

Due Impartiality

Due impartiality....This is one of the key phrases which was at the root of the action by the SNP. So, what does it mean?

The BBC was set up by Royal Charter and the most recent of these was the 2006 Charter which sets out the structure for the BBC Executive and The BBC Trust which replaced the old Governor structure. Its funding is met by the licence fees paid by those with TVs throughout the UK.

It is a public service broadcaster (PSB) and as such it has certain duties to ensure that it complies with standards of impartiality, fairness and accuracy. (As a PSB broadcaster it must produce news content.)

It sets out its commitment to impartiality in its Editorial Guidelines which are available on the BBC website. A significant part of the Guidelines provides that the BBC will avoid bias or imbalance of views of controversial subjects. Nothing more controversial than politics it seems.

It is specifically stated that if there is a series (as there was in this case) then the series must be considered as a whole rather than one of the programmes in isolation. So as long as each party is given enough time over the series then the BBC will be deemed to have complied with its obligations.

As well as this at the time around a General Election is treated with special care, and to achieve due impartiality at this time, the BBC state that they will ensure that each party is covered proportionately over an appropriate period, normally a week. Past and current levels of electoral support must also be taken into account when making decisions as to how much airtime to give to a political party.

On this ground alone then, perhaps the SNP were never going to succeed?