

**Debate Pack**

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# The Government's role in upholding the impartiality of BBC news coverage

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Parliamentary material</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Further reading</b>	<b>28</b>

# 1 Background

## 1.1 Regulatory framework

The BBC's Board is responsible for ensuring the delivery of the BBC's mission and public purposes. Moreover, the Royal Charter and the accompanying Framework Agreement establish that it is a duty of the BBC Board to set the standards for the BBC's editorial and creative output and services. The Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee is responsible for advising the Board on whether the BBC's editorial standards are being upheld. Separately, the Executive's Editorial Standards and Complaints Committee reports to the Executive Committee on editorial standards, risks, complaints and compliance.

The BBC is externally regulated by Ofcom.

### BBC

The BBC's constitution is set out in a [Royal Charter](#) (PDF) which is granted by Statutory Order in Privy Council and renewed around every ten years. The rules under which it operates are set out in a [Framework Agreement](#) (PDF) between the BBC and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The current Royal Charter was approved in December 2016 and began on 1 January 2017, following a lengthy review process. It runs until 31 December 2027.<sup>1</sup>

Upon the expiry of the BBC's Royal Charter, "no recommendation may be made to His Majesty in Council" to grant a further charter until the review requirements laid out in article 59 of the current Royal Charter have been fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> This includes consultation with the public, the BBC, Ofcom and any person the Secretary of State "considers appropriate". A draft of the proposed charter and framework agreement must be laid before Parliament and debated by each House, although the renewal of the Royal Charter does not require Parliamentary approval.<sup>3</sup>

### Impartiality and the Charter

Under the BBC's [Royal Charter](#), the BBC's object is "the fulfilment of its mission and the promotion of the public purposes" (Article 4). Its mission "is to act in

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about what happened during the last Charter renewal process can be found in the Library's briefing [BBC Charter renewal](#), published 28 December 2016.

<sup>2</sup> [Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation](#) (PDF) (Cmnd 9365), December 2016, art 59(1)

<sup>3</sup> As above, art 59(6)

the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain” (Article 5). The public purposes are set out in Article 6 and include the following references to impartiality:

#### 6. The Public Purposes

The Public Purposes of the BBC are as follows.

**(1) To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them:** the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people’s understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world. Its content should be provided to the highest editorial standards. It should offer a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers, using the highest calibre presenters and journalists, and championing freedom of expression, so that all audiences can engage fully with major local, regional, national, United Kingdom and global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens.

[...]

**(5) To reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world:** the BBC should provide high-quality news coverage to international audiences, firmly based on British values of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness. Its international services should put the United Kingdom in a world context, aiding understanding of the United Kingdom as a whole, including its nations and regions where appropriate. It should ensure that it produces output and services which will be enjoyed by people in the United Kingdom and globally.<sup>4</sup>

### BBC Editorial Guidelines

The Royal Charter and the accompanying Framework Agreement establish that it is a duty of the BBC Board to set the standards for the BBC’s editorial and creative output and services. This is fulfilled by producing and upholding its [Editorial Guidelines](#).

### Complaints procedure

The Charter and the Framework Agreement allow the BBC to define the details of how its complaints process works in practice. This is referred to as the ‘BBC First process’ for resolving editorial complaints:

- Stage 1A: Initial response from BBC Audience Services.
- Stage 1B (if the complaint is progressed further): A response with input from a BBC Manager or member of the editorial team.
- Stage 2 (if the complaint is progressed further): A response from the BBC Executive Complaints Unit.

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<sup>4</sup> [Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation](#) (PDF) (Cmnd 9365), December 2016, arts 6(1)-(5)

- Stage 3 (if the complaint is progressed further): Escalation to Ofcom.<sup>5</sup>

From stage 1A to 2 the complaint is assessed against the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and Standards. At stage 3, it is assessed against Ofcom's Broadcasting Code (unless it is in regard to online material, and then the Editorial Guidelines apply).

## Ofcom

[Ofcom](#) regulates the BBC and has responsibility for all areas of BBC content standards, including the accuracy and impartiality of news, and the impartiality of any programme covering matters of political or industrial controversy and issues relating to current public policy.<sup>6</sup>

Further information about how the Ofcom regulates the BBC is available on its [Regulation of the BBC](#) webpages.

The BBC must comply with the regulatory conditions in its licence. If Ofcom is satisfied that the BBC has failed to comply with a condition, and has given the BBC a reasonable opportunity to make representations about the matter, Ofcom can:

- direct the BBC (or accept undertakings from the BBC) to take such steps Ofcom consider will remedy the failure to comply, and ensure that the BBC complies with their requirements properly in future.
- serve on the BBC a notice requiring it to pay to Ofcom, within a specified period, a specified penalty up to a maximum of £250,000.

