# [GB] Use of “offensive” word on morning radio programme chat show investigated

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A guest (Jeremy Irons) on a morning programme on BBC Radio 2, in telling an anecdote, used the word “fuck”. The presenter immediately said, “You can’t say that”, apologised to listeners, and asked Irons to apologise too - which he did. The presenter then reminded other guests not to use offensive language.

Ofcom received one complaint about the use of the word at that time of day. Ofcom decided to mount an investigation on the basis of issues raised under Section 2.3 of the Broadcasting Code: “In applying generally accepted standards broadcasters must ensure that material which may cause offence is justified by the context … Such material may include, but is not limited to, offensive language.”

The BBC was asked how the programme’s content complied with the rule. It said that Irons had been assessed as “unlikely” to use inappropriate language, but nonetheless had been given a full “face-to-face” briefing which included being reminded that the programme had a large family audience with the potential for children to be listening, and that he should moderate any stories and use of language accordingly. The BBC argued that adequate steps were taken before the programme aired and the immediate response was also appropriate and adequate.

Ofcom had in 2010 conducted research into the pubic’s consideration of the use of offensive language, Audience attitudes towards offensive language on television and radio. This had concluded that the use of the word “fuck” was deemed to be amongst the most offensive, and thus Irons’ use was capable of causing offence. The question was then whether the context could redeem the use of the word. Ofcom chose to look at the programme as a progamme with a large family audience including children listening to it during the school run, within a channel made up of popular music and comedy content. Thus, the use of the most offensive language was not justified by the context.

However, Ofcom chose to resolve the issue without any further action, on the basis that the BBC did have a compliance policy in place to carry out pre-airing risk-assessment of the likelihood of guests using offensive language. Furthermore, in this case, the guest was given a briefing reminding him not to use such language.

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