

## Response to The BBC's Editorial Guidelines Consultation

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), seeks to represent the common interest of the UK's diverse Muslim communities. Founded in 1997, it is the largest umbrella body of its kind in the UK with over 500 affiliates. It is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole. A democratic body underpinned by a constitution, 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.
- 1.2. The MCB has launched a Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM), whose goal is to promote fair and responsible reporting of Muslims and Islam through constructive engagement. This submission is on behalf of the CfMM.
- 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..." (Section 1, Purposes 1 and 4) – purposes that are relevant to this submission and cited in the Draft Guidelines.
- 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 The BBC's Editorial Guidelines Consultation. This document reflects the views 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. The majority of the British Public say what they know about Islam is acquired through the media,<sup>1</sup> and whilst 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 from the BBC.
- 1.7. Despite the wealth of positive and valuable output of the BBC, given this is a consultation on the guidelines, this submission focusses on concerns and challenges with a view to providing tangible and pragmatic improvements to the Guidelines.

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

**1.8.** In this submission we carry forward major points raised in two earlier opportunities: in January 2013 with the BBC Trusts Impartiality Review, and more recently in February 2017 with Director General Lord Hall. At the former, based on information provided us by former BBC employees, we conveyed concerns with an institutional culture that limited management and newsroom opportunities for BME professionals. Five years on, there have been positive steps in this regard. At the latter, our concerns related to story lines and terminology, and also, once too often, the airtime given to those who stir hatred, without adequate challenge. In an increasingly xenophobic and Islamophobic climate, these are serious matters that require BBC action.

**1.9.** This submission is split into the following sections:

- **Section 2: Language**
- **Section 3: Contributors**
- **Section 4: Inaccuracies**
- **Section 5: Consistency**

**1.10.** Section 6 will then list all the recommendations for changes to the Guidelines

## 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.<sup>3</sup>

**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)<sup>4</sup></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, and violent groups. In describing the attack in the southern French town of Trèbes, the BBC referred to the attacker as “Islamist.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar piece on the Egypt election the word is used to describe the democratically elected leader Mohammed Morsi.<sup>6</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>
“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>7</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>
“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</i></li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> BBC Draft Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, Harm and Offence, *Language* 5.3.20

<sup>3</sup> BBC Draft Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, Harm and Offence, *Language* 5.3.38

<sup>4</sup> 2 April 2018, Boko Haram attack: More than a dozen dead in Maiduguri, *BBC News*

<sup>5</sup> 25 March 2018, France gun attack: Trèbes held memorial Mass for victims, *BBC News*

<sup>6</sup> 26 March 2018, Egypt election: Voters to elect president, *BBC News*

<sup>7</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 5, *Value Judgements*

	<p><i>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.”<sup>8</sup></i></p>
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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>9</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>10</sup></li> </ul>
May 2017	“Islamic writing” <sup>11</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 was Islamic in this report.</li> </ul>
June 2017	“Holocaust was a sensitive topic for many Muslims” <sup>12</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>13</sup></li> </ul>
Mar 2018	Signs of radicalisation were “starting to dress differently, to pray five times a day” <sup>14</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>15</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>16</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>
Mar 2018	“Islamic marriage” <sup>17</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The term “Islamic marriage” appears to be being used as a proxy for “Muslim” whilst being entirely irrelevant to the story. The right term is “marriage” unless there is a specific need to distinguish between a civil and religious marriage for a particular reason (not relevant here) in clear breach of the “Portrayal” clause of Section 5 (Harm and Offence).</li> </ul>
Aug 2018	“Islamic Extremism” <sup>18</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The term “Islamic extremism” was used by the contributor Will Geddes (and not corrected by Victoria Derbyshire) following the Westminster car incident rather than “Islamist” or “Daesh-inspired”.</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> 12 June 2005, Is Islamic holy book called “Koran” or “Qur’an”?, *Hartford Courant, The Baltimore Sun*

<sup>9</sup> 22 May 2017, Trump urges Muslim leaders to lead fight against radicalisation, *BBC News*

<sup>10</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, BBC Changes Definition of ‘Islamist’ on Front Page Story After Complaint, *Media Misreporting*

<sup>11</sup> Ed Thomas, 24 May 2017, *BBC News TV Report*

<sup>12</sup> 28 June 2017, Muslim girls complain of Polish racism on Holocaust study trip, *BBC News*

<sup>13</sup> 28 June 2017, 10:29am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>14</sup> 19 March 2018, BBC News (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>15</sup> 19 March 2018, BBC News (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>16</sup> 29 March 2018, “Six o’clock news” BBC Radio 4, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the clip)

