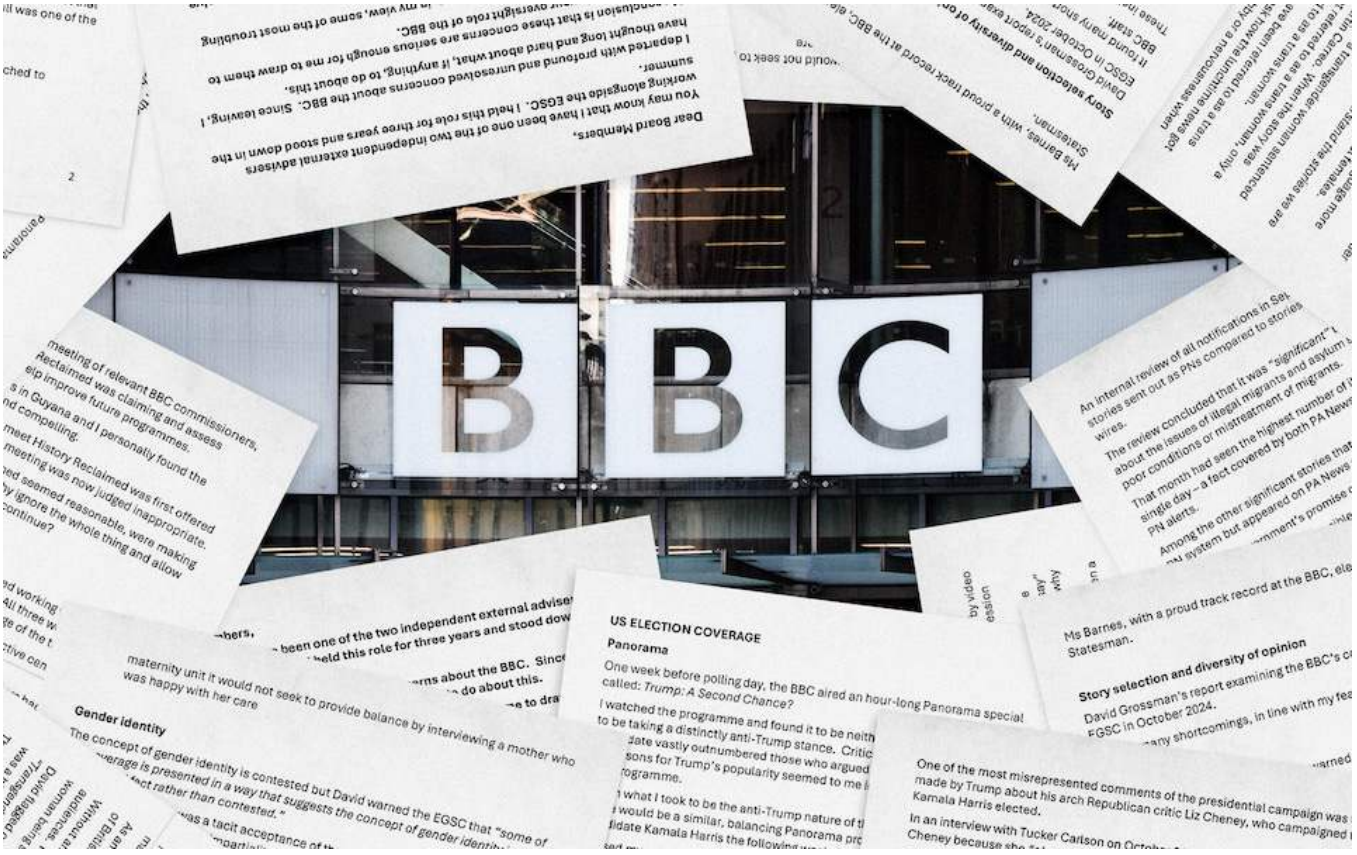
The devastating memo that plunged the BBC into crisis

telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/11/06/read-devastating-internal-bbc-memo-in-full

Gordon Rayner November 6, 2025



The Telegraph has published the internal dossier that has plunged the BBC into crisis.

The document, written by former journalist Michael Prescott and sent to the BBC board, exposes a string of incidents that demonstrate serious apparent bias in the corporation's reporting.

They include evidence that BBC Panorama "doctored" a speech by Donald Trump to make it wrongly appear as though he directly called for violence on the day that his supporters stormed the US Capitol.

Mr Prescott, who until June 2025 was an independent adviser to the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and Standards Board, also highlights serious problems with BBC Arabic's reporting on Gaza, in which it apparently gives extensive space to the views of Hamas.

Elsewhere, he raises concerns that a unit of rogue LGBT+ reporters is censoring coverage of the trans debate, and highlights how the BBC's own flagship fact-checking service, Verify, produced a "thoroughly wrong" report suggesting car insurers were racist.

Mr Prescott's warnings were ignored by senior executives.

The Telegraph's reporting on the memo has led to calls from Kemi Badenoch, leader of the Conservatives, for "heads to roll" at the BBC. Donald Trump Jr has accused its reporters of being "dishonest" and Israel's deputy foreign minister has demanded that Tim Davie, the BBC director-general, be sacked.

Lord Grade, head of the broadcasting regulator Ofcom, has written to Samir Shah, the BBC chairman, urging him to "thoroughly" examine the claims, while Mr Prescott himself is to give evidence on the memo in a parliamentary inquiry next week.

Here you can read each part of the dossier in full:

The introduction

Dear Board Members,

You may know that I have been one of the two independent external advisers working alongside the EGSC. I held this role for three years and stood down in the summer.

