

Reference: 1794994

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

16 April 2024

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about the definition of news and MPs on GB News.

We received this request on 18 March 2024 and have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”).

Your request and our response

Could you provide

1) the definitions you are using for the terms “news” and “current affairs”

Ofcom’s approach to determining whether content constitutes ‘news’ or ‘current affairs’ is set out in our recent decisions regarding five programmes broadcast on GB News, which were published on 18 March 2024. Please see: [Politicians acting as newsreaders, news interviewers or news reporters \(ofcom.org.uk\)](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/newsreaders/newsreaders_20240318/).

As stated therein, given the fundamental importance of maintaining audience trust in broadcast news, and in view of the fact that programme genres and editorial techniques can change significantly over time, no definition of “news” is included in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (“the Code”). It is also important to note that Parliament did not define “news” in the Communications Act 2003, and it was clear that it was intended to be wide ranging and to apply to “news in whatever form” (section 319(8)). Therefore, Ofcom takes the approach of considering whether or not a programme, or a section of a programme, is news or current affairs (or both) depending on a number of factors, including its content and format. Factors that could lead us to classify content as news might include:

- a newsreader presenting directly to the audience;
- a running order or list of stories, often in short form;
- the use of reporters or correspondents to deliver packages or live reports; and/or
- a mix of video and reporter items.

Factors that could lead us to classify content as current affairs might include:

- a more long-form programme;
- the presence of extensive discussion, analysis or interviews with guests, often live; and
- long-form video reports.

Ofcom considers that a programme can be both a news and current affairs programme. In other words, a programme can contain a mix of both types of content. This approach reflects the modern media environment in which there are a range of rolling news channels and programme formats.

2)The basis on which Ofcom has decided that MP's are inherently seen as partial, even though their words and actions are impartial.

We have interpreted your question as asking for the rationale behind Ofcom's decisions of 18 March 2024 which, as referred to above, were concerned with determining whether specific programmes broadcast on GB News were compliant with Rules 5.1 and 5.3 of the Code. In those decisions we stated that the rationale for the Code's restriction on politicians acting as newsreaders, news interviewers or news reporters is that politicians represent a political party or position and are therefore inherently partial on topical issues. Ofcom's Decisions also recognise the special status of broadcast news, which is afforded additional statutory protections because of its fundamental importance in a democratic society.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress.

Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#)