

Briefing note to CMS committee re BBC bias

21st November 2025

Dear committee members

Sex Matters is a human-rights charity that campaigns for clarity about sex in language, law, policy. Culture and media are important to our remit and we have a significant interest in the work and output of our national broadcaster, the BBC.

What follows is intended as helpful evidence to support your questioning in relation to bias in BBC reporting and representation on sex and gender. We hope that your committee will continue to investigate the BBC's impartiality, in particular its failures in this regard.

The BBC's failure to fulfil its charter in relation to reporting on sex and gender is neither recent nor the result of "some mistakes". It has been a multi-year project, starting in 2018 with the publication of the BBC *LGBT culture and progression* report, developed in collaboration with Stonewall and the BBC LGBT staff network.

A note on language:

For clarity this note uses sex-based terms. Man means an adult male. Woman means an adult female. We refer to trans-identifying men (not "trans women") and women (not "trans men"). This is not intended to be disrespectful but to be clear in distinguishing between sex (male/man, female/woman) and transgender identity. This is in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The BBC LGBT progression report set an activist agenda for content and news

In 2018 the BBC published the *LGBT culture and progression* report.¹ It was developed in collaboration with Stonewall and the BBC's LGBT network. James Purnell, BBC Director of Radio & Education at the time, said: "These recommendations reflect what our staff have said and we will now implement them to give all LGBT staff the chance to flourish."

The recommendations went beyond HR policies and committed the BBC to "empower content, news and radio teams to cover LGBT stories and routinely increase the incidental portrayal of LGBT identities" and to "regularly review on-air portrayal and ensure that the full range of fluid sexual orientations and gender identities are represented".

The report noted: "There was a general feeling the News & Current Affairs output often presents balanced debates on LGBT issues which were at odds with the BBC's corporate stance on LGBT inclusion" – in other words, a balanced approach was not acceptable.

¹ BBC (2018). *LGBT culture and progression*.

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Since then, there has been a sustained and serious effort to promote gender ideology and transgender ideas to adults and children, as demonstrated by the evidence below.

Promoting transgender ideology to children

Content aimed at children has represented rejecting one's birth sex as a natural and positive phenomenon with no downsides except those caused by other people (characterised as intolerance or "transphobia", and difficulty in accessing medical treatments).

Examples:

- *I Am Leo* documentary on CBBC.
- The "100 genders" video aimed at primary schools (Key Stage 2).

Lack of impartiality and misleading reporting on gender medicine

Concerns about "gender-affirming" medical interventions for children and adults, and emerging evidence of the harms of this approach, have been ignored, downplayed or misrepresented.

Examples:

- The Cass Review, commissioned by the previous government, with the recommendations accepted in full by the current government, was represented in BBC coverage mainly as a problem of lack of NHS capacity, the stories illustrated by sad isolated young people.
- The scandalous lack of knowledge and care revealed by leaked communications from inside the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) was ignored despite being widely reported elsewhere.

Concealing crimes by trans-identifying men, presenting them as committed by women

News and current affairs reporting has avoided stories where trans-identifying people are not portrayed in a positive light, such as when they are the perpetrators of crime. Male-pattern crimes such as violence and sexual offences have been reported as being committed by "women" if the man concerned claims a female "gender identity". This is misleading and inaccurate.

Examples:

- " 'Predatory' woman who incited man to abuse child, 4, jailed" (predatory was in inverted commas, woman was not).²

Promoting activist terms which confuse and mislead audiences

Confusing terms like "transgender woman" are routinely used to describe men who identify as women, despite the fact that polls show that 30–40% of people do not understand these terms.³ This is compounded by the use of female pronouns for such men. Some BBC reports simply call them women.

Examples:

- The reporting of the trans-identifying male murderers Scarlet Blake and Joanna Rowland-Stuart repeatedly called them "women".
Blake: "A woman accused of killing a man whose body was found floating in a river

² www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-67659811

³ Murray Blackburn Mackenzie (2023). '[Clarity matters: how placating lobbyists obscures public understanding of sex and gender](#)'

confessed the murder to her former partner, a court has heard.”⁴

Rowland-Stuart: “Wife killed husband with samurai sword.”⁵

Biased reporting on contentious issues involving people with trans identities

The debate about inclusion of trans-identifying men (and men with rare disorders of sexual development that resulted in them being mistakenly registered female at birth) in women’s sport has consistently been presented from the male competitor’s point of view, only rarely allowing women’s objections to be aired.

Examples:

- Zambian footballer Barbra Banda was named BBC Women's Footballer of the Year. This is despite the strong possibility that Banda is a male with a DSD. Banda is banned from playing in the African Cup of Nations, and Real Madrid opted against signing the player, after Banda reportedly failed a gender verification test.

This continues, for example on 18th November 2025:

- “Award declined after trans women not included.”⁶

Excessive and unbalanced reporting of transgender issues

There is a steady flow of stories about the challenges facing trans-identifying people, such as a documentary about “transgender women in Bangladesh” which was broadcast seven times on BBC radio this year. There has been no such coverage of the loss of rights suffered by women when trans-identifying men are included in women’s spaces, services and sports.

Loss of impartiality⁷

The result is that the BBC has failed in the first part of its public purpose as stated in its charter:

“To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them: the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming...”

A selection of examples and evidence from this calendar year are set out in the appendix.

The BBC has been a trusted source of news and information, so it is particularly damaging when it presents a distorted view of reality. We are grateful to the committee for its investigation.

Yours sincerely



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⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68299050

⁵ www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy5w6rw33yro

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3epyl4pddwo>

⁷ www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3epyl4pddwo

APPENDIX: A few examples from 2025

January: BBC Radio profiled and promoted a man who dresses as a baby girl and wears nappies. He goes into local primary schools to “teach children about autism” and tries to have one-to-one sessions with them. www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0khc4zw

February: BBC teen drama *Waterloo Road* featured a trans-identifying young man who is upset when his dying grandmother, who has dementia, calls him by his “boy name”. The programme is about helping him cope with this failure on the part of the grandmother.

April: BBC News’s reaction to the Supreme Court ruling that men are not women was to publish more stories about trans-identifying men. The coverage consisted almost exclusively of portraying the judgment as negative for those with trans identities, not balanced by those who welcomed the ruling.

Examples:

17th April: “Supreme Court ruling has dire consequences for trans people, campaigners warn”
www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy8q55d27lgo

20th April: “Cancer gave me courage to admit I am transgender”
www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj9ew4dymndo

22nd April: “My care staff helped me come out as transgender”
www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g7rv33egro

5th May: A BBC presenter on children’s programmes launched a project⁸ in which she distributed badges saying “Safe With Me”, including in schools, for children to wear in public places, to signify that “You will accompany trans+ people to their preferred facilities if asked”. The presenter is Dr Ronx Ikharia, self-described as a “black, queer, transmasculine, non-binary” doctor.

Quite apart from the lack of impartiality displayed by the position this takes against the law, as clarified by the Supreme Court in the For Women Scotland case, it is a serious breach of safeguarding to encourage children to interact with adult strangers like this, more especially adult strangers of the opposite sex who are using private single-sex spaces they should not be entering.

18th May: BBC Politics East discussion with only trans-identifying guests in the studio. The presenter asks a series of questions and accepts the answers without challenge or proof:

- “Who here feels less safe since the Supreme Court ruling?”
- “And who has experienced more transphobia since the Supreme Court ruling?”
- “And who here is more anxious about their future?”

The programme was reported on the BBC News website⁹.

⁸ www.gofundme.com/f/safe-with-me

⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1e6l89wyewo.amp?s=09