I departed with profound and unresolved concerns about the BBC. Since leaving, I have thought long and hard about what, if anything, to do about this.

My conclusion is that these concerns are serious enough for me to draw them to your attention, in your oversight role of the BBC.

What follows is a summary of what were, in my view, some of the most troubling matters to come before the EGSC during my term.

My view is that the Executive repeatedly failed to implement measures to resolve highlighted problems, and in many cases simply refused to acknowledge there was an issue at all.

Indeed, I would argue that the Executive's attitude when confronted with evidence of serious and systemic problems is now a systemic problem in itself - meaning the last recourse for action is the Board.

Much of what I set out below is taken from reports prepared for the EGSC by David Grossman, the Senior Editorial Adviser to the Committee.

My understanding is that, as Board members, you have access to EGSC papers should you wish to read his excellent (and so often damning) analyses.

One of the defences often deployed by the BBC when criticised by external organisations is to claim the evidence presented is mere 'cherry picking'. This is why David's reports were so very important: they came from within the BBC and were produced by a very experienced and talented BBC journalist. Yet his findings were still, on the whole, dismissed or ignored, even after EGSC members tried to press home the case for full-blooded action.

I served as the Political Editor of the Sunday Times for 10 years, and in corporate advisory roles since then, including as Corporate Affairs Director of BT.

I think it is important to state that I have never been a member of any political party and do not hold any hard and fast views on matters such as American politics or disputes in the Middle East. My views on the BBC's treatment of the subjects covered below do not come with any political agenda.

Rather, what motivated me to prepare this note is despair at inaction by the BBC Executive when issues come to light. On no other occasion in my professional life have I witnessed what I did at the BBC with regard to how management dealt with (or failed to deal with) serious recurrent problems.

Long though the following note is, I do urge you to read it. My hope is that you may be able to ensure action where the EGSC has not.

The US election

Panorama

One week before polling day, the BBC aired an hour-long Panorama special called: *Trump: A Second Chance?*

I watched the programme and found it to be neither balanced nor impartial – it seemed to be taking a distinctly anti-Trump stance. Critics of the Republican presidential candidate vastly outnumbered those who argued for him. What examination there was of reasons for Trump's popularity seemed to me insufficient given the overall balance of the programme.

Given what I took to be the anti-Trump nature of the programme, I of course assumed there would be a similar, balancing Panorama programme about Democrat presidential candidate Kamala Harris the following week. I remain shocked that there was not.

I raised my concerns at the EGSC and David Grossman was asked to review the programme.

He concluded the main contributors to the documentary were heavily weighted against Trump, with just one supporter against ten who questioned his fitness for office.

Worse still, David highlighted alarming concerns about how Panorama had edited Trump's speech to his supporters on January 6*, 2021, the day of the Capitol Hill riot.

Examining the charge that Trump had incited protesters to storm Capitol Hill, it turned out that Panorama had spliced together two clips from separate parts of his speech.

This created the impression that Trump said something he did not and, in doing so, materially misled viewers.

The spliced together version of Trump's comments aired by Panorama made it seem that he said: *"We're gonna walk down to the Capitol and I'll be with you and we fight. We fight like hell and if you don't fight like hell, you're not gonna have a country anymore."*

In reality, the first part of Trump's speech: *"We're gonna walk down to the Capitol and I'll be with you,"* came 15 minutes into the speech. The second half of the sentence that was aired by Panorama, *"and we fight. We fight like hell...."* came 54 minutes later.

Fifteen minutes into the speech, what Trump actually said: *"We are gonna walk down to the Capitol and I'll be with you. I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."* It was completely misleading to edit the clip in the way Panorama aired it. The fact that he did not explicitly exhort supporters to go down and fight at Capitol Hill was one of the reasons there were no federal charges for incitement to riot.

That was not the end of Panorama's distortion of the day's events.

On January 6, 2021, the so-called Proud Boys, Trump's supporters, marched to Capitol Hill before Trump had started speaking.

David's report to the EGSC highlighted that Trump's 'speech' clip was followed by video footage of the Proud Boys marching towards Congress. This created the impression Trump's supporters had taken up his 'call-to-arms'.

This was one of the most shocking sets of issues uncovered during my time with the EGSC. If BBC journalists are to be allowed to edit video in order to make people "say" things they never actually said, then what value are the Corporation's guidelines, why should the BBC be trusted, and where will this all end?

And yet, faced with David's findings, the Executive refused to accept there had been a breach of standards and doubled down on its defence of Panorama.

At the EGSC meeting on May 12th , 2025 Jonathan Munro asserted: "There was no attempt to mislead the audience about the content or nature of Mr Trump's speech before the riot at the Capitol. It's normal practice to edit speeches into short form clips."

This completely goes against my understanding of BBC editorial policy regarding misleading edits. You will remember, it was this kind of editing that led to the resignation of BBC1 controller, Peter Fincham, following what has become known as Crowngate.

On the (to my mind shocking) failure to try to balance the anti-Trump Panorama with an equally aggressive look at Harris, Jonathan seemed unconcerned, saying it was not necessary *"for due impartiality to have companion programmes".* Not doing so in this case was a *"legitimate judgement"* within the guidelines, he added, without any further justification as to why he took this (to my mind surprising and alarming) point of view.

Deborah Turness tried to justify the doctored video and mangled timeline of the day by citing the US Congressional Committee on Trump's role in the January 6th riots – the one which concluded he was involved in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the legal results of the 2020 election.

Yet this was a Democrat-packed Committee, not an objective source of truth. I can see no justification for editing video clips so that a presidential candidate appears to say something he never did – and this defence did nothing to change my mind. I do urge the Board to pay particular attention to this matter.

