

Last updated March 2021

Reporting the UK – Revised Guidance

Key points

Accurate reporting of the UK's different governments and cultures is essential to the way our audiences view and judge the BBC's output.

We should respect and reflect the national and regional differences and sensitivities and report all parts of the UK accurately, consistently and fairly, avoiding stereotypes or clichés.

Content producers should use correct terminology and pronunciation for the relevant part of the UK.

Referrals to BBC National Directors

Editorial Guidelines [\(2.4.3\)](#): Any content producers intending to produce output about Northern Ireland or significant projects involving the Republic of Ireland, should notify Director Northern Ireland of their proposals at an early stage. Content producers outside Scotland and Wales should inform the director of the relevant nation of their plans to produce programme material which is based in the relevant nation or which deals significantly with national issues or themes.

General

BBC programmes and services should be relevant and appropriate for all our audiences in all parts of the United Kingdom. Audiences approach our output in different ways and with different expectations because their lives are shaped by different:

- cultural backgrounds
- life experiences
- civic and political institutions.

We should respect and reflect the national and regional differences and sensitivities and report all parts of the UK accurately, consistently and fairly, avoiding stereotypes or clichés.

Key differences

We should note that varying differences exist between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland which principally include:

- the powers of their political institutions - Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd – the Welsh Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the London Assembly and combined authorities.
- legal systems
- education
- crime
- health services
- social services
- transport

- local government and housing
- environment
- religious institutions
- political parties
- languages of the UK
- timing and length of school holidays
- job titles

Locating your story

When our UK audiences are affected differently by a story or issue we are reporting we should make it clear.

We should properly and proportionately label content that has limited applicability across the UK.

We should normally explain the difference in the first sentence of our report and in News programmes signal it in the headline as well. News Correspondents should try to refer at least once to the people actually affected by the story in their package.

The exact method of differentiation will vary from story to story. It may be achieved by:

- simply stating to which part of the UK a story relates;
- referring briefly to how things are done in other parts of the UK;
- adopting a more creative “compare and contrast” approach. For example, in a story about schools, highlighting the differences in the curriculum across the country.

Style, Language, Geography – and Flags

The easiest mistake to make is the casual and loose use of language which betrays a skewed perspective on a story or an inadequate understanding of institutions in different parts of the UK.

Common areas which cause problems include:

- The word "nation" can mean different things to different people. We must be clear what is meant when the word is used. It may be clearer to say United Kingdom or "the UK".
- Care should be taken in the use of “we” and “us”, particularly in sports commentary and coverage involving one of the home nations. For example, not all Scottish football fans would want their support for the English football team to be presumed.
- Groups which have "National" in their title do not always have a remit across the UK. For example, the remit of the National Association of Head Teachers is across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not Scotland, where school leaders are represented, for instance, by the AHDS (Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland) and School Leaders Scotland.

- We should take care in using the phrase “main parties” – this will mean different things in different parts of the UK and sometimes at different times. It will normally need some qualification, e.g. “at Westminster”.

Great Britain (or GB) is not a synonym for the UK as a whole. It doesn't include Northern Ireland. And whilst Ireland is the official name for the Republic of Ireland, it can also be used in referring to the island as a whole. Care is required to ensure that audiences understand what's being talked about/referred to.

We should take care when using terms such as ‘British’ and ‘English’ - they are not interchangeable. People in Northern Ireland may describe their national identity/affiliations in different ways – British, Irish, Northern Irish etc. and we should avoid language that makes assumptions about them.

Although interviewees may refer to Northern Ireland as ‘Ulster’ or ‘the North’ we should not, for reasons of clarity, use either as a synonym. Region is an acceptable and generally understood term for secondary references to Northern Ireland. We should avoid using the word "mainland" when talking about Great Britain in relation to Northern Ireland.

Londonderry is the official name of the City and County. Our general practice is to use this term in the first instance in BBC programmes and reports. We will always use the variant of Derry/Londonderry that organisations use in their own name/title.

The prefix Anglo- describes an English relationship with something and should not be used as a short hand for the UK's relationship. Its use may be appropriate in some (limited) contexts such as *the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (1985).

We also should be accurate and consistent in our graphics and insets. For example, we should not use the Union flag to illustrate a story about exam results in Scotland or England or Wales. The Ulster Banner (or Ulster flag) does not have official status as an emblem for Northern Ireland and is seen as contested by many people.

