

January 2016

**RE: supporting recommendations impartiality review of statistics**

To Jil Matheson and the impartiality review panel:

We are writing this letter as supporting evidence along with our report, *Impartiality Review of BBC Reporting of Statistics: A Content Analysis*. Based on our review of coverage, we identified some areas that *the BBC Trust's impartiality review panel* might consider when making judgements about the BBC's use of statistics and how output might be strengthened:

- *Make better use of existing BBC statistical knowledge across different platforms.* The value of journalists who are able to confidently comprehend and communicate statistical information was clearly evident in our case studies, with the former head of BBC statistics and a More or Less presenter making important contributions.
- *Inform broadcast coverage with the same approach to statistics shown online.* In our analysis of news generally and consistently across the eight case studies, online news was clearly the distinctive BBC platform in its use of statistics, regularly supplying background/context in major stories. As a platform it has more space to do so than radio or TV – but demonstrates an appetite to inform using statistics that other platforms could emulate.
- *Developing a guide to statistical sources and major adjudicators of statistics for BBC journalists.* Since impartiality is fundamental to BBC journalism, it is understandable that journalists often left it to competing sources to put forward their arguments. But, at times, this resulted in more heat than light coming from statistical claims, particularly when rival politicians traded numbers without much independent interpretation. A guide both to credible alternative sources and an understanding of their relative independence from government, industry or wider influences could help BBC journalists broaden the diversity of perspectives when making sense of major news stories.
- Since our study showed few instances of journalists challenging statistical claims, *having a senior data editor/head of statistics* might help journalists better understand competing source positions on some of the major stories widely covered by the BBC.

Yours Sincerely

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