



DRAFT Election Guidelines 2016

Election Campaigns for:

The Scottish Parliament
The National Assembly for Wales
The Northern Ireland Assembly
Greater London Authority (including Mayoral)
Local Government in parts of England (outside GLA area)
Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales.

Polling Day: 5th May 2016

1. The Election Period	2
1.1 The Election Period and when the Election Guidelines and Appendices (“the Guidelines”) come into effect.....	2
1.2 Elections	3
2. Summary of Mandatory issues and referrals	4
2.1 During the Election Period:	4
2.2 Polling day (00.30 – 22.00)	4
3. The Guidelines	5
3.1 Their Purpose	5
3.2 Who the Guidelines apply to	6
4 Due Impartiality	6
4.1 Coverage of Parties and Candidates	6
4.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content	6
4.3 Coverage of other political issues (including the EU referendum), of Westminster, the European Parliament and Councils in the UK during the Election Period	8
4.4 Order of Parties	8
4.5 Items which may not require contributions from other parties or candidates	8
5 Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice	9
5.1 Reports and debates in specific Electoral Areas (Constituencies, Wards or Police areas)	9
5.2 Use of Candidates in issue based packages, wider debates and phone-ins.....	10
5.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services	11
6. Online, Social Media and Audience Contributions	11
6.1 Use of Social Media	11
6.2 Audience contributions	11
6.3 Voting	12
6.4 Audience Programmes, including Debates.....	13
6.5 Material from parties or candidates	13
7 Polls and other tests of opinion	13
7.1 Reporting Polls	14

7.2	Commissioning Polls.....	15
8	Party Leader Interviews.....	15
9	Polling Day	15
10	Complaints	16

Appendices: Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates.....17

1. The Election Period

1.1 The Election Period and when the Election Guidelines and Appendices (“the Guidelines”) come into effect

For the elections taking place on 5th May 2016, the election periods do not all begin on the same day. These guidelines take effect from the first day of the earliest election period for UK-wide output, which is

Monday 21st March 2016 at 00.01

but where the variations may have specific relevance, detailed advice is available from the Chief Adviser, Politics. In any case, election campaigning is likely to begin before the formal election periods and content producers should be sensitive to the need for particular care running up to the Election Period. Again, advice is available from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

The start of the Election period for each election is as follows:¹

GLA (including London Mayor):	Monday 21st March 2016
Scottish Parliament:	Wednesday 23rd March 2016
National Assembly for Wales	Wednesday 30th March 2016
Northern Ireland Assembly	Wednesday 30th March 2016
English Local government	Wednesday 30th March 2016
Police and Crime Commissioners	Wednesday 30th March 2016

The Guidelines remain in effect for all elections until the close of polls at 22.00 on Thursday 5th May.

There is no formal distinction during the election periods between the days before and after the close of nominations. The close of nominations in different elections also falls on different days –31st March in London, 1st April in Scotland, 7th April for all elections in Wales and England (outside London); 12th April in Northern Ireland.

¹ All dates to be confirmed

1.2 Elections

The Scottish Parliament

The Election is contested on the basis of the Additional Member System, with 73 single member constituencies combined with eight regions each electing seven additional MSPs through a party list.

The National Assembly for Wales

The Election is contested on the basis of the Additional Member System, with 40 single member constituencies combined with five regions each electing four additional AMs through a party list.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

The Election is contested on the basis of the Single Transferrable Vote System with 6 MLAs elected in each of Northern Ireland's 18 constituencies.

The Greater London Authority

The election for London Mayor will be contested using the Supplementary Vote system. The election for the London Assembly uses the Additional Member system, electing 14 constituency members and 11 London-wide members for a total of 25 seats.

Local Government in 124 English councils (outside the GLA area)²

35 metropolitan boroughs

19 unitary authorities

70 district authorities

Plus 3 Mayoral elections (in Bristol, Liverpool and Salford) by supplementary vote)

Altogether, approximately 2670 seats contested. (tbc)

Police and Crime Commissioners (England and Wales)

In England (outside London) elections using the Supplementary Vote system take place in 37 geographical police force areas.

In Wales, elections using the Supplementary Vote system take place in all 4 police force areas.

There are no PCC elections in Scotland, Northern Ireland or London.

² Figures still to be confirmed

For further information specific to each election, please refer to the Appendices.

2. Summary of Mandatory issues and referrals

2.1 During the Election Period:

- Any programme which does not usually cover political subjects or normally invite politicians to participate must consult the Chief Adviser Politics before finalising any plans to do so.*
- All bids for interviews or proposals to profile UK party leaders must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics before parties are approached. Bids for party leaders in the nations should also be referred to the appropriate Heads of News in the nations. Offers of such interviews should also be referred before being accepted.*
- Any proposal to use a contribution from a candidate without an opportunity for comment or response from any other parties or candidates must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser Politics. (see context 4.5).
- The BBC will not commission voting intention polls for publication during the campaign.
- Any proposal to commission an opinion poll on politics or any other matter of public policy for any BBC service must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics.*
- There will be no votes (online, SMS/text or social media) attempting to quantify support for a party, a candidate or a party political policy issue.
- Any proposal to conduct a vote (online, text or social media) on any political issue that could have a bearing on any of the elections must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.
- The BBC will not broadcast or publish numbers of e-mails, texts or other communications received on either side of any issue connected to the campaign.

* referral is also mandatory outside election periods.

2.2 Polling day (00.30 – 22.00)

- No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be published.
- There will be no coverage of any issues directly pertinent to the election campaigns on any BBC outlet or social media.

- **It is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in the elections.**

3. The Guidelines

3.1 Their Purpose

There is no area of broadcasting where the BBC's commitment to due impartiality is more closely scrutinised than in reporting election campaigns.

