

Barbican

Editorial guidance on use of potentially offensive language

Background

The Barbican's ethics policy sets out that when programming work we do not set out to offend, however, one of our core values is to be brave and sometime provocative and we aim to sometimes programme work that responds to our fast-changing world. This includes work that engages in the debates that define our age, that is relevant to the issues that affect people's lives and that represents the widest possible range of human experience across a wide diversity of age, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and gender. The policy also recognises that our international outlook and programming approach can occasionally put us at the centre of difficult, nuanced and sometimes controversial debates.

These guiding principles should also be reflected in our editorial approach, whereby we do not deliberately set out to offend or provoke controversy but that we recognise that in some cases artists will want to present work that engages with challenging themes and that at times this involves the use of language that may cause offense.

Freedom of Expression and Editorial Guidelines

The Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance on Freedom of Expression, as protected by the Human Rights Act of 1998 by Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights 'does not protect statements that discriminate against or harass, or incite violence or hatred against, other persons and groups, particularly by reference to their race, religious belief, gender or sexual orientation.'¹ The guidance also states that a number of factors are likely to be relevant in judging whether use of language crosses the boundary into hate speech, including 'the intention of the person making the statement, the context in which they are making it, the intended audience, and the particular words used.'²

Similarly, editorial guidelines from public broadcasters such as the BBC and Channel 4 state that the context is key to the acceptability of language, with the BBC guidance stating that 'it is the responsibility of all content makers to ensure strong language is used only where it is editorially justified.'³ As reflected in this guidance, key to this editorial justification are questions of context relating to why the language is used, who uses it, and how it was used in terms of tone and intent.⁴

Barbican approach

As with other areas relating to the ethical questions, it is suggested that the Barbican takes a nuanced approach as to how it takes decisions on whether uses of potentially offensive language is justified in communications materials and in editorial. It is not the Barbican's role to ban or prevent certain words appearing in these materials or to censor artists, however, it is our responsibility not

¹ Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission Advice and Guidance on Freedom of Expression - <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/freedom-expression>

² Ibid.

³ BBC Editorial Guidance on Strong Language - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/strong-language/guidance-full#heading-audience-expectations>

⁴ Ibid.

to casually use language that may cause offense and to ensure that any use of potentially offensive language is justifiable and to provide a clear rationale and process as to how these decisions are made.

It is therefore suggested that the following process is adopted to make decisions of this nature:

- If an artist's name, title of a work or event/editorial copy contains terms that may cause offence but are mild in nature (e.g. mild/moderate expletives), it is the responsibility of individual departments to make a common-sense judgment on their appropriate use. It is expected in these cases that these words will be used in Barbican communications and marketing materials, but that sound judgment is applied in areas such as appropriateness for intended audience, whether contextualising text is needed and, if intended to be used in poster campaigns, that the language complies with Exterion Media/London Rail Codes of Practice.⁵
- If the language relates to strong swear words or terms that could be seen as derogatory in areas including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality or religion, usage should be signed off by the relevant Head of Department and/or Senior Manager across Communications, Marketing and relevant Artform. Where necessary this should also be agreed with the Artistic Director. In these cases, the following questions should be considered and answered when arriving at a decision on usage:
 - What language is being used?
 - Who is using the language and in what context?
 - What is the tone and intent of the language?
 - Is the language used necessary and justifiable? Is it integral to the artist's description of the work? What would be the implications if it was removed?
 - How have other organisations/publications dealt with the language describing this artist/work?
 - Where will this language be used in Barbican materials and what steps can be taken to ensure it is properly contextualised to audiences? Is it necessary to include any audience guidance/content warnings?
 - Are there any materials where it would be inappropriate to use this language or where it could be taken out of context (e.g. homepage of website, poster campaigns, social media advertising)?
 - Is any further research or consultation needed before a decision is taken?

⁵ Exterion Media Copy Approval Process and Codes of Practice - https://www.exterionmedia.com/uk/~media/files/uk/product_specs/london%20rail/copy-approval-for-london-rail.pdf