



## IMPARTIALITY AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

### ITV GUIDELINES

Anyone is free to become a member of any political party or organisation, and ITV recognises that some staff may wish to be politically active in their own time, outside the workplace and their working lives. It must also be recognised that active political involvement by programme makers, including presenters, or those carrying editorial responsibility within any ITV service may present conflicts of interest. In some circumstances such involvement can call into question the impartiality of the individual, the programme area, ITV or an individual ITV station. This is most acute in news and current affairs and in programmes dealing with political or public policy issues, controversies and debates, but may pose difficulties in any programme area.

ITV will not seek to obstruct any legitimate political activity unreasonably. But if political activity married with an individual's ITV work is likely to jeopardise ITV's reputation or requirement for impartiality, or undermine public confidence in any part of the network, that cannot be acceptable. A decision by any programme maker or editorial personnel to embark on active political involvement should therefore be declared immediately to the appropriate line manager. Consideration can then be given as to whether the activity is compatible with the responsibilities of the individual and ITV as broadcasters, or whether a conflict of interest is likely to arise. For the avoidance of doubt any employee **MUST** inform ITV before engaging in political activities in order that this consideration can be properly given.

*Three areas will be considered:*

- What is the nature and level of the individual's job?
- What responsibility does the individual carry for editorial decisions, programme production or programme policy?
- What is the nature and level of the political involvement?

In this context there is usually no significant difference between national and regional or local politics. An Anglia screen reporter choosing to stand for the council in Norwich is likely to present very similar issues to an ITN editor wanting to run for parliament.

*The individual's job*

- a) Are they known to the public, either in vision or through programme credits?
- b) What programme area do they work in? (All news and current affairs programmes, whether international, national or regional are subject to the most stringent of impartiality requirements.)
- c) How much actual influence do they hold, and how much perceived authority (e.g. screen reporters and presenters)?

It is very unlikely that anyone choosing significant political activity could continue to appear in vision as a news reporter or presenter, for instance, without a perception of partiality being created. Many specialist correspondents could not appear in these circumstances – for example, an education or health correspondent would be seen as compromised by a significant party affiliation – and general news reporters or presenters would not be able to cover many everyday issues for the same reason. Even a sports reporter would be seen as barred by political affiliation from reporting some sports news stories.

Election to political office presents an absolute bar to news personnel routinely appearing in vision. The Ofcom Code says "No politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer or reporter in any news programme unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified".

#### *Editorial and production responsibility*

- a) Do they command or shape any of ITV's programming, either entire programmes or individual items or strands?
- b) Do they significantly influence any programming, items or presentation which deals with public policy issues?

Context is all, of course. An AP on an ITV regional factual programme may sometimes have more command of the agenda and influence over content than a bulletin editor in network news. Again, it is unlikely that someone pursuing significant political activity can assume or maintain a senior level of editorial responsibility in news or current affairs. In some cases, if the individual wishes to pursue a significant level of political activity it may be possible for them to be moved to a less sensitive editorial/ production position if such a vacancy exists and it is practical to do so.

#### *Political involvement*

Aside of party membership, political involvement and activity takes several forms which pose varying risk of conflict of interest:

- a) Standing as candidate or prospective candidate in any election
- b) Holding office in a political party
- c) Canvassing on behalf of a party or election candidate
- d) Speaking on a public platform or writing for publication on issues of political controversy or controversial public policy (whether national or regional)
- e) Taking sides in a national or local referendum

The risk varies in the light of the individual's job and editorial responsibility, as detailed above. Again, in news and current affairs it is unlikely that any of these activities can be reconciled with the more sensitive positions, in vision or in editorial responsibility.

In particular, anyone who intends to seek nomination as an election candidate is unlikely to be able to continue programme or presentation appearances or high level programme responsibilities. If an individual is selected to stand as an election candidate they can not engage in any programme work which could be linked to political issues/ controversial issues of public policy. By definition, therefore, they can not appear in news and current affairs programmes (other than as interviewees in bona fide programming concerning that election) and are likely to be restricted in editorial work in other factual programming. It may be possible to transfer an individual to a less sensitive role on their seeking nomination or being selected as a candidate, in advance of any election campaign, if such a vacancy exists and it is practical to do so.

If in pursuing nomination/seeking election an individual's actions may undermine ITV's impartiality/reputation if they returned to the original role the individual will not be permitted to do so.

#### *Other public office*

Some forms of voluntary public office – e.g. becoming a magistrate or school governor – offer no perception of conflict with impartiality requirements, even though many nominees are put forward by political parties. Such appointments are generally acceptable, even for those working within news and current affairs.

#### *Suitable alternative less sensitive roles*

Where an employee wishes to continue in ITV employment whilst continuing with political activity, ITV will use every endeavour to see if any suitable vacancies are available. ITV is not legally obliged and will not create additional posts in order to guarantee continuing employment during or after a period of political activity. If no suitable vacancies exist and if the employee wishes to proceed with any political activity in circumstances where ITV determines that such activities are incompatible with the employee's role then the employee will need to decide whether to resign from employment. If the employee has been refused permission to pursue any political activity and chooses to do so in contravention of ITV's decision then ITV will consider termination of employment.

*Compliance with these guidelines*

These guidelines are part of ITV policy and as such if contravened ITV reserves the right to invoke the ITV Disciplinary procedure.

For further information regarding these guidelines please contact your Head of Department or HR Manager.

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