

Reference: 01564129

Temiloluwa Dawodu
Information Rights Advisor
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

20 February 2023

Freedom of Information: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information in relation to COVID-19 guidance to broadcasters. We received this request on 7 February 2023. We have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the "FOI Act").

Your request

I was wondering if you made public the guidance you provided to broadcasters in relation to the COVID Pandemic? I hear several broadcasters mentioning that they are not allowed to say certain opinions. I want to find out if this is true, especially as we now know the devastation caused by the extended lockdown. Could this have been evaluated better had broadcasters been able to hear experts questioning the costs of lockdowns as well as the benefits? Was there a guideline 'advising' or threatening broadcasters not to talk about such matters negatively? I wish to find out.

Vaccines, must broadcasters still say "safe and effective" despite them being mentioned on death certificates? I'm hoping the guidelines make it clear what is expected from the broadcasters.

Similarly, is there a similar policy guideline in relation to the Ukraine / Russia conflict? Are our broadcasters 'guided' on what they can say on the subject.

Clearly if guidelines are made public all the above will be answered and I will have a clearer picture of the constraints put on free speech in freedoms loving Britain either through direct intervention or pressure inducing self censorship.

Please provide a link should these documents be available online.

Our response

I am pleased to advise that you can find information related to your request on our webpage, [Broadcast standards during the coronavirus pandemic](#) and in published responses to Freedom of Information requests here:

- [Advice to Broadcasters reporting Covid-19](#) response and [Annex A: Important guidance – Broadcast content on coronavirus, 27 March 2020](#)

- [Reassurance from broadcasters regarding Covid-19 messages](#)
- [Background to Covid-19 guidance to all broadcasters regulated by Ofcom](#)
- [Covid-19 Active & Passive Guidance](#)
- [Media coverage of Covid-19 vaccines](#)

We noted in our [announcement](#) of our investigation into the due impartiality of news programmes on the RT news channel that when dealing with major matters such as the crisis in Ukraine, all Ofcom licensees must comply with the special [impartiality requirements in our Code](#). These rules require broadcasters to take additional steps to preserve due impartiality – namely by including and giving due weight to a wide range of significant views.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any queries, then please contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Temiloluwa Dawodu

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review, **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF