



The BBC's gender confusion:
How The BBC Is Getting
It Wrong With Gender

About Us

The Campaign for Common Sense (CCS) exists to bring together those who want to have grown up discussion and debate.

We will conduct research, and organise events online and across the country, involving experts in all fields and bring them to the widest possible audience.

We will be champions for free speech and tolerance

We believe that...

...nobody has a monopoly on what is right and wrong.

...we all have far more in common than it sometimes seems.

...common sense and fair play are the best way to approach controversial Issues.

...sensitive topics should be discussed frankly & calmly, without trading insults.

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Foreword

Mark Lehain

Few issues arouse as much passion and fury amongst those engaged with them as those of gender identity and transgender rights.

And few institutions are as well placed as the BBC to facilitate meaningful dialogue on the issues and enable greater understanding between people and society in general.

However, as this report shows, when it comes to dealing with transgender issues, the BBC is not an impartial observer and often an active and biased participant.

This is really unfortunate. It exists to inform, educate, and entertain – not advocate for one side or another in contested spaces.

And a contested space is what we see when it comes to discussions around transgender rights - quite literally in the case of those spaces normally reserved by sex e.g. toilets, changing rooms, prisons, refuges.

Despite the best attempts by a small number of activists to shut down debate, there are still many important things to be discussed & understood. Self ID. Transwomen in women's sport. Access to sex-based facilities. Advice and guidance for young people. The effects of puberty blockers and other interventions on trans kids.

These and more are being grappled with by people across the country. Some affect tiny numbers of people. Others potentially affect everyone – whether they are male or female, cis or transgendered. And so it is only right that debate occurs and does so in calm, transparent ways.

All-too-often it isn't happening like this. Abuse and smears are thrown around online, and it spills into the real world too. We all saw the



reaction to JK Rowling's very measured statements. The list of men and women no-platformed, not employed, or forced to leave organisations or employers for not adhering to certain ideas is long and growing longer.

The BBC could and should be playing a part in helping people find a way through this. Sporadically it does – such as Newsnight's investigation into the activities at the Tavistock Centre.

It is uniquely placed in British society to tackle topics that others fear to cover. And it has the expertise and resources to do so well.

We hope that this report will encourage a more careful and consistent approach to the transgender issue, and the BBC's pedigree and strength will shine through even more.

Summary

The BBC's approach to the contested issue of gender identity is inconsistent, of varying quality, and in significant parts of the organisation, unhelpful.

Arguments around transgender rights are heated, people on all sides feel under threat, and divisions seem to be growing wider, not getting better. It is a debate that the BBC could and should be helping the country to grapple with in a way that generates light, not heat.

Yet rather than “inform, educate and entertain”, much of the BBC's output on the topic is making things worse.

Public opinion is overwhelmingly compassionate and tolerant towards people with gender dysphoria, those who are intersex and others who wish to present their gender to the world in ways different from their birth sex.

However, on more difficult aspects – transwomen in women's sports, reporting of crime statistics, changing rooms, refuges, and prisons - a wide range of views are held and opinion is split. Yet the BBC generally presents the issue as settled, and reflects views held by only a minority of people.

It is thus out-of-kilter with the views of both the wider public and many experts too. This causes three main problems, as it:

1. doesn't fulfil the BBC's requirement to be balanced;
2. undermines trust in the BBC; and most importantly
3. puts at risk the common ground that exists, and potentially undermines transgender and other groups' rights.

In this report we have analysed where public opinion is on key transgender issues and then considered where the BBC deviates from this on “three Ps” – policies, people, and productions.

We found that while there are parts of the BBC that cover things brilliantly, such as Newsnight and its coverage of the Tavistock Centre, significant parts do not, being extremely biased, poorly informed, and even patronising.

Some might say that balance across the whole of the BBC's output is enough, and that it is acceptable for different elements of the organisation to take different views within this.

We fundamentally disagree.

For instance, if you are a young person whose consumption of BBC output is largely via their youth-orientated content – Newsbeat, Radio 1, BBC 3 and BBC Sounds - then it is likely that you will only hear the viewpoints of an extreme minority.

Overwhelmingly these fail to be impartial and take an uncritical “affirmation” stance to the question of gender dysphoria and transgender rights. This does not reflect public opinion or that of many experts in the field. More importantly, it means that often the people who most need a balanced exploration of the issues are given a very partisan take, presented as fact.

This partisan take of the issues arises for several reasons.

Policy development has been influenced, and in some cases captured, by unrepresentative interest groups. Some of these are external, but many come from the BBC staff who work on these channels. And being overwhelmingly metropolitan in geography and “woke” in worldview, they are simply out of kilter with the issue as it manifests itself in wider society.

So most of this bias is not deliberate and just a reflection of structural issues - but there has been no attempt to ensure any counterbalance.

Indeed, as we show in this report, key roles have been created to explicitly advocate for certain groups, including those around gender identity, and these have further pushed the corporation towards output that is problematic.

