[GB] Taste and Standards in Broadcasting

IRIS 2009-8:1/22

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In the period following the broadcast of an item on 18 October 2008 during the Russell Brand show, the BBC received 42,851 complaints (see IRIS 2009-5: 15).

The Editorial Standards Committee concluded that the material, regarding Mr Andrew Sachs and his granddaughter Ms Baillie, was “so grossly offensive” that there was no justification for its being broadcast.

Subsequently, the BBC Trust requested the BBC Executive to research audience expectations regarding issues raised by the broadcast and to make recommendations. It commissioned the research from Professor Sonia Livingstone (LSE), Ipsos MORI and the Blinc Partnership and the report was published: “Taste, Standards and the BBC: Public Attitudes to Morality, Values and Behaviour in UK Broadcasting”.

It details major new in-depth audience research carried out by the BBC and sets out the resulting recommendations to tighten up protection for BBC audiences from potentially offensive content, whilst providing appropriate safeguards for creativity and innovation in programming.

On 24 June 2009, the BBC Trust published its response to the BBC Executive’s report, which it welcomed. As was the Executive, the BBC Trust is confronted by the need to balance a number of principles: maintaining the highest editorial standards; ensuring that the audience is not exposed to offensive content; and “guarding against stifling creativity”.

In addition, the Trust made some of its own specific recommendations and outlined the next steps for the “full forthcoming review of the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines” (to take place during 2009), or online guidance, which will, it says, take into account the “public feedback and comments on the findings of the Executive’s report”.

In particular, the Trust recommends that the BBC “should not make programmes that celebrate or condone gratuitous, aggressive, intrusive, and humiliating behaviour”.

The Trust has challenged the Executive to clearly address this issue in the Editorial Guidelines. Whilst licence-payers can distinguish between comedy and satire - of which they approve - they disapprove of programmes containing

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“unjustified humiliation”.

BBC Trust, “Commentary on the Executive’s Report ‘Taste, Standards and the BBC: Public Attitudes to Morality, Values and Behaviour in UK Broadcasting’”

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/taste_standards.pdf

BBC Executive, “Taste, Standards and the BBC: Public Attitudes to Morality, Values and Behaviour in UK Broadcasting”

http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/running/reports/pdf/taste_standards_june2009.pdf

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