[GB] BBC Trust upholds complaint of lack of impartiality in interview with Leader of the Opposition

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The BBC Trust's Editorial Standards Committee considers complaints about unfair treatment in BBC programmes. It has upheld a complaint about an item relating to the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, broadcast in the main evening news bulletin.

The item was broadcast three days after the Paris shootings and just before the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, was due to make a speech announcing the government's anti-terrorism policy. A clip was included of Mr Corbyn stating that he was not happy with a "shoot-to-kill" policy and that it could be dangerous and counter-productive. The report said this was the answer to a question put to him about whether he would be "happy for British officers to pull the trigger in the event of a Paris style attack". He had not in fact been asked that question; the response was in fact to a previous question about whether he would be happy to allow police or the military to "shoot to kill" on British streets. In the same interview, he had also supported stronger security measures involving the police. The report also stated that "[the Prime Minister's] message and the Labour leader's couldn't be more different".

A complaint was made by a member of the public that if the BBC had thought that Mr Corbyn was opposed to permitting police to open fire when terrorists were committing mass murder, that question should have been put to him. The Committee considered that it was not accurate to present Mr Corbyn's reply as a response to a question he had not been asked and then to rely on the response to a different question to support the claim of major disagreement with the Prime Minister. It found that there was no evidence of bias or of any intent by the BBC to misrepresent Mr Corbyn's position. However, given the importance of the issues involved, the BBC had a particular duty to ensure the accuracy of the context in which politicians' views are best understood by audiences. Here the inaccuracy on a highly contentious political matter meant that this standard had not been achieved and so the item was not duly impartial.

BBC Editorial Standards Committee, "News at Six, BBC One, 15 November 2015", issued January 2017

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