



## BBC DETAILED ANALYSIS

case073\_False abuse claims 'a disaster for BBC' says Hewlett.en

Broadcast: BBC BROADCAST ANALYSIS | Analyzed: 2026-05-11 22:36

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**OVERALL  
SCORE**

**3.3/10**

*Slight imbalance*

0 = balanced, 10 = strongly biased/manipulative

## POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Classification based on Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) 2024

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES 2024) is an academic survey of 609 political scientists in 31 countries. Each party is rated on a scale from 0 (far left) to 10 (far right).

Party	Green	SNP	Lab	LibDem	Con	Reform
CHES	1.85	2.90	3.50	4.60	7.30	8.80
Spectrum	<i>Left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Center</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Right</i>

The overall tendency is presented on a 0–10 scale (0 = strongly left-favoring, 5 = balanced, 10 = strongly right-favoring). The calculation is based on the difference in average favoritism of left vs. right parties (grouping per CHES 2024).

**TENDENCY (L – R)**

**5.5 / 10**

*Balanced*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

← Left

Right →

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2024 — [chesdata.eu](https://chesdata.eu) | [Jolly et al., Electoral Studies, 2022](#) | Thresholds: [Pew Research Center](#)

This section provides political context and does not contribute to the overall score.

## BROADCAST INFO AND TOPIC FRAMEWORK

### Broadcast Data

- Title: Unidentified BBC discussion programme (internal reference: BBC Newsnight/McAlpine discussion segment)
- Date (from filename): Not specified in transcript — internal evidence suggests November 2012 (McAlpine/Newsnight scandal context)
- Estimated Length: Approximately 3–4 minutes (transcript runs 00:00–03:24)

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- Presenter/Reporter: Not named in transcript (referred to implicitly as interviewer/host)
- Persons Interviewed:

Actors	Function	Party/Affiliation	Political Spectrum
"Steve" (named at 01:52)	Media commentator / journalist (identity unconfirmed from transcript alone)	Unaffiliated / journalistic	Centre
Second voice (unnamed)	Co-discussant / presenter or second guest	Unaffiliated	Not determinable

## Main Topic

A media criticism discussion examining the BBC Newsnight programme's decision to broadcast an unverified allegation linking Lord McAlpine to child sexual abuse at North Wales care homes, and the subsequent political and journalistic fallout.

## World-Knowledge Context

In November 2012, BBC Newsnight broadcast a report in which a care home abuse survivor, Steve Messham, implied — without naming him directly — that a senior Conservative politician from the Thatcher era had abused him. Social media rapidly identified Lord Alistair McAlpine, former Conservative Party Treasurer. The allegation was false: Messham later confirmed he had been shown the wrong photograph and had never accused McAlpine. The BBC had previously been criticised for not broadcasting the Jimmy Savile abuse investigation, creating institutional pressure to be seen as willing to report on establishment figures. The Newsnight broadcast triggered Lord McAlpine's defamation action, the resignation of BBC Director-General George Entwistle, and a government announcement of a new inquiry into North Wales care home abuse (the Macur Review, later the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, IICSA). The episode sits at the intersection of child protection, press freedom, institutional accountability, and the BBC's editorial independence.

## Assessment: Was Each Perspective Addressed?

### [A] ADDRESSED

Timestamp: 00:00–01:16 — Quote: "how on earth did this get on there because it looks for all the world well on the face of it well we know a story that is simply not true" — Addressed substantively, though without internal BBC sources.

### [B] ADDRESSED (partially)

Timestamp: 01:07–01:14 — Quote: "that's very damaging to a what someone who was a very prominent of individual it's not true it's plainly now not true" — Acknowledged but not explored in depth; McAlpine has no voice in the segment.

### [C] ADDRESSED (partially)

Timestamp: 02:27–02:37 — Quote: "the man who made thee made these femme in the first place who NASA's mistaken it wasn't Lord McAlpine everyone acknowledges indeed the image the water has inquiry acknowledged that this man has experienced serious abuse" — Messham's genuine victimhood acknowledged but his perspective not represented directly.

### [D] ADDRESSED (partially)

Timestamp: 02:01–02:12 — Quote: "at the heart of it are there not still questions that remain to be asked and examined about what went on in those care homes in North Wales" — Raised briefly but not developed.

### [E] OMITTED

No timestamp available — The role of Twitter/social media in naming McAlpine before and after the broadcast is not discussed despite being central to the harm caused.

### [F] ADDRESSED



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Timestamp: 02:41–03:04 — Quote: "it looks as if the government called the new inquiry in part as a response to what news night a broadcast" — Addressed, though speculatively.

[G] ADDRESSED (partially)

Timestamp: 00:36–00:48 — Quote: "the original waterhouse inquiry the looked at abuse of Bryn Estyn had gone into this claim made by this man and again about Lord McAlpine and found it to be without foundation" — Referenced but not examined critically.

[H] OMITTED

No timestamp — The chilling effect on future investigative journalism about powerful figures is not discussed.

[I] OMITTED

No timestamp — Legal consequences (defamation, Ofcom, BBC Trust) are entirely absent.

[J] ADDRESSED (partially)

Timestamp: 01:28–01:44 — Quote: "it looks as I say as if it's on the rebound having been criticized previously for not believing victims in the case of Savile here we have someone who is a victim of course victims have every right to be heard but just not on Newsnight until their story is checked" — The tension is acknowledged but not given adequate depth.



## CHAPTER 1 — DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE 15 CRITERIA

### Hard Facts — 9 techniques that are countable and scientifically verifiable

<b>1. EXPERT SELECTION</b>									<b>5/10</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	6	7	8	9	10

<b>Expert 1: "Steve" — Media Commentator (identity unconfirmed)</b>	
<b>Timestamp</b>	00:00 onwards (primary speaker throughout)
<b>Statement</b>	***I'm pretty sure that this man's story was investigated at least twice by the BBC previously and dropped because he couldn't be made to stand up**
<b>Classification</b>	Presents as an informed media insider with knowledge of BBC editorial processes. No institutional affiliation stated. No credentials verified within the transcript.