These Guidelines are intended to offer a framework within which journalists:

- can operate in as free and creative an environment as possible,
- deliver to audiences impartial and independent reporting of the campaign, giving them fair coverage and rigorous scrutiny of the policies and campaigns of all parties.

The BBC is also legally obliged to adopt a **Code of Practice** with respect to “the participation of candidates at a parliamentary or local government election in items about the constituency or electoral area in question which are included in relevant services during the election period”. This obligation is fulfilled by [Section 5 of these Guidelines](#).

The BBC is also required, under the terms of its Charter and Agreement of 2006 to ensure that political issues are covered with due accuracy and impartiality. These Election Guidelines supplement the Editorial Guidelines (Chapter 4, [“Impartiality and Diversity of Opinion”](#) and Chapter 10, [“Politics and Public Policy”](#)). They should, in particular, be read in conjunction with the sections in Chapter 10 on “Reporting UK Election and Referendum Campaigns” and “Broadcasting During Elections”, which say the BBC must ensure that:

- news judgements continue to drive editorial decision-making in news based programmes.
- news judgements at election time are made within a **framework of democratic debate** which ensures that due weight is given to hearing the views and examining and challenging the policies of all parties. Significant minor parties should also receive some network coverage during the campaign.
- we are aware of the **different political structures** in the four nations of the United Kingdom and that they are reflected in the election coverage of each nation. Programmes shown across the UK must also take this into account.

The Guidelines are publicly available and the BBC can expect to be held accountable for their implementation during the campaign.

3.2 Who the Guidelines apply to

It is the responsibility of each editor to ensure that their content producers are aware of how the Guidelines apply to their output.

Any programme which does not usually cover political subjects or normally invite politicians to participate must consult the Chief Adviser Politics before finalising any plans to do so.

The Appendices set out information specific to the different elections and different parts of the UK.

Each programme, strand, website or channel must bear in mind the location of its intended audience in applying these Guidelines.

These Guidelines apply to any content intended for UK audiences, covering any aspect of the election.

4 Due Impartiality

4.1 Coverage of Parties and Candidates

To achieve due impartiality, each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and interactive services, for each election covered, must ensure that the parties (and, where relevant, independent candidates) are covered proportionately over an appropriate period, normally across a week.

Determining appropriate levels of coverage should take into account levels of past and current electoral support (see Appendices).

Electoral support in the previous equivalent election is the starting point for making those judgements. However, other factors should be taken into account where appropriate, including evidence of variation in levels of support in more recent elections, changed political circumstances (e.g. new parties or party splits) as well as other evidence of current support. The number of candidates a party is standing may also be a factor.

4.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content

Daily news magazine programmes should normally achieve proportional and appropriate coverage within the course of each week of the campaign.

This means that each strand (e.g. a drive time show on radio) is responsible for achieving impartiality itself within the week and cannot rely on other outlets at different times of day (e.g. the breakfast show) to do so for it. This does not preclude programmes, in specific circumstances, from co-operating to organise joint coverage, thereby achieving due impartiality across the station or channel. But such an arrangement needs clear sign-posting and should normally be referred to the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Programme strands should avoid individual editions getting substantially out of kilter. There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda, e.g. when party manifestos are launched, but in that case care must be taken to ensure that appropriate coverage is given to other manifesto launches on the relevant days.

The News Channel and radio summaries will divide the 24 hour day into blocks and aim to achieve due impartiality across a week's output in each one.

Weekly programmes, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or another, should signpost both forward and backwards so that it is clear to the audience that due impartiality is built in over time. In these instances, due impartiality should be achieved over the course of the campaign.

The same guidelines as those for programmes will apply to BBC Editorial content on all bbc.co.uk sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. blogs, podcasts and downloads, as well as any social networking which is associated with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties ([see section 6 below](#)).

Editorial Guidelines (4.4.14) say that programme-makers "...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..."

In the context of these elections, content producers will need to take all reasonable steps to be sure that contributors are appropriately described, and that they have taken account, for instance, of comments made by them on social media, how their organisations are funded and the nature of quoted research or polling. In reporting, in particular, on press coverage of the campaign and in newspaper reviews, they should also take account of any relevant subjective editorial stance.

Any programme or content giving coverage to any of the elections must achieve due impartiality overall among parties during the course of the whole campaign.

In all elections, the BBC must take care to prevent candidates being given an unfair advantage, for instance, where one candidate's name is featured through depicting posters or rosettes etc.

Anyone who is in doubt as to how this applies to their own content should contact the Chief Adviser, Politics, for advice.

4.3 Coverage of other political issues (including the EU referendum), of Westminster, the European Parliament and Councils in the UK during the Election Period

The elections do not happen in isolation and other elected bodies may well continue their normal activity during the campaign. Content producers need to comply with the general requirement of due accuracy and due impartiality, aware of the possible influence of any other political coverage on the election campaigns.

This applies to all Parliamentary reportage during the campaigns; some council business will also continue during the election period. These should continue to be covered in the normal way, though any issues relating to any of the elections across the UK which are discussed in Parliament or councils must be reported with care to maintain due impartiality.

All content producers need to bear in mind which issues are within the remit of the different bodies and ensure it is clear to the audience when stories have a bearing on an election. They also should be alert to other party politicians, including ministers, shadow ministers and other party spokespeople and MPs at Westminster, who are not involved directly in the elections, intervening in issues relevant to any of the elections and ensure that due impartiality is maintained. Some members of other elected bodies may also be candidates in these elections; care should be taken to ensure that unfair advantage in the election campaigns is not derived from their other political roles.

If the Election period overlaps with the Referendum Period on EU membership, content producers must also take account of the Referendum Guidelines and ensure due impartiality is achieved with regard to both votes.