The BBC still has an important role to play in public life. It can shine a light on sensitive issues in a way that helps audiences better understand other people's views and help build a consensus that brings everyone together. Sadly, on the issue of gender identity it is often a partisan player, not an impartial convener.

To ensure more balanced output, enhance trust in the BBC, and enable discussions that benefit wider society, CCS make five recommendations:

1. The BBC Board should commission an independent review of existing trans practice – policies, people, and productions – to assess the legality, impartiality and balance of these issues against its obligations.
2. BBC leadership should issue a clear statement as to how it intends to fulfill its obligation to impartiality and balance in coverage on this contested issue
3. Guidance for producers should be issued to support them in ensuring output that is inclusive, impartial, and informative
4. Historical material or advice that fails to meet the standards of impartiality and balance required should be addressed – through re-editing, or where this is not possible, withdrawal from circulation.
5. The LGBT correspondent role should be reviewed to ensure impartiality, or removed.

Transgender issues – where is public opinion?

For our launch report – [Getting Along Again](#) – we surveyed over 2000 people from across the country on a range of issues. Within this were two questions on transgender rights.

When asked about **“Rights for people who were born male but identify as female and vice versa”**

- 28% thought things had gone too far
- 33% thought things were about right
- 17% responded “don’t know”, and
- only 22% thought they hadn’t gone far enough.

When asked about **“Changes in society to take into account those who identify as neither male nor female”**

- 33% thought things had gone too far
- 28% thought things were about right
- 18% responded “don’t know”, and
- only 20% thought the changes hadn’t gone far enough.

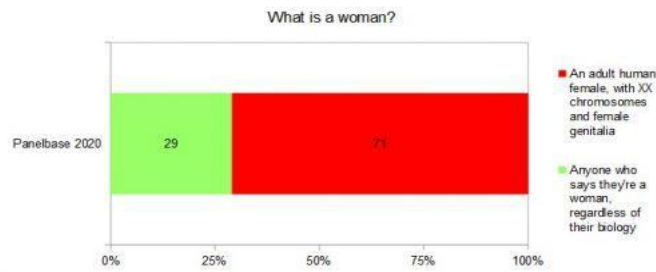
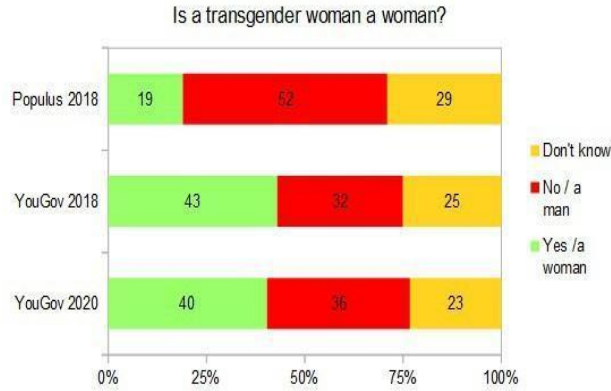
So in both cases, there are similar proportions of people for each stance, and opinion is clearly split. It also shows that there is a majority against taking things further, and that the issue is far from settled. BBC coverage should reflect this.

Clearly these questions didn’t specify the “changes” and “rights” in focus – however there have been a number of more detailed polls on some of these things in recent years.

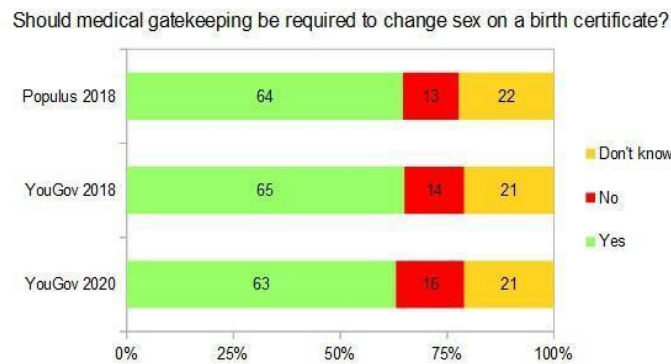
[An extremely helpful summary of them can be found on the Fair Play For Women website](#) – and they have kindly said we can reproduce here the charts they have there.

The surveys included don’t cover all of the aspects that come under this topic, but they do cover the big ones – changing gender, “self ID”, access to single-sex facilities, and sport.