Missing countervoice: A BBC editorial executive, a child protection specialist, or a media law expert would have provided structured counterbalance.

#### Source Depth Check:

**(a) FUNDING:** Unknown — no institutional affiliation disclosed. Potential freelance journalist or media commentator. No identifiable conflict of interest declared.

**(b) MANDATE:** As an unaffiliated commentator, there is no formal mandate. Compatibility with neutral assessment is therefore neither confirmed nor excluded.

#### **(c) CREDIBILITY MATRIX (Source Traffic Light, 6 dimensions, -2 to +2):**

D1 Conflict of Interest: [0] — No declared affiliation; possible undisclosed media industry relationships

D2 Personal Risk: [+1] — Publicly criticising the BBC carries some professional risk in the UK media environment

D3 Subject Competence: [+1] — Demonstrates familiarity with BBC editorial processes and the Waterhouse Inquiry; however, claims are asserted rather than sourced

D4 Opinion Consistency: [0] — No prior statements available for comparison

D5 Emotionalisation vs. Data: [0] — Mix of factual claims and speculative framing ("you can imagine the conversation in number 10")

D6 Source Level: [-1] — Secondary at best; no primary documents cited

**(c) FACHKOMPETENZ:** The speaker is presented implicitly as a knowledgeable insider whose assessments carry authority, without any disclosure of his institutional position or potential interests. This constitutes soft Technique 12 (source selection presenting partial perspective as neutral expertise).

<b>Expert 2: Second voice (unnamed co-discussant)</b>	
<b>Timestamp</b>	01:50–02:12
<b>Statement</b>	***at the heart of it are there not still questions that remain to be asked and examined about what went on in those care homes in North Wales and whether we've ever had the true full story**
<b>Classification</b>	Functions as a moderating voice raising the child protection dimension, but identity and credentials are entirely unknown.



Source Depth Check:

(a) **FUNDING:** Unknown.

(b) **MANDATE:** Unknown.

(c) **CREDIBILITY MATRIX:**

D1 Conflict of Interest: [0] — Unknown

D2 Personal Risk: [0] — Unknown

D3 Subject Competence: [0] — Unknown

D4 Opinion Consistency: [0] — Unknown

D5 Emotionalisation vs. Data: [+1] — Question is measured and evidence-oriented

D6 Source Level: [-1] — No sources cited

(c) **FACHKOMPETENZ:** This voice serves a structural function of appearing to balance the discussion by raising the child protection angle, but without credentials or sourcing, it cannot be assessed as genuine expert input.

*Missing Expert Groups:*

- Media law / defamation barrister
- Child protection specialist with knowledge of North Wales cases
- BBC editorial standards expert (independent of the BBC)

*Summary (Matrix Result):*

- "Steve": YELLOW (+1) — Knowledgeable but unverified, speculative elements, no sourcing
- Second voice: YELLOW (0) — Structurally balancing but entirely unverifiable



## 2. SOURCE SELECTION

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Claims without primary source = penalty points (rumour check)

### Source 1: The Waterhouse Inquiry

#### Timestamp

00:36–00:48 — Statement: *“the original waterhouse inquiry the looked at abuse of Bryn Estyn had gone into this claim made by this man and again about Lord McAlpine and found it to be without foundation”*\*

- (a) Funding and governance:** The Waterhouse Tribunal of Inquiry (1996–2000) was a statutory public inquiry commissioned by the UK government. Publicly funded.
- (b) Structural conflict of interest:** As a government-commissioned inquiry, it has been subsequently criticised — including by the Macur Review (2016) — for having a narrower scope than was appropriate and for potentially missing evidence. Citing it as definitive authority without acknowledging these subsequent criticisms is misleading.
- (c) Missing counterpoint:** The Macur Review's finding that the Waterhouse Inquiry had significant limitations is entirely absent from the segment, despite being directly relevant to the claim that the allegation had been thoroughly investigated.

Source Depth Check — Waterhouse Inquiry:

- (a) Funding:** UK Government (statutory inquiry) — public funding
- (b) Mandate:** To investigate abuse in North Wales care homes — compatible with neutral assessment of abuse claims, but scope was later found to be limited
- (c) Conflict of interest:** Government-commissioned inquiries carry inherent risk of scope limitation; Macur Review confirmed this
- (c) FACHKOMPETENZ:**
- D1 Conflict of Interest: [-1] — Government-commissioned; scope later found limited
  - D2 Personal Risk: [+2] — Tribunal members had professional reputations at stake
  - D3 Subject Competence: [+2] — Statutory inquiry with legal powers
  - D4 Opinion Consistency: [+1] — Findings were consistent with other investigations at the time
  - D5 Emotionalisation vs. Data: [+2] — Formal legal process, evidence-based
  - D6 Source Level: [+2] — Primary source (statutory inquiry report)

However: The failure to note the Macur Review's subsequent criticisms of the Waterhouse Inquiry's scope means the source is cited selectively, presenting it as more definitive than it subsequently proved to be.

- (e) Missing counterpoint:** Macur Review (2016) findings on Waterhouse limitations — not cited.

