PBS - KODIĊI TAL-ETIKA

33830. L-ONOR. GRAZIELLA ATTARD PREVI staqsiet lill-Ministru għall-Kultura, l-Artijiet u l-Gvern Lokali: Jista' l-Ministru jwieġeb il-mistoqsijiet parlamentari 32484 u 32871 u jqiegħed fuq il-Mejda tal-Kamra l-Kodiċi tal-Etika tal-PBS?

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ONOR. OWEN BONNICI: Qed inpoġġi fuq il-Mejda tal-Kamra l-informazzjoni rikjesta kif mgħoddi lili.

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Ethics Guidelines for Staff Members

Introduction

TVMnews is bound to cover the news with impartiality, and to treat audiences, news sources, advertisers and others fairly and openly, and to be seen to be doing so.

The act of reporting and presenting the news often puts journalists in the position of working very closely with sources. The need for ethical behaviour and avoidance of conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived is hereby strongly worded. The reputation of TVMnews is also affected by public perceptions, and so do the professional reputations of its staff members. Thus PBS and members of its news and current affairs staff share an interest in behaving ethically and in avoiding conflicts of interest or an appearance of a conflict.

Conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may come up in many areas. They may involve the relationships of staff members with audiences, news sources, advocacy groups, advertisers, or competitors; with one another, or with PBS. And at a time when two-career families are the norm, the civic and professional activities of spouses, family and companions can create conflicts or the appearance of conflicts. Staff members have an obligation to carry out their jobs—and their private lives—with no real or apparent conflicts of interest.

Scope

PBS believes beyond question that its staff share the values these guidelines are intended to protect. Whilst there may be a difference of views over applying these values which PBS will seek to resolve through mature discussion, nevertheless, PBS views any violation of these guidelines as a serious offence that may lead to disciplinary action, potentially including dismissal or termination, subject to the terms of engagement.

These guidelines are not an exhaustive compilation of all situations that may lead to ethical concerns or may give rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interest. PBS does not exclude action to against such situations simply because they are not explicitly listed in these guidelines and reserves the right to modify, alter and amend as appropriate.

This document also embraces other procedure documents, guidelines and policies which apply to the same people listed hereunder.

Applicability

These guidelines are applicable to all the news staff who work directly with the preparation of content, whether for news bulletins, news related content or current affairs programming, including during absence from work or on some sort of leave.

The applicability includes editors, news editors and sub-editors, journalists, reporters, newscasters, current affairs hosts, news & current affairs producers. These apply also to any other person who directly or indirectly is involved in the preparation, production or publishing of the news or current affairs. The same roles within the sport and digital media departments are included.

Our contracts with freelance contributors require them to avoid conflicts of interest, real or apparent. In keeping with that, they must honour these guidelines.

This group of people is referred to hereinafter as "staff" or "staff members".

The Law

Several sections of the law deal with media in Malta. Broadcasting is primarily regulated by the Constitution of Malta (*Chapter XI- Laws of Malta*), the Broadcasting Act (*Chapter 350 - Laws of Malta*) and its subsidiary legislation.

Subsidiary Legislation 350.14 entitled *'Requirements as to Standards and Practice Applicable to News Bulletins and Current Affairs Programmes'* is of particular relevance, and should be consulted regularly by all staff members.

Section 18 and Section 19 of Subsidiary Legislation 350.14 provide the following:

> *18. Impartiality of the Public Service Broadcaster*
>
> *18.1 Producers of news and current affairs programmes should have no outside interests or commitments which could damage the public service broadcaster's reputation for impartiality, fairness and integrity.*
>
> *19. Presenters and Reporters primarily associated with the Public Service Broadcaster*
>
> *19.1 Those known to the public primarily as presenters of, or reporters on, news programmes or programmes about current affairs broadcast on the public service broadcaster must be seen to be impartial. It is important that no off-air activity, including writing, the giving of interviews or the making of speeches, leads to any doubt about their objectivity on-air. If such presenters or reporters publicly express personal views off-air on controversial issues, then their on-air role may be severely compromised. It is crucial that in both their work with the public service broadcaster and in other non-public service broadcasting activities such as writing, speaking or giving interviews, they do not:*
>
> *i. state how they vote or express support for any political party;*
>
> *ii. express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current party political debate;*
>
> *iii. advocate any particular position on an issue of current public controversy or debate;*
>
> *iv. exhort a change in high profile public policy.*

Broadcasting Guidelines

PBS has also a set of Broadcasting Guidelines which bind every production published or commissioned by PBS. These guidelines also describe *individual responsibilities* and *external activities.*

These guidelines should be adhered to at all times and form an integral part of the guidelines listed below.

Guidelines

1. Staff members

1.1. Staff members are employed and contracted by PBS to provide a service as per the job description. This service is provided for and on behalf of PBS. Staff members are not independent contractors. They are expected to be loyal to its policies and editorial guidelines at all times, without exception.

1.2. No staff may exploit for personal gain any information acquired at work, or use his or her association with PBS to gain favour or advantage.

2. Ethical Behaviour

2.1. Ethical behaviour in an editorial environment is a must at all times. Ethical behaviour and practice should be an intrinsic part of the job and not simply motivated through written or verbal instructions or through policies and guidelines.

2.2. Honesty and fairness should always prevail. This is particularly true with reference to the delivery of accurate information in an impartial, just and balanced manner.

2.3. The work or output should not be designed by the beliefs, opinions or the desires of the staff member.

2.4. All staff members should adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity. Commercial or political considerations should not come into play.

2.5. Staff members should endeavour to get to the truth and declare it in the dispatches, programmes and news bulletins unequivocally in a manner which leaves no doubt about its validity and accuracy.

2.6. Similarly, we should treat the audiences with due respect and address every issue or story with due attention to detail by presenting a clear, factual and accurate picture. We must also give full consideration to the feelings of victims of crime, war, persecution and disaster, their relatives and the viewers, and to individual privacies and public decorum.

2.7. We should welcome fair and honest media competition without allowing it to affect adversely the standards of performance and thereby having a "scoop" would not become an end in itself.

2.8. We should present the diverse points of view and opinions without bias and with impartiality.

2.9. We should recognise diversity in human societies with all their races, cultures and beliefs and their values and intrinsic individualities so as to present unbiased and faithful reflection of them.

2.10. We should acknowledge a mistake when it occurs, promptly correct it and ensure it does not recur.

2.11. We should be transparent in dealing with the news and its sources while adhering to the internationally established practices concerning the rights of these sources.

2.12. Plagiarism, malicious distortion of facts, slander, and the publication of libellous allegations and/or false and baseless allegations, bribery in money or in some other way to give or withhold information should be considered as grave offences against the profession and a betrayal of public trust.

3. Obeying the Law

3.1. All laws and regulations must be observed and obeyed at all times during the pursuit of the news.

3.2. Staff must not break into buildings, homes, apartments or offices.

3.3. They may not purloin data, documents or other property, including such electronic property as databases and email or voice mail messages.

3.4. They may not tap telephones, invade computer files or otherwise eavesdrop electronically on news sources.

3.5. Staff members may not record conversations without the prior consent of all parties to the conversations. Even where the law allows recording with only one party aware of it, the practice is a deception. The editor may approve rare exceptions to this prohibition in places where recordings made secretly are legal.

3.6. The law is there to be observed at all times both during duty and off-duty. Extra care should be taken by staff members to avoid even the minor or trivial infringements.

4. Expressions of Opinion

4.1. Staff members must be mindful that opinions they express may damage the PBS's reputation as an unbiased source of news. They must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum, whether through blogs, social networks, comments pages, petitions, bumper stickers or lapel buttons. They

must not take part in demonstrations in support of causes or movements - or contribute to them in any way.