Ofcom publishes an annual assessment of the BBC's compliance against its regulatory requirements and of its performance against Ofcom's performance measures. In addition, Ofcom must conduct at least two in-depth periodic reviews of the BBC's performance during the Charter period, and it can carry out additional reviews where it feels it is appropriate to do so.

In its most recent annual report on the BBC's performance, Ofcom said that the BBC "must continue to challenge and ask difficult questions of itself as it embeds its impartiality recommendations".<sup>7</sup> It completed three standards investigations in 2022/23 (two of these concerned content broadcast in 2021); all three concerned BBC's obligations in regard to due impartiality. One breach was recorded, and in the other two instances Ofcom concluded that was no breach of impartiality rules.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BBC, [BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures](#) (PDF), June 2020

<sup>6</sup> Ofcom, [Introduction to Ofcom's Operating Framework for the BBC](#) (PDF), October 2017, para 2.6

<sup>7</sup> Ofcom, [Annual Report on the BBC 2022-23](#) (PDF), 30 November 2023, p3

<sup>8</sup> As above, p71

## Government role

The BBC is operationally and editorially independent of Government and there is no provision for the Government to intervene in the BBC's day-to-day operations. However, the Secretary of State does regularly meet with the Director General of the BBC and has previously used these meetings to raise concerns around the BBC's coverage of particular events.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2

## Timeline of recent developments

### Tim Davie's introductory speech as BBC Director-General, September 2020

In this speech, Tim Davie outlined his four priorities that would “guide our choices over the coming weeks and months”. The first of these was to “renew our commitment to impartiality”. He said that the organisation needed “to champion and urgently recommit to impartiality”.<sup>10</sup> The two primary actions referenced in this context were:

- Explore new ways of delivering impartiality. That is, seeking a wider spectrum of views.<sup>11</sup>
- New actions to uphold due impartiality: new guidance on delivering impartiality guidelines, new social media rules, “clearer guidance” on the declaration of external interests, and new training.<sup>12</sup>

### Serota Review, October 2021

The Serota Review into the BBC's editorial processes, governance and culture was published in October 2021. Led by the BBC Board's Senior Independent Director Sir Nicholas Serota, it followed on from [Lord Dyson's investigation](#) (PDF) into Martin Bashir's interview with Princess Diana on 20 November 1995. The Serota Review was commissioned by the Board of the BBC in order to understand whether the organisation had both learnt from the past and was able to respond to challenges in the present.

The review found that in the six areas of failure identified by Lord Dyson “governance and oversight are now stronger now than they were in 1995.”<sup>13</sup> This included “a renewed and continuing emphasis by the current Director-

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<sup>9</sup> PQ 6713 [on [BBC: Community Relations](#)], 18 December 2023; PQ 2250 [on [BBC: Gaza](#)], 22 November 2023

<sup>10</sup> BBC, [Tim Davie's introductory speech as BBC Director-General](#), 3 September 2020

<sup>11</sup> As above

<sup>12</sup> As above

<sup>13</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p5

General on editorial values, particularly impartiality”.<sup>14</sup> However, it said that there was still “potential for significant improvement”. To this end, the review set out recommendations against each of the failings identified by Lord Dyson:

### **Editorial values and culture**

“We found that BBC management needs to do more to embed editorial values into the fabric of the organisation.” It recommended that the BBC emphasise the importance of frank and open discussion and give editorial values greater prominence throughout the organisation.<sup>15</sup>

The BBC accepted this recommendation and said that it would “reinforce the primacy of editorial values amongst the BBC’s wider values”. Alongside other actions such as ensuring the consistent application of training requirements.<sup>16</sup>

### **Editorial oversight and support**

Due to increases in the range, complexity and volume of BBC output, it suggested that the editorial challenges faced by the organisation had “increased substantially since 1995.”

To this end, it recommended that the BBC Board commission and publish regular reviews in key areas of public debate to assess whether the BBC has met its editorial standards. Whilst the BBC Executive should develop an internal management tool that systematically assesses whether content meets these standards.<sup>17</sup>

In response, alongside its other actions on impartiality (outlined in the following section), the BBC committed to strengthen the Editorial Policy team.<sup>18</sup>

### **Raising concerns**

It found that the organisational culture did not always encourage and promote the necessary levels of trust for editorial concerns to be raised in conversation between managers or colleagues. Many people were also found to be unsure as to how to informally raise concerns, or unfamiliar with the formal editorial whistleblowing process.

The Serota Review said that BBC should support a culture where staff comfortable discussing these concerns. It also recommended the

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<sup>14</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p5

<sup>15</sup> As above

<sup>16</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p4

<sup>17</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p6

<sup>18</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p5

development of a “clear and strengthened” editorial whistleblowing policy and provide a regular summary of whistleblowing data to Ofcom.<sup>19</sup>

In response, the BBC said it would create a new editorial whistleblowing policy, and strengthen the existing governance arrangements around whistleblowing.<sup>20</sup>

### Conducting editorial standards investigations

It is one of the BBC Board’s responsibilities to set and uphold the BBC’s editorial standards. This includes responsibility for the oversight of the complaints framework and procedures.

