



Note to Broadcasters – Election programming in the election period for the by-elections taking place in July and August 2026

Election programming

On 30 July 2026 there will be a by-election to elect the Mayor of Greater Manchester. On 13 August 2026 there will be a UK Parliamentary by-election in Clacton.

Ofcom reminds all broadcasters that they must comply with the rules for election-related programming – in particular [Section Five](#) (Due Impartiality)¹ and [Section Six](#) (Elections and Referendums)² of the Broadcasting Code (“the Code”). Broadcasters should also note the prohibition on political advertising contained in section 321 of the Communications Act 2003 and reflected in Section 7 of the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP Code).

As set out in paragraph 1.5 of Ofcom’s electoral digest published on 19 February 2026 ([‘Evidence of past electoral support and evidence of current support ahead of the various elections taking place on 7 May 2026’](#)): “Should other elections occur before the publication in early 2027 of Ofcom’s next electoral digest, e.g. by-elections, it is open to broadcasters to make reference to this digest in helping to frame their decisions. It might also be necessary in such circumstances for broadcasters to assess any more recent evidence that may be relevant”.

Additionally, in its [Decision published on 12 June 2026](#), Ofcom’s Election Committee recognised the fast-changing, dynamic political landscape and reminded all broadcasters that **“during any election period, broadcasters need to keep under review relevant new evidence of current electoral support to ensure that due weight and an appropriate amount of coverage is given to political parties”**.

Broadcasters should also refer to [Ofcom’s previous Note to Broadcasters on election programming, published on 23 February 2026](#).

¹ See also Ofcom’s published [Guidance to Section Five](#).

² See also Ofcom published [Guidance to Section Six](#).

Ofcom has received questions about coverage of the Clacton by-election, given that a number of parties have decided not to field a candidate. Ofcom is a post-broadcast regulator. During an election period political parties and independent candidates must be given due weight in any TV and radio coverage. This means they must receive the appropriate level of coverage across an election period based on their past and current electoral support. Broadcasters must also consider giving appropriate coverage to parties and independent candidates with significant views and perspectives. Broadcasters are free to decide the nature and level of appropriate coverage so long as they comply with the heightened due impartiality requirements during the election period.

The election period and Ofcom's procedures

The rules in Section Six of the Code apply when Ofcom determines that the election period has started. We have considered all relevant information and Ofcom has determined that the start dates of the election periods are:

- **25 June 2026** in the case of the Greater Manchester mayoral by-election to be held on 30 July 2026; and
- **9 July 2026** in the case of the UK Parliamentary by-election in Clacton to be held on 13 August 2026.

In each case, the election period ends with the close of the poll.

If a complaint raises a potentially substantive due impartiality issue in election-related programming (whether news or non-news) during the election period which Ofcom considers might require redress before the election, it may be necessary for Ofcom to act quickly to determine the outcome in a proportionate and transparent manner before the election. Broadcasters should therefore be prepared to engage with Ofcom on short timescales.

Ofcom will consider any breach arising from election-related programming to be potentially serious and will consider taking appropriate regulatory action, which could include the imposition of a statutory sanction.