The use of the word Principality as a substitute for Wales is generally not appropriate, except in the context of talking about the Prince of Wales and Wales as a principality in that respect.

Geographical location should be described in a consistent way and with as much detail as is reasonable. We should take care when talking about "north, south, east and west...". Yorkshire may be the North if you are watching or listening in Southampton but not if you are in Inverness or Carlisle. If we mean the North of England we should say so.

Job titles can be different. In Scotland, the word Depute (as in Depute Head at a school) is widely used. It is a word that may be unfamiliar to audiences in other parts of the UK. So in scripting it is acceptable to refer to someone as: "her deputy". However we should not change Depute to Deputy when using the official title.

Getting your terminology right around Government, Parliaments and Assemblies

We should use the correct names for the Parliaments and Assemblies and the political posts in them:

- the Westminster Parliament – the House of Commons, the House of Lords
- the Scottish Parliament
- the Senedd – the Welsh Parliament
- the Northern Ireland Assembly
- the London Assembly

- On May 6th 2020, the National Assembly for Wales changed its name to become the Welsh Parliament, commonly known as the Senedd in everyday communications. Assembly Members (AMs) are now known as Members of the Senedd (MSs).
- Therefore, the formulation Welsh Parliament should be used in English or Senedd Cymru in Welsh, or more commonly Senedd in either language if the context is clearly understood by audiences. There were no changes to the name of the Welsh Government or titles of Welsh Government Ministers.

The phrase “the government” can mean different things to different people. People living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have two governments – at a UK level and a nation level. Our reporting – especially for UK-wide output - must be clear about which government in the UK is being referred to.

When we refer to government ministerial roles, we should be clear about their jurisdiction. For example, in script, it may be appropriate to say – in the right context - “the Health Secretary for England”. However, on-screen labelling should also reflect titles accurately, e.g. “UK government Health Secretary”.

In the Northern Ireland Executive, the First Minister and deputy First Minister hold joint office and have equal powers, seniority and responsibilities.

Health and Social Care (HSC) is the name of the publicly funded healthcare system in Northern Ireland.

The Belfast Agreement (1998) is also known as the Good Friday Agreement. Our usage should appropriately reflect both terms.

Broadcast Material from the Chambers

The BBC’s Editorial Guidelines (published before the name-change in Wales) say: *“The House of Commons, the House of Lords, committees of both houses, as well as the Scottish Parliament and the Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland have rules of coverage should normally be observed”*. ([10.3.6](#))

“Any proposal to amend material from the chambers of Parliaments or Assemblies (including Westminster) or any proposal to use material from the Parliaments or Assemblies at all outside news, factual programmes or content for educational purposes, must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics”. ([10.3.7](#))

There are separate rules of coverage for the devolved institutions (Scottish Parliament, The Senedd – the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly) to the Westminster Parliament.

Devolution in England

Outside Westminster, the governance of a significant number of people in England is by means of a range of different political bodies from unitary authorities to mayoralities of combined authorities.

There are directly elected mayors representing combined authorities, London boroughs, unitary authorities and other metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts.

All mayoral combined authorities have agreed devolution deals with central government, in which additional powers and budgets have been transferred from Whitehall.

While all combined authorities lead on planning and strategy for regional transport, skills training and economic development, some have additional devolved powers and budgets.

For example, the Mayor for Greater Manchester is additionally responsible for policies on health, housing, waste management, policing and the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

It's important to note that mayors of combined authorities are not equal counterparts with respect to the portfolio of services for which they are responsible.

We must also be clear in the use of titles. For example, there is a Mayor of Liverpool, and there is a Mayor for the Liverpool City Region.

On social and cultural issues in England, we should be careful about talking about issues such as a north/south divide since there may well be east/west differences and the boundaries of where north and south begins can be an issue for dispute.

Sources of Advice in addition to Editorial Policy

Content producers planning programme material which deals with national issues or themes within Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland should – if they are based outside the relevant nation – consult with a senior editorial figure in that nation at an early stage.

Content producers with particular queries about national, regional or local issues should contact the relevant Newsrooms for advice.

Advice on the correct pronunciation of names and places should be obtained from the relevant Newsroom and the BBC Pronunciation Unit.