# [GB] BBC Ends Sponsorship of On-air Events After Complaints from Commercial Rivals

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The BBC trust has found breaches of editorial guidelines and weaknesses in fair trading rules in relation to the sponsorship of BBC-organised events. As a result, the BBC management has decided to end such sponsorship.

The BBC does not carry any advertising in its public service broadcasting nor may its programmes be sponsored. However, it has permitted commercial sponsorship of BBC events, notably “Sports Personality of the Year”, and its website offered “rights packages” for such events. After the December 2007 broadcast of this programme, its commercial rival ITV and the organisation representing private radio broadcasters complained that there had been breaches of editorial guidelines through the prominence of the sponsor’s logo and through on-air mentions. They also alleged that there had been unfair trading through offering sponsorship at below market rates and a breach of the BBC’s Charter and Agreement, as there was no statement of policy for the use of alternative finance in place with the Secretary of State and the event was really a programme which could not be sponsored.

The BBC rejected the complaints, which were then appealed to the BBC Trust. The latter decided that editorial guidelines had been broken and that this had compromised the editorial integrity of the BBC. Fair trading guidelines had not been broken, but they needed to be tightened to make clear that they apply to the sponsorship of events. There had been a technical breach of the BBC Agreement, as there was no policy for the use of alternative finance in place with the Secretary of State; more seriously, when one was later agreed, the programme would not have been compliant.

The Trust required much tighter controls over events sponsorship, with strengthening of the editorial guidelines and closure of the sponsorship website. There should also be consideration of how to handle complaints raising both editorial and fair trading issues. In the event the BBC management went further, deciding to end sponsorship by commercial companies for any on-air BBC event, at a cost of around GBP 1.5 million per annum.

***BBC Trust, “Fair Trading and Editorial Appeals: Sports Personality of the Year 2007”, July 2008***

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http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/appeals/sp07/summary.pdf

***BBC, "BBC Management Statement: BBC Trust Finding and Conclusion on Sports Personality of the Year". 21 July 2008***

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/07_july/21/statement.shtml

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