

General Election 2017



Polling Day: Thursday 8th June 2017

Election Guidance for UK Radio Stations

Who is this handbook for?

These guidance notes have been created by The Radio People to help broadcasters during the General Election of 2017 and to ensure that the impartiality requirements in the Communications Act 2003 are correctly observed.

It is the responsibility of every radio station to ensure that all those who broadcast on-air and online are aware of how the regulations apply to everything they do.

This best practice guide should be read in conjunction with Section Six of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code – Elections and Referendums. Radio stations are also reminded that Ofcom has update this section since the General Election in 2015. The update section can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2orhruu> . The guidance notes can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2ovGM5u>

Which are the ‘larger’ parties?

Ofcom has now removed the concept of ‘larger’ parties from their rules and replaced it with a requirement on broadcasters to take election-related editorial decisions and decisions about coverage by reference to evidence of past electoral support and/or current support.

Ofcom has set out factors, in the latest version of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Section Six), which all broadcasters should consider in weighing different types of evidence when making decisions in election party coverage.

Election Period?

The ‘Election Period’, which is known as ‘Purdah’, begins at 00.01 on Wednesday 4th May (the day following the last day of Parliament) and remains in effect until the polls close at 22.00 on polling day - Thursday 8th June.

On polling day, Thursday 8th May (00.30 – 22.00):

- No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be broadcast or published online.
- There must be no coverage of any issues that relate to the election campaign.
- It is a **criminal offence** to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in the election.

Presenters who are candidates

Presenters who are either candidates or representatives of candidates must not present programmes of any kind on the radio station during the election period. They are also not allowed to appear as guests in a non-political programme unless that programme was planned or the appearance scheduled before the election.

For the avoidance of doubt, a candidate is defined in section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and refers to someone standing at the election or at the very least, included in a list of candidates that has been submitted about the election.

Due impartiality

To achieve due impartiality, all content, whether it is on-air or online, must ensure that the political parties are covered proportionately over an appropriate period, normally across a week.

Each individual programme is responsible for achieving impartiality and cannot rely on other programmes at different times of day to redress any imbalance. Programmes that run weekly must indicate to listeners the content of previous and subsequent shows so it is clear to listeners that due impartiality is built in over time.

Due impartiality also applies to online content such as websites, blogs and any social media which is associated with the station. Radio stations must take care to prevent any one candidate being given an unfair advantage or disadvantage, for instance, where a photograph of a candidate is used, retweeted or repurposed in a Tweet, Facebook post or on a blog.

Fairness to all candidates

If a candidate takes part in an item about his or her constituency, then candidates of each of the major parties must be offered the opportunity to take part. Outside the major parties, broadcasters must offer the same opportunity to all candidates within the constituency who represent parties with previous significant electoral support or where there is evidence of significant current support.

However, if candidates or parties refuse or are unable to participate, the item may still be broadcast. Refusing or declining an invitation to take part is not grounds for preventing that item from being broadcast. However, the radio station's obligations of fairness in ensuring listeners are informed of all aspects of an argument remains the responsibility of the broadcaster.

Radio stations may use either candidates or party representatives. However, if a candidate from one of the parties is invited to take part, the other participants should also be candidates.

List of candidates

Reports and items that refer to any candidates by name should also refer to an online list of all candidates and parties standing. Where there is no online list available then the candidates should be listed verbally. Any items where a reference is made to the list of candidates before the close of nominations should make it clear that these are known candidates so far.

Candidates

Candidates may take part in phone-ins about the election or election issues. However, callers to the radio station must be verified to see if they are candidates. If a caller is a candidate, it must be made clear to listeners that the person speaking is a contributor with a political agenda and not an ordinary member of the public.

The general rule of thumb to use is 'if you wouldn't broadcast it on the radio then it shouldn't be published online'.

It is good practice to ensure that radio presenters avoid compromising the station's impartiality by expressing their own views on political matters, either on personal websites, blogs or social media.

Listener engagement, both on-air and online, is an intrinsic part of what radio is about. Listener contributions are an important expression of opinion. It is important that those selected for inclusion, on-air and online, are selected to achieve due impartiality. It is equally important to avoid creating an 'artificial' balance by not reflecting the weight of opinion. This is a particularly tricky balance for broadcasters to strike.

Listener input may come by text, social media, email or 'vox pop'. Stations must take responsibility for the authenticity of the contribution, that it is genuine independent and, where contributions come from candidates, that it is clearly identified as such.

All radio station web pages inviting debate on the election must be properly moderated to encourage a range of views.

Vox pops

It is important during the General Election to ensure a complete range of views is reflected.

Any programme where a live studio audience discusses election issues must consider carefully how the audience is selected to achieve due impartiality. The process must stand up to public scrutiny if you are challenged.

Polling day

There can be no on-air or online coverage of the election campaign on polling day, from 00.30 until polls close at 22.00. However, you do not have to remove archive reports or listen again content.

No opinion poll on any issue relating to politics or the election may be published until after the polls have closed. Whilst the polls are open, it is a **criminal offence** to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election.

Handling complaints

All stations should have a formalised complaints procedure. Make sure all complaints are documented so that you have a written record to refer to during any Ofcom investigation.

Further information

The Radio People is a broadcast media consultancy providing a range of professional services to commercial and community broadcasters worldwide:

- Station Rescue, Reorganisation and Recovery
- Interim Station Management
- Compliance Monitoring & Reporting
- Audience Research
- Advertising and Digital Sales Campaigns

For further information please visit: www.theradiopeople.co.uk or email election2017@theradiopeople.co.uk

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