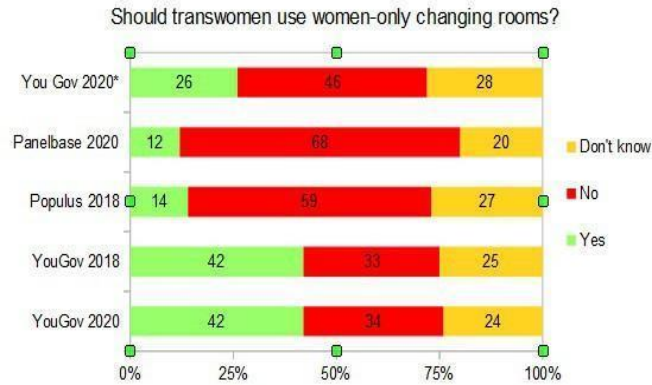
On the question of whether people can change their birth sex, opinion is split, and there is no majority for the view that transgender women are women:



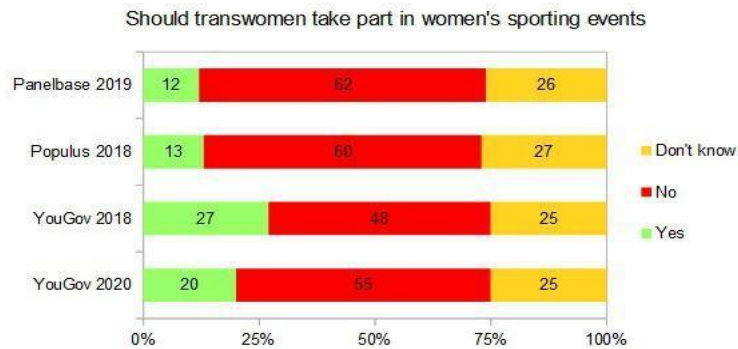
On whether medical professionals should remain part of the process for people to change their legal gender, there is a clear majority for keeping doctors involved and not moving to a system of “self ID”.



The issue of access to women’s changing rooms is one that can arouse a lot of anguish, and this is reflected in surveys too. Note the variation in findings, and also that none of the polls found a majority in favour of access for biological males:



And there is a clear majority against transwomen taking part in women's sport:



Obviously the BBC isn't obliged to match its output to public opinion – its job is to be impartial on contested issues. As these data show, opinion IS split and these issues ARE contested. To present them as settled, and in a manner completely at odds with society, is extremely problematic – for the BBC's special status, reputation, and those people most affected by the matters at hand.

We will now look at the BBC's approach and see how it compares the public's range of opinions.

Analysis – BBC policies

Let's look first at some of the *policies* of the BBC.

Like any mature media organisation, there will be swathes of guidance, rules, and protocols. These will both reflect AND influence the values and actions of the people who work there.

For the purposes of our research we have focused on the most pertinent:

- the [BBC's Royal Charter](#)
- its [Editorial Guidelines](#)
- [Guidance Note: "Individual Use of Social Media"](#)
- [Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2016 – 20](#) & [Workforce Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023](#)
- [LGBT culture and progression report October 2018](#)

The Royal Charter

[The Royal Charter](#) is the constitutional basis for the BBC. Amongst other things, it sets out the BBC's Object, Mission and Public Purposes, which should determine the BBC's approach to issues.

Article 4 lays out the Object:

"The BBC's Object is the fulfilment of its Mission and the promotion of the Public Purposes."

Article 5 is the Mission, containing the famous 'inform, educate, and entertain' phrase:

"The Mission of the BBC is to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain."

Article 6 lists the BBC's Public Purposes – what it should do to fulfill its mission:

"The Public Purposes of the BBC are as follows:

1. To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them
2. To support learning for people of all ages
3. To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services
4. To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom
5. To reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world."

The requirement to provide *impartial* news and information is important when considering the BBC's approach to transgender issues. Also important is purpose 4 – "to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities..."

There is little here for people to take issue with. Indeed, being an impartial provider of news and information is probably what most people see as the core function of the BBC. What is meant by "impartial" though?

Editorial Guidelines

The [BBC states that](#):

"The Editorial Guidelines are the BBC's values and standards. They apply to all our content, wherever and however it is received."

Section 4 of the [guidelines addresses impartiality](#). It states:

"The BBC is committed to achieving due impartiality in all its output. This commitment is fundamental to our reputation, our values and the trust of audiences. The term 'due' means that the impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation."

It goes on to say:

“Due impartiality usually involves more than a simple matter of ‘balance’ between opposing viewpoints. We must be inclusive, considering the broad perspective and ensuring that the existence of a range of views is appropriately reflected. It does not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles, such as the right to vote, freedom of expression and the rule of law. We are committed to reflecting a wide range of subject matter and perspectives across our output as a whole and over an appropriate timeframe so that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted.”

Also:

“Where our content highlights issues on which others campaign, we must take care not to endorse those campaigns, or allow ourselves to be used to campaign to change public policy. But this should not prevent us highlighting issues and offering our audiences choices about how to confront them.”

These form a sound definition of due impartiality, and how it should be achieved by BBC staff.

As we shall see later in this report though, how all of the above is interpreted varies greatly. It is clear that some feel it is more important that their roles or output “reflect, represent or serve” interest groups than it is to observe due impartiality. Whether they have this correctly is something to be considered further by the Corporation.

Guidance – Individual Use of Social Media

The BBC’s [Editorial Guidelines state that](#):

“These Editorial Guidelines apply to all content broadcast or published by the BBC whoever creates or makes it and wherever in the world and however it is made or received. They set out the standards expected of everyone making or presenting our content or output (terms used interchangeably throughout).”

