# BBC Online Material Code

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# Introduction to the BBC Online Material Code

## The Legislative Background

The Framework Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation 2017 (the "Framework Agreement") was updated in December 2025 ("the Updated Framework Agreement")[1]. This update put into effect recommendations from the Mid-Term Review of the BBC's Charter which was carried out by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 2024.

Pursuant to this update, Ofcom is required to draw up one or more codes for 'BBC UK Public Online Material' (referred to herein as "online material") containing standards best calculated to secure the standards objectives contained in section 319(2)(a), (b), (c) (including the special impartiality requirements in section 320) and (d) to (f) of the Communications Act 2003 ("CA03") ("the applicable standards objectives"). The code is to be known as the BBC Online Material Code ("the Code"), and the standards securing the applicable standards objectives are included in Sections One to Six of the Code.

The Updated Framework Agreement also requires that in providing online material the BBC must observe the Fairness Code in force under section 107 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, so far as Ofcom determines the standards are relevant to the provision of that online material. For the purposes of enforcing the BBC's observance of the Fairness Code in relation to online material, Ofcom will apply the existing Section Seven and Section Eight of the Broadcasting Code, in so far as Ofcom determines the standards are relevant to the provision of that online material.

The requirements of the Code do not affect the existing and continuing requirement for the BBC to observe Ofcom's Broadcasting Code for its television and radio services.

The Updated Framework Agreement defines BBC UK Public Online Material as content provided as part of the UK Public Services[2] by the BBC online and intended for users in the UK (or in any part of the UK), including BBC-branded content on third party websites, applications and interfaces.

This includes any content included in BBC news and sports websites, BBC apps on smartphones, television or other devices, any BBC social media account (including reposts by a BBC social media account including that of any individual working for the BBC) and BBC educational and learning resources.

References to "content" include written text and still or moving images, with or without sound, and content consisting of sound only.

[1] Updates to BBC Framework Agreement: December 2025.

[2] A list of the UK Public Services is published and maintained on the BBC's website at updated-list-of-uk-public-services-september-2025.pdf.

Online material does not include content on the BBC World Service or on-demand content in an on-demand programme service[3] ("ODPS") (including BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds)[4]. It also does not include BBC corporate materials, reports, speeches or statements by the BBC or individuals working for the BBC and internal publications, nor any posts on a BBC message board or comments page, user-generated and interactive content that is not directly linked to a BBC UK Public Service, nor content provided by any person other than the BBC as a dissociable section of a service provided by the BBC.

Where relevant and necessary the Code also uses the term "online item". An "online item" is defined as an arrangement of online material presented to audiences as a single, identifiable item. This may include written text; still or moving images, with or without sound; sound-only online material; or any combination of these. An online item may be updated over time while remaining identifiable as the same item. An online item might include, for example, a text-based article with embedded links, images, audio or video; an individual video or audio item, including a livestreamed programme; or other standalone content.

The BBC is reminded of the legislative background that has informed the rules, of the principles that apply to each section, the meanings given by Ofcom and of the guidance issued by Ofcom, all of which may be relevant in interpreting and applying the Code. No rule should be read in isolation but within the context of the whole Code and the Fairness Code including the headings, cross-references and other linking text.

The Code has been drafted in the light of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights ("the Convention"). In particular, the right to freedom of expression, as expressed in Article 10 of the Convention, encompasses the audience's right to receive creative material, information and ideas without interference but subject to restrictions prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society.

In drafting, reviewing and revising the Code, Ofcom has had due regard to the matters specified in section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 ("the public sector equality duty") and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Although a link included in the online material may lead to features outside of the BBC's UK Public Services online which are not regulated by Ofcom, the provision of access to those features by, for instance, the inclusion of a link, is within the control of the BBC and so within Ofcom's remit. Ofcom may therefore require such a link or facility to be removed where Ofcom has concerns, in the light of its duties and, in particular, the standards objectives set out in section 319 of the Act, about the material to which it leads. In any event, the transition from the BBC to third-party control must be clear to the viewer, so as to manage both audience expectations regarding the material to which they are being led and the risk to the BBC of being found in breach of this Code (for example Rules 1.2 and 2.1).