The review found that the process for internal investigations of editorial matters was “ad-hoc” and “not clearly defined or sufficiently transparent”. As a result, it recommended that the BBC should establish and publish a procedure for self-initiated internal investigations into potential breaches of the guidelines.<sup>21</sup>

In response, the BBC said it would “set out a simple and proportionate procedure for internal investigations into potential breaches of the Editorial Guidelines.”<sup>22</sup>

### Governance

The review heard evidence from inside and outside the BBC as to the emerging editorial risks and issues faced by the BBC. For example, the use of technology and the spread/creation of fake news, and “a polarisation of opinion” due to the rise of social media. This polarisation then challenges “the BBC’s ability to reflect accurately the full breadth of opinion in society”.

The review recommended that the Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee play a more active role in monitoring these risks and ensuring that BBC staff have the necessary tools to manage them. It also said that the BBC should recommend that the Framework Agreement be amended to specify that the Board should also assess performance against Editorial Guidelines.<sup>23</sup>

The BBC said it would take forward this recommendation with Government, and it was introduced through an amendment to the Agreement in May 2022.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p7

<sup>20</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p6

<sup>21</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p7

<sup>22</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p6

<sup>23</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, pp28-30

<sup>24</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p6. The BBC Board must “be responsible for assessing the BBC’s performance on the timely delivery of those plans and guidelines.”

### Transparency and accountability

The review found that “a significant number of contributors felt there was a culture of defensiveness at the BBC, especially around admitting mistakes.” It recommended that the BBC “strengthen the procedures in place to share information at a senior level on emerging editorial trends, risks, and issues.”<sup>25</sup>

In response, the BBC said it would share more information at a senior level on emerging editorial trends, risks and issues.<sup>26</sup>

### BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan, October 2021

This ten-point plan (published the same day as the Serota Review) set out four specific actions on impartiality, alongside the BBC’s response to each of the six recommendations from the Serota Review.

On 1 July 2022, [the BBC set out its progress on this plan](#), finding that the organisation had either completed or progressed all of actions from this and the Serota Review. By November 2023, it had subsequently completed all of these actions.<sup>27</sup>

#### Continue to deepen the understanding of impartiality across the organisation

This was a commitment to “expand the measures to renew the BBC’s commitment to impartiality”. This included training and “strengthening the understanding of editorial guidelines and social media rules”.<sup>28</sup>

#### Challenge ourselves creatively to ensure we reflect a wide range of viewpoints

This involves editorial leaders in the BBC recognising “the challenge of serving an ever more diverse audience”, and being part of the effort “to bring a broader set of viewpoints and perspectives to the British public from across the whole UK”.<sup>29</sup>

#### Ensure that we are meeting the highest standards on impartiality across our output

To ensure public accountability on impartiality, the BBC committed to carry out a series of regular independent thematic reviews of output in key areas of

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<sup>25</sup> BBC, [The Serota Review: BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture](#) (PDF), October 2021, p8

<sup>26</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p7

<sup>27</sup> Ofcom, [Annual Report on the BBC 2022-23](#) (PDF), 30 November 2023, pp3-4

<sup>28</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, p2

<sup>29</sup> As above



public debate. The topics of the reviews are agreed annually by the BBC Board.<sup>30</sup>

The first of these [thematic reviews](#) was published on 30 January 2023, and looked at taxation, public spending, government borrowing and debt output. A [thematic review into migration output](#) was announced on 19 May 2023.

### **Enhance day-to-day governance and accountability to ensure change is delivered**

This was a commitment to “strengthen governance and accountability in the area of impartiality”.<sup>31</sup>

### **Launch of BBC Verify, May 2023**

The new BBC Verify brand was launched on 22 May 2023. This comprised around 60 journalists who undertake “fact-checking, verifying video, countering disinformation, analysing data and - crucially - explaining complex stories in the pursuit of truth”.<sup>32</sup>

### **Changes in BBC News, 29 November 2023**

On 29 November 2023, BBC News announced its savings and digital reinvestment plans:

- Reformatting of Newsnight – it will become a 30-minute interview, debate and discussion show, remaining as a nightly
- BBC News Investigation Unit – a new unit that will “bring together the best investigative talent across BBC News.”
- Bringing BBC broadcast journalism to online audiences – this includes creating a new “in-depth digital experience”, and additional resource to ensure the “the speed and quality of 24/7 digital journalism and digital streaming”.
- Restructure of BBC News’ story teams in the UK –the creation of more roles within BBC Verify, a UK Editor based in Salford, the creation of a Royal Editor position, and new correspondent and report positions. Alongside a number of post closures within the teams.
- Relocation of an extended hour-long edition of the BBC News at One to Salford.