We must be realistic and accept that nowadays it is extremely difficult for an organisation as large as the BBC to achieve this all the time. Recent years have seen a proliferation of media through which content can be made and shared. And with the rise of social media in particular, every BBC employee’s tweet or post could potentially be taken to be BBC content.

With this in mind, on his first day in the job as Director General, [Tim Davies made it clear to staff that they needed to take great care sharing personal views online](#), in order for the BBC to be seen as impartial. New guidance was issued – [“Individual Use of Social Media”](#) – and this is extremely clear about when and how it applies, and how staff should and should not use social media.

It states:

“The over-riding principle of this Guidance is that anyone working for the BBC is a representative of the organisation, both offline and also when online, including on social media; the same standards apply to the behaviour and conduct of staff in both circumstances.

Those working for the BBC have an obligation to ensure that the BBC’s editorial decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any personal interest or bias...

Everything published by the BBC on social media is governed by the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines and now also by this more detailed Guidance. The Guidance also applies, in certain respects, to the personal use of social media by anyone working for the BBC...”

The Director General made it clear that persistent or serious breaches could lead to [people losing their jobs](#).

“Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2016 – 20” & “Workforce Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023”

The first of these laid out the BBC’s plans to increase the diversity of its people, partners, and output:

“For us, diversity means all the ways we differ and it includes everyone. It includes our visible differences such as gender, race and ethnicity and visible disabilities. But it also includes our non-visible differences such as sexual orientation, social class, heritage, religion, unseen disabilities, different perspectives and thought processes, education, family status and age. At the BBC it also includes the nations and regions and where our audiences and employees live and work.”

It identified a number of steps to do this:

“The steps we set out in this strategy are bold and detailed. We pledge that by 2020 the BBC will have:

- a workforce at least as diverse, if not more so, than any other in the industry;
- met portrayal targets that cover a much wider range of diversity than any other broadcaster, with a bigger impact for audiences across a wider range of programmes; and
- hardwired diversity in what we do, making it something that everyone at the BBC understands and all those who make programmes for us supports.”

It was explicit that the BBC intended not just to abide by its mission and Public Purposes, but to change the mindset and activities of those it worked with too. Ten key steps were detailed – the most pertinent ones relating to trans issues are 1, 2, 6 and 7 below.

1 New 2020 On-air PORTRAYAL TARGETS to ensure our content on screen and on-air reflects our audiences a. 50% women on screen, on-air and in lead roles across all genres from Drama to News b. 8% disabled people on screen and on-air including some lead roles c. 8% LGBT on screen portrayal including some lead roles d. 15% Black, Asian and ethnic minorities on screen, on-air and in lead roles across all genres	6 With our industry partners and the CREATIVE DIVERSITY NETWORK we will deliver DIAMOND which will measure our progress against our diversity objectives in an open and transparent way.
2 New DIVERSITY COMMISSIONING GUIDELINES to ensure that anyone who makes programmes for the BBC shares our values and commitments to make programmes which represent our audiences	7 New 2020 WORKFORCE TARGETS to ensure our employees and LEADERSHIP TEAMS reflect and represent modern UK. Women 50%; Ethnic minorities 15%; Disability 8% and for the first time LGBT 8%.
3 The creation of a CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR DIVERSITY AND DIVERSE TALENT, BASED IN BIRMINGHAM bringing control and support for the BBC's diverse programming together, in one place.	8 We will continue with our successful DIVERSITY EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES such as the BBC/Clore Leadership programme, Creative Access Internships and mentoring schemes for women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.
4 We will continue to INVEST IN AND DEVELOP NEW TALENT through internal development programmes to embed diversity at the heart of our channels and workforce: The Assistant Commissioner Development Programme, £2.1m Diversity Creative Talent Fund and Creative Access Graduate Trainee Interns (over £10M over the duration of the strategy).	9 We will embed Diversity and Inclusion in all of our Divisions, Channels and Genres with LEADERSHIP OBJECTIVE SETTING AND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING which will include unconscious bias training for all managers and interviewers.
5 New DIVERSE AUDIENCE PANELS to get closer to our under-represented audience groups and to get direct feedback on our output and increase audience satisfaction.	10 We will focus on SOCIAL INCLUSION by measuring it at entry level and creating a sustainable and diverse talent pool for the future through our APPRENTICE PROGRAMMES .

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Targets were set such that “by 2020, the BBC will have:

- a workforce at least as diverse, if not more so, than any other in the industry;
- met portrayal targets that cover a much wider range of diversity than any other broadcaster, with a bigger impact for audiences across a wider range of programmes...”

Workforce (All staff and leadership levels)	2017 Target	2020 Target
Women	n/a	50%
Disability	5.3%*, 5%**	8%
Black Asian and ethnic minorities	14.2%*, 10%**	15%
LGBT	n/a	8%

*All staff **Leadership

Onscreen Portrayal	2017 Target	2020 Target
Women on screen, on-air and in lead roles	n/a	50%
Disability on screen and in some lead roles	5%	8%
Black, Asian and ethnic minorities on screen, on-air and in lead roles	15%***	15%
LGBT on screen and in some lead roles	n/a	8%

***Portrayal only

Recently the BBC released a new “Workforce Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023” that built on the above. New targets were set as part of “The 50:20:12 framework”, and these included targets around trans visibility:

The 50:20:12 framework

The table below shows how we performed against our diversity and inclusion targets as set out in the Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020.