Where the Code or the Fairness Code have been breached, Ofcom will normally publish a finding and explain why the BBC has breached the Code or the Fairness Code (these findings are available in Ofcom's BBC Online Material Bulletin). If the BBC breaches the Code or the

[3] The BBC is required to observe the Broadcasting Code in relation to its on-demand content on ODPS.
[4] It is important to note that where the BBC on-demand programme service contains other dissociable services, such as livestreamed BBC television programme services, those may be considered BBC online material. For example, this would likely include livestream content on BBC iPlayer that is not simultaneously broadcast.

Fairness Code deliberately, seriously, repeatedly or recklessly, Ofcom may impose statutory sanctions against them.[5] Ofcom's procedures for investigating cases (following the receipt of a complaint or otherwise) and applying sanctions to the BBC are also on the website. Members of the public who have no access to the web can ask Ofcom to send them a copy of the procedures by post.

## How to use the Code

The Code is set out in terms of principles, meanings and rules. The principles are there to help readers understand the standards objectives and to apply the rules. The meanings help explain what Ofcom intends by some of the words and phrases used in the Code. The most relevant legislation is noted under each section heading so readers can turn to the legislation if they wish.

When applying the Code and the Fairness Code to online material, the BBC should be aware that the context in which the online material appears is key. In setting this Code, Ofcom has also had regard to the matters contained in section 319(4) CA03 (with such adaptations as appear appropriate) to such extent those matters appear to them to be relevant to the securing of the applicable standards objectives. These criteria have informed Ofcom's approach to setting the Code and therefore must be taken into account by the BBC when interpreting the rules.

In setting this Code, Ofcom has also had regard to the objective that the standards set in relation to online material should be consistent with those set for broadcast television and radio services to such extent as appears to it to be appropriate. This has informed Ofcom's approach to setting the Code and therefore must be taken into account by the BBC when interpreting the rules.

The Code does not seek to address each and every case that could arise. The BBC may face a number of individual situations which are not specifically referred to in this Code. Examples included in the Code are not exhaustive. However, the principles, as outlined in the following sections, should make clear what the Code is designed to achieve and help the BBC make the necessary judgements.

In applying the Code and the Fairness Code to its online material, the personalised and interactive nature of the online experience should be taken into account by the BBC.

To assist the BBC further, as well as readers, viewers and listeners who wish to understand online standards, guidance for the BBC to accompany the Code and the Fairness Code will also be issued by Ofcom on the Ofcom website and will be reviewed regularly.

The BBC should be familiar with its audience and ensure that the content of its online material can always be justified by the context and the editorial needs of the online material.

The BBC may publish online material on any subject or issue it chooses, but it is expected that the BBC will ensure at all times that its online material complies with the general law, as well as this Code.

[5] Ofcom's power to impose sanctions on the BBC are set out in the BBC Charter.

# 1. Protecting under-eighteens

This section sets out the rules on measures with regard to protecting people under the age of eighteen.

*Note: This section must be read in conjunction with Section Two on Harm and Offence.*

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes, in particular, sections 3(4)(h) and 319(2)(a) and (f) of the Communications Act 2003, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the BBC Charter and Agreement.

## Principle

To ensure that people under eighteen are protected.

## Rules

### Measures to protect under-eighteens

1.1 Material that might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of people under eighteen must not be included in BBC UK Public Online Material ("online material").

1.2 In the provision of online material, the BBC must take all reasonable steps, including putting in place appropriate measures, to protect people under eighteen from material that is unsuitable for them.

**Meaning of Measures**

Measures include but are not limited to, the following:

- age ratings or other content classification systems;
- content warnings and information;
- parental controls, including restricted mode settings, child accounts, and PIN protection; and
- age assurance.

Appropriateness of these measures should be judged considering:

- the nature of the content and the potential risk to under-eighteens;
- the nature of the measure and the extent to which it mitigates the risk to under-eighteens;
- the extent to which clear information about the availability and functionality of the measures to protect under eighteens is provided to parents and carers and the steps taken by the BBC to ensure that all such measures are implemented and operate effectively;
- the nature of the platform on which the online material is made available;
- the likely expectations parents and carers may have about the platform and the content it typically carries; and
- the likelihood of under-eighteens accessing the content and their likely age range.