<sup>17</sup> 13 March 2018, Raped woman married-off for money and visa, court told, *BBC News*

<sup>18</sup> 14 August 2018, *Victoria Derbyshire, BBC Two 09:44*

2.4. Given the current guidelines have been insufficient to prevent the challenges with terminology and poor language choice, MCB’s Centre for Media Monitoring recommends the following addition to the guidelines:

**Recommendation 1**

*The guidelines should explicitly refer to the BBC Style Guide<sup>19</sup> to ensure that a lack of adherence to the Style Guide is considered a breach of the guidelines.*

*Furthermore, terminology choice on the most controversial and regularly used items including “Islamic state”, “Islamic extremism”, “Islamist”, “Jihadi” should be used in line with a style guide, which should publicly explain adherence to the following principles:*

- Academic veracity
- Being understandable by the wider audience
- Consistency

### 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, and who Newsnight recently identified as someone who radicalised far-right extremists. The air time given to unrepresentative fringe elements distorts the perception that the general public has of British Muslim communities.

3.2. In today’s political environment where the far-right are on the rise across the world including in the UK, where our security services have taken over the fight against the far-right from the police<sup>20</sup> and bigoted ideas are being promoted more openly, it is understandable that a larger number of bigoted views will be broadcast if editorially justified, as outlined in the guidelines.<sup>21</sup>

3.3. The BBC currently has the following guidelines that could be relevant:

- **Abusive treatment:** Religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination should not be subject to abusive treatment<sup>22</sup>;
- **Contributors’ Affiliations:** Their background is explained to give context to their bigoted views;<sup>23</sup>
- **Contentious Views and Possible Offence:** Their bigoted and anti-Muslim views are appropriately challenged.<sup>24</sup>

3.4. However, consider the following selection of examples of the BBC failing to live up to these guidelines including:

Guest	Programme	Historical background	Key points
Frank Gaffney	BBC Radio 4 Today, 30 Jan 2017	“One of America’s most successful professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Gaffney’s conspiratorial views on Muslims were not part of his introduction, nor was he</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> BBC News style guide  
<sup>20</sup> 28 October 2018, MI5 to take over in fight against rise of UK rightwing extremism, Vikram Dodd, *The Guardian*  
<sup>21</sup> BBC Draft Guidelines, 4.3.14  
<sup>22</sup> BBC Draft Guidelines, 12.1  
<sup>23</sup> BBC Draft Guidelines, 4.3.12  
<sup>24</sup> BBC Draft Guidelines, 4.3.14

		Islamophobes” <sup>25</sup> , who thought the Missile Defence Logo was evidence of Obama’s ‘Submission To Shariah’ <sup>26</sup>	<p>challenged for his contentious views on “Sharia”, CATO, the Muslim Brotherhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst the Today programme team refused to initially acknowledge the error, it did so after the Editorial Complaints Unit were called upon<sup>27</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>28</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>29</sup></li> </ul>
Douglas Murray	BBC 2, Sunday Politics, 28 May 2017 <sup>30</sup>	Mr Murray has in the past made statements <sup>31</sup> such as, “conditions for Muslims in Europe must be 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 only identified by the presenter as being “of the Henry Jackson Society.”<sup>32</sup></li> <li>• He was provided a platform to share his intolerant views on a video<sup>33</sup></li> <li>• He was not challenged by the presenter or the other panellist 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>34</sup></li> <li>• The MCB has raised a complaint about this failure to adhere to the BBC’s own guidelines.<sup>35</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>36</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</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>25</sup> 16 November 2016, Donald Trump 'appoints Islamophobic conspiracy theorist to transition team', *Charlotte England, The Independent*

<sup>26</sup> 25 February 2010, Frank Gaffney Posits That Missile Defense Logo Is Evidence of Obama’s ‘Submission To Shariah’, *Max Bergmann, Think progress*

<sup>27</sup> 30 January 2017, BBC Complaints, Today Programme, BBC Radio 4, *Finding by the Executive Complaints Unit*

<sup>28</sup> 27 April 2017, Concerns raised over students' unions' anti-Israel stance, Jon Ironmonger, *Victoria Derbyshire, BBC Two*

<sup>29</sup> 15 November 2017, BBC upholds complaint about failure to identify Israel advocates in BDS report, *Ben White, Middle East Monitor*