Based on our diversity targets for 2020, the BBC has achieved its aim of reflecting the diversity of our audiences within our workforce. However, there is still work to do to achieve gender balance and increase Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff representation in leadership.

Measure	Unit	BBC 15-16 Full-Year	BBC 19-20 Full-Year	2020 Target	New Target(s)
Gender	All staff	48.7%	48.3%	50%	50%
	Leadership	41.4%	45.0%	50%	50%
BAME	All staff	13.4%	15.1%	15%	20%
	Leadership	9.2%	11.9%	15%	20%
Disability	All staff	3.6%	9.4%	8%	12%
	Leadership	2.8%	8.0%	8%	12%
LGBTQ+	All staff	n/a	8.8%	8%	Over 50% out at work*
	Leadership	n/a	8.9%	8%	Over 50% out at work*

*Defined as being open about your LGBTQ+ identity to your manager, measured by an annual staff survey.

The strategy gave this by way of explanation for the targets:

“ONS estimates the UK population is 4.6% LGBTQ+. At the BBC 8.9% of our staff have told us they are LGBTQ+ and many still prefer not to say. LGBTQ+ representation at the BBC is strong, but we know from staff surveys that many of our LGBTQ+ staff still aren’t open about their LGBTQ+ identity at work. We commit to increasing the number of LGBTQ+ staff who are open about their LGBTQ+ identity in the workplace to at least 50%.”

Obviously, trans representation falls under the “LGBTQ+” heading and the Corporation doesn’t state what share of that trans people should be.

But it is telling that the intention is to have roughly twice the proportion of LGBTQ+ staff as the general population i.e. the BBC explicitly aims to NOT be representative. It does not explain why this is necessary to help it achieve its mission or Public Purposes, nor what steps are being taken to ensure this ‘unrepresentative’ workforce can still reflect the public at large.

We would also suggest that these targets put the Corporation at odds with the wider public’s view of trans rights, and take a significant step away from impartiality towards activism. This risks the BBC’s reputation, and may also put support for trans rights at peril.

LGBT Culture and Progression Report

In autumn 2018 the BBC published a review of LGBT progression and culture, as part of its wider work on “Inclusion”.

The review was conducted with support from the trans-rights campaign group Stonewall. We would question this decision, given the partisan and activist nature of Stonewall, and the requirement for the BBC to maintain due impartiality at all times.

Indeed, the first of ten recommendations that came out of the review was for the BBC to improve its ranking on a Stonewall-run “Workplace Equality Index.” Editorial guidance states that “we must take care not to endorse those campaigns, or allow ourselves to be used to campaign to change public policy.” Such close work with, and funding of, Stonewall is surely a significant breach of this.

In addition, the Corporation may have put itself at risk of breaching the Equality Act 2010 if it has followed advice or adopted policies from Stonewall, as the [recent investigation into activities at Essex University has shown](#).

Based on the staff engagement findings and with support from Stonewall, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Ensure our customs, practices and recruitment are inclusive to LGBT staff. One indication of this would be for the BBC to be included in the Stonewall Top 100 Workplace Equality Index.
2. Introduce an allies programme which includes senior leaders. 'Straight allies' can be key to advancing fair treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff.
3. Raise the profile of senior LGBT staff as role models and launch an LGBT staff mentoring programme.
4. Provide support, guidance and training for managers supporting transgender staff, particularly when they are transitioning.
5. Strengthen information given at induction and during diversity and inclusion and unconscious bias training, to be clearer and more specific about LGBT concerns and issues.
6. Review our systems and practices to ensure they are inclusive of non-binary genders, including those operated by our third party suppliers and ensure this is the case with any new systems being procured.
7. Empower our Content, News and Radio teams to cover LGBT stories and portrayal, and routinely increase the incidental portrayal of LGBT identities.
8. Strengthen the staff network, BBC Pride, to increase engagement with LGBT staff and allies across the organisation.
9. Introduce a reverse mentoring programme for team managers and senior leaders involving LGBT staff, so they are more aware of the issues.
10. Review and be explicit about our corporate stance on LGBT events including Pride festivals. As part of this, review the term LGBT to ensure it is still the most appropriate and inclusive term for the range of sexual orientation and gender identities.

By adopting such ideas and approaches, and forcing them onto its workforce and commissioning partners, the BBC is potentially excluding the majority of its audience, because, as the polling reported above shows, they do not tend to share or agree with them.

We thus have a situation where BBC policies and practice are out of kilter with those who fund it, and potentially in contradiction with its Charter & Editorial Guidelines.

Let's now explore how BBC people and productions align with the policies examined.

