

## **Response to OFCOM Thematic review of representation and portrayal on the BBC**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1.** The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), founded in 1997, is the largest umbrella body in the UK with over 500 affiliates, seeking to represent the common interest of Muslims in Britain. It is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole.
- 1.2.** The Muslim Council of Britain's affiliate base reflects the diversity of Muslims in the UK, being made up of hundreds of mosques, educational and charitable bodies, cultural and relief agencies and women and youth groups and associations across the UK from a range of ethnic, geographical and theological backgrounds and traditions.
- 1.3.** The BBC is a public service broadcaster with the important core mission of informing, educating and entertaining, and aims to be a trusted guide for everyone. Two of its five public purposes are to "provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them" and to "reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions..." – purposes that are relevant to this submission.
- 1.4.** There is an expectation that it continues to aspire to highest standards with respect to independence, impartiality and integrity. However, this will depend on the commitment to fulfil its vision: that it should "help contribute to the social cohesion and wellbeing of the UK"; to "speak to people with a range of characteristics and to better understand the concerns outlined above by different minority groups." Furthermore it is important that it speaks to audiences across the UK to better understand their reflections on how the nations are represented and portrayed.
- 1.5.** The MCB welcomes the opportunity to input into OFCOM's "Thematic review of representation and portrayal on the BBC". This document reflects a consensus view of our affiliates, and, we believe, across a broad spectrum of Muslim communities in the UK. Muslims in Britain comprise 5% of the population in England and Wales, with audience expectations for quality output from the BBC much the same as everyone else. Our major broadcaster has responsibilities towards all sections of British society.
- 1.6.** There have been brilliant programmes on BBC related to Islam or Muslims, including most recently BBC Radio 4's "Muslims on Islam in Britain today" and BBC Two's Monty Don's Paradise Gardens. The focus of this submission is on news in particular.
- 1.7.** The majority of the British Public say what they know about Islam is acquired through the media,<sup>1</sup> and whilst some of the most reprehensible anti-Muslim bigotry is documented to be within sections of the print press, this submission puts forward concerns related to Islamophobia and the portrayal of Muslims specifically at the BBC.
- 1.8.** This submission is split into the following sections:
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section 2: Language</b></li> <li>• <b>Section 3: Guest Contributors</b></li> <li>• <b>Section 4: Inaccuracies</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Section 5: Consistency</b></li> <li>• <b>Section 6: Imagery</b></li> </ul>
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- 1.9.** The final section will outline specific recommendations to improve the BBC's coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> March 2018 "A Review of survey research on Muslims in Britain", Ipsos MORI, pp.80

## 2. Language

**2.1.** BBC guidelines state that “different words cause different degrees of offence in different communities as well as in different parts of the world. A person's age, sex, education, employment, faith, nationality and where they live, may all have an impact on whether or not they might be offended.”<sup>2</sup> Care must therefore be taken with the language used when discussing any topic, and in particular controversial topics related to Muslims and Islam so as not to misinform or reinforce prejudices or stereotypes.

**2.2.** *Terminology:* editorial decisions are made to determine the right words to use for specific recurring issues. These should follow the principles of academic veracity, being understandable by the wider audience and consistency. The table below sets out a number of examples demonstrating a failure of the BBC to adhere to these principles in its terminology choices:

