

## GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE USE OF EXPERTS IN AND ON CHANNEL 4 PROGRAMMES

### Introduction

The purpose of this note is to remind all of those involved in commissioning and making programmes for Channel 4, E4 and More 4 of best practice in relation to the use of experts in the production and broadcasting of our programmes.

An expert can often make or break a programme. This note is designed to help identify from the early stages when and where the intended use of a particular expert could prove potentially problematic. It is important to ensure that thorough background checks are made to establish the credibility and credentials of experts before placing reliance upon them. In doing so, we can close down what is often the first line of potential attack from someone trying to undermine the credibility and veracity of one of our programmes.

There is no intention to limit the types of bona fide experts which can be used within our programmes. An individual who lacks more traditional or mainstream qualifications can for another legitimate reason, e.g. through their experience, be considered authoritative. Provided they are not portrayed in a way which would mislead the viewer, their contribution may still be valuable.

These guidelines, which are intended to assist both commissioning editors and programme-makers, cover the use of experts over a widely differing range of functions throughout the production process and on a range of different programmes. Their roles are also varied from advising on a minor aspect of a programme behind the scenes, or at the opposite end of the spectrum where the expert's advice and role is a crucial and visible part of the programme.

Since these guidelines will apply to a broad scope of different circumstances, they are not intended to be proscriptive but rather to assist you in exercising your own discretion; obviously not all experts will need the same level of scrutiny.

### Practical Considerations

1. Consider the role of the expert in your programme. It is important to bear in mind the potential which the expert may have to influence the health, safety and welfare of contributors and viewers alike. Take special care when checking experts who play a more significant role, and are likely to be crucial to a central thesis in the programme. **Particular care is needed where advice given may be controversial and where vulnerable groups of people, such as children, will be affected.**
2. Has the expert been criticised or had their integrity, bona fides or methods questioned before? As a first step it is vital to check what is in the public domain about the expert through internet searches and press cuttings. Such a search may flag issues of concern requiring further investigation and referral up.

3. A reputable expert should not be reluctant to assist you in thoroughly vetting his or her credentials and background. Explain that vetting will be conducted prior to inclusion of the expert in the programme.
4. In order to avoid filming experts who ultimately cannot be used in the final programme, vetting of experts should be carried out before the start of filming. At the very latest checks must be finalised prior to broadcast. The commissioning editor and programme lawyer must be briefed on the expert's credentials.
5. A senior individual (at the level of series producer or above) must be clearly responsible for the scrutiny of experts and confirmation of their credentials.
6. An individual may be deemed 'expert' for a wide range of different reasons. The following points should be used to ascertain whether your expert is a credible authority on your programme's subject-matter.

#### Regulation

7. Is this field/industry regulated? An internet search can be used to establish this. If so, is it regulated by a professional organisation recognised by government?
8. Check whether your expert is a recognised member of this organisation. It is strongly advised that you obtain written evidence.
9. Where an expert is no longer affiliated to a professional body, it may be appropriate to make further checks to find out why their membership has lapsed or whether there are any other reasons, for example has any disciplinary action been taken against them?
10. If unregulated, check whether credible associations or membership bodies aimed at self-regulation are in operation in this expert's field. Does the expert belong to such an organisation and/or does he claim to adhere to its standards?

#### Qualifications

11. Do specific qualifications apply in this expert's field? If so, ensure that the expert holds these qualifications. In most circumstances it will be necessary to obtain a copy of qualification certificates or written confirmation from the awarding body.
12. With respect to unregulated industries, obtain copies of certificates or seek confirmation from the awarding body. Most importantly, assess the credibility of the body itself. What standing does this awarding body have? Is it recognised by credible peer associations? Is there any other evidence of standing in this expert's field?

#### References

13. Consider the impartiality and standing of all referees.

14. Where credibility depends on recommendation (for example, in unregulated professions) then several personal references from clients should be obtained and checked.
15. Where credibility depends on recommendation by an organisation or company in this field, this should be from a credible organisation or company and confirmed in writing.
16. Where appropriate, consider whether checks should also be made of other programme-makers who may have worked with that expert before.

#### Impartiality

17. Does the expert, or a body to which he is professionally affiliated, receive funding from any organisation? Does this raise an issue of bias or impartiality?
18. Consider whether the expert may have an agenda or axe to grind. Including in a programme an expert who has a hidden motive for voicing certain views could seriously damage any defence you may need to rely upon later (particularly if that motive is improper or untoward).

#### Personal agents, websites, commercial activities and other PR

19. Check with the expert that all of their PR material accurately and consistently represents their credentials and ensure that they are consistent with those included in the programme and all associated Channel 4 publicity.
20. Be alert to inconsistencies in material relating to the expert's details. Follow up any doubts you may have.
21. Do not rely solely on third parties, such as agents, to confirm an expert's credentials, make sure these are independently verified.

#### The programme itself

22. Take great care to portray the nature of expertise accurately. Avoid the use of terms which could mislead viewers. For instance, professional titles such as 'doctor' and 'nurse' should only be used in reference to contributors who are qualified and state-registered as medical professionals.
23. In some circumstances it may be prudent to convey to the viewer that experts involved in the programme-making have been thoroughly checked.

If you are in any doubt as to the application of these guidelines please ensure that you take early advice from your commissioning editor and as appropriate from your programme lawyer in the Legal & Compliance Department.