clear where the balance of argument lies on climate change and which clarified that the Met Office's position was in line with the prevailing scientific view.
- The shortcomings of the sections of the programme dealing with climate change had been addressed in a note accompanying the programme on iPlayer.
- The programme would not be repeated in any form.
- The Director of Radio commissioned Editorial Policy to examine the editorial brief and supervision of the programme.
- The Executive's investigation was conducted by Editorial Policy, and it outlined three issues that had contributed to the failure:
 - otherwise experienced staff lacked the necessary expertise or awareness of the subject;
 - this was compounded by higher-than-usual workload and the programme covering a subject that had not been part of the editorial specification;
 - over-reliance on the presenter of a personal view programme in the casting of an appropriate range of contributors.
- All programme makers in Religion and Ethics' radio department would complete the BBC Academy's Impartiality online training module, which included a substantial scenario on reporting climate change science.
- Radio division was reviewing training records to ensure all relevant production staff had also completed this module.
- Schedulers would be asked to give due consideration to the potential impact of increasingly stretched talent and production resources when responding to requests for delayed transmissions. The expectation was that, in the case of this particular incident and production department, difficulties would be alleviated to some extent by its forthcoming transfer to Radio Production, as becoming part of a larger pool of staff could help smooth out peaks and troughs in demand.
- Staff in Radio were reminded of the expertise that existed within the division in the Radio Science Unit, and of the need to consult when relevant.
- Programme makers were reminded of the accuracy and impartiality requirements that still existed in personal view programmes and the need to retain adequate editorial scrutiny and supervision over the selection of contributors.
- The Radio compliance form would be amended so that it would no longer only ask if a programme contained a personal view that was unbalanced, but would also include prompts for consideration of how impartiality had been achieved in a personal view programme.

Relevant background information

To inform their consideration of the reported breach of the Editorial Guidelines, Trustees took into account relevant background information about climate science.

Trustees noted that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had been formed in 1988 by the United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. They noted that it aimed to provide policy makers with the most relevant authoritative and objective scientific assessments which were “policy relevant without being policy prescriptive”, and that thousands of scientists were involved in contributing to the IPCC’s work. They noted that the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) had been published in 2014 and was the most up-to-date assessment from the Panel. The IPCC described its own work as follows:

The main activity of the IPCC is to provide at regular intervals Assessment Reports of the state of knowledge on climate change.

They noted that the Fifth Assessment Report had been given separate consideration by MPs on the House of Commons’ Select Committee for Energy and Climate Change. Having studied the Fifth Assessment Report, the Select Committee had published its own Conclusions and Recommendations. Details of the background documents can be found in Annex 2, the most relevant excerpts are quoted below.

Periods of hiatus are consistent with earlier IPCC assessments that non-linear warming of the climate is to be expected and that forced climate changes always take place against a background of natural variability. The current period of hiatus does not undermine the core conclusions of the [Working Group I] contribution to AR5 when put in the context of the overall, long-term global energy budget.

We agree with its conclusion that the IPCC’s latest assessment of the sensitivity of the climate towards greenhouse gas emissions gives no grounds for a change in policy action.

The conclusions of this inquiry are very clear: the WGI contribution to AR5 is the best available summary of the prevailing scientific opinion on climate change currently available to policy-makers. Its conclusions are derived with a high confidence from areas of well understood science. Uncertainty remains in a small number of important areas but these are diminishing.

We can now be more confident than ever that human activity is the dominant cause of the warming witnessed in the latter half of the 20th Century. The most significant human impact is through the release of carbon dioxide, which is predicted to continue to cause warming in the coming decades and centuries.

There are, as there ever will be, uncertainties in the science, but these uncertainties do not blur the overwhelmingly clear picture of a climate system changing as a result of human influence.

The implications of the report for policy-makers in the UK are simple: there is no scientific basis for downgrading the UK’s ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It

is imperative that this message is also understood by the international community. The Government must renew its commitment to achieve a global deal on climate change.

Trustees noted that the Met Office's own website made clear its links with the IPCC and also included a number of links to other scientific and news reports related to climate change.

