

BBC caused 'significant distress' to Jewish community with false anti-Muslim claims

The BBC caused "significant distress" to the Jewish community when it reported that students targeted in an anti-Semitic incident had used anti-Muslim slurs, Ofcom has ruled.

The watchdog found the BBC guilty of "significant editorial failings".



The group of Jewish young people was targeted as their bus travelled along Oxford Street in central London, with [footage showing men on the pavement performing Nazi salutes](#), spitting and punching the windows.

[In its coverage of the incident on December 2 last year](#), the BBC claimed that "racial slurs about Muslims" could be heard coming from inside the bus. However, [the audio was disputed](#).

The phrase which the BBC had interpreted as “dirty Muslims”, said in English, was identified by others as a Hebrew phrase which translated as: “Call someone, it’s urgent.”

The BBC received complaints about its interpretation and, in a report obtained on December 9, the BBC’s own translators disagreed on which phrase was used. Yet the broadcaster did not update its online news article for almost eight weeks.

“The BBC made a serious editorial misjudgement by not reporting on air, at any point, that the claim it had made about anti-Muslim slurs was disputed, once new evidence emerged,” the watchdog said. “Our investigation uncovered significant editorial failings in the BBC’s reporting of an anti-Semitic attack on Jewish students travelling on board a bus in London.

“The BBC’s reporters claimed that an audio recording made during the incident included anti-Muslim slurs – which it later changed to the singular ‘slur’ – which came from inside the bus. Shortly afterwards, it received evidence which disputed this interpretation of the audio. The BBC failed to promptly acknowledge that the audio was disputed and did not update its online news article to reflect this for almost eight weeks.

“During this time, the BBC was aware that the article’s content was causing significant distress and anxiety to the victims of the attack and the wider Jewish community. This, in our opinion, was a significant failure to observe its editorial guidelines to report news with due accuracy and due impartiality.”

“The BBC could – and should – have acted much more promptly and transparently in responding to the issues raised. . . it demonstrates that the BBC has further to go in learning how to respond when its reporting is in contention. We consider it deeply unfortunate that the BBC’s handling of complaints in

this case and its failure to represent the views from the Jewish community became the overriding focus of this incident and detracted from the focus being on the anti-Semitic incident and the experiences of the victims.”

Ofcom’s ruling “validates our significant concern over the BBC’s actions on this issue,” the Board of Deputies said,

A spokesman for the Campaign Against Antisemitism said: “Almost a year after the BBC’s abominable coverage of an [anti-Semitic incident on Oxford Street](#), Ofcom has seen what every viewer and reader of the BBC’s coverage could but which the BBC itself refused to accept: its reportage added insult to the injury already inflicted on the victims and the Jewish community . . . “