

# Editorial Policy



## Guidance Note

### Fictitious News Bulletins

*This guidance note should be read in conjunction with BBC Editorial Guidelines ([www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines](http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines)) Section 3: Accuracy, which outlines the BBC's policies on misleading audiences.*

*In cases of doubt, further assistance can be sought from the duty Editorial Policy Adviser by telephoning 0870 333 4550 or BBC extension (02) 81819.*

*All Guidance Notes can be found at [edpol.gateway.bbc.co.uk/guidance\\_notes.shtml](http://edpol.gateway.bbc.co.uk/guidance_notes.shtml) (BBC internal link) or [www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/).*

### **Introduction**

Increasingly, programme makers in drama and documentary are seeking to use fictitious news bulletins as part of their story telling.

This calls for judgment on two levels. First, is the proposed use likely to undermine the BBC News brand and its reputation for accuracy and impartiality, or carry risks for the credibility of the presenter? Second, is it likely to cause confusion or even anxiety in the audience?

### **The news brand**

Any proposal to use a BBC News set or presenter to present a fictitious bulletin should go to the Head of TV News or Head of Radio News as appropriate. They will need to make a judgement as to whether the proposal is likely to undermine the authority or credibility of BBC News, or compromise its perceived accuracy or impartiality.

It will normally be inappropriate to use a BBC correspondent in the field to front a fictitious news report. Head of Newsgathering must give approval to any proposal. If there is a case for an exception to be made - for instance in a clearly comic situation - Heads of Department must be consulted.

### **Avoidance of confusion**

To avoid the danger of audiences being confused as to the reality of what they are seeing or hearing, some basic precautions should be taken:

- High profile presenters should not be used in their usual news setting
- Care should be taken in the filming of the fictitious bulletin to give visual clues that this is not a conventional bulletin, for example, the bulletin as seen on a TV set, over the shoulder and profile shots, and so on
- In drama and drama documentary, the use of music can also be a means of signalling fiction rather than fact
- At every stage, the production team need to think carefully about the possible impact of the fictitious bulletin on people joining the programme late. It will often be appropriate to label the footage at suitable intervals to avoid confusion or unnecessary anxiety
- If the drama features News library footage, beware of causing embarrassment, surprise or offence through the use of inappropriate or outdated footage, especially traumatic or contentious material featuring identifiable people, e.g. riots, funerals. Be alert to any legal problems. It may also be important to inform identifiable people that footage is to be used in a dramatic context so that they are forewarned about its inclusion and have an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have about it.