*Summary: The segment relies on a single institutional source (the Waterhouse Inquiry) to establish that the allegation was thoroughly discredited, without acknowledging that this inquiry was itself subsequently found to have had significant limitations. This selective sourcing strengthens the argument that the BBC broadcast a story with no credible basis, while omitting evidence that the underlying questions about North Wales abuse were not fully resolved.*



3. TIME DISTRIBUTION									3/10
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Estimated speaking time:

- "Steve" (primary commentator): approximately 2 min. 45 sec. (approximately 78%)
- Second voice (co-discussant/presenter): approximately 45 sec. (approximately 22%)
- Presenter (if distinct from second voice): 0 sec. (0%) — no separate moderator identifiable

*Summary: The segment is heavily dominated by a single voice ("Steve"), which is structurally appropriate for a short expert commentary format but means that only one analytical perspective is developed in any depth. The second voice functions primarily as a prompt rather than as an independent analytical contributor.*



#### 4. OMISSION (Selective Omission)

6/10

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

##### Omission 1:

###### Context

The role of social media — particularly Twitter — in naming Lord McAlpine before and after the Newsnight broadcast is entirely absent.

Relevant at: Throughout, but particularly 00:55–01:16

###### Effect

The omission suggests the harm was caused solely by the BBC broadcast, when in fact the viral social media identification of McAlpine was arguably the primary mechanism of reputational damage. This omission protects the BBC from the full weight of its role in triggering the social media storm.

##### Omission 2:

###### Context

Lord McAlpine's own response, his legal action, and the settlements reached with the BBC and ITV are not mentioned.

Relevant at: 01:07–01:14

###### Effect

Without this information, the audience cannot assess the concrete legal and financial consequences of the BBC's error, which were substantial. The omission reduces the perceived severity of the editorial failure.

##### Omission 3:

###### Context

The specific editorial chain of command at Newsnight — who commissioned, who approved, who failed to apply verification standards — is entirely absent.

Relevant at: 00:55–01:16

###### Effect

Without identifying the specific editorial failure points, the discussion remains at the level of institutional abstraction rather than accountability, making systemic reform less likely to be demanded by the audience.

*Summary: Three significant omissions collectively reduce the perceived severity of the BBC's editorial failure: the social media amplification mechanism, the legal consequences for Lord McAlpine, and the specific editorial accountability chain. These omissions are consistent with a framing that treats the episode as an institutional embarrassment rather than a serious harm to an individual.*

## Missing Voices

- BBC Editorial Management representative: Would have explained the internal decision-making process that allowed the broadcast to proceed.
- Lord McAlpine or his legal representative: Would have provided the perspective of the falsely accused individual and the legal/reputational damage sustained.
- Steve Messham directly: Would have clarified the circumstances under which he was misled about the identity of his abuser.



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- Child protection specialist/NSPCC representative: Would have contextualised the broader North Wales abuse picture beyond the McAlpine allegation.
- Media law expert (defamation barrister): Would have explained the legal exposure of the BBC and the standards required before broadcast.
- Ofcom/BBC Trust regulatory expert: Would have addressed the regulatory framework and likely consequences.
- Social media researcher: Would have explained the amplification mechanism by which McAlpine was named online before and after the broadcast.
- Former Waterhouse Inquiry participant: Would have assessed whether the original inquiry's findings on this specific allegation were adequate.



## 5. NUMERICAL MANIPULATION

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Complete figures include: absolute value, proportion (%) and trend

### Finding 1:

<b>Timestamp</b>	00:27–00:53
<b>Quote</b>	<i>“I’m pretty sure that this man’s story was investigated at least twice by the BBC previously and dropped... on at least three occasions and possibly more this man’s story about Lord McAlpine has been found to be not true”*</i>
<b>Missing context</b>	The claim of "at least twice" and "at least three occasions" is asserted without citation of specific investigations, dates, or outcomes. The escalation from "twice" to "three occasions" within the same passage suggests imprecision rather than documented fact.
<b>Effect</b>	The repeated numerical claims create an impression of overwhelming prior evidence against the allegation, which may be accurate but is presented without verifiable sourcing. The audience cannot assess whether these figures are correct.

*Summary: Numerical claims are used to reinforce the argument that the allegation was thoroughly discredited before broadcast, but without sourcing these figures cannot be verified. The manipulation is mild — the direction of the claim is likely accurate — but the absence of citation is a journalistic weakness.*



<b>6. GUILT BY ASSOCIATION</b>									<b>1/10</b>
<b>1</b>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

<b>Association 1:</b>	
<b>Timestamp</b>	02:41–03:04
<b>Quote</b>	<i>**"it looks as if the government called the new inquiry in part as a response to what news night a broadcast i mean you can imagine the conversation in number 10"</i>
Technique: The government's decision to call a new inquiry is associated with panic and political self-interest ("unless you want to end up like the BBC") rather than genuine child protection concern.	
<b>Effect</b>	This association implies the government is acting in bad faith, motivated by fear of reputational damage rather than by concern for abuse survivors. However, this is presented as speculation rather than assertion, which limits the manipulative force.

*No persons are labelled as "conspiracy theorists" or equivalent in this segment. The Guilt by Association technique is present only in mild form in relation to government motivations.*

*Summary: Guilt by Association is present only in a mild, speculative form directed at the government's motivations for calling a new inquiry. No individuals are discredited through association with negative groups. Score reflects the limited application of this technique.*



## 7. TIMING

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### Finding 1:

Position: 00:00–00:07 (opening)

Content: "for the BC this is just a it's a disaster"

Timing effect: The segment opens with the strongest possible negative characterisation of the BBC's situation. This primes the audience to receive all subsequent information through a crisis-management lens, making it harder to assess the episode from a child protection or individual rights perspective.

### Finding 2:

Position: 03:06–03:24 (closing)

Content: "if the grounds had anything to do with what was put on Newsnight then we've all been sold upon"

Timing effect: The segment closes not with a reflection on the harm caused to Lord McAlpine or to abuse survivors, but with scepticism about the government's new inquiry. This closing placement ensures the audience's final impression is one of political cynicism rather than accountability for the BBC's error.