During the EGSC meeting, neither the Director General nor the Chairman made any comment about Jonathan's dismissive attitude to David's findings or Deborah's defence of the edited video clips.

My concerns prompted me to email the Chairman the day after the EGSC meeting.

With regard to the Executive's comfort in having video clips edited to misrepresent the speaker, I warned: *"This is a very, very dangerous precedent. I hope you agree and take some form of action to ensure this potentially huge problem is nipped in the bud."*

I received no reply.

Liz Cheney

One of the most misrepresented comments of the presidential campaign was that made by Trump about his arch Republican critic Liz Cheney, who campaigned to get Kamala Harris elected.

In an interview with Tucker Carlson on October 31st, 2024, Trump took issue with Ms Cheney because she *"always wanted to go to war with people".*

He went on to describe her as a "radical war hawk". He added: *"Let's put her with a rifle standing there with nine barrels shooting at her face. OK let's see how she feels about it."*

Mr Trump went on to attack politicians *"sitting in Washington in a nice building saying "oh gee, let's send 10,000 troops right into the mouth of the enemy..."*

Mr Trump was clearly criticising politicians who readily send US troops to war without thinking about the human cost.

The Harris campaign chose to see things otherwise and claimed Trump had advocated shooting Liz Cheney.

On behalf of the EGSC, David Grossman looked at the BBC's US presidential race coverage overall. Alas, when it came to the Cheney matter, the BBC repeatedly pushed this inaccurate version of what Trump said.

On the BBC News Channel on 1st November, one presenter asked his guest: *"He is out there on the campaign trail saying he wants people to shoot Liz Cheney in the face.... Is that the sort of thing women react well to?"*

Speaking on the Six O'Clock News the same night, North America Editor Sarah Smith said Trump had been *"ratcheting up the violent rhetoric".*

She added: *"In the latest spat, Donald Trump has been accused of being petty, vindictive and a wannabe tyrant because he suggested that one of his political opponents should face guns, have them trained on her face."*

On World News America, one presenter said Trump *"appeared to suggest Liz Cheney should face a firing squad for her stance on foreign policy"*.

The following day the BBC's North America Correspondent told the News Channel that Trump had had a *"rough week"* which included *"comments about the Republican Liz Cheney and how she should face nine rifle barrels"*.

US election coverage more broadly

David Grossman's review of the BBC's coverage of the US presidential race not only highlighted the significant failures of Panorama and of multiple outlets over Trump's views about Liz Cheney, it also uncovered a range of wider concerns.

I commend to you his full report, delivered to the EGSC on January 16th, 2025, but below is a summary of his findings:

1. The BBC ignored its own guidelines about not giving undue weight to a single poll and gave excessive coverage to the rogue 'Iowa poll' – which suggested a Harris victory days out from the election. This poll dominated coverage in the days leading up to polling day while other polls that contradicted its findings were underplayed.
2. The BBC focused too heavily on campaign issues promoted by the Harris campaign, such as abortion and women's rights, at the expense of giving greater weight to jobs, the economy and immigration – which proved to be a significant driver of how people voted.
3. In covering Trump's legal wrangles during the campaign, (in May he was found guilty of 34 felony counts of falsifying records), the BBC often failed to highlight that many US prosecutors are political appointees. This prevented viewers from having an understanding of the anti-Trump 'lawfare' at play during the presidential race.
4. There was an over-emphasis on certain events, such as Trump's comments about people eating pets in Springfield. That dominated the coverage for a week which, David's report warned, appeared "excessive" and risked compromising impartiality.
5. The BBC sometimes fell into using, without attribution, contested language such as *"reproductive rights"*. This signals to many BBC viewers, particularly those in America, a biased mindset.
6. There was an overall tendency to frame issues in a way that was similar to the Harris campaign and less fact checking of *"questionable statements"* she made as opposed to Trump. Words used by the Harris camp were also echoed in some BBC coverage, such as referring to Trump supporters as *"election deniers"*. The phrase *"baseless"* was also used to describe some of Trump's contested claims but never in association with questionable claims made by his opponent.
7. The use of aggregate economic and immigration data skewed coverage because it masked important class and regional variations which contributed to the election result.

8. The balance of more in-depth programmes was *“markedly anti Trump/pro Harris”.* The internal review couldn’t find a single programme that looked more critically at Harris and her record than at Trump.

BBC bias dossier

BBC doctored Trump speech, internal report reveals
Read our analysis in full

Racial diversity

During my time as an advisor to the EGSC it became clear the BBC fell too easily for putting out ill-researched material that suggested issues of racism when there were none.

The insurance swindle that never was

On February 24, 2024, multiple BBC outlets gave extensive coverage to one of BBC Verify’s first flagship reports, which purported to show a so-called “*ethnic penalty’* in car insurance.

The central claim was that people living in areas with a high proportion of ethnic minority residents paid more for car insurance, even when road accident figures and crime levels were similar. A scandal, if true.

BBC audiences were being encouraged to believe Britain’s major insurers were, intentionally or unintentionally, racist and charging high prices to customers based on their ethnicity.

The story featured in all the morning bulletins on national and local media, both television and radio. There were longer reports on BBC Breakfast, the One and Six and on the News Channel. Radio 1 Newsbeat, 5 Live Wake Up to Money and Tik Tok also covered the story.

Only one guest was interviewed for the piece, who agreed with the claim. The Association of British Insurers declined to appear and its statement, which provided important context, was selectively quoted.

