

## **BREADTH OF OPINION IMPARTIALITY REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### Background

Ensuring the impartiality and accuracy of the BBC's content is a key priority for the Trust; it is essential to its independence that the BBC retains the public's trust as an impartial and accurate purveyor of news and programming. The BBC is required to deliver duly accurate and impartial news by the Royal Charter and Agreement and to treat controversial subjects with due accuracy and impartiality. The Trust's role is to ensure this obligation is being fulfilled.

Impartiality reviews allow the Trust to examine the BBC's impartiality in specific areas of output through a rigorous review which can, when deemed necessary, lead to behavioural change.

This review will examine the implementation of a principle of impartiality – breadth and diversity of opinion. This commitment is unique to the BBC and is managed across services and platforms and not necessarily through any single programme or item.

As the 2010 BBC Editorial Guidelines state:

'Across our output as a whole, we must be inclusive, reflecting a breadth and diversity of opinion.'

The Guidelines also say the BBC is:

'committed to reflecting a wide range of opinion across...output as a whole and over an appropriate timeframe so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under-represented'

and that it

'exercises editorial freedom to produce content about any subject, at any point on the spectrum of debate, as long as there are good editorial reasons for doing so'.

### Scope of the review

The review will cover the BBC's UK network television and radio broadcasts and the BBC's online content. Where appropriate the review will also analyse coverage from the English regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

It will assess News, Current Affairs and Factual output. It will analyse some coverage from 2007 against that from 2012/13 for comparative purposes, through close examination of some specific topics. In considering impartiality, it will assess whether:

- Decisions to include or omit perspectives have been reasonable and carefully reached, with consistently applied judgement across an appropriate range of output

- ‘due weight’ has been given to a range of perspectives or opinions e.g. minority views should not necessarily be given equal weight to the prevailing consensus
- Appropriate scrutiny has been applied to audience opinions (relayed through phone-ins or user-generated material for example) and no debate appears closed to members of the audience who support a minority view but may not have made contact with the BBC.

### Scope limitations

- As this review focuses on impartiality, it will not seek to draw broader conclusions about the quality of BBC output. Nor will this review draw conclusions from the quantity of coverage except where it is considered to have been a contributory factor affecting impartiality.
- The primary purpose of this review is not an examination of portrayal as described in the Guidelines - the full and fair reflection of the UK’s people and cultures in order to avoid offensive stereotypical assumptions

### Approach

The full BBC Editorial Guidelines (which can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/>) set out how impartiality is to be attained in BBC content.

The Trust report will draw on an assessment from an independent author. To support the review, content and audience research will be commissioned by the Trust. The Trust will also ask the BBC to outline the ways in which it sets out to provide breadth of opinion.

The main workstreams of the review will include:

- Content analysis
- Author engagement with key stakeholders
- Audience research
- Discussion with the BBC Executive
- A submission from the BBC Executive

The results of the author’s engagement with key stakeholders, the Executive’s submission, content research, audience research and other sources of evidence will be analysed and considered by the author before a final assessment is presented to the Trust. When publishing its final report the Trust will also publish the evidence gathered as part of the review, including the Executive’s submission.

### Timetable

August 2012	Review announced
Summer 2013	Report published