



Dame Caroline Dinenage M.P.
Chair, DCMS Select Committee
Via email

13/10/2023

Dear Dame Caroline

I am writing as chair of the British Broadcasting Challenge, a non-partisan campaigning group set up two years ago to promote the values of public service broadcasting. We are asking your committee to consider setting up an urgent enquiry into whether Ofcom is adequately carrying out its statutory duty to regulate for impartiality in UK broadcasting.

Our Parliament legislated for impartiality in the 2003 Communications Act, making Ofcom responsible for implementing that legislation in respect of all licensed broadcasters. Disturbingly, recent evidence suggests that this duty is not being applied to all broadcasters.

Furthermore, in her recent public statements Ofcom's Chief Executive Dame Melanie Dawes appears to have misunderstood Ofcom's duties. She told the Guardian that the rules around impartiality "require us to prioritise freedom of expression". No such requirement exists. She told the BBC's PM programme that citizens expect "the very highest standards of impartiality" from public service broadcasters. The law makes no distinction between different categories of broadcasters.

This country has a rich tradition of impartiality in broadcasting, which has ensured that broadcast journalism – across the board – is by far the most trusted. In an age of easy disinformation through online and social media, it is even more incumbent on us to protect that legacy – just as Parliament intended. We have seen in the United States what can happen when that legacy is allowed to wither and die.

This apparent reversal of decades of national policy - which have served our democratic institutions well and help to protect an informed and well-functioning civil society – has taken place with no consultation nor any input from MPs or parliamentary committees. It has allowed a licensee to broadcast flagrantly partisan opinion, in direct contradiction of the law and Ofcom's own regulatory codes.

We believe that it is vitally important that Ofcom be held to account. We therefore ask you to initiate an enquiry as a matter of urgency. We are copying this letter to all committee members.

Yours Sincerely

Pat Younge
Chair, British Broadcasting Challenge

Cc: DCMS Committee members, Secretary of State, Shadow Secretary of State, Liberal Democrat spokesperson, SNP spokesperson