This story caught my eye simply because I found its central claim to be so unlikely. For me, it was hard to imagine UK FTSE Boards or executive teams conceiving of or sanctioning a policy to charge ethnic minority customers higher prices. I also found it hard to conceive of a systems glitch across insurance companies giving rise to this supposed phenomenon.

I raised the issue at the EGSC and David Grossman was tasked with investigating BBC Verify’s findings. His report to the EGSC six weeks later cited *“multiple serious editorial problems”* with the coverage.

The central claim implied causation, (that being an ethnic minority resulted in you being charged more), but the reporting and commentary did not consider other issues that can affect insurance charges. The report was also based on old and unsuitable data. None of it was less than five-years-old, some of it was nine.

The report also relied on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which does not cover many of the issues that might concern insurance companies, such as the claims' history of the area or how many people charged with driving without insurance live there.

All the data was presented as if it was current and none of the limitations were explained.

The Executive realised these were substantive problems and the initial response was to remove the claim about an 'ethnic penalty' in the online article. An extra line was also added: *"Overall crime levels of the type of accidents measured by the IMD do not capture everything used to calculate insurance risk."*

Yet the report was so thoroughly wrong that later, a stricter view was taken, and the entire report was taken down, which I understand is very rare.

It had taken six months for the BBC to take decisive action about a story that was not fit for purpose and spread damaging misinformation.

As far as I know, no one has ever been disciplined for this hugely embarrassing episode and worrying questions remain. Who commissioned it, where was the professional scepticism and what checks were made prior to publication and broadcast?

How could this piece go out unchallenged across so many BBC outlets and what does this say about BBC professionalism and governance?

Insecure jobs claim across BBC radio and TV

On August 13th, 2023, the BBC News website ran a story under the headline: *"Ethnic minority workers in insecure jobs up 132% since 2011".*

The story was also covered on BBC News Channel, the One O'Clock News and radio bulletins on Radio 4, Radio 1 Newsbeat and the Asian Network.

It was based on research by the TUC, which concluded it was evidence of *"structural racism in action"* in the decade since 2011.

The report excluded other factors outside of race, such as the hugely increased number of immigrants, age, proficiency in English, educational qualifications or immigration status. It also failed to consider this was the decade when the 'gig economy' took off.

The TUC's report framing had been accepted without question by the BBC, which led to concerns not just about impartiality but also accuracy.

Following an upheld ECU complaint, the story was later amended to concede the rise could simply be due to the numerical rise in ethnic minority workers in the workforce as a whole.

A subsequent review about how the BBC reports group level differences on issues such as race and sex, was carried out by David Grossman for the EGSC. It concluded that BBC reporters often accept the conflation of correlation with causation - just as with the insurance

‘ethnic penalty’ story. Lessons do not seem to have been learned and acted on, and here we have a clear example.

The EGSC was warned that BBC reporters should be particularly sceptical of data produced by groups seeking to lobby for policy or regulatory change. This information should never be accepted at “face value” the report concluded.

As we all know too well, Britain’s social cohesion is strained, and too many politicians seek to exploit grievances around ‘fairness’. The British public should be able to rely on the BBC for an impartial exploration of the challenges and opportunities we all face in society. This is rather less likely to happen if BBC reporters lack the skills to interrogate statistics and end up putting out stories such as the “insecure jobs” one.

I note that a recent Panorama has come under fire for potentially erroneous use of statistics in relation to the Lucy Letby case. That would make three recent occasions where serious errors have been committed by the BBC through misuse of statistics.

BBC Push Notifications system is an outlier in ignoring immigration issues

On March 7th, 2024, the EGSC were told of “selection bias” in favour of certain stories being sent out on the BBC’s push notifications (PN) to more than seven million users of the BBC News app.

An internal review of all notifications in September, 2023, considered the selection of stories sent out as PNs compared to stories on PA News and the internal BBC Quickfire wires.

The review concluded that it was *“significant”* that of 219 notifications, just four were about the issues of illegal migrants and asylum seekers. Of those, three centred on the poor conditions or mistreatment of migrants.

That month had seen the highest number of illegal migrants crossing the Channel in a single day – a fact covered by both PA News and BBC Quickfire but was not on the BBC PN alerts.

Among the other significant stories that September that were not covered by the BBC’s PN system but appeared on PA News and BBC Quickfire were:

- The Government’s promise of new staff to cut the asylum processing backlog
- The rejection of a possible EU asylum returns agreement
- Issues about the Bibby Stockholm boat which was being used to house asylum seekers
- New figures showing the £8m daily cost of housing migrants in hotels
- An extension of the use of hotels for Afghan refugees
- A warning from the then Home Secretary about the impact on social cohesion if boat crossings were not stopped.

The review concluded: *“It is not clear why none of these stories were sent out at PNs, when perhaps less significant stories were extensively covered”.*

For context, in the same month the BBC sent out 12 notifications about Russell Brand.

History Reclaimed asks BBC to use expert historians and is ignored

On December 29th, 2022, The Telegraph had an article about a report from History Reclaimed, a group of renowned historians, mainly senior post-holders at Oxford and Cambridge.

They had reviewed four factual BBC programmes containing historical content and found each wanting. The main conclusion was this was caused by producers seeking out non-expert academics who would give good quotes, primarily about racism and prejudice. This was producing an overly simplistic and distorted narrative about British colonial racism, slave-trading and its legacy.

History Reclaimed recommended that in the future the BBC should source the views of expert historians in their relevant fields.

The BBC's response was dismissive. In its statement, the BBC said: *"Cherry-picking a handful of examples or highlighting genuine mistakes in thousands of hours of output on TV and radio does not constitute analysis and is not a true representation of BBC content".*

This defensiveness when challenged over contested areas is something the BBC demonstrates time and time again and was an issue I had raised at the EGSC.