Trustees noted that the Met Office was a public sector body that lay within the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. They appreciated that Select Committees generally had wide ranging powers to carry out their own inquiries and to seek information from a wide range of organisations, however, they understood that the main parliamentary scrutiny of the Met Office in the House of Commons came from the Science and Technology Select Committee. They noted that, according to the Government's website, the Science and Technology Select Committee existed to:

...ensure that Government policy and decision-making are based on good scientific and engineering advice and evidence

They noted that the Science and Technology Committee had, in 2012, published an inquiry into "Science in the Met Office" which had included scrutinising the robustness of the models used by the Met Office for its work in climate prediction. It had also considered the supercomputing requirements of the Met Office. In its final report, the Committee found that that the Met Office's models were "highly regarded across the UK and around the world"; it also considered there should be "a step-change in supercomputing capacity".

Trustees noted the Committee had drawn attention to the discrepancy between previous climate predictions from the Met Office and the 'flattening' of the growth in temperatures:

The Met Office is [...] widely recognised as a world-leader in climate prediction. However, we note that the climate model did not accurately predict the extent of the flattening of the temperature curve during the last ten years.

However Trustees noted there was no substantial criticism of the Met Office's work in the report. They also noted information from the Met Office that it had made its first decadal forecast in 2007 (which related to the period 2004-14)^[1] and that the World Meteorological Organization had reported that the rise in global temperature in 2014 was within the range forecast by the Met Office.

^[1] The Met Office predicted that by 2014, temperatures would be 0.3 degrees warmer than in 2004, +/- 0.21 degrees – giving a range of outcomes from 0.09-0.51 degrees celsius. They noted from the Met Office that the World Meteorological Organization had reported that the global temperature in 2014 was 0.13 degrees celsius higher than in 2004 and that this was within the forecast range.

They also noted that the Government had responded to the report and its response had included the following:

The Government welcomes the Science and Technology Committee's report on Science in the Met Office and the Committee's positive assessment that the Met Office is a world-leading institution underpinned by robust science.[...]

The UK is a leader in climate science research and modelling and the Met Office through the Met Office Hadley Centre is the focal point of this UK capability.

Trustees also noted that a separate body, the Committee on Climate Change, had been established to be an independent advisor to Parliament and the Government by the Climate Change Act 2008. In terms of the science of climate change, its website stated:

There are natural cycles, but what we are seeing now is very different. The main cycle of global change over the last million years has been in and out of 'ice ages', in which Earth's average surface temperature changed by about 4-7°C. For the last 10,000 years we have been in a warm phase between ice ages, meaning we would expect gradual cooling rather than the rapid further warming seen since 1950. The pattern of warming also matches what we expect from our emissions, and does not match that from other natural influences alone such as the Sun.

Scientists predict the Earth will warm 1.7-5.4°C by the end of this century without concerted efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This pace of global change is far faster than any of the ice age cycles.

Trustees noted that this prediction was in line with the projections provided by the IPCC. The Committee on Climate Change website included the following information in terms of the 'pause' in rising temperatures:

Average surface temperature has risen more slowly over the last few years. This "pause" is still a short period of time for the climate, and it does not have a major impact on long-term projections.

Since 1998 global temperature has been rising at a rate of 0.04°C per decade, lower than the longer-term rate of 0.11°C per decade since 1950. The temperature record is noisy due to natural, unpredictable fluctuations which can mask (or add to) underlying changes. Scientists therefore use longer periods (around 30 years or more) to identify robust climate trends.

The cause of the current slowdown is a topic of research. Scientists have identified several plausible causes, from slightly reduced solar heating and a series of small volcanic eruptions to additional storage of heat in the oceans. But there is very strong evidence that the whole climate system is still heating up, and the global surface temperature rise will resume in the coming decades.

Other important indicators of a changing climate have not paused since 1998: Arctic sea ice is decreasing, global sea level is rising, and the hottest days of the year are becoming hotter.

Finding in Full

Trustees noted the Editorial Guidelines for Accuracy and Impartiality¹ and, in particular, the Guidelines related to Due Weight and to Personal View Output. Trustees noted that all BBC output was required to meet the standard of ‘due’ accuracy and impartiality, which was defined as follows:

The term “due” means that the impartiality/accuracy must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation.

Trustees noted the programme had been broadcast since 2008 and considered that it was an established series. They also considered that its provocative title would alert listeners that this was not a straight-faced approach to the subject and they also noted the continuity announcement which preceded the programme indicated this as well:

Now Quentin Letts returns with another series questioning the continuing relevance of some of Britain’s cherished institutions. Today he asks, ‘What’s the point of the Met Office?’