<sup>30</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

<sup>31</sup> 17 October 2017, Why the Conservative frontbench broke off relations with Douglas Murray – and what happened afterwards, *Paul Goodman, Conservative Home*

<sup>32</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

<sup>33</sup> 28 May 2017, How should we confront Islamist extremism? *The Sunday Politics, BBC One*

<sup>34</sup> 26 January- 20 February 2015, British-Muslims-Poll, *ComRes, pp.29*

<sup>35</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, BBC Sunday Politics Show Platforms Activist Calling for ‘Less Islam’ to Counter Terrorism, *Media Misreporting*

<sup>36</sup> 01 December 2017, Trump was right May has overseen unprecedented number of terror attacks, BBC guest claims, *Nicole Stinson, Daily Express*

			and then even on issues that have been scrutinised elsewhere in the BBC's output."
Frank Gaffney	BBC Today, 27 March 2018	As above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Despite the Editorial Complaints Unit having ruled that he should be introduced appropriately following his appearance in January 2017 (see above), he was still introduced by Sara Montague as "President of the Centre for Security Policy – it's a national security research organisation in Washington" with no reference to his controversial background</li> </ul>
Daniel Pipes	BBC News at 6	<p>He has propagated a number of far-right myths including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Confirmed: Barack Obama Practiced Islam"<sup>37</sup></li> <li>"10 to 15 percent of the world's Muslims are militants"<sup>38</sup></li> <li>"The 751 No-Go Zones of France"<sup>39</sup></li> <li>Western European societies were "unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene ..."<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He was introduced as "Middle East Forum, US Supporter of Robinson" with no acknowledgement of his controversial history.</li> </ul>
Katie Hopkins	BBC Radio Leeds, 16 August 2018	Called refugees "cockroaches", called for a "final solution" after the Manchester attack <sup>41</sup> etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She was introduced as "The journalist, The pundit, The so-called truth teller, one-time Apprentice candidate" by Liz Green, which is not reflective of the controversial nature.</li> <li>She was not an expert on the topic that she was talking about and it is difficult to understand the editorial justification for her presence on the programme</li> <li>Furthermore, she was inadequately challenged for her controversial views.</li> </ul>
Raheem Kassam	BBC Radio 4 Today, 2 August 2018	He has authored "No Go Zones: How Sharia Law Is Coming to a Neighborhood Near You"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>He stated a number of controversial items about Muslims and Islam, and whilst some was challenged, none of this was challenged: "There are significant numbers inside Muslim communities that support Sharia, that support FGM that will not report terrorists in their midst."</li> <li>He claimed "I'm a Muslim immigrant chap..." to give credibility but there is no challenge recognising that he is now an "ex-Muslim, atheist"<sup>42</sup> who considers the faith of Islam to be "fascist" and "totalitarian".</li> </ul>

The purpose of the above examples are illustrative, and further examples are available on request.

<sup>37</sup> 7 January 2008, Daniel Pipes website

<sup>38</sup> Militant Islam Reaches America (*Daniel Pipes*), John Esposito, 2002

<sup>39</sup> 14 November 2006, Daniel Pipes website. (Whilst he claims to have substantially changed his understanding since, it was his initial conspiracy theory that gained traction around the world)

<sup>40</sup> 19 November 1990, Daniel Pipes website, (He has since provided an "explanation" for those words)

<sup>41</sup> 26 May 2017, Katie Hopkins leaves LBC radio show after 'final solution' tweet, *Alexandra Topping, Guardian*

<sup>42</sup> 29 April 2018, Raheem Kassam, *Twitter*

- 3.5. The CfMM believes that 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.
- 3.6. Furthermore, the CfMM believes that 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>43</sup>
- 3.7. Given the current guidelines have been insufficiently prepared to deal with the new era of far-right activists, the CfMM recommends the following clarifications and additions to the guidelines:

#### **Recommendation 2**

*Controversial individuals or organisations should not be provided a platform unless editorially justified and unless sufficient research about their views has been conducted. This will allow for an appropriate introduction and support the interviewer in being prepared to provide robust challenge.*

#### **Recommendation 3**

*Where an interviewer has not been able to sufficiently challenge an individual on all the controversial items raised, the controversial nature of those items should be explained at a later stage to viewers with equal prominence to the original interview.*

#### **Recommendation 4**

*Those individuals who are known to have a partisan line on issues should not be introduced as **independent** analysts. If it is understood that an individual was introduced inadequately, a more thorough introduction should be given at the same slot the following day, or as soon as is reasonably possible following the initial interview.*

#### **Recommendation 5**

*Where there are factual errors (in particular on controversial topics) which cannot be adequately dealt with through challenge on the day, an in-depth analysis of the topic to ascertain the facts should be provided by the programme.<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>43</sup> 28 December 2018, “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, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter*)

<sup>44</sup> 20 June 2018, This has been done by the BBC e.g. claims by Beatrix van Stroch (AfD party in Germany) were not able to be challenged on the Today programme but the following day, a more detailed analysis had been done and the facts were laid out for the viewers.