Following The Telegraph's story, I suggested a meeting of relevant BBC commissioners, producers and editors to review what History Reclaimed was claiming and assess whether any of its recommendations might help improve future programmes.

My own forebears were indentured labourers in Guyana and I personally found the History Reclaimed report both fascinating and compelling.

An initial plan for one senior BBC executive to meet History Reclaimed was first offered and then withdrawn. The EGSC was later told a meeting was now judged inappropriate.

I remain slightly mystified by this. History Reclaimed seemed reasonable, were making limited claims and suggested an easy solution – why ignore the whole thing and allow the questionable practice, apparently identified, to continue?
BBC bias dossier

BBC forced to withdraw 'thoroughly wrong' racism allegations
Read our analysis here

Biological sex and gender

A BBC presenter contacted me about a month after I started working with the EGSC. He put me in touch with a reporter and a producer. All three were from different parts of the BBC but had shared concerns about BBC coverage of the trans issue.

The story that each person told me was what sounded like effective censorship by the specialist LGBTQ desk within News.

As virtually all shows had lost their own reporters, programme editors had to make requests to News if they wanted a correspondent to cover a story. I was told that time and time again the LGBTQ desk staffers would decline to cover any story raising difficult questions about the trans-debate.

The allegation made to me was stark: that the desk had been captured by a small group of people promoting the Stonewall view of the debate and keeping other perspectives off-air. Individual programmes had come to lack their own reporters as a counterweight.

What I was told chimed with what I saw for myself on BBC Online - that stories raising difficult questions about the 'trans agenda' were ignored even if they had been widely taken up and discussed across other media outlets.

There was also a constant drip-feed of one-sided stories, usually news features, celebrating the trans experience without adequate balance or objectivity.

A typical example was the story of Gisele Shaw, a gushing tale of a transgender wrestler who felt "liberated" by coming out.

This story, posted on March 15th, 2023, glossed over how the wrestler, who is a biological male, had repeatedly won trophies by competing in women's competition.

The Board might take note that the one undisputed run of ground-breaking journalistic excellence in this space was that of Newsnight's Hannah Barnes, who went on to author the seminal book about the medical treatment and mistreatment of 'trans children'.

Her work might well now not be possible at the BBC, given the culture I describe above combined with changes at Newsnight and the lack of any programme-specific reporters.

Ms Barnes, with a proud track record at the BBC, elected to depart for the New Statesman.

Story selection and diversity of opinion

David Grossman's report examining the BBC's coverage of trans issues came to the EGSC in October 2024.

It found many shortcomings, in line with my fears and the concerns raised with me by BBC staff.

These included:

- On story selection, his report warned of an *"unintended editorial bias"*
- *"Significant voices"* were too often missing from the BBC's coverage, including those who had transitioned and regretted their decision or those who had concerns about the process
- The report couldn't find a single example in the review period that reflected the experience of de-transitioners

- It noted there were more stories about the waiting times for people to receive care than examining the quality of that care itself
- It also noted a surprisingly high number of stories about drag queens considering it is such a niche group of people
- Stories that raised concerns about the quality or safety of care given to gender questioning children and adults received *"little or no coverage"*
- In March 2024, there was widespread media coverage of leaked documents from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health which raised concerns about the quality of care given to gender-distressed children. It was picked up by the Mail, Economist, Observer, Washington Post, the Times and others but not the BBC
- There was also scant coverage of biological women campaigning to exclude biological men from sensitive spaces
- The BBC failed to cover the story of Darlington nurses who took their employer to court for allowing their changing room to be used by biological males. This story was covered extensively by other news outlets including Sky News and GB News
- Similarly, there was no coverage of claims biological male police and prison officers were being allowed to conduct strip searches on women and girls
- The report warned that the phrase *"assigned at birth'* in relation to biological sex was appearing frequently in coverage, despite being advised against in guidelines
- The report noted concerns with how the debate about the Cass Review was framed on Newsnight – the views of a doctor critical of the Tavistock Clinic were "balanced" with those of a trans woman, who said she had received excellent care. The report pointed out that if Newsnight was covering concerns about a maternity unit it would not seek to provide balance by interviewing a mother who was happy with her care

Gender identity

The concept of gender identity is contested but David warned the EGSC that *"some of our coverage is presented in a way that suggests the concept of gender identity is an established fact rather than contested."*

He also warned there was a tacit acceptance of the concept of 'gender identity' in BBC guidelines that could cause impartiality problems and recommended a change.

The guidelines state: *"for most people their sex and gender identity are the same".*

He suggested adding: *"Others may reject the idea that they have a gender identity that is separate from their biological sex at all".*

My understanding is we are still waiting for the updated news style guide, nearly 12 months since David's report was presented to the EGSC.

David's findings highlight a cultural problem across the BBC – that too many of its staff have never considered the idea of "gender identity" to be either spurious or offensive to many people.

As an institution the BBC too often views issues of gender and sexuality as a celebration of British diversity rather than exploring the complexities of the subject.

Without anchoring stories in biological sex, they risk becoming incomprehensible to audiences. For example, they may not understand the concerns about a transgender woman being sent to a women's prison.

David flagged one article, carried on BBC News in June, 2024, under the headline: *"Transgender woman guilty of rape after night out".* Without adding that the offender was a biological man, this story would be confusing for many.

The review recommended BBC reporters and presenters should use language more *"anchored in biological sex"* – such as biological males and biological females.

"Otherwise, there is a real danger that audiences may not understand the stories we are attempting to cover."