Trustees agreed that the tone of the programme overall was well-established – it was questioning and humorous, similar to that of a journalistic sketch – and that listeners would have been familiar with the format and style of the programme. They noted that the Executive considered it was “personal view content” and that the Guidelines for Personal View Content stated:

4.4.29 - The BBC has a tradition of allowing a wide range of individuals, groups or organisations to offer a personal view or opinion, express a belief, or advance a contentious argument in its output. This can range from the outright expression of highly partial views by a campaigner, to the opinion of a specialist or professional including an academic or scientist, to views expressed through contributions from our audiences. All of these can add to the public understanding and debate, especially when they allow our audience to hear fresh and original perspectives on familiar issues.

Such personal view content must be clearly signposted to audiences in advance.

4.4.30 ...we should:

- retain a respect for factual accuracy
- fairly represent opposing viewpoints when included...

Trustees appreciated that personal view programmes were a very valuable way of giving voice to a wide range of opinions and to ensuring that many aspects of debate were allowed airtime. They noted that the Guidelines for Personal View output contained significant protections to ensure that a wide range of views were included in BBC output,

¹ the appropriate sections are set out below in Annex 2

including those which were “contentious” and “highly partial”; while the guidelines noted that “due weight” allowed for the inclusion of “minority views”.

The Committee agreed that the series had a strong authorial voice. Trustees considered listeners would have expected that the programme would be broadly humorous and would include the author’s own ‘take’ on the Met Office and its operations. They considered that, to this extent, audiences would have expected the programme to be the presenter’s “personal view” of the Met Office. Even if this was not entirely clear to audiences, in any event the requirement was that all output should be duly accurate and duly impartial.

The Committee then turned to the way climate change was referred to in the programme. Trustees noted the introductory statement which said that the Met Office’s stance on climate change was “not uncontroversial” and also noted that the programme went on to include a number of script lines and contributions that questioned the Met Office’s work in this area and the science behind its long term forecasting suggesting that: it had been given the task of lobbying for and promoting the “man-made climate change theory”; that the theory that more CO₂ led to global warming was a “fiction”; and that the Met Office exaggerated the threat posed by global warming to “biblical” proportions as part of its “political lobbying”. Trustees considered that the BBC had failed to ensure that there was sufficient signposting to alert listeners that this was a “personal view” programme and had also failed to include adequate information about what constituted the prevailing scientific opinion. This was in breach of the Personal View Guideline in that it did not “retain a respect for factual accuracy” or “fairly represent opposing viewpoints when included”.

Trustees considered the following elements of output in turn:

I. The programme indicated that the Met Office’s position on climate change was “not uncontroversial”.

The script included the statement that the Met Office “...takes a not uncontroversial position on climate change”.

Trustees noted that the opening of the programme indicated the Met Office’s position was controversial. They noted the following scripted comment:

“...Some forecasts can seem almost biblical these days. Heatwaves, floods, ‘weather events’, to use a term not found in Genesis. We once spoke of natural disasters but they may in part be the fault of mankind. One enters the foggy debate about climate change at one’s peril, but is the Met Office, with its attachment to the state and with its emotionally-splashy presenters, truly impartial here?”

Trustees acknowledged that the script suggested that some “natural disasters [...] may in part be the fault of mankind”. However they noted that the script referred to the “foggy debate” around climate change, which indicated that climate change science remained a matter of considerable dispute and, in that context, the presenter went on to query whether the Met Office was “truly impartial” on the subject.

It was noted that Quentin Letts had explained to the Trust Unit after the programme, that he did not have a particular position on climate change and that this was why he had referred to “*foggy debate*” in his script. He considered it was incontestable that ongoing discussion about responses to climate change had created public uncertainty on global warming.

2. Contributors

Trustees noted the contributions of a number of individuals. Firstly, they noted one interviewee who was described as running his own “forecasting service”. Audiences were told he used “non-mainstream methods” and yet achieved “a strong record for accuracy”. Trustees considered that audiences would have understood he was not using conventional methods – but, on the basis that he had “a strong record for accuracy”, would have been inclined to put some trust in his views.

They noted that the contributor stated that the Met Office had been given the job to “*promote [...] defend and propagate, the man-made climate change theory and suggest what horrors are going to come allegedly from more CO2*” and he stated that this was a “*fiction*”. They noted that the presenter said this was “*a contentious point*”, they also noted that there had been no direct challenge to it. Trustees also noted that the interviewee ran a company producing its own long range weather forecasts and that his views were not in line with prevailing scientific opinion on climate change science. His web-site stated: “*Global Warming is over and there is no evidence that CO2 ever was, is or will be a driver of world temperatures or Climate Change*”. They considered this was not in line with the prevailing science and that the audience was not given the necessary information to allow them to assess his comments in that context.