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<sup>30</sup> BBC, [BBC Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan](#) (PDF), October 2021, pp2-3

<sup>31</sup> As above, p3

<sup>32</sup> [“Explaining the 'how' - the launch of BBC Verify”](#), BBC News, 22 May 2023

- Reduction of content commissions – closure of the Our World strand on the News Channel, and nine fewer hours of single documentaries each year for BBC Two.<sup>33</sup>

## Mid-Term Review, May 2022-January 2024

Article 57, introduced to the Royal Charter in 2016, allows the Secretary of State to conduct a Mid-Term Review “focussing on the governance and regulatory arrangements for the BBC”.<sup>34</sup> Under article 57 (2) of the 2016 Royal Charter, the Secretary of State must determine the scope and terms of reference (including timing) of the review following consultation with the BBC, Ofcom, the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and the Northern Ireland Ministers.<sup>35</sup> The review was launched on 26 May 2022, and its findings and recommendations were published on 22 January 2024.<sup>36</sup>

The review was conducted by officials from DCMS; assistance was provided by the BBC and Ofcom in connection with the review. DCMS also sought information from “specific third parties as appropriate” (for example, key stakeholder bodies).<sup>37</sup> Editorial standards and impartiality, and complaints were amongst the key focuses of the review.

### Editorial standards and impartiality

The review sought to assess the effectiveness of the BBC’s governance mechanisms in ensuring compliance with its Editorial Standards, and the enforcement of its content standards.

It was recognised in the review that impartiality standards were now “at the heart” of the BBC’s priorities, and that achieving impartiality is “complex and challenging”. However, it also concluded that further work in this area was necessary.

Amongst its recommendations in this area, the Government said that it wanted to see “clear and substantive evidence that the 10-point action plan has had sufficient, long-term concrete impact at Charter Review”.<sup>38</sup> It recommended that the Board ensures detailed, timely reporting of progress against the action plan’s commitments. It also recommended that the BBC publishes information about what its Safeguarding Impartiality training includes, how it is conducted, and intended outcomes.

The review also considered Ofcom’s regulation and relationship with the BBC in this area. The Government said that Ofcom’s regulatory responsibilities

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<sup>33</sup> BBC, [BBC News announces savings and digital reinvestment plans](#), 29 November 2023

<sup>34</sup> [Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation](#) (PDF) (Cmnd 9365), December 2016, art 57

<sup>35</sup> As above, art 57(2)

<sup>36</sup> DCMS, [BBC review to focus on impartiality and ‘levelling up’ job opportunities](#), 26 May 2022

<sup>37</sup> DCMS, [BBC Mid-Term Review: Terms of Reference](#), 26 May 2022

<sup>38</sup> DCMS, [The BBC Mid-Term Review](#), CP 999, January 2024, para 93, p30

should be expanded to possibly include BBC online public service material that is targeted at UK audiences and over which the BBC has editorial control, including where that is on a third-party platform.<sup>39</sup>

This would mean that Ofcom would be required to apply the same principles of the Broadcasting Code in a new code specific to the characteristics of the online material detailed above. The precise scope of the new regulatory framework will be confirmed following further discussions between Government, Ofcom and the BBC. Changes will be made to the Framework Agreement to implement this change.

### Complaints

Another focus of the review was the way the BBC handles complaints through its BBC First system, and Ofcom's framework for assessing BBC complaints.

The Government found that the "BBC First model continues to broadly deliver the outcomes it was intended by the Charter".<sup>40</sup> However, it put forward recommendations for specific areas in which it could be improved. It also committed to review the complaints process at Charter Review and consult on alternative models to BBC First.

One of the Government's recommendations was for Ofcom to conduct regular reviews of a representative sample of the Executive Complaints Unit's complaints decisions and make public a summary of its findings. This will be made a formal requirement through an amendment to the Framework Agreement.<sup>41</sup> It also recommended that the BBC make more information public about how the Executive Complaints Unit makes "fair decisions".<sup>42</sup>

Finally, it put forward a change in Ofcom's role in relation to occasions where the BBC has identified a breach in its own editorial standards and therefore upheld (or partly upheld) a complaint. The Government said that these breaches should be publicly recorded by Ofcom; if Ofcom decides not to launch its own investigation into an upheld complaint the reasoning for this should also be made available.<sup>43</sup>

## 1.3

### Recent comment

The impartiality of BBC News' coverage has been the focus of increased stakeholder discussion during the 2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict. In

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<sup>39</sup> DCMS, [The BBC Mid-Term Review](#), CP 999, January 2024, para 113, p36