Where there are other major news stories, special care is needed to ensure that any political element is covered comprehensively, but also reflects the fact that it is an election period. How this is achieved will depend on the particular circumstances of each case. For example, where there are major stories which fall outside inter-party rivalry, due impartiality may be achieved by allowing more time to those politicians most closely involved, reporting fully statements giving the audience factual information and, on occasion, reflecting vigorous internal debates within parties.

4.4 Order of Parties

The order in which parties appear in packages or are introduced in discussions should normally be editorially driven. However, programme makers should take care to ensure they vary this order, where appropriate, so that no fixed pattern emerges in the course of the campaign. Fairness may sometimes be best achieved – for instance, in debates - simply by drawing straws.

4.5 Items which may not require contributions from other parties or candidates

In exceptional circumstances, comments from candidates can stand alone, without any other political contribution, where to use one might appear

insensitive or risk the appearance of a media circus. This might include interviews about a personal tragedy, a public disaster, or where the person concerned is an eye witness to a news incident. Any proposal to use a comment in this way must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser, Politics.

5 Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice

5.1 Reports and debates in specific Electoral Areas (Constituencies, Wards or Police areas)

The intention of these guidelines is to encourage vigorous debate and to give a higher profile to candidates in general, without giving unfair advantage to one candidate or party over another.

Candidates or parties declining to take part in constituency/ward/area reports or debates cannot, by doing so, effectively exercise a veto over such coverage.

However, this does not weaken in any way the BBC's obligations of fairness in ensuring the audience is informed of all main strands of argument: further advice should be sought, in such circumstances, from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Programmes may decide to use either candidates or their representatives in items. But if a candidate is invited to take part, the other participants should, where at all possible, also be candidates (see below [5.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services](#)). In exceptional circumstances, if a candidate is genuinely unavailable, the opportunity may be offered instead to a suitable party representative or substitute from within the electoral area (e.g. party official or agent) but it should normally be made clear to the audience that the missing candidate was invited and why they were unable to take part. If a party or candidate declines to put forward a representative or nominates someone in a way which risks unfairness to other candidates, the item/programme may go ahead without them.

Reports or debates about a specific electoral area, such as a council ward, a constituency or a police area, should give due weight to candidates who have demonstrated substantial electoral support in that area (either through their own candidacy or their party's). This means that if any candidate takes part in an item about a specific electoral area, then these other candidates should also be offered the opportunity to take part, or be given a similar opportunity across a series of reports.

Candidates or parties who have not demonstrated that they have substantial electoral support in that area must still be offered proportionate coverage. How that is achieved will be a matter for editorial judgment, but the following should be regarded as a minimum:

Short reports and items, including those online, which refer to only some of the candidates in an electoral area (or areas) should also refer to an online list of all candidates and parties standing (or, if before close of nominations, to a list of candidates so far). If such a report is being broadcast several times on

the same channel or station, the online list of candidates should be referred to on each occasion and at least once the list should feature visually and/or verbally.

For longer items or programmes, such as debates - if not all the candidates are taking part - (or where there is no online list available for the relevant electoral area), then the candidates should be listed, visually and/or verbally, in addition to any reference to a full online list of candidates.

Content producers must ensure generally that candidates are not given an unfair advantage; for instance, camera operators should take care where a candidate's name is featured prominently through depicting posters or rosettes etc.

Where candidates have other roles – political or non-political - care should be taken to ensure that they do not gain an unfair advantage in the election campaign over other candidates.

Before the close of nominations, content producers need to ensure due impartiality in regard to any contributor who is expected to stand as a candidate.

5.2 Use of Candidates in issue based packages, wider debates and phone-ins

As well as debates or other items using candidates within constituencies, wards, or police areas, all types of content may use an appropriate range of candidates from different constituencies or wards to discuss together election issues. There may also be circumstances in which it is appropriate to use both candidates and non-candidates (for instance, where a party spokesperson is not standing, or for debates between party leaders.)

Reasonable references to local examples within a constituency, ward, or police area, for instance, to local hospitals, schools, examples of crime, etc, are allowed, providing it does not result in any unfairness to a candidate who is not taking part.

In order to maintain due impartiality, the choice of candidates or parties represented should be appropriate to the item. Who takes part and in what format, for instance, in debates, is a matter for editorial judgement, so long as that is exercised with due impartiality in the specific context of the election period.

The choice of individual to represent a party will be made on editorial grounds, but care must be taken over the course of the campaign to ensure that one candidate is not unduly favoured at the expense of others. A candidate taking part as a national spokesperson should not gain an unfair advantage over other candidates while discussing issues directly relevant to their electoral area. This may mean advising them in advance of the BBC's due impartiality obligations, or swift intervention by the presenter of a live programme, or editing before broadcast, as necessary.

Candidates may be encouraged to take part in phone-ins about the election or election issues. However, callers must be checked to see if they are candidates and it must be clear to the audience that they are speaking not as ordinary members of the public but as contributors with a political agenda. Care must be taken that over time programmes are not giving undue prominence to one party or undue preference to one candidate over others in the same electoral area. Care should also be taken – and advice sought - with regard to any contribution from a candidate during a phone-in or similar programme which is not about the elections or political issues more generally.

Further advice on use of candidates can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

5.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services

Some politicians in Wales are not Welsh language speakers. In the event that a candidate is not a Welsh speaker, Radio Cymru and BBC Wales programmes for S4C may draw on both candidates and other party representatives or appropriate substitutes, including in programmes about specific electoral areas.

Few politicians are Gaelic speakers. In the event that a party is unable to find a Gaelic speaking candidate, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC Alba programmes may draw on both candidates and other party representatives or appropriate substitutes, including in programmes about specific electoral areas.