Secondly, Trustees noted that the programme went on to introduce two former members of the House of Commons Select Committee for Energy and Climate Change. They noted that in introducing them, the presenter stated that the Met Office was: “*... open to political scrutiny, not least by the Commons Select Committee on Climate Change....*” The presenter identified a Labour MP and a Conservative MP who had been members of the Select Committee at the time when it had been considering the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report.

They noted that the first MP to be interviewed stated that the Met Office’s long term predictions were “*very poor*”.

He went on to refer to some scientists who, in terms of responses to climate change, believed that they were absolutely right and who said:

“... ‘we must save the planet, we must change the way we produce energy and therefore we will have lots of alternative renewable forms of energy which at the moment are very expensive’.

The money that my constituents are paying effectively is a flat tax on their energy bills. I think that would, that money would be better spent ie not on a flat tax way, but would

be better spent on research so that we can genuinely produce clean and cheap electricity rather than expensive ugly electricity.”

The second MP to be interviewed was asked whether he was a “total sceptic on man-made climate change?”:

Interviewee *No, I studied physics at Cambridge, so I accept the basic thesis that a bit more CO2 in the atmosphere, or a lot more CO2 in the atmosphere, will marginally warm up the earth but I’m what’s known as a luke-warmist, one who thinks that there won’t be much warming as a result of it and that’s the scientifically proven bit of theory. Anything going on the alarmist scale is pure speculation. The sad thing is that they’ve become committed to a particular pseudo-scientific doctrine and now are unwilling to change their doctrine when the facts refute it.*

QL: *By that you mean man-made climate change?*

Interviewee *Alarmist man-made climate change. There is a certain amount of man-made climate change going on but not very much and they are pretending there is a lot and going to be a lot and when their predictions turn out to be false then they don’t change their theory. Dame Julia Slingo, the Chief Scientific Officer of the Met Office now says that the heating must have taken place but it hasn’t shown up on the surface of the earth because it’s been swallowed by the deep oceans. It’s a new version of the deep oceans swallowed my homework thesis.*

Trustees noted that apart from introducing both MPs as being former members of the Select Committee there was no other signposting around their contributions. They considered that, as a result, audiences would reasonably have expected them to reflect the views of the Select Committee during the period on which they had sat on it. On the contrary, however, when the Committee considered the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report, the views of the two MPs had not been in line with the rest of the Select Committee and both MPs had voted against accepting the Select Committee’s report into the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report.

They also noted that both MPs were members of the Global Warming Policy Foundation – an organisation which was set up by Nigel Lawson in 2009 to consider and challenge the costs and implications of policies advocated in response to climate change.

They noted too that, at the time, the MPs had released a statement which included the following information:

...we do not dispute the science of the greenhouse effect [...] However, there remain great uncertainties about how much warming a given increase in greenhouse gases will cause, how much damage any temperature increase will cause and the best balance between adaptation to versus prevention of global warming.

Trustees considered audiences had not been given enough information to understand that the MPs’ perspective was not in line with that of the rest of the Committee. Nor was it made clear that Commons scrutiny of the Met Office itself fell mainly to the Science and Technology Select Committee (see above). However they noted that one of the MPs had

been a member of the Science and Technology Select Committee at the time when it produced its “Science in the Met Office” report. They noted the report had included criticism of predictions by the Met Office as to the “flattening of the temperature curve” over a ten-year period. Trustees considered audiences had not been given accurate information about the parliamentary scrutiny of the Met Office.

They considered that it was not the role of the BBC to stifle discussion and that the Editorial Guidelines included specific protection to ensure that no particular perspective was excluded from BBC output. However, they concluded that the programme should have included further signposting to allow audiences to understand their contribution to the debate.

3. Criticisms made of the Met Office were not adequately put to the Met Office representative

Trustees noted that the inclusion of a representative from the Met Office gave the BBC a significant opportunity to address the points that had been made in the script and in contributions to the programme. They noted that the Series Producer had instructed the Producer to ensure the interview with the Met Office was scheduled at the end of the recording schedule, so that all significant criticisms could be addressed. However, at that point the Series Producer was not aware that the programme included any references to climate change.