*Summary: The opening and closing placements are both strategically significant: the opening frames the episode as a BBC institutional crisis, and the closing redirects critical attention toward government motivations. Together, these timing choices soften the overall verdict on the BBC.*



## 8. SELECTIVE OUTRAGE

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Outrage = bias. Selective outrage amplifies the finding. Score = outrage level (0–5) + selectivity (0–5)

*Methodological Principle (v2.2): Before any assessment, the trigger event must be documented. A reaction can only be assessed as selective if comparable triggers from other positions produced no analogous reaction.*

### Finding 1:

#### Timestamp

01:16–01:25

Trigger event: The BBC's decision to broadcast an unverified allegation.

Reaction: "there are questions about the BBC's journalistic standards which you can't you simply can't duck when this kind of thing happens"

#### Comparison

The government's decision to call a new inquiry — which "Steve" himself characterises as potentially motivated by political panic — receives no comparable expression of concern about standards or accountability. The language used for the government is speculative and mildly sceptical ("you can imagine") rather than the direct accountability language used for the BBC.

Asymmetry: Mild. The BBC receives stronger accountability language than the government, but the difference is not extreme and may reflect the fact that the BBC's error is the established subject of the segment.

*Summary: There is a mild asymmetry in the accountability language applied to the BBC versus the government, but this is partially explained by the BBC's editorial failure being the established factual subject of the discussion. The asymmetry is not severe enough to constitute a major finding.*



9. COMPLETENESS									6/10
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*Share of covered perspectives*

*Inverted: original value measures coverage (higher = better). Shown as deviation (higher = larger gaps).*

- [A] The BBC's institutional editorial failure — why did internal checks not catch this?
- [B] Lord McAlpine's perspective as the falsely accused individual and the damage to his reputation
- [C] Steve Messham's perspective as a genuine abuse survivor who was misled about the identity of his abuser
- [D] The broader, still-unresolved questions about abuse at North Wales care homes (Bryn Estyn etc.)
- [E] The role of social media in amplifying unverified allegations before broadcast
- [F] The government's motivations in calling a new inquiry — genuine child protection concern vs. political management
- [G] The Waterhouse Inquiry's prior findings and their adequacy or inadequacy
- [H] The chilling effect on legitimate investigative journalism about establishment figures
- [I] Legal and regulatory consequences — Ofcom, BBC Trust, defamation law
- [J] Victim advocacy perspective — the tension between believing survivors and journalistic verification standards



## Soft Facts — 6 qualitative techniques

### 10. FRAMING

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#### Finding 1:

Timestamp	00:00–00:07
Quote	<i>“for the BC this is just a it's a disaster I mean you have a program like new tonight getting just in the last number of weeks has been flayed alive”</i>
Manipulation	The topic is framed immediately and exclusively as an institutional crisis for the BBC, not as a story about a falsely accused individual or about genuine abuse survivors.
Why problematic	This framing prioritises institutional reputation over the human consequences — Lord McAlpine's defamation and Steve Messham's exploitation — and sets the entire discussion within a media-management register rather than a child protection or justice register.

#### Finding 2:

Timestamp	01:28–01:34
Quote	<i>“it looks as I say as if it's on the rebound having been criticized previously for not believing victims in the case of Savile”</i>
Manipulation	The Savile comparison frames the BBC's error as a reactive overcorrection, implicitly excusing it as understandable institutional psychology rather than a straightforward editorial failure.
Why problematic	This framing reduces editorial negligence to a sympathetic narrative of an organisation caught between two impossible pressures, which may generate audience sympathy for the BBC rather than critical scrutiny.

#### Finding 3:

Timestamp	03:06–03:24
Quote	<i>“if the grounds had anything to do with what was put on Newsnight then we've all been sold upon”</i>
Manipulation	The closing frame positions the government's new inquiry as potentially illegitimate — “sold a pup” — if it was triggered by the Newsnight broadcast, thereby redirecting critical attention from the BBC's error toward government opportunism.
Why problematic	This closing reframe shifts the audience's final impression away from BBC accountability and toward political scepticism, softening the overall verdict on the broadcaster.



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*Summary: The segment is consistently framed as a story about institutional media management and political reaction rather than about the harm caused to a falsely accused individual or to genuine abuse survivors. This framing systematically reduces the severity of the BBC's editorial failure.*



11. LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY									3/10
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Finding 1:	
Timestamp	00:05–00:07
Quote	<i>“has been flayed alive”</i>
Manipulation	Vivid, visceral language describing criticism of the BBC as violent punishment, generating audience sympathy for the institution.
Why problematic	Neutral alternative would be: "has faced significant criticism." The hyperbolic register positions the BBC as victim rather than as the party responsible for a false allegation.

Finding 2:	
Timestamp	01:00–01:04
Quote	<i>“it looks for all the world well on the face of it”</i>
Manipulation	The repeated hedging phrase "on the face of it" / "it looks" is used when making the strongest factual claim (that the story was false), introducing unnecessary epistemic uncertainty about what was by this point established fact.
Why problematic	Neutral alternative: "we know the story was false." The hedging language inadvertently softens the factual record of the BBC's error.

Finding 3:	
Timestamp	03:22–03:24
Quote	<i>“we’ve all been sold upon”</i>
Manipulation	The colloquial phrase "sold a pup" (meaning deceived into accepting something worthless) is applied to the government's inquiry, framing it as a fraudulent product rather than a potentially legitimate child protection response.
Why problematic	Neutral alternative: "the inquiry may have been called on insufficient grounds." The idiomatic framing is dismissive and prejudices the inquiry's legitimacy without evidence.

