

## Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Section 50)

### Decision Notice

**Date: 23 November 2009**

**Public Authority:** British Broadcasting Corporation  
**Address:** 2252 White City  
201 Wood Lane  
London  
W12 7TS

### Summary

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The complainant made information requests to the British Broadcasting Corporation (the "BBC") for information about the number of FOI requests that it receives; certain outcomes from those requests; and the number of FOI requests its journalists or media reporters had sent to local authorities in Wales over a period of time. Although the BBC disclosed the information relating to the number of FOI requests that it receives and the requested outcomes it did not provide the requested information concerning the number of requests its journalists or media reporters had sent to local authorities as it was deemed to be outside the scope of the Freedom of Information Act ("the Act") because it was held for the purposes of journalism, art or literature. The Commissioner is satisfied that the information in question was held for the purpose of journalism, art and literature. Therefore the BBC was not obliged to comply with Parts I to V of the Act.

### The Commissioner's Role

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1. The Commissioner's duty is to decide whether the BBC has complied with its duties under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the "Act"). This Notice sets out his decision.

### The Request

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2. On 1 October 2009 the complainant requested the following information from the BBC:

*"I wish to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act*

*How many requests have you received under the Freedom of Information Act for the below (sic) years?*

*2006*

*2007*

*2008*

*2009 to date*

*Of the requests for each year, how many of the requests were answered within 20 working days?*

*How many requests have been subject to an internal review?*

*How many requests have been referred to the Information Commissioner?*

*How many requests for information have your journalists/media reporters sent to local authorities within Wales during the below years?*

*2006*

*2007*

*2008*

*2009 to date*

*Of those requests - how many for the above years have been sent to Cardiff*

*County Council?"*

3. On the same date the BBC responded and provided him with the majority of the information he had requested. It did not, however, provide information relevant to the following requests:

*" How many requests for information have your journalists/media reporters sent to local authorities within Wales during the below years?*

*2006*

*2007*

2008

2009 to date

*Of those requests - how many for the above years have been sent to Cardiff*

*County Council?"*

4. The BBC stated that the information relevant to these requests is excluded from the Act because it is held for the purposes of 'journalism, art or literature.' The BBC went on to say that it was not required to supply information held for the purposes of creating its output. The BBC also explained that it uses the Act to gather information about the operation of other public bodies as part of its core journalistic function.
5. The complainant responded on 6 October 2009 asking for an internal review to be carried out as he felt that the information could only be held for purposes of management and performance and should not be excluded from the Act. However, the BBC declined on the basis that it did not offer internal reviews when the information requested is not covered by the Act.

## The Investigation

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### Scope of the case

6. On 8 October 2009 the complainant contacted the Commissioner to complain about the way his requests for information had been handled. The complainant specifically asked the Commissioner to consider whether the withheld information was likely to be held for a number of purposes. He suggested that if it was and the dominant purpose test was applied, the information would fall within the scope of the Act. The Commissioner has only considered the two requests referenced in paragraph 3 above.

### Chronology

7. Having reviewed the request and the correspondence supplied by the complainant the Commissioner decided that it was not necessary to contact the BBC for further information or arguments regarding its handling of the request.
8. On 2 October 2009 the High Court handed down its judgments in relation to two appeals it had heard involving the application of the derogation by the BBC. Both judgments found in favour of the BBC. The Commissioner has applied the findings of the two judgments to the facts of this case. As explained further below, the High Court found that the dominant purpose test was not the correct test to apply when considering the derogation. The Commissioner is bound by the High Court decisions and he has therefore applied the test set out in the judgments when making a decision in this case. In view of this he has not given further consideration to the dominant purpose test as it is no longer relevant.

## Analysis

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### Substantive Procedural Matters

#### Jurisdiction

9. Section 3 of the Act states:

“3. – (1) In this Act “public authority” means –  
(b).... any body...which –  
(i) is listed in Schedule 1.....”