Trustees considered the interview as it was broadcast did not allow the Met Office to adequately address the concerns that were raised in the programme about its position on climate change science, or to establish that that position was supported by the majority of climate scientists. They noted that the interview did not address the criticism that the Met Office promoted a climate change theory which was fiction or that they were committed to a pseudo-scientific doctrine and are unwilling to change their doctrine when the facts refute it, or that its climate change predictions amounted to alarmism. They considered that not only was the Met Office representative not given an adequate opportunity to respond to the criticisms that had been aired, but listeners could have formed the impression that the Met Office representative agreed with the presenter when he stated that its predictions were exaggerated to the extent that they were of “biblical” proportions.

Trustees’ Conclusion

Trustees considered that programmes which gave presenters considerable freedom to express their own opinions were an important part of the BBC’s output. They enriched output by ensuring a wide range of voices were heard and that different perspectives were brought to air. Trustees considered that presenter-led programmes inevitably gave the presenter a good deal of input in terms of shaping the script, suggesting contributors and influencing the points that would be raised. However they considered that there was a very important balance to be struck by the production team in allowing an individual’s views to be brought to air while also ensuring the requirements of the Editorial Guidelines were met. They noted that it was vital that the BBC retained appropriate editorial control over, as well as responsibility for, its output.

Trustees considered audience expectations for this programme would have afforded the presenter a good deal of leeway to assess the Met Office's work in a way that was partial and humorous. However they considered that the audience would not have expected the programme to take a stance on climate science that differed from the prevailing scientific opinion without making that clear to audiences. They considered this failing related to the script and to the way in which some individual contributions were introduced and used. They considered that the interview with the Met Office could have gone a considerable way to redress the balance, but that an opportunity had been missed so that responses by the Met Office that would have answered some criticisms were not included in the programme, while other criticisms were not put to the Met Office for a response.

Trustees noted the Executive's statement that the programme would not be rebroadcast. However, they considered the breach was sufficiently serious that the programme should also not be available online.

Trustees considered that the publication of their finding – which would subsequently be reported in the Annual Report and Accounts – was an appropriate response to the imbalance created in the broadcast.

Trustees considered this was a serious breach of the Editorial Guidelines for Accuracy and Impartiality.

Annex I - Applicable Editorial Guidelines

The relevant Guidelines are those for Accuracy and Impartiality. All output is required to reach the standard of 'due' accuracy/impartiality, which is defined as follows:

The term 'due' means that the accuracy/impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation.

The following Accuracy guidelines are also relevant:

3.2.2

All BBC output, as appropriate to its subject and nature, must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in clear, precise language. We should be honest and open about what we don't know and avoid unfounded speculation. Claims, allegations, material facts and other content that cannot be corroborated should normally be attributed.

3.2.3

The BBC must not knowingly and materially mislead its audiences. We should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact or otherwise undermine our audiences' trust in our content.

The following Impartiality guidelines are also relevant:

4.1 Introduction

...Due impartiality is often more than a simple matter of 'balance' between opposing viewpoints. Equally, it does not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles.

4.2.1

We must do all we can to ensure that 'controversial subjects' are treated with due impartiality in all our output.

Due Weight

4.4.2

Impartiality does not necessarily require the range of perspectives or opinions to be covered in equal proportions either across our output as a whole, or within a single programme, web page or item. Instead, we should seek to achieve 'due weight'. For example, minority views should not necessarily be given equal weight to the prevailing consensus.

Nevertheless, the omission of an important perspective, in a particular context, may jeopardise perceptions of the BBC's impartiality. Decisions over whether to include or omit perspectives should be reasonable and carefully reached, with consistently applied editorial judgement across an appropriate range of output.

4.4.7

When dealing with 'controversial subjects', we must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact.

4.4.8

Due impartiality normally allows for programmes and other output to explore or report on a specific aspect of an issue or provide an opportunity for a single view to be expressed. When dealing with 'controversial subjects' this should be clearly signposted, should acknowledge that a range of views exists and the weight of those views, and should not misrepresent them.

Consideration should be given to the appropriate timeframe for reflecting other perspectives and whether or not they need to be included in connected and signposted output.

If such output contains serious allegations, a right of reply may be required, either as part of the same output, or in a connected and clearly signposted alternative.

4.4.14

We should not automatically assume that contributors from other organisations (such as academics, journalists, researchers and representatives of charities) are unbiased and we may need to make it clear to the audience when contributors are associated with a particular viewpoint, if it is not apparent from their contribution or from the context in which their contribution is made.

