

Editorial Policy



Guidance Note

Off-Air Activities

Guidance for News and Current Affairs Presenters and Editorial Staff in BBC News, BBC Nations and Regions and BBC Global News

This guidance note should be read in conjunction with BBC Editorial Guidelines (www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines) Section 13: Editorial Integrity and Independence and the BBC Conflicts of Interest Guidelines (www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/conflicts/).

In cases of doubt, further assistance can be sought from the duty Editorial Policy Adviser by telephoning

All Guidance Notes can be found at edpol.gateway.bbc.co.uk/guidance_notes.shtml (BBC internal link) or www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/.

Introduction

The off-air activities of our editorial staff and presenters should not undermine the public's perception of the impartiality, integrity and objectivity of the BBC.

The BBC's Conflicts of Interest Guidelines state the BBC's policy in this area and include advice on maintaining impartiality; declaring conflicts of interest; acceptability of outside commitments; political activities; commercial, business and financial interests; personal benefits and commercial advertising.

The BBC Conflicts of Interest Guidelines provide advice for staff and freelancers working in all genres across all BBC Divisions. This note specifically provides additional guidance for those working in news and current affairs areas where the BBC's reputation for impartiality is crucial and where there are particular sensitivities about off-air activities. Factual and topical programmes which are not primarily related to news and current affairs output are not specifically covered by this guidance note. Advice for these programmes is found in the general BBC Conflicts of Interest Guidelines which apply to all output areas across the BBC.

This guidance note gives additional specific advice for news and current affairs areas on:-

- Letters to the press

- Writing for external publications
- Writing books
- Public Speaking
- Chairing conferences
- Media training

Principles for maintaining impartiality

1. BBC Staff, BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts and freelances primarily known as BBC news and current affairs presenters or reporters

It is essential that BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non staff contracts and freelances known to the public primarily as presenters or reporters on BBC news or current affairs programmes do not undertake any off-air activities which could undermine the BBC's reputation for impartiality. Nothing they do or say should bring the BBC into disrepute. No off-air activity, including writing for newspapers, magazines or websites, writing books, giving interviews, making speeches or chairing conferences should lead to any doubt about the objectivity or integrity of their work for the BBC. If BBC journalists, presenters or reporters publicly express personal views off-air on controversial issues, then their editorial or on-air role may be severely compromised.

BBC staff and freelances primarily known as presenters or reporters on BBC news and current affairs programmes must not

- state or reveal publicly how they vote or express support for any political party
- express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current party political debate
- advocate any particular position on an issue of current public controversy or debate
- exhort a change in high profile public policy.

Permission must be sought from the relevant Head of Department about the suitability of writing or speaking commitments. Heads of Department should ensure that the relevant BBC Press and Publicity manager is informed about these commitments and the dates of publication or appearance.

Contracts with presenters and reporters who are primarily associated with the BBC should reflect requirements for impartiality when undertaking off-air activities and the need to seek approval for such activities as outlined in this guidance note.

2. Freelance presenters whose primary identity is not the presentation of BBC news and current affairs programmes

In some cases the BBC may employ as freelance presenters people whose primary occupation or identity is not the presentation of BBC news or current affairs. For example, presenters may be academics or newspaper editors or columnists and they may have particular viewpoints on current affairs. The BBC would not place the same constraints on their off-air activities as would be placed on BBC news staff or mainstream news or current affairs presenters and reporters. But employment of such freelance presenters should not undermine the BBC's impartiality and it may be advisable in some cases to state on air what their main position or occupation is and, if relevant, that they hold a partial view on a topic. Such presenters should not be used to present news bulletins or major daily news programmes dealing with a range of issues.

Presenters whose primary identity is not the presentation of BBC news and current affairs should be asked to clear with the BBC any articles or letters to the press which directly relate to the programme which they present.

Specific detailed guidance for BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non-staff contracts and freelancers primarily associated with BBC News and Current Affairs programmes

1. References to the BBC

BBC staff and presenters or reporters primarily associated with BBC news and current affairs programmes should not speak or write publicly about the BBC without specific, prior written approval from the relevant Head of Department. Heads of Department should ensure the relevant BBC Press and Publicity Manager is informed of any approval given to speak or write about the BBC or the broadcasting industry.

When undertaking outside activities, it is also important that no reference is made which might imply BBC endorsement of an outside commercial organisation.

2. Letters to the press

BBC staff and presenters or reporters primarily associated with the BBC should clear with the Head of Department and the relevant BBC Press and Publicity manager any letter to the press which deals with the subject matter of the programmes they work on. They should also clear any letter which relates to the BBC or broadcasting or deals with any political, public policy or controversial issue.

3. Articles for newspapers, magazines and websites

This guidance on writing for newspapers, magazines and websites applies to BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non staff contracts and freelancers known to the public primarily as presenters or reporters on BBC news or current affairs programmes.

Regular Columns

BBC staff, BBC correspondents and freelances primarily known as BBC news presenters or reporters should not normally write regular columns for non-BBC websites or external publications which are not published by or for the BBC.

It particular they should not write a regular column which deals with:

- News, current affairs, politics or current world affairs
- Economics, business or finance
- Matters of current political or public policy debate or industrial controversy at a local, national or international level
- Media issues
- Moral or ethical issues or religion.

Sport columns

Columns on sport often deal with issues of public controversy. For this reason, those who work on political programmes or mainstream news and current affairs programmes dealing with a range of issues should not write regular columns about Sport for non-BBC publications or websites. Those working on other programmes may in some cases write columns about Sport with the express approval of the Head of Department. Such columns must not focus on any political or business controversies associated with Sport and any reference to such matters must be strictly impartial. Heads of Department will require copy approval.