## Coverage of Sexual and Other Offences in the UK Involving under-eighteens

1.3 Where statutory or other legal restrictions apply preventing personal identification, the BBC should also be particularly careful not to provide clues which may lead to the identification of those who are not yet adult (the defining age may differ in different parts of the UK) and who are, or might be, involved as a victim, witness, defendant or other perpetrator in the case of sexual offences featured in criminal, civil or family court proceedings:

- by reporting limited information which may be pieced together with other information available elsewhere, for example in newspaper reports (the 'jigsaw effect');
- inadvertently, for example by describing an offence as "incest"; or
- in any other indirect way.

*(Note: The BBC should be aware that there may be statutory reporting restrictions that apply even if a court has not specifically made an order to that effect)*

1.4 When covering any pre-trial investigation into an alleged criminal offence in the UK, the BBC should pay particular regard to the potentially vulnerable position of any person who is not yet adult who is involved as a witness or victim, before including their name, address, identity of school or other educational establishment, place of work, or any still or moving picture of them. Particular justification is also required for inclusion of such material relating to the identity of any person who is not yet adult who is involved in the defence as a defendant or potential defendant.

## Involvement of people under eighteen in BBC Online Material

1.5 Due care must be taken over the welfare and the dignity of people under eighteen who take part or are otherwise involved in online material. This is irrespective of any consent given by the participant or by a parent, guardian or other person over the age of eighteen in loco parentis.

1.6 People under eighteen must not be caused unjustified distress or anxiety by their involvement in online material or by the publication of the online material.

1.7 Prizes aimed at children must be appropriate to the age range of both the target audience and the participants.

# 2. Harm and Offence

This section outlines standards for online material so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from harmful and/or offensive material.

This section must be read in conjunction with Section One: Protecting under-eighteens. The rules in this section are designed not only to provide adequate protection for adults but also to protect people under eighteen.

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes, in particular, sections 3(2)(e) and 319(2)(a) and (f) of the Communications Act 2003, Articles 10 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the BBC Charter and Agreement.

## Principle

To ensure that generally accepted standards are applied to BBC UK Public Online Material (referred to as "online material") so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of harmful and/or offensive material.

## Rules

### Generally Accepted Standards

2.1 Generally accepted standards must be applied to online material so as to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of harmful and/or offensive material.

2.2 Factual material or portrayals of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience.

*(Note to Rule 2.2: News is regulated under Section Five of the Code)*

2.3 In applying generally accepted standards the BBC must ensure that material which may cause offence is justified by the context (see meaning of "context" below). Appropriate information should also be published where it would assist in avoiding or minimising offence.

**Examples of material which may cause offence include, but are not limited to:**

offensive language; violence; sex; sexual violence; humiliation; distress; violation of human dignity; discriminatory treatment or language (for example on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership) and treatment of people who appear to be put at risk of significant harm as a result of appearing in and/or contributing to online material

**Meaning of "context"**

Context includes (but is not limited to):

- the editorial content of the material;

- the degree of harm or offence likely to be caused by the inclusion of any particular sort of material;
- the format and type of the online item;
- the way in which the content is presented and encountered;
- the likely size and composition and likely expectation of the audience;
- the age of the material;
- the length of time for which the material is available;
- the extent to which the nature of the material can be brought to the attention of the potential audience for example by giving information;
- the effect of the material on audience members who may come across it unawares; and
- the nature of access to the material e.g. whether there are measures in place that are intended to prevent children from reading, viewing and/or listening to the material.

## Violence and dangerous behaviour

2.4 The BBC must not include material which, taking into account the context, condones or glamorises violent, dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour and is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour.

## Suicide and self-harm

2.5 Methods of suicide and self-harm must not be included in online material except where they are editorially justified and are also justified by the context.

## Photosensitive epilepsy

2.6 The BBC must take precautions to maintain a low level of risk to viewers who have photosensitive epilepsy. Where the BBC can demonstrate that the inclusion of flashing lights and/or patterns is editorially justified, viewers should be given adequate advance information about its inclusion.