4.4.18

Contributors expressing contentious views, either through an interview or other means, must be rigorously tested while being given a fair chance to set out their full response to questions. Minority views should be given appropriate space in our output; it is not for the BBC to suppress discussion.

Personal View Content

4.4.29

The BBC has a tradition of allowing a wide range of individuals, groups or organisations to offer a personal view or opinion, express a belief, or advance a contentious argument in its output. This can range from the outright expression of highly partial views by a campaigner, to the opinion of a specialist or professional including an academic or scientist, to views expressed through contributions from our audiences. All of these can add to the public

understanding and debate, especially when they allow our audience to hear fresh and original perspectives on familiar issues.

Such personal view content must be clearly signposted to audiences in advance.

4.4.30

Additionally, when personal view programmes and websites (for example, blogs) cover 'controversial subjects', especially those concerning matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy, we should:

- retain a respect for factual accuracy
- fairly represent opposing viewpoints when included
- provide an opportunity to respond when appropriate, for example in a pre-arranged discussion programme
- ensure that a sufficiently broad range of views and perspectives is included in output of a similar type and weight and in an appropriate timeframe.

The Adviser also considered the following Guideline relating to Fairness was relevant:

Right of Reply

6.4.25

When our output makes allegations of wrongdoing, iniquity or incompetence or lays out a strong and damaging critique of an individual or institution the presumption is that those criticised should be given a "right of reply", that is, given a fair opportunity to respond to the allegations.

Annex 2

The finding of the House of Commons' Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change can be found through this link:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/energy-and-climate-change-committee/news/report-ipcc-5-assessment-review/>

These paragraphs are from the Conclusions and Recommendations

The hiatus

11. Periods of hiatus are consistent with earlier IPCC assessments that non-linear warming of the climate is to be expected and that forced climate changes always take place against a background of natural variability. The current period of hiatus does not undermine the core conclusions of the WGI contribution to AR5 when put in the context of the overall, long-term global energy budget. Despite the hiatus, the first decade of the 2000s was the warmest in the instrumental record and overall warming is expected to continue in the coming decades. (Paragraph 53) Domestic climate policy

Domestic climate policy

15. We believe that the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) was right to consider a range of values for climate sensitivity (and their relative uncertainties) when reviewing the Fourth Carbon Budget. We agree with its conclusion that the IPCC's latest assessment of the sensitivity of the climate towards greenhouse gas emissions gives no grounds for a change in policy action. (Paragraph 73)

16. The WGI contribution to AR5 re-affirms the scientific underpinning of the Climate Change Act 2008 and hence the UK's ambitious greenhouse gas emission reductions targets. We believe that there is merit in considering embedded carbon emissions alongside territorial emissions in the policy making process. (Paragraph 75)

Overall conclusions

19. The conclusions of this inquiry are very clear: the [Working Group 1] contribution to [Assessment Report 5] is the best available summary of the prevailing scientific opinion on climate change currently available to policy-makers. Its conclusions are derived with a high confidence from areas of well understood science. Uncertainty remains in a small number of important areas but these are diminishing. ...

20. The size and scale of the report reflects the huge effort by the international climate science community, who volunteer their time and expertise. We can now be more confident than ever that human activity is the dominant cause of the warming witnessed in the latter half of the 20th Century. The most significant human impact is through the release of carbon dioxide, which is predicted to continue to cause warming in the coming decades and centuries...

21. *The IPCC has updated its processes. The WGI contribution to AR5 is the most exhaustive and heavily scrutinised Assessment Report to-date. Tightened review processes ensure that the report has been compiled to the highest standards of scholarship; a remarkable feat given the size of the operation. The authority of the reports comes not from the process and procedure, but from the evidence itself, the thousands of peer-reviewed academic papers that form a clear and unambiguous picture of the state of the climate. Collectively, this evidence reveals a pattern of expanding observations, increasing computational ability and improving understanding across the climate system. There are, as there ever will be, uncertainties in the science, but these uncertainties do not blur the overwhelmingly clear picture of a climate system changing as a result of human influence. The report offers an excellent vantage point from which the scientific community can reflect on the state of climate science, and develop research strategies for the future.*
(Paragraph 82)

22. *The implications of the report for policy-makers in the UK are simple: there is no scientific basis for downgrading the UK's ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is imperative that this message is also understood by the international community. The Government must renew its commitment to achieve a global deal on climate change.*
(Paragraph 83)