<sup>40</sup> As above, para 141, p43

<sup>41</sup> As above, para 156, p47

<sup>42</sup> As above, para 183, p55

<sup>43</sup> As above, para 197, pp58-9

particular, the decision to not describe Hamas as 'terrorists'.<sup>44</sup> Lucy Frazer, the Secretary of State, raised this matter with the Director General of the BBC in October 2023. She said that she had asked Tim Davie whether the BBC was considering reviewing the appropriateness of these guidelines.<sup>45</sup>

The BBC's Editorial Guidelines describe 'terrorism' as a "difficult and emotive subject with significant political overtones and care is required in the use of language that carries value judgements". To this end, it recommends not using the term 'terrorist' without attribution.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "[BBC defends policy not to call Hamas 'terrorists' after criticism](#)", BBC News, 11 October 2023; "[CULTURE SECRETARY LUCY FRAZER: I'm so disappointed... The BBC must call Hamas what they are – terrorists](#)", Daily Mail, 13 October 2023

<sup>45</sup> Board of Deputies of British Jews, [Board Of Deputies Calls On Government For Urgent Review Of BBC Editorial Guidelines](#) (accessed 26 February 2024)

<sup>46</sup> BBC, [BBC News style guide: Israel and the Palestinians](#), 15 November 2022. A full list of the BBC's responses to editorial, technical and corporate issues is available on its [Corrections and Clarifications](#) webpage.

## 2 Parliamentary material

### 2.1 Early Day Motions

#### [BBC and repeat offences](#)

That this House notes recent comments from the highly paid BBC presenter Gary Lineker where he has engaged in public spats with MPs, signed a letter regarding Government policy, having done this in the knowledge that the BBC, which is funded by the public purse via the licence fee, have only recently declared that presenters of flagship programmes outside news and current affairs have a particular responsibility to respect the BBC's impartiality because of their profile on the BBC, and this was only enacted as a result of his previous political activism; and calls on the Director General to indicate what action he intends to take given the fact that Gary Lineker is a repeat offender and appears to believe he can be a millionaire public sector sports presenter at the same time as being a political commentator.

11 Dec 2023 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 190 (session 2023-24)

**Primary sponsor:** Campbell, Mr Gregory | **Party:** Democratic Unionist Party

**Other sponsors:** Robinson, Gavin · Shannon, Jim · Blackman, Bob · Lockhart, Carla

**Number of signatures:** 5

#### [BBC impartiality](#)

That this House notes with deep concern the recent saga at the BBC surrounding Match of the Day host Gary Lineker and the lack of appropriate leadership from Richard Sharp, chair of the BBC; believes that this matter highlights a serious failure in implementing proper, politically impartial leadership at the BBC, which has put its reputation as one of Britain's most trusted institutions in question; and calls for the immediate resignation of Richard Sharp.

13 Mar 2023 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 955  
(session 2022-23)

**Primary sponsor:** Turner, Karl | **Party:** Labour

**Other sponsors:** Hosie, Stewart · MacAskill, Kenny · Sheppard, Tommy  
· Cooper, Daisy · Osborne, Kate

**Number of signatures:** 20

## 2.2 Debates

[BBC: Government Role in Impartiality](#) – HC Deb 14 Mar 2023 - 729  
cc713-726

[BBC: Government Role in Impartiality](#) – HL Deb 15 Mar 2023 - 828  
cc1314-9

## 2.3 Statement

[BBC update](#)

22 Jan 2024 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS198

[Publication of BBC Mid-Term Review Terms of Reference and updates to the Framework Agreement](#)

26 May 2022 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS67

## 2.4 Parliamentary Questions

[BBC Mid-term Review](#)

**Asked by:** Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)

My innate lack of deference has probably not got me far in this place over the past 22 years, but it is good to see you in your rightful place this morning, Mr Speaker.

The BBC is a great British institution, as the Secretary of State says. In considering the mid-term review, will she reflect on the importance, in this era of fake news, biased comment and social media, of having a space in which information and news are presented impartially and in accordance with editorial guidelines? The BBC is criticised from the left and the right, which probably reflects the fact that it generally gets things right.

**Answered by:** Lucy Frazer | **Department:** Culture, Media and Sport

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the BBC plays a critical role. It is extremely trusted not only here but across the world. The BBC is an important institution, which is why it is so important that it remains impartial. I know that the director-general agrees and, like me, thinks there is more to do. That is why, in the mid-term review, we set out things that the BBC continues to need to look at. The BBC agrees with our mid-term review and has accepted all our recommendations.