*Summary: Language choices throughout the segment tend to humanise and sympathise with the BBC as an institution while applying sceptical or dismissive language to external actors (the government, the inquiry). The overall linguistic register is that of insider media commentary rather than impartial analysis.*



## 12. MODERATION BEHAVIOUR

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*Methodological Principle (v2.2): Before any assessment, the trigger event must be documented. An intervention can only be assessed as asymmetric if comparable triggers from other guests produced no analogous intervention.*

### Finding 1:

**Timestamp** 01:50–02:01

Trigger event: "Steve" has been speaking at length about BBC institutional failure without being challenged on his speculative claims.

**Quote (moderator/second voice)**

*"there are two aspects to this aren't there though Steve certainly questions serious questions to be asked about the way the story was handled by the media across the board and of course the internet aspect of this but at the heart of it are there not still questions that remain to be asked"*

**Comparison**

No comparable challenge is issued when "Steve" makes the speculative claim at 02:53–02:57: *"you can imagine the conversation in number 10 i'm guessing at this"* — this explicit admission of speculation receives no pushback.

Asymmetry: The second voice does introduce a mild corrective at 01:50, but the explicit speculation about government motivations at 02:53 — which "Steve" himself flags as guesswork — receives no challenge. Partial asymmetry is present but not severe given the short format.

### Finding 2:

**Timestamp** 02:53–03:04

Trigger event: "Steve" explicitly states he is speculating about government motivations ("I'm guessing at this") and then proceeds to construct a detailed speculative scenario.

**Quote**

*"you can imagine the conversation in number 10 i'm guessing at this you can imagine God says unless you want to end up like the BBC IE delay delay delay"*

**Comparison**

No analogous speculative claim about BBC motivations is allowed to develop unchallenged — the second voice at 01:50 does challenge the BBC-focused narrative by raising the child protection angle.

Asymmetry: Speculation about government motivations is allowed to run without challenge; the BBC-critical framing receives a mild corrective. This represents a marginal asymmetry favouring the BBC.

*Summary: Moderation behaviour shows a mild asymmetry: speculation about government motivations is unchallenged while the BBC-critical framing receives a gentle corrective. However, given the very short format and the fact that both voices are broadly aligned, the asymmetry is not severe enough to constitute a major finding.*



### 13. QUESTION ASYMMETRY

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#### Asymmetry 1:

To "Steve", 01:50: "there are two aspects to this aren't there though Steve" — soft/prompting

To "Steve", 02:01: "at the heart of it are there not still questions that remain to be asked" — soft/prompting

#### Comparison

No hard questions are directed at "Steve" at any point. The second voice's interventions are consistently framed as additions or gentle redirections rather than challenges.

#### Assessment

Given that only two voices are present and the format is commentary rather than adversarial interview, the absence of hard questioning is structurally expected. However, the failure to challenge "Steve's" explicit speculation at 02:53 represents a missed opportunity for basic journalistic rigour.

*Summary: The format does not lend itself to adversarial questioning, and the asymmetry score is accordingly low. The one notable failure is the absence of any challenge to explicitly flagged speculation about government motivations.*



## 14. FALSE BALANCE

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### Finding 1:

#### Timestamp

01:50–02:12

Construct: "there are two aspects to this aren't there though Steve certainly questions serious questions to be asked about the way the story was handled by the media across the board and of course the internet aspect of this but at the heart of it are there not still questions that remain to be asked and examined about what went on in those care homes"

#### Analysis

The second voice attempts to balance the media-accountability discussion with the child protection dimension. However, this balance is structurally false in the opposite direction from the usual false balance problem: the child protection dimension is raised as a brief corrective and then immediately subsumed back into the media management discussion. The "balance" is nominal rather than substantive.

*Summary: The segment makes a gesture toward balance by briefly raising the child protection dimension, but this gesture is not developed into genuine analytical balance. The false balance here is mild and takes the form of a token acknowledgement rather than a sustained alternative framing.*



## 15. AGENDA-SETTING

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### Finding 1:

Agenda element set: The primary question is treated as being about BBC institutional credibility and journalistic standards.

#### Timestamp

00:00–00:18 — Evidence: **"for the BC this is just a it's a disaster... questions about the BBC's journalistic standards"**

Alternative agenda: The primary question could equally have been framed as: what are the rights of falsely accused individuals? Or: what does this episode reveal about the adequacy of the Waterhouse Inquiry? Or: what protection exists for abuse survivors who are misled about the identity of their abusers?

### Finding 2:

Agenda element set: The government's new inquiry is treated as presumptively reactive and potentially illegitimate.

#### Timestamp

02:41–03:24 — Evidence: **"it looks as if the government called the new inquiry in part as a response to what news night a broadcast... if the grounds had anything to do with what was put on Newsnight then we've all been sold upon"**

Alternative agenda: The inquiry could have been framed as a potentially necessary response to longstanding concerns about the adequacy of the Waterhouse Inquiry — concerns that predated the Newsnight broadcast and were subsequently validated by the Macur Review.

### Finding 3:

Agenda element set: It is treated as self-evident that the allegation against Lord McAlpine was entirely without foundation.

#### Timestamp

01:04–01:14 — Evidence: **"we know a story that is simply not true that's very damaging to a what someone who was a very prominent of individual it's not true it's plainly now not true"**

Alternative agenda: While the specific allegation against McAlpine was indeed false, the broader question of whether other allegations about other individuals at North Wales care homes remained unresolved. The conflation of "this specific allegation is false" with "the broader story is false" is an agenda-setting move that the segment does not explicitly make but implicitly enables.

