[GB] BBC Tightens Rules on Sponsored Programmes after Breaches of Guidelines on BBC World News

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The BBC Trust's Editorial Standards Committee has found that fifteen programmes broadcast on BBC World News breached its editorial and/or sponsorship guidelines. BBC World News is the commercial channel available across Europe and much of the world; unlike the BBC's domestic services, it carries advertising.

All the programmes involved had been acquired by the BBC at no or minimal cost from independent producers. They included Taking the Credit, on carbon trading, which had been funded by Envirotrade; this amounted to sponsorship, which is prohibited for news and current affairs. Other programmes on environmental matters had been funded by international organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programmes and UNESCO and, in one case, by a commercial company. In some cases the funder featured and was promoted in the programmes; there was also a suggestion that commercial, financial or other interests may have influenced editorial judgments, resulting in a breach of the guidelines on conflicts of interests. There were either no sponsor credits or these were insufficiently prominent and not clearly identified. Four episodes of the series Develop or Die and four other programmes had been made by a company forming part of a group of which the Malaysian government was a client. As the programmes concerned Malaysia and its government's policies, this created a conflict of interest in breach of the editorial guidelines. In none of the cases was there found to be any breach of the rules relating to impartiality.

As a result of the decision, the BBC Executive has taken a number of actions to safeguard impartiality and protect it against conflicts of interest. Thus, BBC World News will no longer commission or acquire programmes sponsored by non-commercial organisations and will not commission or acquire programmes at a nominal cost from independent production companies. Instead, all programmes will be commissioned or acquired on a transparent commercial basis. Sponsored programmes will only be commissioned in areas other than news and current affairs genres. A list of approved production companies will be drawn up and due diligence and approval processes strengthened.

'BBC to tighten rules on commercial sponsorship following serious breaches of its guidelines on commercial channel World News', BBC

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http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/news/press_releases/november/world_news.shtml

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