A prime example would be the case of Scarlet Blake - a transgender woman sentenced on February 26th, 2024, for the murder of Jorge Martin Carreo. When the story was reported on the One O'Clock News, Blake was not referred to as a trans woman, only a woman. On the Six O'Clock News, she was referred to as a trans woman.

In a statement, the BBC conceded that Blake should have been referred to as a trans woman in the lunchtime programme. It is interesting to ask how the lunchtime news got this wrong - it may well speak to capture by a particular lobby or a nervousness when reporting these subjects.
BBC bias dossier

BBC trans coverage 'censored' by its own reporters
Read our analysis in full

Israel-Hamas war

Story selection

In July, 2024, a Senior News Editor from the BBC World Service concluded an internal review of BBC Arabic which did not show up any editorial "red flags".

Unconvinced by its findings, the EGSC pressed for a more thorough review of its output in relation to the Israel and Gaza conflict.

David Grossman was commissioned to review five months of coverage, from May 7th, 2024, to October 6th, 2024. That amounted to 535 articles on the English language website and 523 on BBC Arabic.

On January 16th, 2025, the EGSC received his report, which exposed stark differences in the way important stories had been handled by BBC Arabic and the BBC's main news website.

For example:

- On story selection, the BBC's main news website posted 19 separate stories about the hostages taken by Hamas on the day of its terror attack. On BBC Arabic there were none
- By contrast, every critical article about Israel that appeared on BBC News English website was replicated by BBC Arabic
- The English language website had three times as many stories that primarily dealt with the suffering of Israelis. These included the horrors faced by hostages held captive in Gaza, how traumatised Israeli communities were coping, Hamas and Hezbollah rocket attacks on residential Israeli communities and growing antisemitism. These were all missing from BBC Arabic
- There were no articles critical of Hamas on the BBC Arabic site and four on the English site.

Story treatment - Fawzia Sido liberation

BBC News' English website covered the story of a Yazidi woman, Fawzia Sido, rescued by Israeli soldiers after a decade as a sex slave in Iraq, prior to her arrival in Gaza.

Kidnapped, drugged, raped and "sold off" for marriage to an ISIS fighter at the age of just 11, the story detailed her escape and rescue, with back up for her claims from the US State Department and the Iraqi authorities.

BBC Arabic ran the same story but with critical differences - starting with the headline: *"Israel says 'Yazidi prisoner returned to Iraq after ten years in Gaza,' Hamas tells BBC 'Israel narrative is fabricated'"*.

The bulk of BBC Arabic's story is taken up by a 582-word-long statement by Hamas disputing the woman's terrible story.

Story treatment – Hamas attack on Jaffar

Similarly, there were major content and tone differences in stories covering an attack by Hamas terrorists on October 1st, 2024, which killed seven Israeli civilians in Jaffa.

The BBC News' English website revealed how the victims included Inbar Segev Vigder, a young mother who died shielding her 9-month-old baby from harm.

BBC Arabic covered the story under the headline: *"The Qassam Brigades claims responsibility for the Jaffa operation, what do we know about it?"* The report presented the attack as a military operation and gave no information about the victims.

Similarly, the deaths of four hostages in Gaza on June 3, 2024, were covered with a dedicated article on the English language site but dismissed in four paragraphs in a BBC Arabic article that focused on Hezbollah attacks on Israel.

Story treatment – the Majdal Shams rocket attack

Another major story in the conflict, Hezbollah's bombing of a football game in the Golan Heights on July 27th , 2024, that left nine children dead, was also given critically different treatment.

The English language version included Hezbollah's denials that it was responsible for the Majdal Shams rocket strike but included evidence to suggest it had bombed other sites in the area.

The BBC Arabic story, posted four hours after the English language version, did not include evidence linking Hezbollah to the bombing of a nearby military compound, just two miles from the football pitch, and prominently included the terror group's denials.

Its headline referred to "Israelis" being killed and injured in the attack, not children.

A day-two story covered on the Arabic website contained unsubstantiated claims from Iran and Syria that Israel faked the attack as a pretext for attacking Hezbollah.

It was clear from David's extensive research in this report that BBC Arabic's story selection, tone and focus were considerably different to the BBC News' English website.

It is hard to conclude anything other than that BBC Arabic's story treatment was designed to minimise Israeli suffering and paint Israel as the aggressor.

At the time, one very experienced person attending the EGSC meeting described the findings as the most "extraordinary paper" she had ever seen. It should have prompted urgent action by the executive but it did not.

Executive response to the EGSC report into BBC Arabic

The BBC has faced, and still faces, considerable criticism from the Jewish community and from cross-party parliamentarians across both Houses over its record in reporting the conflict in Gaza and, in particular, the coverage of BBC Arabic.

In spite of this, and the findings of the internal BBC report, there is no sign of an open admission by the executive about systemic problems within BBC Arabic.

There is no sign of any programme to correct the problems, other than making changes to senior positions at the World Service, a move in which the Director General appears to place a great deal of trust. But how is new management to wrestle with the problems unless there is first a genuine admission of just how deep-seated the problems are?

The Executive's attitude can be judged by what happened at the EGSC on March 6", 2025, when the Committee was told the management changes at the World Service did not arise *"from any editorial problem specific to BBC Arabic".*

Jonathan Munro responded to David Grossman's review by dismissing or diminishing its findings.