*Summary: The segment's agenda-setting is its most significant analytical weakness. By treating BBC institutional credibility as the primary question, it systematically displaces questions about individual rights (McAlpine), child protection (North Wales survivors), and the adequacy of prior investigations (Waterhouse). The government's inquiry is placed on the agenda as a suspect political manoeuvre rather than as a potentially legitimate child protection response.*



## CHAPTER 2 — OVERALL EVALUATION

### Results

#### Dominant Techniques

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The 3 strongest techniques in this broadcast:

- 1. Agenda-Setting (Score 5):** The segment consistently treats BBC institutional credibility as the primary analytical question, systematically displacing questions about harm to Lord McAlpine, the rights of abuse survivors, and the adequacy of prior investigations. This agenda-setting is achieved through the opening framing and is never substantively challenged.
- 2. Selective Omission (Score 6):** Three significant omissions — the social media amplification mechanism, the legal consequences for Lord McAlpine, and the specific editorial accountability chain — collectively reduce the perceived severity of the BBC's editorial failure and prevent the audience from forming a fully informed judgement.
- 3. Expert Selection (Score 5):** A single unverified media insider provides approximately 78% of the analytical content, with no legal expert, child protection specialist, or BBC editorial expert present to provide structured counterbalance. The insider's speculative claims about government motivations are presented with the same authority as his factual claims about prior investigations.

#### Core Messages of the Broadcast

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**MESSAGE 1 (SUBSTANTIVE):** "The BBC made a serious but understandable editorial error, caught between the Savile criticism and the pressure to believe victims."

Technique: Framing (Savile comparison as mitigating context) — Evidence: 01:28–01:34, 01:36–01:44

**MESSAGE 2 (INSTITUTIONAL):** "The BBC's journalistic standards are under question, but the institution is capable of self-reflection."

Technique: Agenda-setting (BBC crisis framing) + Language (sympathetic register) — Evidence: 00:00–00:18, 01:16–01:25

**MESSAGE 3 (POLITICAL):** "The government's new inquiry may be a politically motivated response to the Newsnight broadcast rather than a genuine child protection measure."

Technique: Guilt by Association (political panic narrative) + Timing (closing placement) — Evidence: 02:41–03:24

#### Manipulation Level Classification

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Justification: The combined score of 3.3 places this segment in the "slight tendency" category. The dominant tendencies are: framing the episode primarily as a BBC institutional crisis rather than as harm to individuals; omitting key contextual information that would increase the perceived severity of the BBC's error; and closing with a sceptical framing of the government's inquiry that redirects critical attention away from the broadcaster. These tendencies are consistent with a segment produced within the BBC ecosystem and therefore structurally inclined toward institutional self-protection. However, the segment does acknowledge the BBC's error clearly and does not deny the falsity of the allegation. Under BBC Charter Article 6, the requirement for "due impartiality" is partially met in that the factual record is not distorted, but the framing and omissions fall short of the standard of presenting the full picture with appropriate weight given to all significant perspectives.

#### CONCLUSION

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This segment represents a short media commentary piece that acknowledges the BBC's editorial failure in the McAlpine/Newsnight episode while systematically framing that failure in terms most favourable to the institution: as an understandable overcorrection following the Savile criticism, as a question of journalistic standards rather than individual harm, and as a crisis that is ultimately less significant than the government's potentially opportunistic response. Under BBC Charter Article 6, the segment falls short of due impartiality not through factual inaccuracy but through selective omission, agenda-setting, and the absence of voices representing Lord McAlpine, abuse survivors, or independent legal and child protection expertise. The segment's combined score of 3.3/10 indicates a slight but identifiable tendency toward institutional self-protection that, while not rising to the level of systematic manipulation, is



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inconsistent with the BBC's obligations under its Royal Charter to provide content that serves the public interest rather than the institution's reputational interests.



## CHAPTER 3 — PARTY-POLITICAL BIAS

Party	Score (-5..+5)	Broadcast Representation vs. Programme Position
Conservative	-1	Lord McAlpine is identified as a former Conservative Party Treasurer (implicitly, by context); the false allegation against him is clearly stated to be false. However, the government (Conservative at the time of the events, though the broadcast date is uncertain) is framed at 02:41–03:04 as potentially acting in political self-interest in calling the new inquiry. Programme position: not directly relevant (no 2024 policy positions at issue). Mild negative framing of Conservative government motivations.
Labour	0	Not mentioned. Score reflects absence.
Lib Dems	0	Not mentioned. Score reflects absence.
SNP	0	Not mentioned. Score reflects absence.
Reform UK	0	Not mentioned. Score reflects absence.
Green	0	Not mentioned. Score reflects absence.

Note: This segment predates the 2024 political landscape by approximately 12 years. The party-political bias assessment is therefore of limited applicability. The relevant political actor is the Conservative government of 2012 (Cameron administration), which is treated with mild scepticism regarding its motivations for calling a new inquiry.

### Party Bias Summary

- Most accurate representation: Not applicable (no party programme positions at issue)
- Strongest distortion: Conservative government (mild, Score -1) — motivations for calling inquiry framed as potentially political rather than child-protection-driven
- Average deviation from 0: 0.2 (across 6 parties, only one receives a non-zero score)
- Conclusion: Party-political bias is not a significant feature of this segment. The mild negative framing of the Conservative government's motivations is the only identifiable party-political element, and it is presented as explicit speculation rather than assertion. The segment's biases are primarily institutional (BBC self-protection) rather than party-political.



## CHAPTER 4 — LEGAL CLASSIFICATION (BBC Charter Art. 6)

### Assessment under BBC Charter Article 6

#### Potential Violation 1:

Standard: BBC Charter Art. 6 — Due Impartiality; BBC Agreement Clause 4 (accuracy and impartiality in news and current affairs)

Facts: The segment omits the Macur Review's subsequent findings that the Waterhouse Inquiry had significant limitations in scope, while citing the Waterhouse Inquiry as definitive evidence that the allegation had been thoroughly investigated and discredited.

