[GB] The Dyson Report considers the BBC’s investigation of 1995 Panorama’s interview with HRH Princess of Wales lacked integrity and transparency.

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The Dyson Report ("the Report") published on 14 May 2021 held that the BBC fell short of its high standards of integrity and transparency by failing to mention to the public its investigation in 1995 and 1996 into the shortcomings of Martin Bashir’s ("Bashir") Panorama interview with HRH Princess of Wales (HRH). Also, Tony Hall (now Lord Hall), then the BBC’s Managing Director of News and Current Affairs, could not have concluded from the BBC’s investigation at the time that Bashir, who had secured the interview, was an honest and honourable man. *Panorama* is a weekly current affairs programme screened on BBC1.

The Report’s Terms of Reference were set by Lord Dyson and approved by the BBC on the basis that Lord Dyson considered them appropriate. The Report had been commissioned as a consequence of ongoing criticism of the BBC’s failure to properly account for the shortcomings about how the interview with HRH had been procured and the lack of reprimand against Martin Bashir who eventually had admitted he had used fake bank statements to encourage HRH’s brother, the Earl Spencer ("ES"), to consider Bashir as the right person to interview his sister.

The interview with HRH was aired on 20 November 1995 during which she was explicit about her difficulties with the Royal Family and marital problems with her husband Prince Charles.The Report found that Bashir had commissioned graphic designer Matt Wiessler to produce fake bank statements indicating that a former employee of ES and HRH’s Private Secretary had received payments from the media company, News International, with the implication that they had betrayed her trust.

Bashir had shown the fake statements to ES. The Report considered Bashir using the fake statements portrayed himself as someone who could be trusted to interview HRH. Such conduct was a serious breach of the 1993 BBC’s producer’s guidelines.

When Wiessler saw the broadcast interview he reported his concerns to Tim Gardam, Head of Weekly Programmes in BBC News and Current Affairs. This led to Gardam investigating the matter and Bashir providing an account of the faked documents. Gardam accepted what Bashir had said but asked for him to produce

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independent evidence that HRH had not been shown the statements. On 22 December 1995 Bashir produced a note from HRH saying she had not seen the statements. Gardam was not aware the fake statements had previously been shown by Bashir to ES.

Gardam had not considered the possibility that HRH had been influenced to do the interview as a consequence of her brother seeing the statements. No approach was made to ES for his version of events.

Newspaper reports suggested that something was amiss which led to Bashir admitting to Gardam that the fake statements had been shown to ES. The BBC decided that it must find out the entire truth behind Bashir's activities. Bashir was interviewed by senior BBC staff, Tim Suter and Richard Peel, and the conclusions were expressed in a letter from Tony Hall. Although this letter was probably not sent despite Bashir's conduct breaching guidelines. Again, there was no approach to ES.

Media reports continued of inappropriate conduct and a full inquiry was commissioned by Lord Hall and was undertaken by Gardam's successor Anne Sloman. Mr Bashir was unable or unwilling to give Sloman and Hall any credible explanation of why he had commissioned the fake bank statements, and why he had shown them to ES for his version of what had happened.

The Report concluded that Hall and Sloman were woefully ineffective for failing to interview ES and the reasons for not doing so were rejected. There was no scrutiny of Bashir's account with any degree of scepticism and caution even though Bashir had lied three times and he was unable to explain why he had produced fake statements. Lord Hall could not have concluded that Bashir was an honest and honourable man. The Report determined Bashir had, by using the fake statements, deceived and induced ES to arrange a meeting with HRH.

Despite the extensive media coverage elsewhere, the answers given by the BBC to specific questions by the press were evasive. Also, by failing to mention on any BBC news programme the fact they had investigated Bashir's conduct and the outcome of the investigations, the BBC fell short of its high standards of integrity and transparency.

Dyson Report, BBC

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