## 4. Inaccuracies

4.1. Accuracy is a core principle of journalism and is expected as standard especially from our public broadcaster. 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>45</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>46</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>47</sup></li> </ul>

4.2. When there are errors or changes in the text following a complaint, the CfMM believes there should be an acknowledgement of the error and an apology where necessary, with equal prominence to the original error.

4.3. The CfMM believes that when there are errors or changes, these should be acknowledged as a matter of course, rather than only when the Editorial Complaints Unit are involved.

4.4. Examples of where this does not appear to have been the case, include:

Date	Language choice	Key points
Aug 2017	"Muslim problem" <sup>48</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>49</sup></li> </ul>
Feb 2018	Female modesty is "one of the main pillars of Islam" <sup>50</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>51</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>

<sup>45</sup> 14 March 2018 BBC Help and Feedback/Corrections and Clarifications, *This Week, BBC One, 5 March 2015*

<sup>46</sup> 20 January 2017, BBC Help and Feedback/Corrections and Clarifications, *5 Live Breakfast Show, BBC Radio 5 Live, 25 August 2016*

<sup>47</sup> 25 May 2016, Suliman Gani-an apology, *BBC News*

<sup>48</sup> 17 August 2017, Sarah Champion quits Labour front bench over rape article, *BBC News*

<sup>49</sup> BBC Complaints, Sarah Champion quits Labour front bench over rape article, *Finding by the Executive Complaints Unit*

<sup>50</sup> 19 February 2018, 12:28am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter* for the change)

<sup>51</sup> 07 March 2018, Britain First leader and deputy leader jailed for hate crimes, *BBC News*

- 4.5. It appears that there is a policy in place where most changes are not acknowledged, unlike the industry standard within other online websites. The CfMM suggests that the industry standard be adopted and added to the guidelines:

**Recommendation 6**

*Any error – once identified – must not only be corrected promptly but there should also be an acknowledgement of the error with due prominence, and — where appropriate — an apology published.*

**Recommendation 7**

*After the Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU) have reached a judgement on a particular complaint, that ruling should not only be on the ECU website, but also be placed on the article in question or referenced in the programme in question.*

- 4.6. There are also inaccurate narratives that build up through time in coverage. For example:

- **Muslim taking over schools:** The so-called Trojan Horse scandal at schools, has been conclusively proven to be “fake” despite uncovering legitimate concerns (unrelated to terrorism and Muslims taking over schools).<sup>52</sup> Yet this story and framing of Muslims taking over schools, continued to be reported as serious news for many years.
- **Christian girls are being forced to live with Muslim foster parents:** Following the well-established factual inaccuracies surrounding the front pages of The Times, which created a false narrative about “Christian girl forced into Muslim foster care”, the BBC covered this story. Whilst the BBC did an excellent job in demonstrating good Muslim foster parents and investigating the story, when the final information was made public that debunked the original thesis, it did not receive the coverage of the initial false narrative.
- **Polling data:** Whilst the BBC is rightly not responsible for the perception of Muslims in the UK, it is important background that should help frame future discussions and perhaps act as a driver for fact-checks and further investigations:
  - 31% of young children believe Muslims are taking over England<sup>53</sup>
  - A third of the population believe that there are Sharia no-go zones in the UK<sup>54</sup>
  - The average Brit believes that Muslims constitute c.15% of the population<sup>55</sup>

**Recommendation 8**

*Where any BBC output covers a topic where a false narrative is likely to be understood by the viewer, the BBC should ensure appropriate context is provided to viewers so that any false narrative is corrected*

<sup>52</sup> 1 September 2017, Trojan horse: the real story behind the fake 'Islamic plot' to take over schools, *Samira Shackleton, The Guardian*

<sup>53</sup> 19 May 2015, Racist and anti-immigration views held by children revealed in schools study, *Matthew Taylor, The Guardian*

<sup>54</sup> 17 October 2018, Third of British people wrongly believe there are Muslim 'no-go areas' in UK governed by sharia law, *Lizzie Dearden, Independent*