## Competitions and voting

2.7 Online competitions and voting must be conducted fairly.

2.8 The BBC must draw up rules for an online competition or vote. These rules must be clear and appropriately made known. In particular, significant conditions that may affect an audience members' decision to participate must be stated at the time an invitation to participate is offered.

**Meaning of "competition"**

A competition or free prize draw featured in online material in which audiences/users are invited to enter by any means for the opportunity to win a prize.

**Meaning of "voting"**

Features in online material in which audiences/users are invited to register a vote by any means to decide or influence, at any stage, the outcome of a contest.

# 3. Crime, disorder, hatred and abuse

This section of the Code covers material that is likely to incite crime or disorder, reflecting Ofcom's duty to prohibit the publication of this type of material.

There are also rules in this section covering material containing hatred, abusive and derogatory treatment, and portrayals of crime and criminal proceedings. These are relevant to Ofcom's duty to provide adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material in UK Public Services provided by the BBC online. (See also Section Two: Harm and Offence)

The rules in this section are intended to reflect the BBC's right to freedom of expression and audiences' right to receive information and ideas. For example, the BBC may wish to report on or interview people or organisations with extreme or challenging views in news and current affairs coverage, which is clearly in the public interest. There are various editorial approaches the BBC can take to provide context when featuring extreme and/or offensive views in online material, some of which are set out below.

As with other sections of the Code, no rule should be read in isolation but in the context of the whole Code and the supporting notes provided. The BBC should also refer to Ofcom's published guidance for more information on complying material under this Section.

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes, in particular, sections 3(2)(e), 3(4)(j) and 319(2)(b) and (f) of the Communications Act 2003, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the BBC Charter and Agreement.

## Principle

To ensure that material likely to encourage or incite the commission of crime or to lead to disorder is not included in BBC UK Public Online Material ("online material").

## Rules

### Incitement to crime and disorder

3.1 Material likely to encourage or incite the commission of crime or to lead to disorder must not be included in online material.

*Note: under Rule 3.1, material that is likely to encourage or incite the commission of a crime or to lead to disorder includes, but is not limited to:*

- *content which directly or indirectly amounts to a call to criminal action or disorder;*
- *material promoting or encouraging engagement in terrorism or other forms of criminal activity or disorder; and/or*
- *hate speech which is likely to encourage criminal activity or lead to disorder.*

**Meaning of "terrorism"**

See the definition in Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which is also summarised in Ofcom's guidance to this section of the Code.

**Meaning of "hate speech"**

All forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, social origin, gender, sex, gender reassignment, nationality, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, colour, genetic features, language, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth or age.

**Meaning of "crime"**

This may relate to any offence under law that is punishable by imprisonment or by a fine.

**Meaning of "disorder"**

This includes but is not limited to the criminal offence of civil disorder.

**Meaning of "likely to encourage or to incite the commission of crime or to lead to disorder"**

A portrayal of crime, or of incitement to crime, will not necessarily result in a breach of Rule 3.1. The likelihood of content inciting crime or leading to disorder will depend on the nature of the material as well as the context in which it is presented to the audience.

Significant contextual factors under Rule 3.1 may include (but are not limited to):

- the editorial purpose of the online item within which the material is included (see the definition of "online item" in Section 5);
- the status or position of anyone featured in the material; and/or
- whether sufficient challenge is provided to the material.

For example, there may be greater potential for material to encourage or incite the commission of crime if an online item sets out to influence the audience on a subject or theme or provides an uncritical platform for an authoritative figure to advocate criminal activity or disorder.

There may be less potential for a breach of Rule 3.1 if opposing viewpoints and sufficient challenge are provided to people or organisations who advocate criminal activity or disorder, or where an online item seeks to provide an examination of or commentary on criminal activity or disorder in the public interest.

## Hatred and abuse

*Note: Rules 3.2 and 3.3 reflect the standards objective on the provision of adequate protection for members of the public from the inclusion of offensive and harmful material (section 319(2)(f) of the Communications Act 2003)*

3.2 Material which contains hate speech must not be included in online material except where it is it is justified by the context.