Term	Key points
“Islamic State”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term creates an unreasonable link between Islam and the terror group. Alternatives include “Daesh” or “Al-Dawla”.</li> <li>• The BBC has argued that it cannot use a pejorative term such as “Daesh” as that breaches its impartiality requirements. This is an inconsistent position given the BBC uses the pejorative term “Boko Haram” for the terror group in Nigeria (actual name: Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah li al-Da'wah wa al-Jihad).</li> <li>• “Al-Dawla” is the term used by the terror group itself (short-form for al-Dawla al-Islamiyya). The BBC has argued that “Islamic State” is solely a translation of this term. However, the BBC does not translate the terms of foreign groups e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ETA - ‘Basque Homeland and Liberty’</li> <li>○ Hizbullah - ‘Party of God’</li> <li>○ Al Qaeda ‘The Base’</li> <li>○ Taliban - ‘Students’</li> <li>○ Hamas - ‘Islamic Resistance Movement’ etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
“Islamist”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technically an “advocate of running the government in accordance with their understanding of Islamic law”, its usage has moved to a specifically more derogatory meaning “advocate of militancy or fundamentalism linked to Islam”, blurring the line between non-violent political groups, whose views may be deeply problematic, and violent groups. In describing the attack in the southern French town of Trèbes, the BBC referred to the attacker as “Islamist.”<sup>3</sup> In a similar piece on the Egypt election the word is used to describe the democratically elected leader Mohammed Morsi.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Furthermore, even when violence exists and the perpetrators of the violence are Muslim, the term is used, apparently independently of whether the motivation may be political. E.g. consider the Bosnian Serbs’ Christianity during the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia – their faith is not considered part of their motivation, although Bosnian Muslims were targeted <i>because</i> of being Muslims.</li> </ul>
“Terrorist”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See Section 5 on “Consistency”</li> </ul>
“Jihadi”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The words ‘<i>jihadi</i>’ and ‘<i>jihadist</i>’ are used without much consistency and have become shorthand for ‘terrorist’ when the suspect is Muslim. This is despite BBC guidelines in reporting terrorism which discourage the use of the word ‘terrorist’ and also stress on consistency and accuracy. BBC Guidelines say words used for acts of terror should specifically describe the actions of the perpetrator: for example, bomber, attacker, gunman, kidnapper).<sup>5</sup> In describing the attack in the southern French town of Trèbes, the BBC not only used the term “Islamist” as has been stated above but also described the actions as a “Jihadist” attack.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, Harm and offence, *Language 5.4.20*

<sup>3</sup> 25 March 2018, France gun attack: Trèbes held memorial Mass for victims, *bbc news/world/europe*

<sup>4</sup> 26 March 2018, Egypt election: Voters to elect president, *bbc news/world/middle east*

<sup>5</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, *Value Judgements*

"Koran"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professor Jane I. Smith, at the Hartford Seminary's Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations said: <i>"The more appropriate transliteration is Qur'an rather than Koran, Muhammad rather than Mohammad or Mohammed, and Muslims rather than Moslems. In each case, the less-desirable spelling is associated with Orientalism, which we all want to avoid."</i><sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
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**2.3. Poor language choice:** A non-exhaustive list of examples where the BBC has failed in its duty to ensure the appropriate choice of language is as below:

Date	Language choice	Key points
May 2017	"Islamist" <sup>7</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The BBC defined Islamist as "the name of a dystopian ideology which is destructive for everyone, including Muslims" – this appears to have been changed following a complaint by the MCB but with no acknowledgement of the error.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>
May 2017	"Islamic writing" <sup>9</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A BBC News report on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017 saw correspondent Ed Thomas proceed to ask a neighbour of Salman Abedi if the reported flag seen hanging outside his house had "Islamic writing" despite reporting earlier in the sequence that the BBC had been told a flag with "Arabic writing" had been seen hanging outside his home – unclear what Islamic in this report is supposed to refer to.</li> </ul>
June 2017	"Holocaust was a sensitive topic for many Muslims" <sup>10</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This unjustifiable claim implying that individuals who identify as Muslims are likely to find the murder of millions of Jews as "sensitive" was removed later without acknowledgement of the error.<sup>11</sup></li> </ul>
Aug 2017	"Muslim problem" <sup>12</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr Kavanagh used the term "the Muslim Problem" in The Sun (capitalisation was important as it made it clear that he is using the Nazi-like terminology analogous to "the Jewish Problem"). The BBC chose to use the lowercase and even after being informed of this, decided it was unimportant. The complaint was finally upheld by the BBC's Executive Complaint Unit (ECU) many months later.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>
Feb 2018	Female modesty is "one of the main pillars of Islam" <sup>14</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This false statement playing to certain gender stereotypes about Islam and Muslims was changed after complaints but with no acknowledgement of the error.</li> </ul>
Mar 2018	"Muslim gang-rape trial" <sup>15</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no evidence that the gang-rape was in any way linked to Islam or Muslims. The word Muslim was later removed after complaints, including by the MCB, but was done so without acknowledgement of error or apology.</li> </ul>
Mar 2018	Signs of radicalisation were "starting to dress differently, to pray five times a day" <sup>16</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The presenters failed to challenge the over-simplified (and highly problematic) explanation of radicalisation. The author Asne Seistrad, is well-regarded, and this error (which she separately acknowledged<sup>17</sup>) could have been avoided if the presenters were able to recognise the dangers of this standalone statement.</li> </ul>
Mar 2018	"Islamic attack" <sup>18</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The adjective "Islamic" was used to describe a terror attack in France rather than "Daesh inspired", which is less problematic as it does not link the entirety of the faith of Islam with an attack.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Hartford Courant, 12 June 2005, Is Islamic holy book called "Koran" or "Qur'an"?, *The Baltimore Sun*

<sup>7</sup> 22 May 2017, Trump urges Muslim leaders to lead fight against radicalisation, *bbc news/world/us/canada*

<sup>8</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, BBC Changes Definition of 'Islamist' on Front Page Story After Complaint, *Media Misreporting*

<sup>9</sup> Ed Thomas, 24 May 2017, *BBC News TV Report*

<sup>10</sup> 28 June 2017, Muslim girls complain of Polish racism on Holocaust study trip, *bbc news/world/europe*

<sup>11</sup> 28 June 2017, 10:29am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>12</sup> 17 August 2017, Sarah Champion quits Labour front bench over rape article, *bbc news/uk-politics*

<sup>13</sup> BBC Complaints, Sarah Champion quits Labour front bench over rape article, *Finding by the Executive Complaints Unit*

<sup>14</sup> 19 February 2018, 12:28am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>15</sup> 07 March 2018, Britain First leader and deputy leader jailed for hate crimes, *bbc news/uk-england*

<sup>16</sup> 19 March 2018, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>17</sup> 19 March 2018, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>18</sup> 29 March 2018, "Six o'clock news" on BBC Radio 4, see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the clip)

### 3. Contributors

3.1. The BBC was one of many broadcasters which regularly provided a platform for Anjem Choudary in the name of free speech – a man who has since been jailed for urging support for the terror group Daesh. One can only hope that lessons have been learnt.

3.2. In today’s political environment where the far-right are on the rise across the world and bigoted ideas are being promoted more openly, it is understandable that a larger number of bigoted views will be broadcast. However, in such situations, the duty on the BBC is to ensure:

- Their background is explained to give context to their bigoted views;
- Their bigoted and anti-Muslim views are appropriately challenged – this may require any of the following:
  - The choice to not provide a platform to bigots to spread their bigotry;
  - A clear agreement that bigoted views will not be discussed;
  - Where bigoted views are raised, they are robustly challenged.