4.2. Staff should not behave in such a way that damages PBS's reputation for strict neutrality in reporting on politics and government; in particular, no one may wear campaign buttons or display any other form of political partisanship while on the job.

4.3. Social media, personal digital pages, personal posts or through comments on threads should not be considered as an escape root or a loophole for the expression of opinions. These guidelines should be respected and observed both on-duty, off-duty and in any form or medium.

4.4. Staff members are not to publicly demand a change in high profile public policy.

5. Personal Relationships

5.1. Relationships with sources require a diligent exercise of sound judgment and self discipline in order to avoid partiality.

5.2. Staff members must be sensitive that personal relationships with news sources can erode into favouritism, in fact or appearance. And conversely staff members must be aware that sources may be eager to win our good will for reasons of their own.

5.3. Staff members may meet sources informally over a meal or drinks, but they must keep in mind the difference between legitimate business and personal friendship. Scrupulous practice requires that periodically we step back and take a hard look at whether we have drifted too close to sources we deal with regularly.

5.4. Audience members may react with suspicion to revelations of friendships or romances that develop between journalists and their sources. Journalists and their managers must realise relationships that would be perfectly acceptable between other adults might not be viewed in the same way when there is also a journalist-source relationship.

5.5. Romantic involvement with a news source (including public figures) would foster an appearance of partiality. Therefore staff members who develop close relationships with people who might figure in coverage they provide, edit, package or supervise must disclose those relationships to the editor. In some cases, no further action may be needed. But in other instances staff members may have to recuse themselves from certain coverage.

6. Political Relationships

6.1. All PBS staff should refrain from publicly associating themselves with a political party or otherwise undermine the perception of the impartiality, integrity, independence and objectivity of PBS.

6.2. Expressing public support for any political party or expressing views or lobbying in favour of or against a policy which is a matter of current party political debate or a matter of public or industrial controversy violates these principles and is not allowed.

6.3. At no instance should one state in public how one intends to vote or how one has just voted in an election or referendum.

6.4. Endorsement of political candidates is not allowed. In general, staff members are not to undertake promotions or endorsements of political parties or individual candidatures or political organisations.

6.5. In cases where any PBS staff member decides:

i. To participate in any campaign or
ii. Stand as a candidate in a national, European or local election or to seek nomination as a party candidate, to work for or be publicly associated with any campaigning group or non-political organisation but which is involved in current public controversy whether political or not, or to undertake similar activities,

it is the duty of such staff member to inform the Editor-in-Chief of this activity, in writing, as soon as reasonably possible and prior to this information becoming public.

7. Gifts

7.1. Staff members may not accept gifts, tickets, discounts, free travel, reimbursements or other inducements from any individuals or organisations covered by PBS or likely to be covered by PBS.

7.2. Exceptions may be made for occasional mementos.

7.3. Gifts should be returned with a polite explanation.

7.4. Staff members may not accept employment or compensation of any sort from individuals or organisations who figure or are likely to figure in coverage they provide, edit, package or supervise.

7.5. Staff members must not ask news sources or others they meet in a professional capacity to extend jobs or other benefits to anyone. They also must not offer jobs, internships or any benefits to news sources.

7.6. Staff members may not accept anything that could be construed as a payment for favourable coverage or as an inducement to alter or forgo unfavourable coverage.

7.7. Staff members may accept any gifts or discounts available to the general public. They are also free to take advantage of conventional corporate discounts that PBS has offered to share with all employees including free admissions to events or other benefits extended to all employees.

7.8. If any such benefits do raise doubts, staff members should not make avail of them and bring them to the attention of the editor.

8. Business Interest

8.1. Members of the staff should declare any vested business interest whatever it may be, even if it may be considered as trivial.