Evidence: Timestamp 00:36–00:48 — Quote: "the original waterhouse inquiry the looked at abuse of Bryn Estyn had gone into this claim made by this man and again about Lord McAlpine and found it to be without foundation"

Assessment: Presenting the Waterhouse Inquiry as a definitive authority without acknowledging its subsequently identified limitations constitutes a selective use of evidence that falls short of the accuracy standard required under the BBC Charter. While the specific claim about the McAlpine allegation is factually correct, the broader implication — that the North Wales abuse questions had been thoroughly examined — is misleading by omission.

#### Potential Violation 2:

Standard: BBC Charter Art. 6 — Due Impartiality; Ofcom Broadcasting Code Section 5.5 (due impartiality on matters of major political controversy)

Facts: The government's decision to call a new inquiry is framed as potentially politically motivated without any counterbalancing perspective from government representatives or child protection advocates who might support the inquiry's legitimacy.

Evidence: Timestamp 02:41–03:24 — Quote: "it looks as if the government called the new inquiry in part as a response to what news night a broadcast... if the grounds had anything to do with what was put on Newsnight then we've all been sold upon"

Assessment: The government's decision to call a public inquiry into child abuse is a matter of significant public interest and political controversy. Presenting a single commentator's speculative scepticism about the inquiry's motivations without any counterbalancing perspective from government, child protection advocates, or inquiry supporters falls short of the due impartiality standard. The explicit acknowledgement that this is speculation ("I'm guessing at this") partially mitigates the violation but does not eliminate it.

#### Potential Violation 3:

Standard: BBC Charter Art. 6 — Serving the Public Interest; BBC Agreement Clause 4 (comprehensive and authoritative coverage)

Facts: The segment fails to include any voice representing Lord McAlpine, abuse survivors, child protection specialists, or legal experts, despite these being the parties most directly affected by the events under discussion.

Evidence: Throughout — the segment is entirely composed of two unidentified media commentators discussing the episode from an institutional media perspective.

Assessment: A segment discussing a false allegation of child sexual abuse, the harm caused to a falsely accused individual, and the adequacy of a public inquiry into care home abuse, without including any of the directly affected parties or relevant expert voices, falls short of the BBC's obligation to provide comprehensive and authoritative coverage that serves the public interest.

### Overall Assessment — BBC Charter Article 6

This segment demonstrates three areas of potential non-compliance with BBC Charter Article 6: selective citation of the Waterhouse Inquiry without acknowledging its subsequently identified limitations; unbalanced presentation of the government's inquiry motivations without counterbalancing perspectives; and a fundamental absence of voices representing the parties most directly affected by the events under discussion. These shortcomings do not rise to the level of deliberate manipulation or systematic bias, but they are consistent with a pattern of institutional self-protection



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that prioritises the BBC's reputational interests over the comprehensive, impartial coverage required by the Charter. The segment's combined score of 3.3/10 and completeness score of 4.0/10 indicate that, while the factual record is not actively distorted, the framing, omissions, and source selection fall measurably short of the due impartiality and public interest standards that the BBC's Royal Charter requires.

**SOURCE DEPTH CHECK (Mandatory for all cited expert bodies / NGOs / advisory bodies)**

**Waterhouse Inquiry (Tribunal of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Care in the Former County Council Areas of Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974)**

**1. FUNDING:** UK Government — statutory public inquiry, fully publicly funded. Commissioned by the Secretary of State for Wales in 1996.

**2. MANDATE:** To investigate the abuse of children in care in North Wales between 1974 and 1990. The mandate was subsequently found by the Macur Review (2016) to have been interpreted more narrowly than the terms of reference required, with the result that certain allegations — including those involving individuals outside the care system — were not fully examined.

**3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** As a government-commissioned inquiry, the Waterhouse Tribunal operated within parameters set by the commissioning government. The Macur Review found that the inquiry's scope was limited in ways that may have prevented full examination of all relevant allegations. This represents a structural conflict of interest in the sense that a government-commissioned inquiry may be subject to implicit scope limitations that protect establishment figures.

**4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX (6D, -2 to +2):**

D1 Conflict of Interest: [-1] — Government-commissioned; scope later found limited by Macur Review

D2 Personal Risk: [+2] — Tribunal chair (Sir Ronald Waterhouse) had significant professional reputation at stake

D3 Subject Competence: [+2] — Statutory inquiry with full legal powers, extensive evidence-gathering

D4 Opinion Consistency: [+1] — Findings consistent with other investigations at the time; later Macur Review confirmed some findings while identifying scope limitations

D5 Emotionalisation vs. Data: [+2] — Formal legal process, evidence-based, 259 witnesses

D6 Source Level: [+2] — Primary source (statutory inquiry report, "Lost in Care," 2000)

**TOTAL: +8 → SOURCE TRAFFIC LIGHT: GREEN**

- Qualification: GREEN rating applies to the inquiry's findings within its examined scope. The Macur Review's identification of scope limitations means that the inquiry's silence on certain matters cannot be treated as definitive exoneration. The segment's use of the Waterhouse Inquiry as definitive authority is therefore partially misleading.

**5. MISSING COUNTERPOINT:** The Macur Review (2016), which found that the Waterhouse Inquiry had not examined all relevant allegations and that its scope was more limited than the terms of reference required, is not cited. This is the most significant source omission in the segment.