<sup>55</sup> Perils of Perception, *Ipsos Mori, 2016*

## 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>56</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>57</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>58</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>59</sup> when describing the attack by Khalid Masood. <sup>60</sup> (23 March 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finsbury Park Attack<sup>61</sup> (19 June 2017) with attacker called: Cardiff Man<sup>62</sup>, Finsbury Park attacker<sup>63</sup>, Mosque attack suspect<sup>64</sup>, Darren Osborne<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Car rams into crowd of people at Charlottesville rally.<sup>66</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>67</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>68</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terror accused Connor Ward 'has mental health issues'<sup>69</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>

<sup>56</sup> 23 June 2017, Finsbury Park mosque official complains to BBC over attack coverage, Mark Sweney, *The Guardian*,

<sup>57</sup> 23 June 2017, Why was Finsbury Park Terror attack not even mentioned on Question Time, 06:56am, (see Miqdaad Versi, *Twitter*)

<sup>58</sup> Lee Rigby attack: 23 May 2013, Question Time episode: 23 May 2013. Adebowale charged 30 May 2013, Adebolajo charged 1 June 2013  
Finsbury Park attack: 19 June 2017, Question Time Episode 22 June 2017. Osborne charged 23 June 2017

<sup>59</sup> 23 March 2017, London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack, *BBC News*

<sup>60</sup> 23 March 2017, London attack: Four dead in Westminster terror attack, *BBC News*

<sup>61</sup> 19 June 2017, Finsbury Park attack: Theresa May condemns 'sickening' terror attack, *BBC News*

<sup>62</sup> 23 June 2017, Finsbury Park attack: Cardiff man Darren Osborne charged, *BBC News*

<sup>63</sup> 02 February 2018, Finsbury Park attacker Darren Osborne jailed for minimum of 43 years, *BBC News*

<sup>64</sup> 30 January 2018, Finsbury Park mosque attack suspect hoped to kill Jeremy Corbyn, *BBC News*

<sup>65</sup> 01 February 2018, Darren Osborne guilty of Finsbury Park mosque murder, *BBC News*

<sup>66</sup> 12 August 2017, Car rams into crowd of people at Charlottesville rally, *BBC News*

<sup>67</sup> 01 August 2016, Leytonstone Tube attacker Muhiddin Mire jailed for life, *BBC News*

<sup>68</sup> 08 June 2016, Leytonstone Tube knife attacker guilty of murder bid, *BBC News*; 17 June 2016, Leytonstone knife attack victim speaks out for the first time, *BBC News*; 08 June 2016, *How Leytonstone Tube attack unfolded*, *BBC News*

<sup>69</sup> 21 February 2018, Terror accused Connor Ward 'has mental health issues' *BBC News*

- 5.3. Consider the following two case studies of terror attacks committed by individuals who were not Muslim. Given the reporting of Daesh-inspired terrorism is well understood, the points raised in the below case studies, will perhaps give pause for thought.

**Münster terror attack – committed by a non-Muslim:**

- **Issue 1: Without knowing, assumption it was Daesh-inspired not far-right:** At the time, nobody knew what had happened but the anchor of BBC News on 7 April<sup>70</sup> said: ““it seems pretty clear this was a terrorist attack, even though that has not been confirmed” and then the World Service Editor Mike Sanders referred to previous Daesh-inspired terror attacks e.g. in Berlin (December 2016), Stockholm. The anchor and correspondent did not cite other far-right individuals who have committed such terror attacks. This occurred throughout the day.
- **Issue 2: When known it is not Daesh-inspired, still link to “Islamist” attacks:** Even AFTER they were found to have no Islamist connection, we see statements like: “the incident comes at a time of heightened concern after *jihadi* attacks in Britain, France and Spain” and “there is nothing to say at the moment that there was any Islamist background but we must wait and see.”
- **Issue 3: Mental health problems were noted front and centre:** “the driver, who had psychological problems”<sup>71</sup>

**Quebec terror attack against a Mosque – committed by a non-Muslim:**

- **Issue 1: Despite being known not to be “Islamist”, it is seen as incumbent to link to “Islamists”** e.g. “in the past, Islamic as well as right wing extremists have used vehicles to carry out similar attacks.”<sup>72</sup>
- **Issue 2: Not called a terror attack by the BBC apparently as it was not “Islamist”:** e.g. following on from the above, the quote continues: “but the authorities say for now they are not treating this as a terrorist incident”, implying that were it to have been “Islamist”, it would have been considered a terrorist incident.
- **Issue 3: Rare reference to terrorism:**<sup>73</sup> Whilst often the term “terror attack” is only used by the BBC when there is a senior person who states it is a terror attack, in this case, the term was not used.<sup>74</sup> This is despite the Prime Minister of Canada calling it a terrorist attack.<sup>75</sup>
- **Issue 4: Rationale of terrorist stated as driver:** The headline of one article states: “Quebec City mosque shooter feared Trudeau's refugee policy”,<sup>76</sup> which many would argue, is providing an excuse for the terror attack