6. Online, Social Media and Audience Contributions

The same guidelines as those for programmes will apply to BBC Editorial content on all bbc.co.uk sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. blogs, podcasts and downloads, as well as any social media identified with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties.

6.1 Use of Social Media

BBC editorial staff and anyone involved in producing election-related content must avoid compromising the BBC's impartiality or bringing the BBC into disrepute by their activities, for instance, by expressing their own views (or endorsing the views of others) on political matters, either on personal websites or social media.

6.2 Audience contributions

Audience contributions offer immediacy and interactivity to the BBC's output both broadcast and on the web. These contributions are an expression of opinion and are not an indication of the weight of opinion on one side or another of a question. The range selected for inclusion must be chosen to achieve due impartiality, not just by the weight of audience activity. However,

we must not seek to achieve what might be considered “artificial” balance by giving a misleading account of the weight of opinion, particularly on social media where the activity of a relatively small number of people can create a disproportionate impression.

Audience contributions may come by text, social media message or email, or some other interactivity mechanism, including “vox pop”. They may be unsolicited, or they may arise from calls to action, in either broadcast output or online or through social media. It should always be made clear that vox pops or comment taken from social media sites are an expression of an argument not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side. Care must therefore be taken over where vox pops are recorded or where the social media comment originally appeared as well as how they are edited to ensure an appropriate range of views is reflected.

However we receive them, content producers should be rigorous about establishing the origins of materials offered as audience contributions and take responsibility for their authenticity. It may be necessary to verify that a contribution apparently from an individual in the public eye is genuine. Where such contributions come from candidates, that must be clearly identified.

All online debate on the election, whether on bbc.co.uk or BBC branded social media accounts will be actively hosted and appropriately moderated and filtered. Those parts of the BBC’s online presence which do not normally engage in political issues should seek advice from the Chief Adviser, Politics, before doing so.

Content producers should be alert to organised campaigns or lobbying by parties, pressure groups, candidates or people acting on their behalf, particularly on social media platforms. If organised lobbying is suspected during the Election Period, contributors may be asked to provide contact details for verification purposes. Careful consideration should be given to the editorial impact of such lobbying and whether the bbc.co.uk escalation strategy should be activated; it may be necessary, for example, to put a message board into pre-moderation or read only mode.

Journalists and moderators will have to make fine judgements between remarks that constitute robust debate and personal abuse. The general rule of thumb should be if we would not normally broadcast it on radio or TV, it should not be online or on BBC branded social media accounts. Filters for harm and offence and personal abuse will operate as usual, but they should not be relied on as a substitute for effective moderation.

Unless specifically hosting election discussions, non-news sites should direct users who want to discuss the election in message boards or comments to appropriate areas of the news site such as political blogs or relevant news articles.

6.3 Voting

During the Election Period, the BBC will not broadcast or publish numbers of contributions received on any campaign issue to estimate support for any side

or party. There will be no online votes attempting to quantify support for a campaign, party, politician or policy issue during the Election Period, nor should other quantitative methods, such as a count of the number of texts or social media contributions, be used to assess the level of support.

Producers must ensure that text votes are not translated into anything that could be construed either as a representation of public opinion as a whole, or the BBC's opinion. Any proposal to conduct text voting on any political issue that could have a bearing on the elections must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.

6.4 Audience Programmes, including Debates

Any programme, or set of programmes (e.g. organised across local radio or regional TV) covering elections and planning to use a live audience should consult the Chief Adviser Politics to discuss the selection of the audience and how to achieve due impartiality. All such procedures must stand up to public scrutiny.

There is no single way to assemble an audience for these sorts of programmes. Producers will need to take account of many different factors, such as the format – e.g. the role of the audience, the make-up of the panel, the geographical area, etc. What is most important is that – editorially – each and every programme has made a carefully considered judgement about fairness and impartiality in those particular circumstances.

6.5 Material from parties or candidates

BBC News Online will not normally link directly to election-related material on the websites either of political parties or individual candidates, unless there is an editorial justification (e.g. a row caused by a prominent figure publishing policy on his/her website contradicting the manifesto on the party's website) and then it will be promoted only for a limited period and mindful of any impartiality issues.

BBC News Online will list links to all available party sites, provided that it does not give strong grounds for concern that this breaches the [BBC Harm and Offence guidelines](#) or the law e.g. defamation or incitement to racial hatred.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-harm-introduction/>

Any speeches or other material published by or contributed by candidates or parties which are carried in full or in part must be selected on news value, while bearing in mind that due impartiality requires that an appropriate range of such material is carried.

7 Polls and other tests of opinion

Section 6 of the Election Guidelines should, where appropriate, be read in conjunction with Chapter 10 of Editorial Guidelines and the Editorial Policy

Guidance "[Opinion Polls, Surveys, Questionnaires, Votes, Straw Polls](#)", available on the Editorial Policy website.

7.1 Reporting Polls

During the campaign our reporting of opinion polls should take into account three key factors:

- they are part of the story of the campaign and audiences should, where appropriate, be informed about them;
- context is essential, and we must ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the language used in reporting them;
- polls can be wrong - there are real dangers in only reporting the most "newsworthy" polls – i.e. those which, on a one-off basis, show dramatic movement. Even apparently consistent trends may be wrong or failing to tell the whole story of what is happening

So, the general rules and guidance applying to the reporting of polls need to be strictly applied during election campaigns. They are:

- not to lead a news bulletin or programme simply with the results of an opinion poll (especially a single voting intention poll);
- not to headline, on broadcast output, the results of a single voting intention poll unless it has prompted a story which itself deserves a headline and reference to the poll's findings is necessary to make sense of it;
- not to rely on the interpretation given to a poll's results by the organisation or publication which commissioned it, but to come to our own view by looking at the questions, the results and the trend;
- to report the findings of voting intentions polls in the context of trend. The trend may consist of the results of all major polls over a period or may be limited to the change in a single pollster's findings. Poll results which defy trends without convincing explanation should be treated with particular scepticism and caution;
- not to use language which gives greater credibility to the polls than they deserve: polls "suggest" but never "prove" or even "show"; it is important that other editorial judgements – eg which aspects of the election may be given more coverage – do not rely too heavily on what the polls may appear to be indicating.
- to report the expected margin of error if the gap between the contenders is within the margin. On television and online, graphics should *always* show the margin of error;
- to report the organisation which carried out the poll and the organisation or publication which commissioned it;

Particular care should be taken with newspaper reviews; polling alone should not normally be the lead item in a newspaper review and should always be reported with a sentence of context (e.g: “that’s rather out of line with other polls this week”).

