

The Pollard Review

BBC Response

December 2012



BBC TRUST RESPONSE

This report was commissioned by the BBC Executive Board, with the agreement of the BBC Trust, to establish whether there were any failings in the BBC's management of the *Newsnight* investigation relating to allegations of sexual abuse of children by Jimmy Savile, including the broadcast of tribute programmes on the BBC.

Serious allegations were made that the BBC had attempted to suppress knowledge of Jimmy Savile's wrongdoing for its own corporate benefit. These allegations threatened to undermine the trust that people place in the BBC. We needed to get to the truth about what had happened, and to be honest about any failings. Nick Pollard's investigation was independent, expert, thorough and fast. He has produced a very full report, and we accept all its recommendations.

On the most important point, Nick Pollard does not believe there was any inappropriate managerial pressure or consideration that influenced the Editor of *Newsnight* not to run the Savile story. Nor has he found evidence that "anyone involved in the making of the tribute programmes knew of any allegations against or rumours about Savile".

Nonetheless, it is clear that there were serious failings in editorial oversight and management control that now need to be met with concerted action by the BBC.

George Entwistle has already resigned as Director-General, and where other individuals are criticised we will support the BBC Executive in taking whatever action is necessary.

We also welcome the immediate actions that the Executive will take, detailed below, to address the Review's recommendations about existing editorial and management processes. We will expect to receive regular implementation reports as these changes are made.

Beyond these measures, the Pollard report also highlights some bigger questions about the management culture of the BBC. It portrays an organisation where chaos and confusion could have been avoided through better leadership, organisation and communication.

We recognise these as long-term failings that will not be solved by structural re-organisations or new compliance systems. Change must start with the people at the top behaving differently and setting an example that the rest of the organisation can follow; taking initiative and responsibility; sharing information; embracing criticism. That means persuading staff at all levels to abandon the sort of insularity, leaking and distrust that is unveiled in this report.

We will now ask the incoming Director-General, Tony Hall, to set as his first and top priority the reform of the BBC's management culture. We will expect him to present us with his plan to lead this sort of change within three months of his arrival. We will ask him to include proposals to improve the Executive Board's oversight of editorial decision-making, both through the executive support he receives as Editor-in-Chief and through the contribution that can be made by the non-Executive Directors. For our part, we will consider whether there are improvements that can be made to lines of communication between the Trust and the Executive Board at the top of the BBC.

The BBC portrayed by the Pollard Review is not fundamentally flawed, but has been chaotic. That now needs to change.



BBC EXECUTIVE BOARD RESPONSE

We commissioned the Pollard Review to consider the management by the BBC of a *Newsnight* investigation relating to allegations of abuse by Jimmy Savile. We thank Nick Pollard for his work and clear report.

We welcome Pollard's conclusion that the decision to drop the investigation was not due to managerial pressure. Specifically, *"the decision to drop the original investigation was flawed and the way it was taken was wrong but I believe it was done in good faith. It was not done to protect the Savile tribute programmes or for any improper reason."*

However, the report makes uncomfortable reading. It raises basic questions about how we work, communicate and make decisions as an organisation. The report also exposed failures in leadership. We accept Pollard's recommendations in full.

The BBC has already faced significant consequences. The former Director-General, George Entwistle, has resigned. We have separately investigated the editorial failings around *Newsnight's* McAlpine investigation and taken disciplinary action against a number of individuals. This is covered in a separate statement.

Our response to the Pollard Review will have two parts. First, we will take a number of immediate actions to address the weaknesses in editorial and managerial processes. Second, the acting and designate Directors-General will examine the issues identified in BBC News and develop a plan to improve how we work, communicate and make decisions.

We must remain a self-confident, creative organisation that takes editorial risks and produces world-class journalism. Our proud tradition will be sustained by learning the right lessons and making the necessary changes. The primary need is not to introduce new rules and regulations but to make existing processes work and address issues of organisation, culture and leadership.

Immediate actions

In order to address Pollard's key recommendations on editorial and managerial processes, we will take the following immediate actions:

- The senior editorial team for *Newsnight* will be replaced with the appointment of a new Editor and Deputy Editor. *Newsnight* is one of the BBC's flagship journalism programmes. Both the Savile and McAlpine investigations fell short of what is expected. The new Editor will work closely with the Director of News to revitalise the programme.
- The BBC's Management Board will receive a regular report from the Director-General on the highest risk programmes and investigations across the BBC. The BBC's existing Managed Risk

Programmes List (MRPL) will be strengthened and assume a central role in managing editorial risk across the organisation. There will be clear written criteria for the inclusion of programmes and investigations in the MRPL, and a proper gradation of the risks they raise. The purpose and importance of the MRPL will be communicated to all senior editorial figures and managers in the BBC. We will also look at the extent to which the MRPL can be used for 'quick turnaround' stories.

- There will be strengthened guidance for BBC journalists on how and when material should be handed to the police. Where the broadcast of an investigation is not possible but evidence has been obtained of serious criminal activity, the BBC should be alerted at a corporate level so it can determine the appropriate action. The guidance will be supported by improved training.
- The Editors' Blog is a useful tool for public accountability and transparency. The handling of the Savile blog was inappropriate. The role of the Editors' Blog will be reviewed and entries will comply with the BBC's editorial standards.
- While, as Pollard recognises, a degree of separation between BBC News and other Divisions is necessary to safeguard journalistic independence, there must be effective channels for communication at a senior level. Potential conflicts of interest on editorial matters, or between editorial and corporate matters, will be considered by the BBC's Management Board and resolved in ways that safeguard the BBC's editorial integrity and independence.
- While the key issues we must confront are organisational and cultural, the Pollard report has also raised questions about the actions and decisions of a small number of individuals. Proportionate action will be taken.

Longer-term actions

We will address Pollard's recommendations that relate to how we work, communicate and make decisions, through the following actions:

- The acting and designate Directors-General will examine the issues identified in BBC News. It is clear that aspects of the management and culture within BBC News must change.
- We will develop a plan to address the wider questions about how we work, communicate and make decisions, in preparation for the new Director-General's arrival. The priority is to create a BBC that is more united and single-minded. Organisational structures and silos cannot get in the way of effective team-work and sharing information. We must guard against insularity through a willingness to learn from what works well in other organisations.
- When the new Director-General is in place, we will consider the roles and responsibilities at the top of the BBC to ensure effective oversight of editorial standards.

- Above all else, we must keep the victims of Savile's abuse at the forefront of our minds. Our efforts in this regard will be informed by Dame Janet Smith's review of the culture and practices of the BBC during the time Savile worked here.

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