22 Feb 2024 | Oral questions - Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 745 cc819-820

**Date answered:** 22 Feb 2024

### [BBC Mid-term Review](#)

**Asked by:** Rob Butler

I started my career as a BBC reporter, and I firmly believe in the importance of our national broadcaster being both independent, particularly at moments and eras such as this, and completely impartial. However, every year, many people complain that the BBC is not as impartial as it should be, even that it is biased, and the BBC then dismisses the vast majority of those complaints. Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that the public would perhaps have more confidence in how those complaints are investigated if they were investigated independently from the outset?

**Answered by:** Lucy Frazer | **Department:** Culture, Media and Sport

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The public rightly expect the BBC to be an exemplar of impartiality. Our review highlighted issues in relation to both impartiality and complaints. As a result, the BBC will undertake significant reforms on both impartiality and complaints. At

the charter review, as I have already said, we will examine whether the BBC first process remains the right complaints model.

22 Feb 2024 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 745 c819

**Date answered:** 22 Feb 2024

### [BBC Mid-term Review](#)

**Asked by:** Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)

Whether she has had recent discussions with the BBC Board on the implementation of recommendations in the BBC mid-term review.

**Answered by:** The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lucy Frazer) | **Department:** Culture, Media and Sport

The BBC is a hugely valued institution, and the mid-term review seeks to ensure that it continues to provide an outstanding service by improving its processes in relation to both impartiality and complaints. I regularly meet the BBC's chair and director-general, and I will continue to use those meetings to raise these important issues.

22 Feb 2024 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | 901480 | 745 cc819-820

**Date tabled:** 08 Feb 2024 | **Date for answer:** 22 Feb 2024 | **Date answered:** 22 Feb 2024

### [BBC: Gaza](#)

**Asked by:** Ali, Tahir

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has had recent discussions with the BBC board on potential bias in the BBC's coverage of Gaza.

**Answering member:** Julia Lopez | **Department:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport



The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Ministerial team regularly meets with BBC leadership, including members of the Board, to discuss a range of issues.

The BBC has a duty to provide accurate and impartial news and information. In delivering that duty, the BBC is editorially and operationally independent and decisions around its editorial policies and guidelines are a matter for the BBC. Ofcom is the external independent regulator responsible for ensuring BBC coverage is duly impartial and accurate under the Broadcasting Code and BBC Charter.

The Secretary of State has repeatedly made clear that the BBC's accuracy and impartiality is critical to viewer trust. It is particularly important when it comes to coverage of highly sensitive events, such as the terrorist acts committed in Israel on 7 October and the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The Secretary of State has regularly stated that point in meetings with the BBC.

13 Feb 2024 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 13328

**Date tabled:** 06 Feb 2024 | **Date for answer:** 08 Feb 2024 | **Date answered:** 13 Feb 2024

### [BBC: Funding](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-Afl)

My Lords, the BBC's funding depends on people having confidence in its unimpeachable impartiality. If its highly paid presenter Gary Lineker comments obsessively and one-sidedly about Israel and holds it to standards never applied to other countries—including, this weekend, disgracefully posting a call for it to be banned from international competitions—he is clearly breaking even the BBC's watered-down guidelines. Is it not about time that he was shown the red card?

**Answered by:** Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con)

My Lords, the BBC social media guidelines say very clearly that:

“Everyone who works for the BBC should ensure their activity on social media platforms does not compromise the perception of or undermine the impartiality and reputation of the BBC”.

Particular parts of the guidelines apply to flagship presenters; it is important that the BBC applies those guidelines to all those whom it employs.

17 Jan 2024 | Oral questions - Supplementary | Answered | House of Lords | 835 c416

**Date answered:** 17 Jan 2024

### [BBC Current Affairs Coverage: Impartiality](#)

**Asked by:** Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)

Whether she has had recent discussions with the BBC Board on the impartiality of the BBC's current affairs coverage.

**Answered by:** The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Julia Lopez) | **Department:** Culture, Media and Sport

The BBC has a duty to deliver its impartial and accurate news and current affairs coverage under its royal charter. It is editorially independent, which means that editorial policies are a matter for the BBC, but both the Secretary of State and I regularly meet the BBC's leadership team. We have discussed the important issue of impartiality on multiple occasions. It is also a key focus of the Government's mid-term review of the BBC's governance and regulation.

11 Jan 2024 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | 900897 | 743 cc430-1

**Date tabled:** 19 Dec 2023 | **Date for answer:** 11 Jan 2024 | **Date answered:** 11 Jan 2024

### [BBC: Political Impartiality](#)

**Asked by:** Davison, Dehenna

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the BBC's compliance with the impartiality clauses in its charter.

**Answering member:** Julia Lopez | **Department:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The BBC has a duty to deliver impartial and accurate news coverage and content under its Royal Charter. As such, the Government has been clear that the BBC must place a firm emphasis on impartiality and maintaining the highest editorial standards.

The Government welcomes that the BBC accepted the findings and recommendations of the Serota Review and has committed to reform through its 10 point Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan. The BBC now needs to demonstrate clear and continued progress as the plan is embedded into business as usual.