He wrote: "*While no service is perfect and all of us can make mistakes, we believe BBC Arabic delivers against (its) responsibilities with the vast majority of its reporting and analysis".*

Its reporters were an *"unrivalled source of knowledge and editorial content for the wider BBC"* and the team had delivered *"exceptional journalism during this period".*

There had been *"incidents where we have fallen short"* and the BBC had looked to correct and clarify and in some cases, *"relating to the conduct and social media conduct of some of our members taken decisive action".*

The report dismissed concerns about story selection by arguing that *"journalism created for one part of the BBC should not be assumed to travel to another".*

"Stories which do not appear on BBC Arabic online are not necessarily 'missing'. Rather they may not appear for good editorial reasons," Jonathan argued.

On the discrepancies of coverage on the Yazidi sex slave story, Jonathan said the headline in BBC Arabic was not *"complete enough in its attempts to summarise the story"* but added *"no headline is designed to be read in isolation".*

On the Majd al-Shams rocket coverage, Jonathan said: "The EGSC report questions why a BBC Arabic article on 28th July did not mention 'evidence that Hezbollah was responsible'. Culpability was, and still is, disputed. Hezbollah denied responsibility, which is rare...."

David's report had highlighted that there were far fewer stories from an Israeli perspective over the five-month review period than from a Palestinian perspective.

Jonathan's response was to ignore the review period and find stories outside the scope of the review. Jonathan cited two stories "covering the story of Ada Sagi". This was a curious comparison to make.

She was only mentioned on BBC Arabic in the aftermath of October 7th, in a list of hostages taken by Hamas. I have seen no evidence that BBC Arabic, at any point, has told the harrowing story of her kidnap and captivity despite it having been reported elsewhere on BBC, including on the main News website.

As for BBC Arabic's reporting of Hamas? Jonathan argued the high prominence given to Hamas' lines *"helps understanding of what Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza may be hearing".*

He also added *"other data points"* were helpful for *"audience perspective"*. Incredibly,this included an audience survey which revealed BBC Arabic was almost as trusted as Al Jazeera. Is Al Jazeera the new gold standard the BBC wants to aspire to?

All this is to entirely miss the main reasons for having a taxpayer funded World Service - to provide impartial news coverage and to reflect British values on the world stage.

Gaza 'journalists'

Media stories about the antisemitic and pro-Hamas views of journalists appearing on BBC Arabic forced another internal review into the channel in June, 2025.

In April, 2025, The Telegraph reported that BBC Arabic had given a regular platform to the journalist Samer Elzaenen, who had posted a string of antisemitic comments – including suggesting Jews should be burned “as Hitler did”.

At the time it was reported he had appeared “a dozen times” on BBC Arabic reporting from Gaza. However internal research showed Elzaenen, who was consistently introduced as a journalist on BBC Arabic, actually appeared 244 times between 13th November 2023 and 18th April, 2025.

BBC Arabic regular, Ahmed Qannan, who described a gunman who killed four civilians and an Israeli police officer as a “hero” , appeared 217 times on the channel between 8th February, 2024 and the 27th April, 2025. Introduced as a journalist from Gaza, he appeared both on BBC Arabic radio and Gaza Today.

Ahmed Alagha, who described Israelis as less than human and Jews as “devils” appeared 522 times between 21st November, 2023, and 26th April, 2025, across BBC Arabic television, radio and BBC Gaza Today. He was consistently introduced as a journalist.

Revelations about the views of these journalists prompted calls by Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch for wholesale reform of BBC Arabic.

In its public statement, the BBC downplayed their contributions to the channel, even going so far as to claim they were just “eyewitnesses”.

On 26th April, 2025, the BBC in a statement said: *“We hear from a range of eyewitness accounts from the strip”.*

In a separate statement the BBC also said: *“These are not BBC members of staff or part of the BBC’s reporting team”.*

Most viewers would consider hundreds of appearances on the BBC, reporting on developments, to amount to a journalist being almost a part of the Corporation’s reporting team.

Death toll in Gaza

A separate review into BBC coverage of the conflict’s death toll was commissioned and reported back to the EGSC on 2nd July, 2024.

The review was commissioned after the UN revised its figures and admitted the percentage of women and children being killed in the conflict was less than previously thought.

In the 2014 conflict, the Hamas-run health ministry reported casualty figures based on deaths recorded in hospitals. This matters because the majority of hospital-recorded deaths are men.

However, in this war, Hamas has based its figures both on hospital records and on “media reports” from the Gaza Government Media Office. Hamas, which runs the GMO, has never explained how this number has been calculated but the majority of deaths from “media reports” are women and children.

Despite growing concerns that this new methodology was unreliable, the UN and media outlets, including the BBC, reported that 70 per cent of all those killed in Gaza were women and children. Eventually the UN reviewed and revised down the figure to 52 per cent.

In the report to the EGSC, we were warned that for too long the BBC had given *“unjustifiable weight”* to the 70 per cent claim, even though concerns about its credibility were well known.

Mass graves

In April, 2024, and again in June, the BBC covered two stories relating to the discovery of mass graves in Gaza. The first was discovered at Al Nasser hospital and the second at Al Shifa.

The strong implication in the coverage was that Israeli forces had buried hundreds of bodies at both sites prior to withdrawing from the area. The source for both stories was the Hamas controlled Gaza Civil Defence Agency. This was not reflected in the coverage.

The internal report to the EGSC flagged: *“There was no independent corroboration of allegations of war crimes, including alleged evidence of summary executions, torture and bodies found with their hands tied together”.*

One online story incorrectly implied a UN official had corroborated the reports of hands being tied.

It seems that the most likely explanation was the graves at both hospitals were dug by Palestinians and the people buried there had died or been killed prior to the arrival of Israel ground forces.

The EGSC was reminded that the BBC had itself reported extensively on Palestinians digging these graves at the time. These reports had topped its bulletins.