Columns or regular articles on non-controversial issues

In some limited cases, with the prior written permission of the relevant Head of Department, staff and freelances may write regular articles or columns for a non-BBC publication or website on a specific non-controversial topic such as gardening or music. Columns should not deal with any public debate related to the subject matter and it is important that nothing which is written undermines the BBC's reputation for impartiality. Articles should not refer to issues which they are likely to cover on air. The Head of Department will require BBC copy approval for any such articles.

One-off articles related to topical or controversial issues

In some very limited cases, with the prior approval of the relevant Head of Department, a one-off article for a non-BBC publication or website may be written on

- News, current affairs or politics
- Economics, business or finance

- Matters of current political or public policy debate
- Media issues
- Moral or ethical issues or religion

Any such one-off article must be in accordance with the BBC's values and written in the context of BBC marketing for programmes or in support of the BBC or its interests. BBC copy approval will be required. No regular column on such issues is acceptable for a non-BBC publication or website.

One off articles on sport

Heads of Department must decide whether any one-off article on sport is acceptable and whether copy approval is required.

One off articles on other issues

A one-off article about a non-controversial issue may be acceptable but only with the specific approval of the Head of Department. It is important that nothing which is written undermines either the writer's or the BBC's reputation for impartiality. Heads of Department will decide whether copy clearance is required.

Copy approval

As outlined above, BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non-staff contracts and freelancers primarily associated with the BBC will need to have copy cleared for all columns and any one-off articles related to topical or controversial issues. Heads of Department will decide whether copy clearance is required for one off articles on sport or non controversial issues.

Articles must be submitted for BBC approval in good time before the publication deadline and Heads of Department must ensure that the relevant press office is informed.

4. Writing books

BBC staff and BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts

BBC editorial staff and BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts must have prior written approval from their Head of Department to publish a book on any topic. The book should not compromise the integrity or impartiality of the BBC. The copy of any book should be approved by the BBC before publication. Copy should be submitted in good time before publication to the Head of Department or their nominee. The relevant BBC Press and Publicity Manager should be informed of plans to promote and market the book.

Freelance presenters and reporters

Those primarily known to the public as presenters or reporters on BBC news and current affairs programmes should inform the relevant Head of Department about any book they propose to offer for publication before any contractual arrangements are made. The Head of Department will then be in a position to advise in good time whether the proposed book could affect their on air role. The relevant BBC Press Office should be informed about any commitments which presenters have made for writing books.

Books about current topics

In some cases, Heads of Department may agree that a presenter or reporter may write a book about a current topic provided it is not likely to compromise their on-air role or the integrity or impartiality of the BBC. If the book turns out to be controversial or one-sided, editors should consider whether to allow the presenter to cover on-air the issues which they have written about. If there is any possibility of a conflict of interest, the Head of Department should consider whether the presenter should declare that interest on air or not present items or conduct interviews on the issue.

5. Book serialisations

BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non-staff contracts and freelance presenters and reporters primarily associated with the BBC should seek written permission in advance from the relevant Head of Department for the granting of any serialisation rights. Approvals for serialisations must also be agreed with the relevant Press and Publicity Manager. It is the responsibility of the author to inform the relevant Press and Publicity Manager about the press date for the serialisation.

6. Public speaking and other public appearances

BBC Staff and BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts

BBC staff and BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts should get written permission from their Head of Department before undertaking any outside public appearances including speaking at conferences. They must not make any appearances which are promotional for a commercial concern and nothing they do or say should undermine the integrity or impartiality of the BBC. Care should be taken with appearances related to charities, particularly if they are campaigning organisations, and no impression should be given of BBC endorsement of one charity over another. It would not normally be appropriate for BBC staff or a BBC correspondent on a non staff contract to front a campaign for a specific charity.

It is unlikely to be acceptable for any BBC staff member or BBC Correspondent to be included on an agency list of those for hire for public speeches. Under no circumstances should they sign up with an external agency for public speaking without the written permission of the relevant Head of Department.

Freelance presenters and reporters

Those known to the public primarily as presenters or reporters on BBC news and current affairs programmes must remain impartial when speaking publicly or taking part in a question and answer session. They must not promote any political party, campaigning organisation or lobby group. Public appearances to promote an outside commercial organisation are not acceptable and it is important that no off-air activity implies BBC endorsement of an outside commercial concern.

The onus is on presenters and reporters to inform the relevant Head of Department about the overall range of speaking commitments which they undertake and to inform them about any which may be controversial or may lead to problems concerning perceptions of impartiality. If, during a public appearance, a viewpoint expressed turns out to be controversial or one-sided, editors should consider whether to allow the presenter to cover the issue on-air.

7. Chairing conferences

BBC staff and BBC Correspondents on non-staff contracts

BBC staff and BBC correspondents on non-staff contracts must obtain the written permission of their Head of Department before agreeing to chair any conference. They should not chair conferences which are a promotional exercise for a commercial company, which support any political party or are one-sided on an issue of public controversy. Care should be taken in relation to charities, particularly if they are campaigning organisations, and no impression should be given of BBC endorsement of one charity over another.

Freelance presenters and reporters

Presenters and reporters primarily associated with the BBC may chair conferences as part of their off-air work. Conferences they chair should not support any political party, be one-sided on an issue of public controversy or be promotional exercises for commercial companies. The onus is on the presenter or reporter to inform the relevant Head of Department about the overall range of work they undertake and about any particular commitment which may be controversial or may lead to problems concerning perceptions of impartiality.

8. Media training

There are considerable dangers of a conflict of interest if BBC people train individuals or organisations in how to present themselves on television, radio or online.

BBC staff, BBC correspondents on non staff contracts and freelances known to the public primarily as presenters or reporters on BBC news or current affairs programmes should not undertake any media training work. Under no circumstances should they interview anyone they have previously trained.

2 May 2006