Analysis – BBC people & productions

The BBC is a massive organisation, with tens of thousands of staff on its books. It also works with large numbers of people through the companies and other organisations it contracts and cooperates with across its range of activities.

And its output is huge – news and entertainment across TV, radio, BBC Sounds, iPlayer, social media, festivals.

Given all this, it is obvious that even with the most explicit editorial guidelines one cannot expect perfect adherence. We cannot hold the Corporation to impossible standards and demand it accounts for every stray tweet or post on the trans and gender identity issue that doesn't meet its standards on impartiality.

However, we can expect the BBC's people and programmes to at least intend to adhere to these standards. And there are some absolutely fantastic examples of recent work that has grappled with really challenging issues with care – covering the range of credible opinions in impartial ways that allowed the audience to make its own mind up.

(A [helpful list of examples is available on the Transgender Trend website](#), and with their permission we have drawn on this in pulling parts of this report together.)

Positive Example No. 1: Newsnight

The team at Newsnight has excelled in its coverage of the various concerns raised about treatment of young trans people at the Tavistock Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS). In the past few years they have broadcast some exceptionally informative packages on issues including the trial of [puberty blockers on children](#), people [who regretted transitioning](#), the [ignoring of staff concerns](#), and longstanding [safeguarding concerns](#).

Positive Example No. 2: Alison Holt, Social Affairs correspondent

There is also the coverage of the Keira Bell case by Alison Holt. The BBC's Social Affairs correspondent epitomises balance and impartiality. From the [start of proceedings](#), to [initial hearings](#), and [then the](#)

[court case itself](#), through to [the final ruling](#) – her pieces have been everything one could want in order to make up one’s own mind on the various issues under consideration.

Positive Example No. 3: changes to Advice Line signposting

The BBC showed admirable awareness last summer when it reviewed which organisations it signposted on its Advice Line. Following complaints about those signposted for information on gender identity issues it removed Mermaids, the Gender Trust, and the Gender Identity Research and Education Society.

At the time it said that it recognised that it needed to “[remain impartial](#)”, saying in an email to staff:

“A decision to look at the gender identity information line was taken following audience complaints about the action line. This was against a backdrop of increasingly contested issues relating to trans issues and children. It is a complex area and the BBC needs to remain impartial when signposting audiences to organisations that can offer appropriate advice.”

There it is in black & white. The BBC recognising that trans issues and children are contested, complex, and something the BBC needed to remain impartial on. We couldn’t agree more.

Problematic patterns in coverage

So given the professionalism evident in these examples, it makes the bias elsewhere even less understandable. One could conclude that some producers and editors don’t understand that gender identity issues are controversial and contested and need to be treated as such – or they don’t care that this is the case.

Rather than produce a long list of infractions, we present below examples where people or programmes have presented gender identity issues in biased and uncontested ways, not the balanced and impartial manner required by the BBC’s own rules. We have chosen these examples as they are illustrative of broader patterns.

Problem 1: biased signposting of organisations for advice & support

As we saw above, the BBC determined that linking to Mermaids and certain other gender identity organisations for advice didn't meet its requirement to be impartial and removed them from its main Advice Line. However, these same organisations are still linked to for advice elsewhere by the BBC.

Here are some that we found from a simple search of the BBC website – if we can easily find them, the BBC's web gurus certainly can:

[Radio 1 helplines & websites](#)

[Louis Theroux – Transgender Kids](#)

[BBC Surrey – Raising Teens](#)

[BBC Radio 4 15 minute drama – Just A Girl](#) (made with the assistance of Mermaids)

[The story of two transgender children, Victoria Derbyshire](#)

[Families facing gender change challenges](#)

Some of these are for programmes before the change of heart last year, but others appear to be current. Regardless, they are easy enough to find and should be removed as soon as possible.

Problem 2: biased presentation of issues to younger audiences

This is the area of BBC activity that has perhaps caused the most controversy in recent years.

How trans issues are explained to children and young people is really important. They have a right to be informed about things as they are viewed by society as a whole, not simply as a particular group of activists would have it – especially when it is something so personal and contested as gender identity.

And just as we would expect schools to present the main credible arguments around a topic and allow youngsters to form their own opinion over time, so should the BBC. It is there to “inform, educate, and entertain” and it could play a really important role supporting and informing young people struggling with identity issues.

To do this did not require it to adopt the “affirmation” approach to children who think they are trans, and yet it has. Indeed, we would argue that adopting such an ideology means it *cannot* provide the impartial support that is required of its Public Purposes. If there is any BBC output that presents gender critical views to young people as being valid, it is not easy to find as we have yet to come across it in our research.

What is consistently found across the BBC’s youth content – from CBBC, BBC 3, Radio 1, BBC Teach, podcasts, and elsewhere – are only trans affirmative takes. Gender is presented as a spectrum, non-stereotypical behaviours could be signs of being trans, and the importance of accepting [unquestioningly whatever anyone else says about their identity](#) is emphasised [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#).

