[GB] BBC issues editorial guidelines for EU referendum

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Tony Prosser
University of Bristol Law School

The BBC has issued editorial guidelines for the campaign period before the referendum on UK membership of the EU to be held on 23 June 2016. They apply in addition to the general editorial guidelines that cover issues such as impartiality and broadcasting during elections.

The referendum guidelines set out the application of the BBC's obligation of impartiality in detail. This cannot be achieved by a mathematical formula or use of a stopwatch, but the objective should be to provide a "broad balance" between the two sides. Normally, in daily programmes this will mean a broad balance across each week of the campaign, although for one-off output due impartiality and a broad balance must be achieved within a single programme. Particular care should be taken to ensure that audiences know whom or which campaign a contributor is representing. Special care must be taken in broadcasting unrelated stories about individuals or organisations involved in the campaign, but here a broad balance may not be required, for example where a politician is involved in a newsworthy incident unrelated to the referendum. In debates and discussions on the referendum, neither side should be able to exercise a right of veto by declining to take part; in that case producers must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the audience is presented with material from both sides of the referendum debate. There is no requirement for balance between the political parties in discussing the referendum issue, although the general obligation for fair treatment, breadth of opinion and due impartiality remains.

The same guidelines will apply to BBC editorial content on all BBC websites as well as material identified with the BBC that appears on sites operated by third parties. BBC staff must avoid compromising the BBC's impartiality by expressing their own views on personal websites or social media. All online debate on the referendum, whether on the BBC website or BBC branded social media, will be actively hosted and will be moderated and filtered. There will be no online votes, and the BBC will not publish numbers of contributions to assess support for either side.

BBC reporting of opinion polls will not lead a news bulletin or programme simply with the results of a poll, as polls have to be placed in context. The BBC will not rely solely on the interpretation of a poll by the organisation that commissioned it, nor use language which gives polls greater credibility than they deserve (use

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“suggests” but never “proves” or “shows”). Onscreen graphics must always show the margin for error in a poll.

On the polling day there will be no coverage of any of the issues relating to the referendum from 00.30 a.m. until the polls close at 22.00 p.m.

BBC, EU Referendum Guidelines (2016)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/appendix8

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