The entry in relation to the BBC at Schedule 1, Part VI reads:

“The British Broadcasting Corporation, in respect of information held for purposes other than those of journalism, art or literature”

Section 7 of the Act states:

“7. – (1) Where a public authority is listed in Schedule 1 only in relation to information of a specified description, nothing in Parts I to V of this Act applies to any other information held by the authority”.

The BBC has argued that the construction of sections 3, 7 and Schedule 1 means that the BBC is not a public authority where it holds the requested information for the purposes of journalism, art or literature. Consequently, the Commissioner would not have jurisdiction to issue a decision notice given the wording of section 50.

10. This issue has been considered by the House of Lords in the case of *Sugar v BBC*<sup>1</sup>. By a majority of 3:2, the Lords found in favour of the Appellant, Mr Sugar, in concluding that the Commissioner does have jurisdiction to issue decision notices regardless of whether the information that has been requested is derogated. The Commissioner adopts the reasoning set out by Lord Hope at paragraphs 54 and 55 where he said:

*“54. Section 7(1) says that where a public authority is listed in Schedule 1 only in relation to information of a specified description, nothing in Parts I to V of the Act applies to any other information held by the authority. What it does not say is that, in that case, the authority is a hybrid – a “public authority” within the meaning of the Act for some of the information that it holds and not a “public authority” for the rest. The technique which it uses is a different one. Taking the words of the subsection exactly as one finds them, what it says is that nothing in Parts I to V of the Act applies to any other “information” held by “the authority”. This approach indicates that, despite the qualification that appears against its name in Schedule 1, the body is a public authority within the meaning of the Act for all its purposes.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Sugar v BBC* [2009] UKHL 9

*That, in effect, is what section 3(1) of the Act provides when it says what “public authority” means “in this Act”. The exception in section 7(1) does not qualify the meaning of “public authority” in section 3(1). It is directed to the information that the authority holds on the assumption that, but for its provisions, Parts I to V would apply because the holder of the information is a public authority.”*

*55. .... The question whether or not Parts I to V apply to the information to which the person making the request under section 1(1) seeks access depends on the way the public authority is listed. If its listing is unqualified, Parts I to V apply to all the information that it holds. If it is listed only in relation to information of a specified description, only information that falls within the specified description is subject to the right of access that Part I provides. But it is nevertheless, for all the purposes of the Act, a public authority”.*

11. Therefore, the Commissioner has jurisdiction to issue a decision notice on the grounds that the BBC remains a public authority. Where the information is derogated, the Commissioner considers that the BBC has no obligations to comply with Parts I to V in respect of that information.
12. The Commissioner will first determine whether the request is for information held for the purposes of journalism, art or literature and if therefore the BBC is required to comply with Parts I to V in respect of the request.

## Derogation

13. The scope of the derogation has been considered by the High Court in the cases of the BBC v Steven Sugar and the Information Commissioner [EW2349]<sup>2</sup> and the BBC v the Information Commissioner [EW2348].<sup>3</sup> In both decisions Mr Justice Irwin stated:

*“My conclusion is that the words in the Schedule mean the BBC has no obligation to disclose information which they hold to any significant extent for the purposes of journalism, art or literature, whether or not the information is also held for other purposes. The words do not mean that the information is disclosable if it is held for purposes distinct from journalism, art or literature, whilst it is also held to any significant extent for those purposes. If the information is held for mixed purposes, including to any significant extent the purposes listed in the Schedule or one of them, then the information is not disclosable.” (para 65 EA2349 and para 73 EW2348).*

14. The Commissioner interprets the phrase “to any significant extent”, when taken in the context of the judgment as a whole, to mean that where the requested information is held to a more than trivial or insignificant extent for journalistic, artistic or literary purposes the BBC will not be obliged to comply with Parts I to V of the Act. This is the case even if the information is also held for other purposes.