Where concerns have been flagged about its output, it has rarely acted. It did eventually take down “[Understanding sexual and gender identities](#)” video from BBC Teach - notorious for telling children that there are over 100 genders. Even then it claimed it did so as the material was being “willfully misrepresented”, as opposed to it being partisan in the first place.

The end result is that younger audiences – possibly those who would most benefit from the issue being covered by a BBC at its best – receive a message that is incomplete, uninformed, and lowbrow, where it could be reassuring, balanced, and educational.

And if this was perhaps understandable a few years ago, when the rapid increase in trans children and trans visibility was new and not well understood, it is completely unacceptable today.

We have now had high profile cases demonstrating failings in the treatment of young people with gender dysphoria, more data on the impact of puberty blockers on those who receive them, and growing numbers of detransitioners sharing their experiences and regrets. None of these developments is anywhere to be seen in the BBC’s youth output.

Transitioning and trans existence, like that for all people, is not all rainbows and unicorns – and young people deserve the BBC to present the facts as we know them today in an impartial fashion, not in a trivial manner.

Problem 3: inconsistent treatment of campaign groups

As detailed in our analysis of policies, the Corporation is very clear that staff should avoid appearing to endorse or support campaign groups e.g the Editorial Guidelines say:

“we must take care not to endorse those campaigns, or allow ourselves to be used to campaign to change public policy.”

It has made it clear to staff that they should be careful when attending Pride marches, following confusion amongst some after the new social media guidelines were issued. Tim Davie said:

"If news and current affairs staff are participating in such events they must be mindful of ensuring that they do not get involved in matters which could be deemed political or controversial. There is no ban on these staff attending Pride events.

"Attending Pride parades is possible within the guidelines, but due care needs to be given to the guidance and staff need to ensure that they are not seen to be taking a stand on politicised or contested issues."

So attending a Pride march is fine – but walking with the “Conservative LGBT” or “Labour LGBT” group would not be. On this basis, one assumes that marching with Stonewall or other lobby groups would surely not be acceptable.

One would also assume that hosting an annual dinner for Stonewall would be considered a breach of impartiality – yet the [BBC’s LGBT correspondent did this at their Equality Dinner 2019](#).

The same BBC correspondent made a guest appearance last month on [Stonewall’s TikTok channel, giving a short history of the Stonewall riots](#). Stonewall also [shared this video on its Twitter account on February 12th](#) – the very same day that a [court heard allegations that it had tried to get a high profile gender-critical activist sacked from her job as a barrister](#). It is worth noting that the BBC’s LGBT correspondent has not yet covered this court case.

And inconsistencies can be seen again in articles like this [one, about a trans teenager taking the NHS to court over waiting times for treatment](#). The “Good Law Project” – a highly partisan campaign group – are described simply as “acting for the teenager”, whereas the LGB Alliance is described as “a self-

funded lobby group.” They’re both campaign groups with strong views and lots of supporters – they should be described in similar fashions.

Problem 4: staff employed to advocate for communities

Building on some of the examples in the previous section, there are questions as to what the purpose of the BBC’s LGBT correspondent role is for.

Generally journalists in the news gathering part of the BBC specialise in order to be better able to cover stories when they arise. The defence correspondent is there to cover stories *about* defence, not to *represent* or *advocate for* the defence sector. Ditto the City, Social Affairs, or Political Correspondents. After all, the BBC is there to “inform, educate, and entertain” – not advocate.

When the creation of the LGBT correspondent role was announced and Ben Hunte appointed, it was described in the traditional fashion:

‘Richard Burgess, UK news editor for BBC News, said: "BBC News has a rich heritage of covering issues and debates from the LGBT community. This year we announced our first gender and identity correspondent, Megha Mohan, and I'm thrilled that Ben will be taking up this dedicated role which aims to strengthen our offering of LGBT stories and original journalism across the BBC." ‘

One can’t argue with that. However, interviews with Hunte suggest that he saw the role as being about changing people’s minds about LGBT issues. Certainly this is how Attitude magazine reported things after interviewing him:

“But for broadcaster Ben, who left his position at BBC Africa to begin his new reporting duties in earnest last month, the role of LGBT Correspondent isn't just about showcasing the diversity of our community, but changing the hearts and minds of straight, cisgender viewers at home.”

This isn’t surprising given that in the interview Hunte said:

‘ "I want to try to educate some of these people because if you look at, say, the idea of being cisgender, I don't think many people really understand that term. It's something that we as a community have taken on. I still remember the day I had to Google it because I was hearing

people on podcasts talking about it. I thought, “What is cisgender and what does that even mean?” ‘

There’s no hint here that the term cisgender is contested, or that people may not understand it because it has no relevance to their lives, or any other take that is critical of the concept. Just the clear message that people need to be educated – note, not that they may *want* to learn about these things, but that they *should*.

In an [interview in the Evening Standard](#) Hunte made it clear what his role was about:

“ ‘The BBC is obviously a public service broadcaster,’ he says, ‘so it needs to represent other voices. There are many people who feel they’re not being heard. Hopefully I can be the person that brings their voices to the mainstream audience.’ “

If he sees his role as being about bringing voices to the mainstream audience, to educate them about things like the concept “cisgender”, rather than engage with all the credible voices that take a very different stance on such contested things, then one must question whether the role is upholding or undermining the BBC’s commitment to impartiality.