The Government established Ofcom as the independent regulator of the BBC in 2017. Ofcom is responsible for holding the BBC to account against its impartiality responsibilities. It remains a priority for the Government to work with Ofcom to deliver an effective and proportionate regulatory framework that holds the BBC to account while maintaining its creative freedom and operational independence.

A key focus of the Government's Mid-Term Review of the BBC is to look at the regulatory and governance measures which can enable progress on impartiality, more accountability for editorial standards, including the handling of complaints, and a BBC that represents the breadth of the audience it was established to serve.

Our work on the Mid-Term Review is ongoing. The Charter specifies that the review must take place between 2022 and 2024, and we will publish our findings and conclusions in due course.

08 Jan 2024 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 7670

**Date tabled:** 19 Dec 2023 | **Date for answer:** 08 Jan 2024 | **Date answered:** 08 Jan 2024

### [BBC: Political Impartiality](#)

**Asked by:** Offord, Dr Matthew | **Party:** Conservative

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Director General of the BBC on impartiality in its coverage of the Israel and Gaza conflict.

**Answering member:** Sir John Whittingdale | **Party:** Conservative |  
**Department:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The BBC has a duty to provide accurate and impartial news and information. That is particularly important when it comes to coverage of highly sensitive events. The BBC's accuracy and impartiality is critical to viewer trust.

The events in Israel since 7 October are terrorist acts committed by a terrorist organisation, proscribed in the United Kingdom since 2021 and designated as such by many other governments and international organisations.

The BBC is editorially and operationally independent and decisions around its editorial policies and guidelines are therefore a matter for the BBC.

However, calling these acts what they are, and accurately labelling the perpetrators, helps audiences to understand what has happened, is happening and its context.

That is why the Secretary of State has communicated with the BBC, and with the public, her disappointment that the BBC has refused to describe Hamas as terrorists, or the atrocities it has carried out as terrorism. The Secretary of State made that point to the BBC on multiple occasions since the terrorist attacks on 7 October.

As the external independent regulator of the BBC, Ofcom is responsible for ensuring BBC coverage is duly impartial and accurate under the Broadcasting Code and BBC Charter. Ofcom has been clear that responsibility lies with the BBC to decide the vocabulary it uses to describe unfolding events. The Broadcasting Code does not prevent broadcasters referring to terrorist organisations, nor does it prevent them referring to Hamas as terrorists.

16 Nov 2023 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 1337

**Date tabled:** 10 Nov 2023 | **Date for answer:** 14 Nov 2023 | **Date answered:** 16 Nov 2023

[BBC: Political Impartiality](#)

**Asked by:** Moore, Damien | **Party:** Conservative

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the impact of the BBC's use of externally contracted presenters on the impartiality of its output and content.

**Answering member:** Julia Lopez | **Party:** Conservative | **Department:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The impartiality of the BBC, as a publicly-funded broadcaster, goes to the very heart of the contract between the Corporation and all the licence fee payers it serves. This is why the BBC's Royal Charter enshrines the need for the BBC's services and output to be impartial.

The Charter guarantees the BBC's operational and editorial independence, which means that it is for the BBC itself to determine how to deliver impartiality in its output. This would include the BBC's approach to using externally contracted presenters and what impact that has on the impartiality of its output and content.

The Government stands fully behind the requirements of the Royal Charter, and has been clear that the BBC must place a firm emphasis on impartiality and maintaining the highest editorial standards. It can never be the BBC's role to judge, or appear to judge, the diverse values of people from across the country it serves. In an era of fake news, public service broadcasting and a free press have never been more important, and the BBC has been, and should be, a beacon that sets standards to which others can aspire.

The Government established Ofcom as the independent regulator of the BBC in 2017, and it remains a priority for the Government to work with Ofcom to deliver an effective and proportionate regulatory framework that holds the BBC to account while maintaining its creative freedom and operational independence. Ofcom is responsible for the regulation of editorial standards, and can consider complaints about BBC content, including accuracy and impartiality.

31 Mar 2023 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 172509

**Date tabled:** 23 Mar 2023 | **Date for answer:** 27 Mar 2023 | **Date answered:** 31 Mar 2023

### [BBC Mid-term Review](#)

**Asked by:** Sir John Whittingdale | **Party:** Conservative

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the requirement to be politically impartial must cover all those who are presenters on the BBC, including the highest paid? While individual contracts are a matter for the BBC, will she confirm that the mid-term review will cover the issue of enforcement of that rule on freelancers, as well as full-time employees?

