

Religious Content

12

12.1 *(p.224)*

Introduction

12.2 *(p.225)*

Guidelines

12.1 Introduction

The right to exercise freedom of thought, conscience and religion is set out in national and international acts and agreements, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998. This includes the freedom to worship, teach, practise and observe.

This section relates only to the BBC's religious programmes and related output. For the purposes of these Guidelines, this is defined as content dealing with the religious views and/or beliefs of a religion or religious denomination as its central subject or, at least, as a very significant part. The Agreement that accompanies the BBC's Royal Charter reflects that the BBC's religious output contributes to how it meets its Mission and Public Purposes. This content includes programmes and other output – such as online reports – that are derived from or related to those programmes.¹

Religious beliefs are central to many people's lives and this chapter is to ensure we use the proper degree of responsibility in respect to the content of religious programmes and related output.

Producers of religious programmes and related content have editorial freedom for the output to express faith and to explore matters of faith; however, they must ensure that religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination are not subject to abusive treatment.

Where a religion or religious denomination is the subject of a religious programme or related content, the identity of the religion must be clear to the audience.

Vulnerable audiences must be protected from exploitation, and religious programmes must not seek to promote religious views or beliefs by stealth.

¹ The section of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code that relates to this is 4: Religion.

12.2 Guidelines

12.2.1 Producers have editorial freedom for output to express faith and to explore matters of faith. The requirement that religious views and beliefs should not be subject to abusive treatment is not intended to preclude reasonable debate or challenge. While religion and religious views and beliefs may be criticised, we should ensure there is appropriate context and that critical views are open to challenge. Contributors should not be allowed to denigrate the beliefs of others.

12.2.2 We should treat any claims made in our religious output for the special powers or abilities of a living person or group with due objectivity. Such claims should not be made when significant numbers of children may be expected to be watching television or when children are particularly likely to be listening to the radio, or in online content likely to be accessed by children.

12.2.3 Religious output should not be used to recruit, for example by making direct appeals to audiences to join a particular religion. References to the positive effects of belonging to a particular religion will normally be acceptable.

12.2.4 With interactivity related to religious programming, we must exercise a proper degree of responsibility to allow the expression of faith and an exploration of issues around faith, while ensuring that religious views and beliefs are not subject to abuse and that vulnerable audiences are also protected from exploitation. We are more likely to achieve this balance if:

- the space is actively hosted
- we select a suitable form of moderation
- on occasion, we make a rapid intervention – unless, for example, the online community has already responded robustly and in an authoritative way to an offensive comment.

See Section 17 Competitions, Votes and Interactivity: 17.3.45-17.3.56