8.2. Members of staff should also declare any proximity to a business through association or family ties.

9. Endorsements

9.1. Staff members should not act as celebrities or influencers. Any type of endorsement should be avoided.

9.2. It is conflicting and unacceptable for a PBS staff member to perform public relations work, paid or unpaid.

9.3. Staff members cannot do commercial or promotional appearances or endorsements (whether paid, in kind, or unpaid) in any form whatsoever, whether in person (physically, visually or aurally), in writing or through any other means.

9.4. Staff members may in good faith desire to help others be drawn into situations where they participate in fund raising activities for charitable causes. Such associations require the ascertainment of the reputation and scope of the charity so as to safeguard the reputation of PBS and TVMnews. There is an implied contract with our followers that we have investigated the cause and found it worthy and sound.

10. Speaking Engagements

10.1. No staff member may appear before an outside group if the appearance could reasonably create an actual or apparent conflict of interest or undermine public trust in PBS's impartiality. No staff member who takes part in a broadcast, webcast, public forum or panel discussion may write or edit news articles about that event.

10.2. Before any invitation, a staff member must always consult with the editor and obtain approval before accepting an engagement. The editor may ask for further clarifications. It is the the editor's sole purview whether to issue such approval or not.

10.3. Staff members may not accept invitations to speak, host, perform or otherwise appear in a public presentation, public manifestation, public event, corporate event or private event.

10.4. Academic speeches are allowed. Staff members may accept payment of speaking fees, honoraria, expense disbursement and free transportation only from

educational or other non-profit academic groups. Prior consent from the editor should always be obtained. It should be clear that unless otherwise authorised it should be made clear to the audience that the speech/lecture is not endorsed by PBS. To the contrary, the staff member should remind the audience that the views expressed are his or her own. No staff member should agree to an extensive speaking schedule without approval from the management.

11. Other work

11.1. Any other external work or commitment by a staff member is subject to management approval.

11.2. Staff members may not advise individuals or organisations on how to deal with the news media.

11.3. They may not, for example, advise candidates for public office, write or edit annual reports or contribute to the programs of sports teams.

11.4. They are free, however, to offer reasonable (voluntary and unpaid) help to institutions such as their child's school, a small museum, a community charity or their house of worship, given that this in no way may create a real or apparent conflict with these guidelines.

11.5. Staff members may not serve as ghost writers or co-authors for individuals who figure or are likely to figure in coverage they provide, edit, package or supervise. They may not undertake such assignments for organisations that espouse a cause.

12. Use of material

12.1. Employees who wish to use material (notes, stories (either written, published on socials or broadcast), images, video, graphics) they accumulated in their work for non-PBS purposes must seek written approval, copyright clearance and a license to syndicate. This approval must be received prior to submission to any outside publisher, purchaser, organisation or broadcaster, or to posting on websites or social networks. Under no circumstances should the PBS incur expenses for research material that is not used for PBS purposes.

13. Competitions and Contests

13.1. Staff members (or members of their family) may not participate in any competition run on PBS media or associated with PBS, unless such competition is specific for staff members.

13.2. Staff members may not enter competitions organised by individual or groups who may have interest in PBS's coverage.

13.3. They may not act as judges for these competitions or accept their awards.

13.4. Staff members may compete in competitions sponsored by groups whose members are all journalists or whose members demonstrably have no direct interest in the tenor of coverage of the field being judged.

13.5. Staff members who win unsought awards from groups that do not meet the criteria established here should decline politely.

Conclusion

PBS is the public service media provider in Malta and stands by the legacy of credibility through impartiality which we all value and seek to continually improve and update its positions to reflect today's needs and realities. To honour this duty, every staff member should make his utmost to abide by these guidelines to achieve our ultimate goal in providing this public service. This should be the good spirit of all and PBS will not allow individual behaviour to tarnish the collective effort. Staff members are also encouraged to report and bring forward any divergence from these guidelines and PBS commits to examine and scrutinise as necessary to act, rectify or amend as appropriate.