Further questions in this regard are raised when one considers some of the articles published by Hunte. In particular, [“Puberty blockers: Parents’ warning as ruling challenged”](#) from just before Christmas displayed a worrying lack of understanding of the issues covered in the Keira Bell case, as well as breaking longstanding guidance on reporting around suicide.

Hunte presented the case as being about access to puberty blockers, when it was actually about the issue of whether or not children could give informed consent to treatment that was experimental and likely irreversible.

It then repeated the assertion that without this treatment children were more likely to be suicidal – this is both unevidenced, and in [breach of guidance that says speculation around reasons for suicide should be avoided](#).

Finally, it quoted an activist GP with no specialist knowledge of gender dysphoria, and the business GenderGP – [which is run by a doctor currently suspended by the GMC, and sells the puberty blocking drugs now in conflict with the court ruling](#).

Given these topics are meant to be his specialism, it raises worrying questions about why he was unwilling or unable to report objectively on this case and the aftermath.

It was announced recently that [Hunte has moved to a different role at the BBC](#). If the LGBT correspondent role is retained by BBC News a more impartial approach should be taken in the job.

Problem 5: incomplete reporting of details in articles

Two common concerns are often raised about the reporting of stories that involve trans people. One is the use of 'preferred pronouns' and other descriptors such that the audience is unaware of the biological sex of those concerned, where it is relevant to the story.

The second issue is where a story is told uncritically or incompletely, to give a narrative sympathetic to the trans cause or person(s) involved, but which doesn't give an accurate or complete picture as a result.

Unfortunately, examples of the first type often occur with the reporting of criminal cases. The overwhelming majority of violent or sexual crimes are committed by biological males. It doesn't take a huge number of trans cases to skew data on women, or to give a disproportionate impression of trends.

As such, whilst there [are examples of the BBC flagging up where trans women are involved](#), all-too-often this is not the case – such [as this story last year](#), where a trans woman police worker was "charged for having an explosive device, modified firearms and illegal butterfly knives at *her* home." (Our emphasis.)

In terms of the second issue, a pertinent example was [this piece last month about tennis player Renee Richards](#). It told the story of Richards' transition, and battle to be allowed to play in women's tournaments. A clear impression was given that ultimately Richards' biological sex had no impact on their success, for instance:

"It didn't become the story which a lot of people thought it might become," says Barker. "She just melted into the tour and didn't dominate. She won matches and she lost matches. It didn't alter the game as some predicted. But she achieved what she wanted to do, to play professionally as a woman and was welcomed by the vast majority."

Little is made of the fact that Richards was in her forties when she competed, against much younger players. Most significantly though, no mention at all is made of Richards' views on transwomen competing in women's sport. This from an [interview in the Telegraph in 2019](#):

“...Richards... is in agreement with Martina Navratilova, a player she once coached, that transgender athletes who have not had a sex-change operation have an unfair advantage.

‘The notion that one can take hormones and be considered a woman without sex reassignment surgery is nuts in my opinion,’ Richards says. She also revealed that she would never have competed as a woman if she had transitioned in her 20s rather than 40s because she ‘would have beaten the women to a pulp’.

This is another important distinction for Richards. Even those who have had full gender reassignment surgery would, in her view, be at a major advantage if they did so when at the peak of their physical powers.”

To omit this from a piece about Richards' story is unacceptable. It means that readers would likely be left with an incorrect understanding of what Richards' views are today, something which completely changes the narrative given.

The picture overall

It is obvious that whilst there are some impressively professional and impartial aspects to the BBC's policies, people, and productions, significant elements have departed from the mission to inform, educate, and entertain, and moved into the realm of advocacy and partiality.

Recommendations

The BBC is still indisputably a world-class broadcaster. It has wide and deep expertise, particularly in its news and current affairs output, and as we have seen in this report, when it puts its mind to it, it can cover gender identity issues in a grown-up and impartial fashion.

As such we are confident that it can address the undoubted weaknesses that we have demonstrated exist – it just needs to be consistent and persistent in applying its Charter and Editorial Guidelines.

With this in mind, we make the following five recommendations:

1. **The BBC Board** should commission an independent review of existing trans practice – policies, people, and productions – to assess the legality, impartiality and balance of these issues against its obligations.
2. **BBC leadership** should issue a clear statement as to how it intends to fulfill its obligation to impartiality and balance in coverage on this contested issue.
3. **Guidance for producers** should be issued to support them in ensuring output that is inclusive, impartial, and informative.
4. **Historical material should be reviewed for accuracy and impartiality** and where it fails to meet the standards of impartiality and balance required should be addressed – through re-editing, or where this is not possible, withdrawal from circulation.
5. **The LGBT correspondent role should be reviewed to ensure impartiality, or removed.**