[GB] Ofcom clarifies rules on politicians presenting news

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The United Kingdom’s communications regulator, Ofcom, issued new guidance which took effect on 20 October 2025, clarifying how long-standing duties of due accuracy and due impartiality apply when politicians front programmes that include news. In a media environment where formats increasingly blend and news inserts appear within magazine or rolling discussion programmes, the regulator is drawing clearer lines to protect audiences while preserving freedom of expression.

Background

The legal background to this development is a High Court judgment earlier in 2025, *R (on the application of GB News Limited) v. Ofcom*, where it was held that, in law, a programme cannot simultaneously be a “news programme” and a “current affairs programme”. That distinction matters because Rule 5.3 of Ofcom’s Broadcasting Code prohibits politicians from serving as newsreaders, interviewers or reporters in news programmes (subject to narrow exceptions), whereas Rule 5.1 governs all news, requiring "due accuracy" and "due impartiality". The court confirmed that politicians acting in news presenting roles within non-news programmes (including current affairs) fall outside Rule 5.3 and are assessed under Rule 5.1. This clarified scope set the stage for an Ofcom consultation on whether Rule 5.3 should be broadened.

In light of wider media convergence pressures, Ofcom noted in its consultation that audiences increasingly encounter news elements embedded within non-news output (e.g. current affairs programmes that include short news updates) and that politician-presented programmes has become a more established editorial practice. Broadcasters largely urged Ofcom to avoid redrafting Rule 5.3, warning that a broad rewrite risked "operational uncertainty" and an unintended quasi ban on politicians presenting any kind of programme. Ofcom ultimately concluded that the existing pairing of Rules 5.1 and 5.3 *can* protect audiences, provided the Broadcasting Code guidance is modernised.

The Ofcom’s decision in detail

First, Ofcom updated its guidance to make clear that, if a sitting politician presents news within a non-news programme, their political status will normally

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be a relevant factor when assessing whether the news segment was presented with "due impartiality", as Rule 5.1 of the Code requires. The regulator will also consider the nature of the story and the presenter's known position on that issue. The guidance advises broadcasters to refer to Rule 5.3, when the news falls within a news programme, underscoring that different standards are engaged depending on genre.

Second, Rule 5.3 itself remains unchanged but the relevant guidance is tightened. Under the rule, no politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer or reporter in a news programme unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified, in which case the person's "political allegiance" must be made clear. However, the updated guidance clarifies what qualifies as "exceptional circumstances", that is, situations outside the broadcaster's control and not reasonably foreseeable (for example, during a live news bulletin, a sudden security lockdown leaves only a visiting MP in the studio; they deliver a brief, a verified public-safety update, with their party affiliation clearly labelled on screen). Ofcom emphasises that such cases should be rare and that licensees who regularly use political presenters must have contingency plans (for example, a standby non-political presenter on call or an immediate handover to the newsroom feed) to avoid breaching the prohibition if an unexpected news event breaks during their output.

Third, to reduce ambiguity, Ofcom refreshed the guidance definition of a "politician" to expressly include members of the House of Lords and representatives of political parties, while removing a previous reference to "activists". This update aims to capture those who hold or speak for formal political office, without straying into broader civic roles that are not the target of Rule 5.3.

Ofcom made clear that no rule categorically forbids politicians from presenting non-news programmes, including current affairs, provided there is no election period and the output complies with the Code. However, strong impartiality provisions continue to apply. Programmes addressing matters of "political or industrial controversy" or matters of major public policy must preserve due impartiality. The regulator emphasised that it would investigate, where necessary, to ensure that political presenters in current affairs do not tilt output away from well-balanced and well-informed debate.

Finally, recognising that public expectations of news and current affairs are evolving, Ofcom has indicated it may undertake further research into how audiences perceive mixed-format programmes. While that work could inform future refinements, for now, the regulatory settlement rests on clearer guidance rather than new rules. News remains a special case, current affairs with political presenters remain permissible, and editorial boundaries must be actively managed.

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Ofcom updates guidance around politicians presenting news

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/ofcom-updates-guidance-around-politicians-presenting-news?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Ofcom%20updates%20guidance%20around%20politicians%20presenting%20news&utm_content=Ofcom%20updates%20guidance%20around%20politicians%20presenting%20news+CID_c30486fce5a5d501ce2ed37a1041a9bb&utm_source=updates&utm_term=news%20release

Politicians presenting news: Statement on proposed amendment to Rule 5.3 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/consultation-politicians-presenting-news

R (on the application of GB News Limited) v. Ofcom [2025] EWHC 460

https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/GB-News-v-Ofcom.pdf

Guidance Notes - Section Five: Due Impartiality and Due Accuracy and Undue Prominence of Views and Opinions

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/2025/guidance-notes-section-five-due-impartiality-and-due-accuracy-and-undue-prominence-of-views-and-opinions.pdf?v=406322

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