No opinion poll on any subject relating to politics or the elections may be published on polling day (from 00.30) until after the polls have closed.

7.2 Commissioning Polls

The BBC does not commission voting intention opinion polls during election periods. Editorial Guidelines say “any proposal to commission an opinion poll on politics or any other matter of public policy for any BBC service must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics for approval”.

Care must be taken to ensure that any poll commissioned by the BBC is not used to suggest a BBC view on a particular policy or issue. A poll may be commissioned to help inform the audience’s understanding of a current controversy, but it should not be used to imply BBC intervention in a current controversy.

8 Party Leader Interviews

The BBC’s Editorial Guidelines set out that any proposal to interview or profile the main party leaders in the UK must be referred in advance to the Chief Adviser, Politics. The Guidelines also say that for BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Northern Ireland, referral should also be made to the relevant Head of News and Current Affairs with regard to party leaders in the nations. Offers of such interviews from the parties must also be referred before any can be accepted. This mandatory reference is particularly important during these election campaigns.

9 Polling Day

There will be no coverage of any of the election campaigns on polling day, from 00.30 until polls close at 22.00 on TV, radio, bbc.co.uk or our official channels on social media and other websites. Online sites will not have to remove archive reports.

Particular care should also be taken in personal use of social media on polling day.

Coverage on the day will be restricted to factual accounts with nothing which could be construed as influencing the ballots.

No opinion poll on any issue relating to politics or the election may be published until after the polls have closed.

Whilst the polls are open, it is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in the elections.

10 Complaints

Complaints will be handled at the appropriate level from programme editors upwards. The aim is to ensure that whether a complaint has come via BBC Audience Services, direct to a programme or to a correspondent or individual journalist, from a politician or member of the public (who may or may not be a political activist), from a senior party official or an individual candidate, the BBC's response is consistent, robust and swift.

For that reason, normally, on receiving a formal complaint, details should be taken and referred to the appropriate person before any initial response – other than acknowledgement and timescale – is given to the complainant.

Anyone requiring further advice on the application of these Guidelines should consult the Chief Adviser Politics.

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Appendices – Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates

Each section is specific to output in the relevant nation or region – all sections apply to all UK-wide output, except where stated.

Introduction.....	18
Appendix 1. Scotland	18
A1.1 Coverage.....	18
A1.2 Larger Parties in Scotland	19
A1.3 Smaller Parties in Scotland	19
A1.4 Independents.....	20
A1.5 Context of electoral support in Scotland (please see Electoral Landscape paper).....	21
Appendix 2 Wales	21
A2.1 Coverage.....	21
A2.2 Larger Parties in Wales	21
A2.3 Smaller Parties in Wales	21
A2.4 Independents.....	22
A2.5 Context of Electoral support in Wales – please see Electoral Landscape paper.....	22
Appendix 3 Northern Ireland	23
A3.1 Coverage.....	23
A3.2 Larger Parties in Northern Ireland	23
A3.3 Smaller Parties in Northern Ireland.....	23
A3.4 Independents.....	24
A3.5 Context of Electoral support in Northern Ireland – please see Electoral Landscape paper.	25
Appendix 4. London	25
A4.1 Coverage.....	25
A4.2 Larger Parties in London	25
A4.3 Smaller Parties	25
A4.4 Independents.....	26
A4.5 Context of Electoral support in Greater London Authority – please see Electoral Landscape paper	27
Appendix 5 Local government in England (outside London)	27
A5.1 Coverage.....	27
A5.2 Larger Parties in England.....	27
A5.3 Smaller Parties in England	28
A5.4 Independents	28
A5.5 Context of Electoral Support for Local Government in England - please see Electoral Landscape paper.....	28
Appendix 6 Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales	29
A6.1	29
A6.2 Coverage.....	29
A6.3 Context of Electoral support in Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England Wales – please see Electoral Landscape paper.	30
*Appendix 7 Appropriate Network Programmes	30

Introduction

Deciding respective levels of coverage for different candidates in elections, who have varying levels of political support, requires, primarily, good and impartial editorial judgement. There will be legitimate differences in interpretation and application for different programmes and formats. The following guidance is aimed at ensuring there are appropriate levels of coverage, with some minimum level for smaller parties and independent candidates – it does not set any maximum. Advice is available, on a case by case basis, from the Chief Adviser, Politics, both before and throughout the campaign.

So although each outlet must ensure its coverage is proportionate with regard to parties and candidates, that should be treated as a guide rather than as a set mathematical formula. However, there must be good editorial reasons for any significant variation and these cannot supersede the over-riding obligation for due impartiality and fairness.

The relative amount of coverage given to political parties and independent candidates in each electoral area (for instance, across a nation or within an individual constituency) should reflect levels of past and/or current electoral support in that electoral area. In considering this, bearing in mind the location of the intended audience, although performance at the last equivalent election in terms of representation and share of the vote is taken as the starting point, the following factors must also be given due weight:

- performance in subsequent elections, where relevant
- other relevant evidence of current electoral support
- the number of candidates a party fields in the election
- other relevant editorial issues, such as electoral pacts, new parties, coalition agreements etc.