3.3 Material which contains abusive or derogatory treatment of individuals, groups, religions or communities, must not be included in online material except where it is justified by the context. *(See also Rule 4.2 in Section 4: Religion)*

**Meaning of "context" under Rule 3.2 and Rule 3.3**

Key contextual factors may include, but are not limited to:

- the genre and editorial content of the online item or items within which the material is included, or series of items taken as a whole, and the likely audience expectations. For example, there are certain genres such as news and current affairs, drama, comedy or satire where there is likely to be editorial justification for including challenging or extreme views in keeping with audience expectations, provided there is sufficient context. The greater the risk for the material to cause harm or offence, the greater the need for more contextual justification;
- the extent to which sufficient challenge is provided;
- the status or position of anyone featured in the material;
- the way the content is presented and encountered;
- the nature of access to the content e.g. whether there are measures in place that are intended to prevent children from viewing and/or listening to the content, and
- the likely size and composition and likely expectation of the audience.

## Portrayals of crime and criminal proceedings

3.4 Descriptions or demonstrations of criminal techniques which contain essential details which could enable the commission of crime must not be included in online material unless editorially justified.

3.5 No payment, promise of payment, or payment in kind, may be made to convicted or confessed criminals whether directly or indirectly in connection with obtaining a contribution during the production of online material from the criminal (or any other person) relating to his/her crime/s. The only exception is where it is in the public interest.

3.6 While criminal proceedings are active, no payment or promise of payment may be made, directly or indirectly, to any witness or any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness. Nor should any payment be suggested or made dependent on the outcome of the trial. Only actual expenditure or loss of earnings necessarily incurred in connection with obtaining a contribution during the production of online material may be reimbursed.

3.7 Where criminal proceedings are likely and foreseeable, payments should not be made to people who might reasonably be expected to be witnesses unless there is a clear public interest, such as investigating crime or serious wrongdoing, and the payment is necessary to elicit the information. Where such a payment is made it will be appropriate to disclose the payment to both defence and prosecution if the person becomes a witness in any subsequent trial.

3.8 The BBC must use its best endeavours so as not to post material that could endanger lives or prejudice the success of attempts to deal with a hijack or kidnapping**.**

# 4. Religion

This section relates to the responsibility of the BBC with respect to the content of religious online items.

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes, in particular, sections 319(2)(e) and 319(6) of the Communications Act 2003, and Articles 9, 10 and 14, of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the BBC Charter and Agreement.

The rules in this section apply to religious online items.

## Principles

To ensure that the BBC exercises the proper degree of responsibility with respect to UK Public Online Material ("online material") that constitutes a religious online item (see the definition of "religious online item" below).

To ensure that religious online items do not involve any improper exploitation of any susceptibilities of the audience for such online items.

To ensure that religious online items do not involve any abusive treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination.

## Rules

**Meaning of a "religious online item"**

A religious online item is an online item (see the definition of "online item" in Section 5) which deals with matters of religion as the central subject, or as a significant part, of the item.

'**An "online item"** is an arrangement of online material presented to audiences as a single, identifiable item. This may include written text; still or moving images, with or without sound; sound only online material; or any combination of these. An online item may be updated over time while remaining identifiable as the same item. An online item might include, for example, a text-based article with embedded links, images, audio or video; an individual video or audio item, including a livestreamed programme; or other standalone content.'

4.1 The BBC must exercise the proper degree of responsibility with respect to the content of online material that constitutes a religious online item.

4.2 The religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination must not be subject to abusive treatment.

4.3 Religious online items must not improperly exploit any susceptibilities of the audience.

# 5. Due Impartiality and due accuracy

This section relates to the concept of "due impartiality" as it applies to news and other types of online material.

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes, in particular, sections 319(2)(c) and (d), 319(8) and section 320 of the Communications Act 2003 (the Act), the BBC Charter and Agreement, and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

## Principles

To ensure that the BBC's UK Public Online Material ("online material") that constitutes news, in whatever form, is reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality.

To ensure that the special impartiality requirements in the Act are complied with.