**Answered by:** Lucy Frazer | **Party:** Conservative | **Department:** Culture, Media and Sport

As somebody whose grandmother escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930s, I think it is really disappointing and inappropriate to compare Government policy on immigration to events in Germany in the 1930s. It is important for the BBC to maintain impartiality if it is to retain the trust of the public, who pay the licence fee. The BBC is operationally independent, and I am pleased that the BBC will be speaking to Gary Lineker to remind him of his responsibilities in relation to social media.

09 Mar 2023 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 729 c396

**Date answered:** 09 Mar 2023

## 2.5

## Committee material

### [The work of the BBC.](#)

18 Jul 2023 | Parliamentary committees - Unprinted papers - Select Committee oral evidence | House of Lords

**Corporate author:** Communications and Digital Committee

### [Ofcom leadership.](#)

11 Jul 2023 | Parliamentary committees - Unprinted papers - Select Committee oral evidence | House of Lords

**Corporate author:** Communications and Digital Committee

### [The work of the BBC.](#)

13 Jun 2023 | Parliamentary committees - House of Commons papers -  
Select Committee oral evidence | House of Commons | HC 382 2022-23

**Corporate author:** Culture, Media and Sport Committee

[The work of the BBC.](#)

28 Mar 2023 | Parliamentary committees - House of Commons papers -  
Select Committee oral evidence | House of Commons | HC 382 2022-23

Corporate author: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

[The work of the BBC](#)

07 Feb 2023 | Parliamentary committees - House of Commons papers -  
Select Committee oral evidence | House of Commons | HC 382 2022-23

**Corporate author:** Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

[BBC future funding.](#)

10 May 2022 | Parliamentary committees - Unprinted papers - Select  
Committee oral evidence | House of Lords

**Corporate author:** Communications and Digital Committee

## 3 Media

### 3.1 Press releases

[Reforms to boost confidence in the BBC's impartiality and complaints system set out in Mid-Term Review](#)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

22 January 2024

[Rishi Sunak backs 'biased BBC' claim](#)

Times

22 January 2024

[The Times view on Gary Lineker airing his opinion: Over the Line](#)

Times

13 December 2023

[Grant Shapps tells BBC to 'follow the law and call Hamas terrorists'](#)

Times

13 October 2023

[Bectu responds to review into BBC social media guidelines and new rules for flagship presenters](#)

Bectu

28 September 2023



[BBC slammed over royal coverage 'for the 15%'](#)

Republic

17 April 2023

[NUJ statement on BBC Gary Lineker decision](#)

National Union of Journalists

10 March 2023

## 3.2 Articles and blogs

[The BBC has become too woke for working class viewers who are tuning out from the broadcaster, poll finds](#)

Daily Mail

23 February 2024

[I authored BBC social media guidelines, says TV boss after Gary Lineker claimed he helped write them](#)

Telegraph

07 February 2024

[Gary Lineker describes BBC impartiality row as 'lovers' tiff](#)

Guardian

06 February 2024

[Lucy Frazer questioned about BBC bias, as government accused of 'culture wars' over impartiality reforms](#)

Sky News

22 January 2024

[BBC impartiality and accountability at forefront of mid-term Charter review](#)

Telegraph

22 January 2024

[Gary Lineker criticised over Rwanda comments in impartiality row](#)

BBC

11 December 2023

[Carol Vorderman quits BBC show saying she will 'not be silenced' by social media rules](#)

Guardian

08 November 2023

[UK culture secretary seeks to strengthen BBC governance](#)

Financial Times

29 October 2023

[BBC Revised Social Media Guidelines After Gary Lineker Controversy Say Presenters Cannot 'Endorse or Attack' Political Parties](#)

Variety

28 September 2023

[BBC says 'flagship' hosts like Lineker and Lord Sugar must be impartial when shows are on air](#)

Press Gazette

The Government's role in upholding the impartiality of BBC news coverage

28 September 2023

[The BBC is under scrutiny. Here's what research tells about its role in the UK](#)

Reuters Institute

17 August 2023

[Gary Lineker BBC review explained, as former ITN chief to lead probe into impartiality row](#)

i-News

31 March 2023

[BBC launches review into social media guidance for freelancers](#)

BBC

31 March 2023

['A troubled moment' - what is going on at the BBC?](#)

BBC

24 March 2023

[Gary Lineker row goes to heart of BBC reputation - Ofcom boss](#)

BBC

14 March 2023

## 4 Further reading

### [Guidance: Personal Use of Social Media](#)

BBC

Last updated February 2024

### [Ofcom's annual report on the BBC](#)

Ofcom

30 November 2023

### [News Consumption in the UK: 2023](#) (PDF)

Ofcom

20 July 2023

### [Review of the impartiality of BBC coverage of taxation, public spending, government borrowing and debt](#) (PDF)

Michael Blastland and Andrew Dilnot

November 2022

### [Drivers of perceptions of due impartiality: The BBC and the wider news landscape](#) (PDF)

Jigsaw Research and Ofcom

June 2022

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