3.3. A small number of examples of the BBC failing to live up to these principles include:

Guest	Programme	Historical background	Key points
Frank Gaffney	BBC Radio 4 Today, 30 Jan 2017	“One of America’s most successful professional Islamophobes” <sup>19</sup> , who thought the Missile Defence Logo was evidence of Obama’s ‘Submission To Shariah’ <sup>20</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Gaffney’s conspiratorial views on Muslims were not part of his introduction, nor was he challenged for his contentious views on "Sharia", CATO, the Muslim Brotherhood</li> <li>• Whilst the Today programme team refused to initially acknowledge the error, it did so after the Editorial Complaints Unit were called upon<sup>21</sup>.</li> <li>• There was no apology nor was there an on-air acknowledgement of this serious breach of the BBC’s guidelines.</li> </ul>
Pro-Israel advocacy group	BBC 2, Victoria Derbyshire, 27 April 2017	The Israeli advocacy group is vehemently against the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BBC failed to introduce the background of a key interviewee in a report broadcast twice and in the online news item: their leadership role in the pro-Israel advocacy group StandWithUs.<sup>22</sup></li> <li>• This omission was only acknowledged after complaints and the Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU) agreed that the pro-Israeli affiliations of the individuals who spoke against BDS should have been made clear.<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
Douglas Murray	BBC 2, Sunday Politics, 28 May 2017 <sup>24</sup>	Mr Murray has in the past made statements <sup>25</sup> such as, “conditions for Muslims in Europe must be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was only identified by the presenter as being “of the Henry Jackson Society.”<sup>26</sup></li> <li>• He was provided a platform to share his bigoted views on a video<sup>27</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte England, 16 November 2016, Donald Trump 'appoints Islamophobic conspiracy theorist to transition team', *The Independent, news/world/americas*

<sup>20</sup> Max Bergmann, 25 February 2010, Frank Gaffney Posits That Missile Defense Logo Is Evidence of Obama’s ‘Submission To Shariah’, *Think progress*

<sup>21</sup> BBC Complaints, *Today, Radio 4, 30 January 2017: Finding by the Executive Complaints Unit*

<sup>22</sup> Jon Ironmonger, 27 April 2017, Concerns raised over students' unions' anti-Israel stance, *Victoria Derbyshire programme, BBC Two*

<sup>23</sup> Ben White, 15 November 2017, BBC upholds complaint about failure to identify Israel advocates in BDS report, *Middle East Monitor, Article, Europe & Russia, Israel, Middle East, Opinion, Palestine, UK*

<sup>24</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

<sup>25</sup> Paul Goodman, 17 October 2017, Why the Conservative frontbench broke off relations with Douglas Murray – and what happened afterwards, comment, *Conservative Home*

<sup>26</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

<sup>27</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

		made harder across the board which has led to the Conservative party to break of ties with him.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was not challenged by the presenter or Ms Khan when he stated: “we need less Islam”. Examples of implications of this, include expulsion of Muslims, closing down of mosques</li> <li>• Mr Murray misled viewers claiming two thirds of British Muslims would not report a family member they found to be involved in extremism to the Police - a claim not challenged by the presenter despite the BBC’s own Comres poll conducted in 2015 which showing that 94% of Muslims would report those in the community preparing for an act of violence.<sup>28</sup></li> <li>• The MCB has raised a complaint about this failure to adhere to the BBC’s own guidelines.<sup>29</sup></li> </ul>
Mica Mosbacher, member of Trump’s National Advisory Board	BBC, Newsnight, 30 Nov 2017	She referred to the Britain Muslim population as “a problem” <sup>30</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was no attempt made to challenge the central premise of this statement or to dispute this bigotry.</li> <li>• In response to complaints, the BBC provided differing reasons without acknowledging the error e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "Our aim is simply to provide enough information for viewers to make up their own minds."</li> <li>○ “there were also technical challenges that prevented a robust challenge.”</li> <li>○ The guideline couldn’t be interpreted to mean that “on every occasion a contributor expresses a controversial view they must, without exception, be taken to task on it there and then even on issues that have been scrutinised elsewhere in the BBC’s output.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### 4. Inaccuracies