## Rules

**Meaning of "Due Impartiality"**

"Due" is an important qualification to the concept of impartiality. Impartiality itself means not favouring one side over another. "Due" means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the specific online material (see definition of "online item"). So "due impartiality" does not mean an equal division of time or focus has to be given to every view, or that every argument and every facet of every argument has to be represented. The approach to due impartiality may vary according to:

- the nature of the subject;
- the format and type of online item;
- the way in which the content is presented and encountered;
- the likely expectation of the audience as to the content; and
- the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to users.

Context, as defined in Section 2: Harm and Offence of the Code, is important.

### Due impartiality and due accuracy in news

5.1 News, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality.

5.2 Significant mistakes in news should normally be acknowledged and corrected quickly. Corrections should be appropriately signalled to the audience.

5.3 No politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer, reporter or author in any online item that constitutes news, unless, exceptionally, this is editorially justified. Where such use is justified, the individual's political allegiance must be made clear to the audience.

# Special impartiality requirements: news and other content

## Matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy

**Meaning of "matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating current public policy"**

Matters of political or industrial controversy are political or industrial issues on which politicians, industry and/or the media are in debate. Matters relating to current public policy need not be the subject of debate but relate to a policy under discussion or already decided by a local, regional or national government or by bodies mandated by those public bodies to make policy on their behalf, for example non-governmental organisations, relevant international institutions, etc.

## The exclusion of views or opinions

5.4 The BBC's online material must exclude all expressions of the views and opinions of the BBC on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy (unless that person is speaking in a legislative forum or in a court of law). Views and opinions relating to the provision of the UK Public Services are excluded from this requirement.

## The preservation of due impartiality

**Meaning of "online item" and meaning of "series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole"**

An "online item" is an arrangement of online material presented to audiences as a single, identifiable item. This may include written text; still or moving images, with or without sound; sound-only online material; or any combination of these. An online item may be updated over time while remaining identifiable as the same item. An online item might include, for example, a text-based article with embedded links, images, audio or video; an individual video or audio item, including a livestreamed programme; or other standalone content.

**"A series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole"** refers to more than one editorially linked online items, dealing with the same or related issues within an appropriate period. A series can include, for example; a series of explicitly linked 'special' news articles which each separately focus on one particular viewpoint on a particular subject; a cluster of closely related articles on the same story published within a short period; or a package of news, analysis and explainer content dealing with the same story or development and presented as connected coverage.

5.5 Due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy must be preserved by the BBC in its online material. This may be achieved within an online item or over a series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole.

5.6 Where the BBC intends to achieve due impartiality across a series of editorially linked online items taken as whole, this should normally be made clear to the audience by appropriate signalling.

5.7 Views and facts must not be misrepresented in online material in a manner which would call into question the preservation of due impartiality. Views must also be presented with due weight over appropriate timeframes.

5.8 Any personal interest of a reporter, presenter or author which would call into question the due impartiality of the online material must be made clear to the audience.

5.9 Presenters and reporters (with the exception of news presenters and reporters in online material that constitutes news), presenters of "personal view" or "authored" online items and chairs of online items that are a discussion programme or livestream may express their own views on matters of political or industrial controversy or matters relating to current public policy. However, alternative viewpoints must be adequately represented either within the online item itself or in a series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole. Additionally, presenters and reporters must not use the advantage of featuring regularly within BBC online material to promote their views in a way that compromises the requirement for due impartiality.

5.10 Any personal view or "authored" online item must be clearly signalled to the audience at the outset. This is a minimum requirement and may not be sufficient in all circumstances.

**Meaning of "personal view" and "authored"**

"Personal view" online item refers to an online item presenting a particular view or perspective. Personal view online items can range from the outright expression of highly partial views, for example by a person who is a member of a lobby group and is campaigning on the subject, to the considered "authored" opinion of a journalist, commentator or academic, with a professional expertise or specialism in an area which enables them to express opinions which are not necessarily mainstream.

## Matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy

**Meaning of "major matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating current public policy"**

These will vary according to events but are generally matters of political or industrial controversy or matters of current public policy which are of national, and often international, importance, or are of similar significance within a smaller geographical area.