This Guidance will remain open to amendment due to any new relevant evidence of current political support until the day after the close of nominations.

Appendix 1. Scotland

Please note: The Election Period in Scotland begins on Wednesday 23rd March - before the Election Period for some other elections in the UK on 5th May.

A1.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in Scotland (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Scottish

parliamentary elections: as a whole, of an individual constituency or region, or a group of constituencies or regions.

A1.2 Larger Parties in Scotland

Parties which gained substantial representation across Scotland at the 2011 Parliamentary election were:

The Scottish National Party, Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

Bearing in mind the respective shares of the vote in 2011 and over a series of different types of elections, these parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are devolved and which are in the domain of the Scottish Parliament and, therefore, directly at issue in this election.

Appropriate network news programmes* (UK-wide) should have regard to the importance of the Scottish Parliamentary election particularly to their audience in Scotland in relation to the other elections taking place at the same time.

*see Appendix 7

A1.3 Smaller Parties in Scotland

The only other party currently represented in the Scottish Parliament is the Scottish Green Party. The audience will expect us to report their campaign more substantively than those of other smaller parties who are not represented. Since 2011, UKIP has demonstrated an increase in support in Scotland and this should also be reflected with coverage up to a level similar to the Scottish Green Party.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for each of the Smaller Parties, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the 2011 election and at subsequent different elections, we should also take note of current evidence, such as a consistent trend in opinion polls.

In addition, there may be circumstances – for example, in the potential context of “coalition-building” – which mean that it is editorially appropriate for any one or more Smaller Party to receive additional coverage. Other changes in relevant political circumstances since 2011 may also be taken into account.

In BBC Scotland, programmes should ensure that the Scottish Green Party is getting a proportionate share of the coverage each week. Where the larger parties are featuring regularly, the Greens should have a minimum of one appearance a week on each appropriate programme strand.

Any other party that is standing in at least one sixth of the total seats up for election in Scotland (ie 22 constituency seats) or fielding at least 4 candidates in all 8 regional lists should have, as a minimum, the launch of their manifesto (or an equivalent event) covered by Reporting Scotland and An Là on television and Good Morning Scotland and Aithris an Fheasgair on radio, as well as online.

If other programmes choose to cover them they must be consistent and treat all other parties reaching this threshold in a proportionate way.

The principles applied to coverage of the Smaller Parties at a Scotland-wide level should also be applied in any programme items which are based on a particular region and use list candidates. The relative strengths of the parties will vary from region to region and again advice can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics, who will be working with BBC Scotland to help reach this judgement.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate, to the full list of parties standing on BBC News Online Scotland.

A1.4 Independents

There are three independent MSPs sitting in the current Parliament. In constituencies or regions where there are sitting Independent MSPs (including “no party affiliation”), if those candidates stand again, the audience will expect us to give them more coverage than independent candidates who have not previously been elected. Each should be given proportionate coverage, taking account of current evidence as well as past electoral support in any constituency or regional reports.

All constituency or regional reports will refer to the online list, where all independent candidates will be included. This reference is a minimum for independent candidates, and where there is appropriate current evidence, or editorial justification, any one or more independent candidates may receive additional coverage.

However care must be taken to ensure that any such candidates who have a newsworthy personal profile are not given disproportionate coverage which would give them a substantial advantage over other candidates in the same constituency or region.

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

A1.5 Context of electoral support in Scotland (please see Electoral Landscape paper)

Appendix 2 Wales

A2.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in Wales (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Welsh Assembly elections: as a whole, of an individual constituency or region, or a group of constituencies or regions.

A2.2 Larger Parties in Wales

Parties which gained substantial representation across Wales at the 2011 Assembly election were

- Labour, the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats.

In subsequent elections, including the European and General elections, UKIP have demonstrated significant levels of electoral support in Wales.

These five parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are devolved and which are in the domain of the Welsh Assembly and, therefore, directly at issue in this election.

Appropriate network news * (UK-wide) should have regard to the importance of the Welsh Assembly election particularly to their audience in Wales in relation to the other elections taking place at the same time.

*see Appendix 7

A2.3 Smaller Parties in Wales

There are no other parties currently represented in the Welsh Assembly.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for each of the Smaller Parties, we should bear in mind how the electorate voted in the 2011 election and at subsequent different elections, and should also take note of current evidence, such as a consistent trend in opinion polls

In addition, there may be circumstances – for example, in the potential context of “coalition-building” – which mean that it is editorially appropriate for any one or more Smaller Party to receive additional coverage. Other changes in relevant political circumstances since 2011 may also be taken into account.

Any party that is standing in at least one sixth of the total seats up for election in Wales (ie ten constituency seats) or fielding at least 4 candidates in all 5 regional lists should have, as a minimum, the launch of their manifestos covered by Wales Today and Newyddion on television and Good Morning Wales and Post Cyntaf on radio as well as online.

If other programmes choose to cover them they must be consistent and treat all other parties reaching this threshold in a proportionate way.

The principles applied to coverage of the Smaller Parties at a Wales-wide level should also be applied in any programme items which are based on a particular region and use list candidates. The relative strengths of the parties will vary from region to region and again advice can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics, who will be working with BBC Wales to help reach this judgement.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate, to the full list of parties standing on BBC News Online Wales and BBC Cymru Fyw.

A2.4 Independents

All constituency or regional reports will refer to the online list, where all Independent candidates will be included. This reference is a minimum for Independent candidates, and where there is appropriate current evidence, any one or more Independent candidates may receive more coverage.

