

## Fairness

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If a journalist uncovers information that is in the public interest and involves serious allegations against an individual or group, it might not be appropriate to approach those who are the focus of the particular piece of investigative journalism. This is particularly important if the information could lead to criminal arrest. Informed consent

In most cases, the fact that a person is being interviewed is sufficient cover. It is not practical to ensure people have given written consent or filled out paperwork to say they are happy for what they say to be published or broadcast.

Care needs to be taken when dealing with young people and the vulnerable and when you intend to interview someone who has been recently bereaved or has suffered from trauma.

Those we are going to quote must be told when the material will be used, in what context and how we will use the material.

If they are making a significant contribution, on which the whole item or programme is based, this needs to be made absolutely clear to them. They have a right to know:

- if there is a discussion or debate surrounding their contribution and, if so, the range of views being represented and the likely contributors
- whether it is live or edited and when it is likely to be broadcast (be careful not to give assurances if the broadcast time could change)
- a broad outline of the way we see the discussion going
- any changes leading up to broadcast or publication.

We do not need to let them see any pre-recorded material, even if they are involved. If a preview is requested, we need to examine the editorial, legal and ethical reasons for this. Right of reply

In cases where there are allegations of wrong doing, we need to offer a fair opportunity for people to respond to allegations before broadcast or publication.

When seeking a response we need to keep accurate records of when, how and where the person was approached and their response to the offer.

That response needs to be broadcast in the same programme or at the same time as the allegation is made.

Again, legal reasons might override this, and it must be made clear that not seeking a right of reply is in the public interest. Such circumstances must be referred up to a senior editorial figure in your news organisation. Editorial independence

Contributors sometimes try to impose conditions before agreeing to take part in interviews. We must retain editorial control and not enter into any agreement that stops us asking the questions our audience would expect us to pose.

It is unlikely that it would ever be appropriate to broadcast or publish an interview in which the contributor had set out what s/he was prepared to be interviewed about. In such cases it must be made clear to the audience the conditions that were set in order to obtain the interview. The contributor must also be told that we will be making this clear before and after the interview is aired.

Remember, we are journalists dealing with news, not public relations consultants offering a PR platform.

If a contributor refuses to take part, it is not always necessary to mention their refusal. However, if a refusal is an attempt to stop others taking part, particularly those holding different views, then we should state clearly that they refused to take part.

In some cases, people who have willingly contributed will decide to withdraw their consent. We should consider their objections, but whether we use the material or not is an editorial decision and must be based on whether it is in the public interest to publish the material.

We should be open to signing agreements for access to premises or to talk to staff, but we must examine the agreements closely to ensure that they do not involve the surrendering of editorial control. To do so would compromise our editorial integrity.

The same is true of indemnity forms. In all cases, if unacceptable conditions are imposed, we should withdraw from the project.

We should never ask contributors to expose themselves to significant health and safety risks and they must make clear that they recognise and accept any risks in writing. Exercises

- Set out a case where it might not be in the public interest to offer a person or group the right of reply.
- There has been a coach crash with many dead and injured. Two survivors, a young child aged 10 and a badly injured elderly man are being treated by medics. Both tell of the horrors of the accident, describing how people died. Should you use the material?

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This site has used the BBC's Editorial Guidelines as the basis for these short modules on values and ethics. We sought and were given permission to quote from the guidelines and to develop the themes to the extent that they are no longer an accurate reflection of the BBC's stance. These guidelines contain a mix of regional experiences and sensitivities which have been used to develop the guidelines and give them local relevance. These pages are not endorsed by the BBC. MHM would like to thank the BBC for allowing us to use its material.