

## Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway

<b>Type of case</b>	Broadcast Standards
<b>Outcome</b>	Resolved
<b>Service</b>	ITV
<b>Date &amp; time</b>	14 March 2020, 19:00
<b>Category</b>	Offensive language before the watershed
<b>Summary</b>	The most offensive language was broadcast before the watershed. In light of the two on-air apologies, we considered the matter Resolved.

### Introduction

Ofcom received a complaint about the broadcast of offensive language during this episode of the live television variety show.

The programme featured a segment just after 20:00 in which two men performed a strip tease style routine on stage to surprise their wives. During the performance, one of the performer's wives said, *"what the fuck?!"*. After the performance, she had the following exchange with presenter Stephen Mulhern:

Presenter: *"Lucy, what was going through your mind, because I could see what was coming through your lips".*

Guest: *"What the fuck is going on!?"*.

After a shocked response from the audience, Mr Mulhern said, *"If that did go out, I apologise"*. Two minutes later, when the programme returned to the studio, presenter Declan Donnelly said, *"Apologies again if you were offended by any of the language or any of the lip reading there"*.

We considered this raised potential issues under the following rule of the Code:

Rule 1.14: *"The most offensive language must not be broadcast before the watershed (in the case of television)..."*.

## Response

The Licensee said it “sincerely regrets” any instances of offensive language appearing in its programmes before the watershed.

The Licensee stated that *Ant and Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway* has regularly featured items where members of the public are surprised, and that these surprises are always planned and executed with the “help, support and sometimes participation” of families and friends. As the subject cannot be briefed beforehand to avoid strong language, the Licensee said it tries to “gauge their likely reaction” by speaking to families and friends. In this case, the Licensee said the subject’s family said she would enjoy the surprise, and her mother agreed to assist by seeking to “keep an eye” on the subject before the broadcast. The Licensee therefore said its research and preparation “did not lead [it] to believe it likely that she would use strong language when surprised”.

The Licensee said that when the incident occurred it took “prompt steps to blank the offending language on [its] +1 Channel”, and to edit the programme on its on-demand service. It added that two on-air apologies were given “promptly” by presenters. The Licensee therefore said that it took “reasonable steps” both to mitigate the likelihood of the strongest language being used during the live broadcast, and to mitigate any offence caused when it did occur.

Finally, the Licensee noted that this long running series has a “very good compliance record” in this regard.

## Decision

Reflecting our duties under the Communications Act, Rule 1.14 prohibits the broadcast of the most offensive language on television before the watershed.

[Ofcom’s 2016 research on offensive language](#) makes clear that the word “fuck” is among the most offensive language. In this case, the most offensive language was broadcast at around 20:00.

In our recently published research into [audience expectations in a digital world](#), participants overwhelmingly agreed it was essential to protect children from inappropriate content. They also felt that accidental swearing would be much less acceptable if it was broadcast when children were likely to see or hear it. The BARB data for this family entertainment show indicated an average child audience of 834,000, of which 396,500 were younger children aged 4-9 and 437,500 were older children aged between 10-15 years.

However, participants in the research also felt that mistakes like accidental swearing during live broadcasts were more acceptable if they were genuine and not easily avoidable. Ofcom therefore took into account the steps ITV had taken to avoid the most offensive language being broadcast in this live programme. We also took into account that two apologies were broadcast immediately following the incident and that the Licensee removed the offensive language from its +1 and on demand service.

In light of the above, Ofcom’s Decision is that the matter is resolved.

## Resolved