How could this then be forgotten in the subsequent BBC coverage that suggested something more sinister had occurred? The EGSC was offered no explanation.

The question becomes even more pressing when you learn the journalists responsible for the first set of stories were the same journalists who wrote the second set of stories suggesting the graves were evidence of Israeli war crimes.

Executives were presented with the evidence about how badly the BBC had got this wrong but it remains unclear what measures were taken with regard to personnel or training.

Newsnight

In May of this year, Tom Fletcher, the UN's Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, made a claim that an IPC report had warned 14,000 babies in Gaza were at risk of starving to death within the next 48 hours.

The claim, made during Israel's aid blockade, sparked worldwide attention and concern.

Yet the UN quickly distanced itself, refusing to repeat the claim at a press conference.

Accordingly, the BBC updated its online articles to reflect the actual findings on the IPC report in question – that 14,000 children could starve in a year if the blockade was not lifted.

Despite this, Fletcher's inaccurate claim was put to Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon on Newsnight. Why, when the BBC knew the suggestion was wrong?

The same programme also featured images of baby Siwar Ashour who suffered from allergies and required specialist formula. She also had a congenital oesophageal condition, which had been reported in The Guardian.

By the time of broadcast, the BBC already knew the story was out of date and that baby Siwar had received the necessary formula a week earlier, she was maintaining weight and had been discharged from hospital. None of that was revealed in the programme - meaning the BBC had broadcast another inaccurate story.

Twice in the same programme the Newsnight team broadcast stories that were inaccurate and it is not entirely clear why.

This was not the first or last time the BBC has reported stories about starvation in Gaza without telling audiences that the person highlighted has pre-existing medical conditions that might explain their emaciated appearance.

As recently as last month (August, 2025), the BBC had to correct a headline which stated: *'Malnutritioned Gaza woman flown to Italy dies in hospital'.* It was replaced with *'Gaza woman flown to Italy dies in hospital'* after it became clear she had serious preexisting conditions. The correction was only made two days later after the questionable version had been shared around the world.

A tale of two letters

In an internal report presented to the EGSC on May 14th , 2024, the Committee was again warned of problems with the BBC's coverage of Israel's war with Hamas.

This included a BBC News article about Nasser Hospital that appeared under the headline: *"Gaza medics tell BBC that Israeli troops beat and humiliated them after hospital raid".*

Under international law hospitals are exempt from military targeting – except in certain circumstances, which might include the use of a hospital as a military base. The BBC article did not make those circumstances clear and did not cover the evidence Israel had uncovered of Hamas operating there.

On another occasion ,a letter, signed by 600 lawyers, argued the UK Government was breaching international law in selling arms to Israel.

This letter received extensive coverage across BBC television and radio programmes as well as online.

A second letter, written by UK Lawyers for Israel and signed by more than 1,000 lawyers, argued the opposite was true. It was not covered at all online or on television and was referred to on just four bulletins on Radio 4.

An internal investigation by David Grossman into coverage also flagged the description of Hamas tunnels in one BBC report as being used to “move goods and people”.

David warned that while this was factually accurate it hardly told the whole story of what the tunnels were really for and laid the BBC open to the charge of *“aiming to in some way to sanitise Hamas’s terror infrastructure”.*

Did the ICJ say there was a “plausible risk of genocide” as the BBC reported?

The BBC’s coverage of the International Court of Justice’s interim order on January 26th, 2024, was also reviewed by David Grossman in his report to the EGSC.

Former ICJ President Joan Donoghue told BBC’s HardTalk programme the media had widely misinterpreted its findings. She said it was not correct to say the ICJ had ruled there was a *“plausible case of genocide”* in Gaza.

But a report to the EGSC flagged *“numerous instances”* of the phrase being used on BBC reports, analysis and live two-ways on both television and radio. It was also cited by International Editor Jeremy Bowen and on Newsnight.

The report said there were too many instances of the BBC misrepresenting the ICJ’s ruling to be listed in full.

The ICJ report runs to just 26 pages and was written in non-technical language. Had no BBC reporter troubled themselves to read it?

The internal review concluded: *“It is very clear and explicitly states that the court is not making any determination on the merits of South Africa’s case. The ICJ said it was only assessing whether what South Africa had alleged was potentially covered by the genocide convention.”*

Despite the HardTalk interview, it would take months for the BBC to make a clarification.

The BBC is prone to downplaying criticism by saying it receives similar numbers of complaints from both sides. Looking at the evidence set out above, it seems very hard for any pro-Palestinian observers to make a compelling case the BBC has a pro-Israel bias.

Claims against Israel seem to be raced to air or online without adequate checks, evidencing either carelessness or a desire always to believe the worst about Israel. The errors come thick and fast, sometimes with “eyewitness” testimony from locals who have Tweeted in praise of the

October 7 killings and worse. The BBC needs to accept it has systemic issues with the coverage. Only then can the process properly begin to fix the problem.
BBC bias dossier

BBC's bias 'pushed Hamas lies around the world'
Read our analysis in full

Conclusion

Apologies again for the length of this note but I thought Board members who do not attend EGSC on a regular basis might find this summary helpful.

There are clearly worrying systemic issues with the BBC's coverage in the areas set out above. From what I witnessed, I fear the problems could be even more widespread than this summary might suggest.

As I indicated at the start of this note, I have been surprised just how defensive Deborah and Jonathan in particular have been whenever issues are raised. Firm and transparent action plans to prevent the recurrence of problems are in short supply – and so, as you can see, errors are repeated time and again.

My hope is that the BBC Board may be able to begin a process of getting these issues properly addressed.

Michael Prescott