Many Muslims who see the coverage of terror attacks, believe reporting is discriminatory with attacks perpetrated by “Islamists” treated differently to “far-right extremists”. The latest stabbing in Melbourne is a case-in-point.<sup>77</sup> The perpetrator had complained of being 'chased by people with spears' in lead up to attack<sup>78</sup> yet unlike many far-right cases, mental health was not mentioned, leading to understandable concerns about inconsistency.

<sup>70</sup> 7 April 2018, *BBC News 17:02*

<sup>71</sup> 7 April 2018, *BBC News 21:01*

<sup>72</sup> 24 April 2018, *BBC 1 13:03*

<sup>73</sup> Terrorism: Language when Reporting Terrorism, BBC

<sup>74</sup> 28 March 2018, Alexandre Bissonnette pleads guilty to Quebec mosque attack, *BBC Online*

<sup>75</sup> 30 January 2018, Quebec mosque shooting: Trudeau condemns 'terrorist attack', video on BBC site – not on the main articles

<sup>76</sup> 13 April 2018, Quebec City mosque shooter feared Trudeau's refugee policy, *BBC News*

<sup>77</sup> 9 November 2018, Melbourne attack: Man shot dead after fire and fatal stabbing, *BBC News*

<sup>78</sup> 10 November 2018, Bourke Street attacker complained of being 'chased by people with spears' in lead up to attack, *The Age*

- 5.4. Current guidelines refer to “impartiality” but do not provide an explicit reference to systematic inconsistency in a way that may be considered discrimination. The CfMM therefore proposes the following change to the guidelines to protect against this concern:

**Recommendation 9**

*If a representative group provides evidence that suggests discrimination (whether intentional or not) has taken place, the BBC will conduct a review to ascertain the validity of the concerns and propose actions to resolve the concerns going forward.*

**6. List of recommendations**

1. **Terminology:** The guidelines should explicitly refer to the BBC Style Guide<sup>79</sup> to ensure that a lack of adherence to the Style Guide is considered a breach of the guidelines. Furthermore, terminology choice on the most controversial and regularly used items including “Islamic state”, “Islamic extremism”, “Islamist”, “Jihadi” should be used in line with a style guide, which publicly explains adherence to the following principles:
  - Academic veracity
  - Being understandable by the wider audience
  - Consistency
2. **When to platform:** Controversial individuals or organisations should not be provided a platform unless editorially justified and unless sufficient research about their views has been conducted, in order to introduce them appropriately and best prepare the interviewer to provide robust challenge
3. **Consequence of lack of challenge:** Where an interviewer has not been able to sufficiently challenge an individual on all the controversial items raised, the controversial nature of those items should be explained at a later stage to viewers with equal prominence to the original interview.
4. **Consequence of lack of introduction:** Those individuals who are known to have a partisan line on issues should not be introduced as independent analysts. If it is understood that an individual was introduced inadequately, a more thorough introduction should be given at the same slot the following day, or as soon as is reasonably possible following the initial interview.
5. **Fact correction (broadcast):** Where there are factual errors (in particular on controversial topics) which cannot be adequately dealt with through challenge on the day, an in-depth analysis of the topic to ascertain the facts should be provided by the programme.
6. **Due prominence of correction:** Any error – once identified – must not only be corrected promptly but there should also be an acknowledgement of the error with due prominence, and — where appropriate — an apology published.

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<sup>79</sup> BBC News style guide

7. **Due prominence of ECU rulings:** After the Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU) have reached a judgement on a particular complaint, that ruling should not only be on the ECU website, but also be placed on the article in question or referenced in the programme in question.
8. **Provision of context:** Where any BBC output covers a topic where a false narrative is likely to be understood by the viewer, the BBC should ensure appropriate context is provided to viewers so that any false narrative is corrected
9. **Discrimination and inconsistency in output:** If a representative group provides evidence that suggests discrimination (whether intentional or not) has taken place, the BBC will conduct a review to ascertain the validity of the concerns and propose actions to resolve the concerns going forward.