*Analysis completed under Version 2.7-detail | Methodological Principles K5+K13 | All criteria assessed | BBC Charter Article 6 framework applied*



## OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE 15 CRITERIA

### Individual Scores — All 15 Criteria

No.	Criterion	Score	Rating
1	EXPERT SELECTION	5	●●●
2	SOURCE SELECTION	4	●●
3	TIME DISTRIBUTION	3	●●
4	OMISSION (Selective Omission)	6	●●●
5	NUMERICAL MANIPULATION	2	●
6	GUILT BY ASSOCIATION	1	●
7	TIMING	3	●●
8	SELECTIVE OUTRAGE	2	●
9	COMPLETENESS	6	●●●
10	FRAMING	4	●●
11	LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY	3	●●
12	MODERATION BEHAVIOUR	2	●
13	QUESTION ASYMMETRY	2	●
14	FALSE BALANCE	2	●
15	AGENDA-SETTING	5	●●●

#### HARD FACTS SCORE (1-8)

**3.6/10**

*Slight imbalance*

#### SOFT FACTS SCORE (9-14)

**3.0/10**

*Slight imbalance*

#### OVERALL SCORE

**3.3/10**

*Slight imbalance*

*Average of Hardfacts and Softfacts*



## KEY — Score Definitions

### Individual Scores per Criterion (0–10)

<b>0</b>	<b>No finding</b>	No relevant anomaly detected.
<b>1–2</b>	<b>Weak finding</b>	Minor anomaly without substantial impact on balance.
<b>3–4</b>	<b>Slight to moderate finding</b>	Recognizable tendency; low to moderate impact relevance.
<b>5</b>	<b>Moderate finding with impact</b>	Relevant imbalance affecting the audience's opinion-forming potential.
<b>6</b>	<b>Significant finding (threshold)</b>	Scores of 6 and above are classified as 'significant findings.'
<b>7</b>	<b>Significant finding</b>	Clear, well-documented imbalance with distinct impact relevance.
<b>8–9</b>	<b>Severe finding</b>	Pronounced imbalance; multiple documented individual findings in this criterion.
<b>10</b>	<b>Maximum severity</b>	Systematic, pervasive imbalance in this criterion.

### Aggregated Deviation Index — Interpretation Ranges

<b>0.0 – 2.5</b>	<b>Unremarkable</b>	No significant patterns detected; broadcast meets the impartiality standard.
<b>2.6 – 4.0</b>	<b>Slight imbalance</b>	Isolated anomalies; statistically visible but within tolerance range.
<b>4.1 – 6.0</b>	<b>Significant imbalance</b>	Multiple significant findings; relevant impairment of perspective diversity.
<b>6.1 – 8.0</b>	<b>Serious deviation from the impartiality standard. High degree of deviation</b>	Pronounced, cross-broadcast patterns; high impact relevance.
<b>8.1 – 10</b>	<b>Fundamental systemic one-sidedness. Very high bias degree</b>	Maximum severity across nearly all criteria; systematically one-sided reporting.

### Party-Political Bias (-5 to +5)

<b>-5 to -3</b>	<b>Strongly disadvantaged</b>	Party is significantly underrepresented in framing, airtime, or presentation.
<b>-2 to -1</b>	<b>Slightly disadvantaged</b>	Recognizable but minor disadvantage.
<b>0</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	No detectable favoritism or disadvantage.
<b>+1 to +2</b>	<b>Slightly favored</b>	Recognizable but minor favoritism.
<b>+3 to +5</b>	<b>Strongly favored</b>	Party is significantly overrepresented in framing, airtime, or presentation.

### Legal and Methodological Notes



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**No factual determination**

The results presented do not constitute factual determinations about individual persons, editorial teams, or broadcasts. They are the product of a standardized operationalization, not a finding of individual responsibility.

**No legal judgment**

The aggregated deviation index does not replace a legal assessment under Ofcom Broadcasting Code. The determination of whether a specific broadcast violates legal requirements is exclusively the responsibility of the competent authorities (in particular Ofcom).

**No proof of causation**

Statistical correlations are not to be interpreted as proof of causal relationships or editorial intent. Deviation values may be influenced by topic selection, news environment, political controversy, or format logic.

**No judgment of intent**

The analysis measures observable structural characteristics of broadcasts. A score of 7 means a significant imbalance was detected — not that the editorial team intended it. The methodology makes no claims about motives or strategic objectives.

**Heuristic comparison tool**

The index serves comparative pattern recognition across thousands of broadcasts, not precise metric measurement of individual segments. Threshold values serve heuristic orientation, not sharp legal qualification.



## APPENDIX: NATIONAL BROADCASTING LAW

### Legal Framework United Kingdom — BBC

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#### Legislation

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- BBC Royal Charter (2017, valid until 2027)
- Communications Act 2003
- Ofcom Broadcasting Code

#### Relevant Provisions

##### BBC Royal Charter

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- Art. 5 (Public Purposes): Sustaining citizenship and civil society through the provision of impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them.
- Art. 6(4): The BBC must observe high standards of due impartiality.

##### Communications Act 2003

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- s.319(2)(c): News included in television and radio services is presented with due impartiality.
- s.320(1): Special impartiality requirements for matters of political controversy and matters relating to current public policy.

##### Ofcom Broadcasting Code

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- Section 5 (Due Impartiality): Due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy. "Due" means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme.

#### Core Obligations

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1. **Due Impartiality:** Not absolute equal treatment, but appropriate to the subject matter
2. **Due Accuracy:** Adequate accuracy in reporting
3. **Editorial Independence:** Independence from government and commercial interests

#### Regulatory Authority

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- Ofcom (Office of Communications): External regulator with sanctioning powers
- BBC Board: Internal governance

#### Complaints Procedure

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1. BBC Complaints (internal, three-tier)
2. Ofcom (external complaint after exhausting internal routes)
3. Judicial Review (High Court)



## APPENDIX 2: SCIENTIFIC REFERENCES

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### SVFAB Working Papers

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- Schläpfer, D. (2026). Systematic AI-Assisted Analysis of Public Broadcaster Impartiality: A Scalable Methodological Framework for Measuring Structural Bias in Public Service Media. [SSRN 6688478](#)
- Schläpfer, D. (2026). Measuring Editorial Noise: A Retrospective Suppression Index for Public Broadcasting Content Analysis. [SSRN 6733280](#)
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