5.11 In addition to the rules above, due impartiality must be preserved on matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy by the BBC in each online item or in a series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole.

5.12 In dealing with matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy an appropriately wide range of significant views must be included and given due weight in each online item or in a series of editorially linked online items taken as a whole. Views and facts must not be misrepresented.

# 6. Elections and Referendums

This section covers the special impartiality requirements and other relevant legislation that must be applied at the time of elections and referendums.

## Legislation

Relevant legislation includes sections 319(2)(c) and (d), 319(8) and section 320 of the Communications Act 2003, the BBC Charter and Agreement, and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The BBC should also have regard to relevant sections of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) ("RPA") – see in particular section 66A.

## Principles

To ensure that the special impartiality requirements in the Communications Act 2003 and other relevant legislation relating to elections and referendums are applied to BBC UK Public Online Material (referred to as "online material") at the time of elections and referendums.

## Rules

### Online material at the time of elections and referendums

6.1 The rules in Section Five, in particular the rules relating to matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy, apply to the coverage of elections and referendums.

### Online material at the time of elections and referendums in the UK

*Note: The remainder of this section only applies during the actual election or referendum period which is defined below.*

**Meaning of "election"**

For the purpose of this section elections include a parliamentary general election, parliamentary by-election, local government election, mayoral election, Police and Crime Commissioner election, Scottish and Welsh Parliament elections and Northern Ireland and London Assembly elections.

**Meaning of "referendum"**

For the purpose of this section a referendum is a statutory referendum (to which the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 ("PPERA") applies or to which section 127 of PPERA is applied) which includes a UK-wide, national or regional referendum held under the provisions of an Act of the UK Parliament or the Scottish Parliament, but does not extend to a local referendum.

6.2 Due weight must be given to the coverage of parties and independent candidates during the election period. In determining the appropriate level of coverage to be given to parties and independent candidates the BBC must take into account evidence of past electoral support

and/or current support. The BBC must also consider giving appropriate coverage to parties and independent candidates with significant views and perspectives.

**Meaning of "election period"**

For a parliamentary general election, this period begins with the dissolution of Parliament. For a parliamentary by-election, this period begins with the issuing of a writ or on such earlier date as is notified in the London Gazette. For the Scottish Parliament elections and Welsh Parliament elections, the period begins with the dissolution of the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Parliament as appropriate or, in the case of a by-election, with the date of the occurrence of a vacancy. For the Northern Ireland Assembly, the London Assembly and for local government elections it is the last date for publication of notices of the election. In all cases the period ends with the close of the poll.

**Meaning of "candidate"**

Candidate has the meaning given to it in section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) and means a candidate standing nominated at the election or included in a list of candidates submitted in connection with it.

6.3 Due weight must be given to designated organisations in coverage during the referendum period. The BBC must also consider giving appropriate coverage to other permitted participants with significant views and perspectives.

**Meaning of "designated organisation" and "permitted participants"**

Designated organisations and permitted participants are those that are designated by the Electoral Commission.

**Meaning of "referendum period"**

For referendums different periods may apply. A referendum held under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (as amended) begins when the draft of an Order is laid before Parliament for approval by each House. In the case of a referendum held under other Acts, the time at which a referendum period commences is given in the individual Acts. In the case of an Order before Parliament, the time will be given in that Order. In all cases the period ends with the close of the poll.

6.4 Discussion and analysis of election and referendum issues must finish when the poll opens. (This refers to the opening of actual polling stations. This rule does not apply to any poll conducted entirely by post.) The BBC is not required to remove archive online material for the period when the polls are open.

6.5 The BBC may not publish the results of any opinion poll on polling day itself until the election or referendum poll closes.

6.6 Candidates in UK elections and representatives of permitted participants in UK referendums must not be used as news presenters, interviewers, presenters or authors in any type of online material during the election period. Previously published archive online material need not be removed for the election or referendum period.

6.7 Appearances or contributions by candidates (in UK elections) or representatives (of permitted participants in UK referendums) in non-political online material planned or scheduled before the election or referendum period may continue, but no new appearances

or contributions should be arranged or published during the period. Previously published archive online material need not be removed for the election or referendum period.