

14

Religious Content

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14.1 Introduction 320

14.2 Principles 320

14.3 Guidelines 321

14.1 Introduction

The right to exercise freedom of thought, conscience and religion is set out in human rights legislation. This includes the freedom to worship, teach, practise and observe.

This section relates only to the BBC's religious content on all platforms. For the purposes of these guidelines, and in line with Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, this means programmes dealing entirely or mainly with religion, religious beliefs, and views about religion and religious beliefs. 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 programmes¹.

Religious beliefs are central to many people's lives and this section ensures that the content of religious programmes and related output is made with a proper degree of responsibility.

Content makers in other genres that make reference to religion or religious leaders and beliefs should consult the guidelines on Harm and Offence and where necessary Accuracy and Impartiality.

See Section 5 Harm and Offence: 5.4.66–5.4.68, Section 3 Accuracy and Section 2 Impartiality

14.2 Principles

14.2.1 Producers of religious programmes and related content have editorial freedom for the output to express faith and to explore matters of faith. Production teams must ensure that contributors to content about religious views and beliefs are not subject to abusive treatment.

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

- 14.2.2 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.
- 14.2.3 Vulnerable audiences must be protected from exploitation, and religious programmes must not seek to promote religious views or beliefs by stealth.

14.3 Guidelines

- 14.3.1 Content makers have editorial freedom for output to include expressions of 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, it should be ensured that there is appropriate context and that critical views are open to challenge.
- 14.3.2 Any claims made in religious output for the particular powers or abilities of a living person or group should be treated with due objectivity. Such claims should not be made in online content likely to be accessed by children, when significant numbers of children may be expected to be watching television or when children are particularly likely to be listening to the radio.
- 14.3.3 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.
- 14.3.4 Where religious content includes audience interaction, appropriate measures must be in place to allow the expression of faith and an exploration of issues around faith, while ensuring that religious and non-religious views and beliefs are not subject to abuse and that vulnerable audiences are also protected from exploitation.

See Section 17 Competitions, Votes and Interactivity: 17.4.55–17.4.71

