

# Consultation on draft Guidelines for elections to the UK Parliament and for English local government in 2015

**November 2014**

# CONSULTATION: Draft Guidelines for elections to the UK Parliament and for English local government in 2015

## Background

The BBC is required by its 2006 Charter and Agreement to ensure that matters of political controversy and matters of public policy are covered with due impartiality.

The following elections are due to take place on 7 May 2015:

- UK Parliament
- English local government in some areas
- Mayoral elections in some areas

The BBC's Editorial Guidelines set out the values and standards all BBC content must meet. However, the BBC intends to publish additional guidelines for its editorial staff to refer to specifically when covering these elections, including a code of practice<sup>1</sup> required by section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983<sup>2</sup>. These Guidelines are supplementary to the BBC's usual Editorial Guidelines and help to define how the BBC will comply with its duty of due impartiality during the period leading up to and including the above elections.

## The Guidelines

The Guidelines are developed by the BBC Executive (which is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the BBC) and are brought to the Trust for approval.

The BBC Trust is the governing body of the BBC. It is independent from the BBC Executive. The Trust is also the final appeal body in the BBC complaints process.

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<sup>1</sup> As to the participation of candidates in news etc items about the constituency or electoral area broadcast during the election period.

<sup>2</sup> The current version of section 93 was substituted by section 144 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

Once published the Guidelines will be available for producers and editors to refer to when compiling coverage of the above elections. They will formally have effect from 30 March 2015 until the close of polls on 7 May 2015.

The Guidelines are intended to create a framework to assist the producers of BBC content in delivering to audiences impartial reporting of the campaigns, whilst still allowing producers an appropriate degree of editorial and creative freedom.

## **About this consultation**

We're inviting your views on the draft Election Guidelines so that the Trust can take these views into account when considering whether they should approve the Guidelines.

This consultation will allow the Trust to take into consideration the views of registered political parties, those intending to stand and their agents, together with other regulatory bodies, broadcasters and members of the public in determining whether the proposed Guidelines are appropriate. The Trust is also consulting the Electoral Commission.

The consultation period begins on 4 November 2014. In the New Year the Trust will add further appendices to the draft Election Guidelines containing more specific guidance for BBC content producers over the election period. This is likely to include advice on the relative levels of coverage different parties might expect to receive on BBC services. This new material is produced at a later stage in order for it to be as up-to-date as possible. It will also form part of the consultation. Please check the BBC Trust website for updates. If you would like to be notified when this new material is available please contact the Trust on the email address, postal address or telephone number below. In the meantime, to enable respondents to understand the sort of material that is likely to be included, we make available two documents. Document A covers the type of contextual information the BBC takes into account in its decisions about appropriate levels of coverage for parties and other editorial judgements, such as election results and opinion polling. Document B is the guidance issued for the 2010 elections.

## **Questions on which we are seeking a response**

We are interested in receiving any comments which are related to the proposed Guidelines and the associated appendices, when available.

In particular, it would be helpful to receive your views in response to the following questions

- 1. Are the proposed Guidelines and appendices relevant and appropriate for these elections? Please explain why.**
- 2. Are there any omissions from the proposed Guidelines and appendices?**
- 3. Do you have any other comments on the proposed Guidelines and appendices?**

## **How to make a submission**

This consultation will close four weeks after the new appendices are published in the New Year. We will update the Trust website with the closing date.

Please send your submission to: [electionguidelines.consultation@bbc.co.uk](mailto:electionguidelines.consultation@bbc.co.uk) or by post to:

Editorial Guidelines Consultation  
BBC Trust Unit  
180 Great Portland St  
London W1W 5QZ

Hard copy, large print, audio and Braille versions of the guidelines and consultation documents are available upon request by contacting the BBC Trust by email or by post as above, or by telephone on 03700 103 100 or textphone 03700 100 212.

## **Confidentiality**

The BBC Trust usually publishes organisational responses in full when it reaches its conclusions. We will not publish the name or contact details of those responding on behalf of organisations. If you would prefer that all or part of your organisation's response is treated as confidential, please clearly indicate this at the start of your response and state which parts should remain confidential.

We do not intend to publish individual responses from the public and will treat your identity in confidence if you disclose it to us. However, we will publish anonymised data in the interests of transparency. Any specific quotes used in the report will be anonymous unless otherwise requested.

The BBC complies with the Data Protection Act 1998. The BBC Trust will securely store any personal information you provide such as your name, contact details and organisation and use it only for the purposes of administering this consultation. You can find more information on the BBC's privacy policy at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/privacy>.

The BBC is covered by the **Freedom of Information** Act 2000. If a request is made under the Act in relation to this consultation, the BBC may be required to

disclose the information unless an exemption under the Act applies. For more information, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi>.

## **Next steps**

The BBC Trust will take the consultation responses into account and publish the results of this consultation on the Trust website, together with the final guidelines and appendices with guidance, once approved by the Trust. We anticipate that this will be in March 2015.