4.1. Accuracy is a core principle of journalism and is expected as standard especially from our public broadcaster.

4.2. A small number of examples of where the BBC failed in its duty to ensure accuracy, includes:

Programme	Individual	Key points
BBC One, This Week, Correction in 14 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	Dr Haitham al-Haddad accused of believing that Jews were descended from pigs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BBC accepts Dr al-Haddad's assurance that he has not stated that "Jews are descended from pigs". It has withdrawn this allegation and confirms that it will not repeat it<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>
BBC Radio 5 Live, 5 Live Breakfast Show, Correction in 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2017	Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin accused of calling for the lynching of Salman Rushdie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BBC has been asked by Mr Mueen-Uddin to make clear, and it accepts, that while like many Muslims he found the Satanic Verses highly offensive to Muslims and their faith, at no stage did he advocate for or campaign for Mr Rushdie to be lynched or in any way harmed. The BBC apologised to Mr Mueen-Uddin for the distress and damage this statement caused him<sup>32</sup>.</li> </ul>
BBC Radio 5 Live, The Big Debate, April 2016	Imam Suliman Gani accused of being a “supporter of Islamic State”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BBC wishes to make clear that this statement was not true and that he is not a supporter of IS. Imam Gani opposes Islamic State and its activities which he has in the past condemned and campaigned against. The BBC apologises to Imam Gani for the distress and damage this statement caused him.<sup>33</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> 26 January- 25 February 2015, BBC-Today-Programme, British-Muslims-Poll, *ComRes*, pp.29

<sup>29</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, BBC Sunday Politics Show Platforms Activist Calling for ‘Less Islam’ to Counter Terrorism, *Media Misreporting*

<sup>30</sup> Nicole Stinson, 01 December 2017, Trump was right May has overseen unprecedented number of terror attacks, BBC guest claims, *Daily Express*, [news/uk](http://news/uk)

<sup>31</sup> BBC Help and Feedback/Corrections and Clarifications, Wednesday 14 March 2018: This Week, BBC One, 5 March 2015

<sup>32</sup> BBC Help and Feedback/Corrections and Clarifications, Friday 20 January 2017: 5 Live Breakfast Show, BBC Radio 5 Live, 25 August 2016

<sup>33</sup> 25 May 2016, Suliman Gani-an apology, [bbc-news/uk-england-london](http://bbc-news/uk-england-london)

## 5. Consistency

5.1. The BBC has a duty to not discriminate and treat all fairly and equally.

5.2. The table below sets out a small selection of examples where it has failed to do so:

Issue	Treatment of an issue affecting Muslims	Treatment of issues affecting those of other faiths / not Muslims	Conclusion
<b>Treatment of attacks against Muslims prime-time discussion shows</b>	BBC Question Time (22 June 2017) did not cover the Finsbury Park terror attack perpetrated by Darren Osborne (19 June 2017) <sup>34</sup>	BBC Question Time on at least the first two occasions (23 May 2013, 30 May 2013) covered the terror attack that killed Fusilier Lee Rigby as the <i>first</i> question <sup>35</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal risks were the same in both cases (charges were brought after the Question Time episodes)<sup>36</sup></li> <li>Finsbury Park Mosque stated “BBC failed us and the country” for this editorial decision</li> </ul>
<b>Response approach after a terror attack</b>	Terror attacks often prompt the BBC to ask Muslims for their response to an attack	Following the terror attack that led to the murder of Jo Cox MP, white far right activists were not brought on to ask their response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rise of the far-right is not a new phenomenon yet it is seen as a one-off on each occasion rather than being treated in a similar way to “Islamist” attacks</li> </ul>
<b>Use of “terror attack” or “terrorist” depending on perpetrator</b>	Four dead in Westminster Terror Attack <sup>37</sup> when describing the attack by Khalid Masood. <sup>38</sup> (23 March 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finsbury Park Attack<sup>39</sup> (19 June 2017) with attacker called: Cardiff Man<sup>40</sup>, Finsbury Park attacker<sup>41</sup>, Mosque attack suspect<sup>42</sup>, Darren Osborne<sup>43</sup></li> <li>Car rams into crowd of people at Charlottesville rally.<sup>44</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples make it clear that the choice of term “terror attack” appears to be used far more loosely for those perpetrated by “radical Islamists” than by far-right extremists</li> </ul>
<b>Excuses provided after a terrorist has mental health issues</b>	Leytonstone Tube attacker Muhiddin Mire jailed for life <sup>45</sup> (he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and was referred to mental health services by his GP, is given little or no prominence in all the BBC reports on the incident). <sup>46 4748</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terror accused Connor Ward 'has mental health issues'<sup>49</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental health is a rationale that is given legitimacy for a white supremacist / far-right terrorist but is ignored in reporting when it is a “radical Islamist” terrorist</li> </ul>