<sup>2</sup> BBC v Steven Sugar & The Information Commissioner [2009] EWHC 2349 (Admin)

<sup>3</sup> BBC v The Information Commissioner [2009] EWHC 2348 (Admin)

15. For completeness, the Commissioner considers that where information is held for non-journalistic/artistic/literary purposes and is only held to a trivial or insignificant extent for the purposes listed in Schedule 1, then the BBC will be obliged to comply with its obligations under Parts I to V of the Act.
16. Thus, provided there is a relationship between the information and one of the purposes listed in Schedule 1, then the information is derogated. This approach is supported by Mr Justice Irwin's comments on the relationship between operational information, such as programme costs and budgets, and creative output:

*"It seems to me difficult to say that information held for 'operational' purposes is not held for the 'purposes of journalism, art or literature.'" (para 87 EW2348)*
17. The information relevant to the request need not be journalistic, artistic or literary material itself. As explained above all that needs to be established is whether the requested information is held to any significant extent for one or more of the derogated purposes of art, literature or journalism.
18. The two High Court decisions referred to above related to information falling within the following categories:
  - Salaries of presenters / talent
  - Total staff costs of programmes
  - Programme budgets
  - Programme costs
  - Payments to other production companies for programmes
  - Payments to secure coverage of sporting events and other events
  - Content of programmes / coverage of issues within programmes
19. In relation to all of the above Mr Justice Irwin found that the information was held for operational purposes related to programme content and therefore, to a significant extent for the purposes of journalism, art or literature.
20. The Commissioner recognises that the High Court cases did not specifically consider information of the nature requested by the complainant in this case. Nevertheless the Commissioner considers the comments made by Mr Justice Irwin regarding the need for a relationship between the requested information and the derogated purposes are relevant and therefore he has considered them here. The Commissioner is satisfied that information about the number of requests made by BBC reporters/journalists to local authorities is held for the purposes set out in Schedule 1 because it is used to feed into the creative output of the BBC.
21. In view of the above, the Commissioner has found that the request is for information held for the purpose of journalism, art or literature and that the BBC was not obliged to comply with Parts I to V of the Act.

## The Decision

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22. The Commissioner's decision is that as the request is for information held for the purposes of journalism, art or literature the BBC was not obliged to comply with Part I to V of the Act in this case.

## Steps Required

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23. The Commissioner requires no steps to be taken.

## Right of Appeal

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24. Either party has the right to appeal against this Decision Notice to the Information Tribunal. Information about the appeals process may be obtained from:

Information Tribunal  
Arnhem House Support Centre  
PO Box 6987  
Leicester  
LE1 6ZX

Tel: 0845 600 0877  
Fax: 0116 249 4253  
Email: [informationtribunal@tribunals.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:informationtribunal@tribunals.gsi.gov.uk).  
Website: [www.informationtribunal.gov.uk](http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk)

If you wish to appeal against a decision notice, you can obtain information on how to appeal along with the relevant forms from the Information Tribunal website.

Any Notice of Appeal should be served on the Tribunal within 28 calendar days of the date on which this Decision Notice is served.

**Dated the 23rd day of November 2009**

**Signed .....**

**Jo Pedder  
Senior Policy Manager**

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



## Legal Annex

### General Right of Access

**Section 1(1)** provides that -

“Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

(a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and

(b) if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him.”

**Section 1(2)** provides that -

“Subsection (1) has the effect subject to the following provisions of this section and to the provisions of sections 2, 9, 12 and 14.”

**Section 1(3)** provides that –

“Where a public authority –

reasonably requires further information in order to identify and locate the information requested, and

has informed the applicant of that requirement,

the authority is not obliged to comply with subsection (1) unless it is supplied with that further information.”

**Section 1(4)** provides that –

“The information –

in respect of which the applicant is to be informed under subsection (1)(a),  
or

which is to be communicated under subsection (1)(b),

is the information in question held at the time when the request is received, except that account may be taken of any amendment or deletion made between that time and the time when the information is to be communicated under subsection (1)(b), being an amendment or deletion that would have been made regardless of the receipt of the request.”

**Section 1(5)** provides that –

“A public authority is to be taken to have complied with subsection (1)(a) in relation to any information if it has communicated the information to the applicant in accordance with subsection (1)(b).”

**Section 1(6)** provides that –

“In this Act, the duty of a public authority to comply with subsection (1)(a) is referred to as “the duty to confirm or deny”.”