However, care must be taken to ensure that any such candidates who have a newsworthy personal profile are not given disproportionate coverage which would give them a major advantage over other candidates in the same constituency or region.

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

A2.5 Context of Electoral support in Wales – please see Electoral Landscape paper.

Appendix 3 Northern Ireland

A3.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in Northern Ireland (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections: as a whole, of an individual constituency or a group of constituencies.

A3.2 Larger Parties in Northern Ireland

Parties which gained substantial representation across Northern Ireland at the 2011 Assembly election were:

- the Democratic Unionists, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party.

Bearing in mind the respective share of the vote and the level of representation won in 2011, UK-wide programmes which report on the election as it affects Northern Ireland should give similar levels of coverage to the DUP and Sinn Fein. The UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party should also be given appropriate levels of coverage in output which includes the largest two parties, up to and including similar levels of coverage.

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are devolved and which are in the domain of the Northern Ireland Assembly and, therefore, directly at issue in this election.

Appropriate network news programmes* (UK-wide) should have regard to the importance of the Northern Ireland Assembly election particularly to their audience in Northern Ireland in relation to the other elections taking place at the same time.

*see Appendix 7

A3.3 Smaller Parties in Northern Ireland

Four other parties are represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly, each with one seat: NI21, the Northern Ireland Green Party, the TUV and UKIP. The audience will expect the campaigns of these parties – especially those standing at least 18 candidates (one sixth of the seats available) – to be reported more substantively than those of other smaller parties without representation.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for each of the Smaller Parties, BBC Northern Ireland will take account of how the electorate voted in

the 2011 election, at subsequent different elections and also of current evidence of electoral support, as well as other changes in relevant political circumstances since 2011.

All parties which are standing a minimum of 18 candidates³ should receive, as a minimum, the launch of their manifestos (or an equivalent event) covered by BBC Newsline 1830 on television and Evening Extra on radio, as well as online. They should also be included in at least one substantial item on appropriate BBC Northern Ireland programmes during the course of the campaign.

If other programmes choose to cover them they must be consistent and treat all other parties reaching this threshold in a proportionate way.

The principles applied to coverage of the Smaller Parties at a Northern Ireland-wide level should also be applied in any programme items which are based on a particular constituency. The relative strengths of the parties will vary and again advice can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics, who will be working with BBC Northern Ireland to help reach this judgement.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate, to the full list of parties standing on BBC News Online Northern Ireland.

A3.4 Independents

There are two independent MLAs sitting in the current Assembly. In constituencies or regions where there are sitting independent MLAs, if they stand again, the audience will expect us to give them more coverage than independent candidates who have not previously been MLAs. Each should be given proportionate coverage, taking account of current evidence as well as past electoral support in any constituency reports.

All constituency reports will refer to the online list, where all independent candidates will be included. This reference is a minimum for independent candidates, and where there is appropriate current evidence, or editorial justification, any one or more independent candidates may receive additional coverage.

However care must be taken to ensure that any such candidates who have a newsworthy personal profile are not given disproportionate coverage which would give them a substantial advantage over other candidates in the same constituency.

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

³ Still be to confirmed

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

A3.5 Context of Electoral support in Northern Ireland – please see Electoral Landscape paper.

Appendix 4. London

Please note: The Election Period in London begins on 21st March - before the Election Period for all other elections in the UK on 5th May.

A4.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in London (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the GLA elections: either of the Mayoral election or the London Assembly elections - as a whole or of an individual constituency or a group of constituencies.

A4.2 Larger Parties in London

Parties which gained the most substantial levels of electoral support in the 2012 GLA elections were the Conservatives and Labour.

Bearing in mind the respective levels of electoral support in 2012 and over a series of different types of elections, these two parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage where it is directly related to the 2016 GLA elections.

The only other parties which won representation in the 2012 GLA elections were the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats. Bearing in mind the respective levels of electoral support in 2012 and over a series of different types of elections, these two parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage where it is directly related to the 2016 GLA elections.

In some programmes and formats, the four parties may receive similar levels of coverage. This includes debates, items detailing distinctive policies, as well as sequences of interviews with Mayoral candidates or other senior party figures or candidates.

A4.3 Smaller Parties

Other parties which are:

- standing a candidate in the Mayoral Election

And

either

- standing candidates in all London Assembly constituencies
- or
- standing a full slate of candidates in the top-up list for the London Assembly

should have the launch of their manifesto/election campaign (or equivalent event) covered by BBC London on television and on radio, as well as online.

Where the larger parties are featuring regularly, these other parties should have proportionate coverage.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for each of the parties, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the 2012 elections and at subsequent different elections, output areas should also take note of evidence of current electoral support, such as any consistent trend in opinion polls as well as changed political circumstances.

Mayoral candidates not representing a party with a full slate of candidates in either part of the London Assembly elections, or parties with sufficient candidates for the London Assembly elections, but without a Mayoral candidate, may be given the same minimum level of coverage, if there is evidence of past and/or current electoral support or appropriate editorial justification. Additional levels of coverage should be considered when programmes focus on issues where smaller parties may have a distinctive point of view.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate and as a minimum, to the full list on BBC News Online of all parties and candidates standing.

A4.4 Independents

Levels of coverage for independent candidates, either in the Mayoral election or the election for the London Assembly, will depend on evidence of past and/or current electoral support, as well as political circumstances and editorial judgment.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for independent candidates, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the 2012 elections and at subsequent different elections, output areas should also take note of evidence of current electoral support, such as any consistent trend in opinion polls as well as changed political circumstances.

There was one independent candidate for the Mayoralty in 2012, who came fifth (out of seven), with just under 4% of first preference votes.

Independent candidates for Mayor may be given the same minimum level of coverage as qualifying political parties, if there is evidence of past and/or current electoral support or appropriate editorial justification. Additional levels of coverage should be considered when programmes focus on issues where independents may have a distinctive point of view.