## 6. Imagery

6.1. The choices of pictures within reports and online, plays an important role in shaping stories. The pictures chosen should abide by principles including accuracy, impartiality and fairness.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Sweney, 23 June 2017, Finsbury Park mosque official complains to BBC over attack coverage, *The Guardian, TV radio*

<sup>35</sup> Why was Finsbury Park Terror attack not even mentioned on Question Time, 23 June 2017 06:56am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter*)

<sup>36</sup> (*Lee Rigby attack: 22 May 2013, Question Time episode: 23 May 2013. Adebowale charged 30 May, Adebolajo charged 1 June. / Finsbury Park attack: 19 June 2017, Question Time Episode 22 June. Osborne charged 23 June*)

<sup>37</sup> 23 March 2017, London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>38</sup> 23 March 2017, London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>39</sup> 19 June 2017, Finsbury Park attack: Theresa May condemns 'sickening' terror attack, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>40</sup> 23 June 2017, Finsbury Park attack: Cardiff man Darren Osborne charged, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>41</sup> 02 February 2018, Finsbury Park attacker Darren Osborne jailed for minimum of 43 years, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>42</sup> 30 January 2018, Finsbury Park mosque attack suspect hoped to kill Jeremy Corbyn, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>43</sup> 01 February 2018, Darren Osborne guilty of Finsbury Park mosque murder, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>44</sup> 12 August 2017, Car rams into crowd of people at Charlottesville rally, *bbc news/world/us/canada*

<sup>45</sup> 01 August 2016, Leytonstone Tube attacker Muhiddin Mire jailed for life, *bbc news/uk-england*

<sup>46</sup> 08 June 2016, Leytonstone Tube knife attacker guilty of murder bid, *bbc news/uk-england*

<sup>47</sup> 17 June 2016, Leytonstone knife attack victim speaks out for the first time, *bbc news/uk-england/london*

<sup>48</sup> 08 June 2016, How Leytonstone Tube attack unfolded, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>49</sup> 21 February 2018, Terror accused Connor Ward 'has mental health issues' *bbc news/uk-nescotland/orkney & shetland*

- 6.2. The BBC guidelines on images states that images are not to be used to “reinforce prejudicial perspectives or depict groups in stereotypical ways. When possible, we should ensure a diverse range of ethnic groups is depicted in any image.”<sup>50</sup>
- 6.3. The table below sets out a small number of examples where it has failed to adhere to the basic standards expected for image choice:

Image	Rationale for concern
Young Muslim girls wearing a hijab, used to describe illegal schools <sup>51</sup> (BBC Website, May 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only half of the hundred illegal schools being faith based and just a quarter of all of them being Islamic.</li> <li>Removed after complaint (no acknowledgement of error)</li> </ul>
Picture of verses of the Qur’an used when voiceover said: “...thousands of children are left at risk of extremism...” (BBC News at Ten February 26th) <sup>52</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whilst the page was from a book that was implicated in the important investigation, a basic understanding of Islam / Muslims, would recognise the importance of not focussing on the Quranic verses.</li> </ul>
The town that fails to elect an Asian woman (Asian Network & BBC News, February 2018) <sup>53</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With Blackburn having a 28% Asian population the image used to represent this fact is a woman in a full-length burqa.</li> </ul>
Segregation at 'worrying levels' in parts of Britain, Dame Louise Casey warns (December 2016) <sup>54</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main image in this report about a problem with cohesion is of three women in full-length burqas.</li> </ul>

## 7. Recommendations

7.1. **Collect data related to faith:** Without sufficient data, it is difficult to make actionable decisions.