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Care must be taken to ensure that any such candidates who have a newsworthy personal profile are not given disproportionate coverage which would give them an unfair advantage.

A4.5 Context of Electoral support in Greater London Authority – please see Electoral Landscape paper

Appendix 5

Local Government in parts of England (outside London).

There are local elections in 124 English councils:⁴

35 metropolitan boroughs

19 unitary authorities

70 district authorities

Plus 3 Mayoral elections.

A5.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast where elections are taking place in England (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the English local government elections: as a whole, of an individual council or ward or a group of councils or wards.

Content producers should take care to ensure that coverage of local government elections does not cause any unfairness to candidates in the Police and Crime Commissioner elections (see Appendix 6): there must be due impartiality with regard to both elections.

A5.2 Larger Parties in England

Parties with substantial levels of electoral support at local government level in England are:

Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and UKIP.

Taking account of this and levels of electoral support over a series of different types of elections, these parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage where it is directly related to the 2016 English local government elections.

⁴ Figures still to be confirmed

A5.3 Smaller Parties in England

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for each of the Smaller Parties, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the 2012 elections and at subsequent different elections, we should also take note of evidence of current electoral support, such as a robust and consistent trend in opinion polls, as well as relevant political circumstances. Additional coverage should be considered when programmes focus on issues where smaller parties have a distinctive point of view.

The Green Party, in demonstrating some electoral support at local elections, will normally receive coverage proportionate to the larger parties and more than those parties with less evidence of past or current electoral support or fewer candidates.

All parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats available in England (i.e. approximately 445 candidates in 2670 seats – to be confirmed) will have – as a minimum – their manifesto launch (or equivalent event) covered on appropriate network TV and radio news programmes* and online.

If other programmes choose to cover the elections, they must be consistent and treat parties reaching this threshold in a proportionate way. Local and regional programmes covering elections should take account of any different patterns of past and/or current electoral support in their area.

In addition there will be circumstances in which there is a possibility of No Overall Control within a council, meaning it will be editorially appropriate for any one or more of the smaller parties to receive more coverage, for instance, in the context of “coalition-building”.

A5.4 Independents

Independent candidates attract significant levels of support in many local elections and the audience will expect that to be reflected in relevant coverage. Independent candidates should be given proportionate coverage (up to similar levels to the larger parties in some wards or councils), where they have demonstrated:

- significant previous electoral support (e.g. are incumbents)
- there is evidence of significant current electoral support.

In addition there will be circumstances in which there is a possibility of No Overall Control within a council, meaning it will be editorially appropriate for any one or more independent candidates to receive more coverage, for instance, in the context of “coalition-building”.

Relevant output should also take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate indicates some support for a political party, or where a group of independents

are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Appendix 6

Police and Crime Commissioners (England – outside London – and Wales)

A6.1 Coverage

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in England and Wales (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections: as a whole, of an individual police area or a group of police areas.

A6.2 Parties and Candidates

The evidence of the first set of PCC elections, in 2012, is that they are not necessarily contested in the same way as other elections. Not all political parties approached them in the same way (some stood fewer or no candidates) and independent candidates were both prominent and often successful. The high deposit limited the number of candidates. Most were contested more on local issues – without national manifestos.

In assessing differing levels of coverage between candidates, therefore, the weight given to subsequent different types of elections in the same areas is likely to be limited. Similarly, insofar as evidence of “current electoral support” lies largely in opinion polls, these are likely to be of limited use for individual police areas.

In each area, therefore, content producers will take account of “past electoral support” – ie when the PCC elections were last held and who contested them. But they will also have regard for the nature of PCC elections, the number of candidates and the different patterns of electoral support, for instance, as between party and independent candidates (for that reason, there is no difference between the guidance for party and independent candidates).

Content producers may take account of robust and objective evidence of “current electoral support” and of any relevant political circumstances in making judgements about relative levels of coverage. The sort of circumstances where candidates might receive less coverage could be, for instance, where they have not launched a manifesto or have not set out policies specifically on police and crime issues, or where they are campaigning, for instance, on a single issue, or intending to attract attention to a particular cause or commercial enterprise, rather than with a serious intention of being elected. However, this should be a tough test; specific advice is available from the Chief Adviser Politics.

Otherwise, candidates in the same “constituency” – or police area - can normally expect similar (not necessarily identical) levels of coverage to each other across the election period as a whole in items about that police area.

Regional and local stations or programmes covering more than one police area must ensure due impartiality in each (ie take care that coverage of parties or candidates in one area does not create any unfairness towards parties or candidates in another election within the same broadcast area).

Content producers should also take care to ensure that coverage of the PCC elections does not cause any unfairness to candidates in local government elections (see Appendix 5): there must be due impartiality with regard to both elections.

In network programmes which contain items covering the PCC elections in general, care must be taken to ensure that the inclusion of contributors from parties which are standing candidates in many or all the constituencies does not cause unfairness to other candidates (e.g. independents) standing individually in a constituency.

Due impartiality, in each PCC election, should normally be achieved in each programme or across the programme strand. It may be achieved across the whole coverage of a channel or station, but there must then be clear and prominent sign-posting, appropriate references to full website details and due regard given to ensuring fairness (for instance, appropriate scheduling of interviews at different times of the day).

A6.3 Context of Electoral support in Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England Wales – please see Electoral Landscape paper.

***Appendix 7 “Appropriate network programmes”** in the appendices above refers to:

- at least two of the main bulletins on BBC One (ie One, Six, Ten)
- The News Channel, including the News at Five
- Radio 4 1800.
- 5 Live Drive
- BBC Online
- Radio 2 summaries
- Newsbeat