- **Errors:** Whilst the Muslim Council of Britain will be more closely tracking BBC output in the coming year, it is important that the BBC records the types of corrections and errors that are being made, so as to improve coverage.
- **Diversity or portrayal and representation:** The BBC itself compiles data on religion e.g. subjects covered, individuals on screen, offscreen etc. The collection of data in terms of diversity on and off screen should include religion as well as ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. The BBC produces around 150 hours of TV and thousands of hours of network and regional radio dedicated to religion.<sup>55</sup> There needs to be a breakdown of those figures in terms of religions covered to ensure non-Christian licence fee payers are represented in this dedicated output along the lines of their numbers within society. It will also help to illustrate what is being covered and by whom to better understand what subjects are regularly covered, what communities and individuals are given prominence and where the gaps are in terms of better representation and portrayal.

7.2. **Improve diversity:** Many issues are improved when there is a diverse enough workforce that has the required religious literacy to identify issues and organically institute change from within:

- **Content:** The previous Head of Religion stated publicly that putting the percentages together for non-Christian faiths it was in single figures

<sup>50</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines, Stills Photographs and Images, *Political, Religious and Topical Sensitivities*

<sup>51</sup> Hannah Richardson, 16 May 2016, Thousands of children taught in 'illegal schools', *bbc news/education*

<sup>52</sup> Lucy Manning, 26 February 2018, *BBC News at Six TV Report*

<sup>53</sup> Rahila Bano & Nafeesa Shan, 28 February 2016, Blackburn: The town that fails to elect Asian women, *bbc news-england*

<sup>54</sup> 05 December 2016, Segregation at 'worrying levels' in parts of Britain, Dame Louise Casey warns, *bbc news/uk*

<sup>55</sup> 20 December 2017, BBC announces religion and ethics plans, *BBC Media Centre*

- **Staff:** The BBC has made great strides in pursuing diversity across its staff however this is not reflected in major or senior journalistic and editorial roles within the Corporation. Nor can it be said to be reflected in output with the paucity among senior or specialist journalists covering news in significant Muslim areas corresponding with the lack of stories from these regions in national news programming.

In the meantime, engagement with and listening to the views of representative Muslim bodies will be valuable. For example, as the MCB tracks issues with the BBC output (website, news etc.), a direct line would be preferable to going through the complaints process, as is the case with much of the print press.

- 7.3. Acknowledge and track errors:** Where there are errors or changes, these should be acknowledged as a matter of course, rather than only when the Editorial Complaints Unit are involved.
- 7.4. Take great care in the selection of guests:** Balance must be developed between ensuring an output that is fair and represents the diversity of views, and acting as a loudspeaker for bigotry and the spread of hate. The choice to platform such voices and the frequency with which they are platformed, should be closely monitored – with their inclusion being the exception rather than the rule. In such exceptional circumstances, the presenter must be well enough prepped to be able to challenge bigotry, and the guest must be introduced carefully so as to ensure their background is understood by the listeners.
- 7.5. Greater diligence** required in understanding the background of specific thinktanks. Some organisations are heavily invested in promoting an agenda of otherness about Muslims and are key drivers of the anti-Muslim narrative. Their findings must be rigorously scrutinised as in some cases they are found to be inaccurate despite coming from an apparently reputable think tank.<sup>56</sup>
- 7.6. Consistency:** On the biggest issues such as terrorism, an analysis of previous reporting (language, imagery, rationale etc.) will be useful to help inform an updated policy which ensures fairness and equality in the reporting of terror regardless of the background of the perpetrator.

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<sup>56</sup> “Half of UK Muslims would not report extremism”, ITV News – retracted after being found to be inaccurate interpretation of a poll by the think tank Policy Exchange, 28 December 2016 (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter*)