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The Editor,  
BBC Panorama,  
MC4A1, Media Centre,  
Media Village,  
201 Wood Lane,  
London, W12

16<sup>th</sup> December 2010

Dear Sir,

We are writing concerning the Panorama programme, 'British Schools, Muslim Rules' broadcast on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2010.

As you will no doubt be aware John Ware has invited harsh criticism for programmes that he has presented for Panorama in the past such as 'Who Speaks for British Muslims' and 'Faith Hate and Charity'. That Mr Ware is allowed to continue to produce documentaries of questionable merit and quality is a matter of grave concern to us and we set out our concerns on this latest documentary below.

These points are raised in no particular order and are as follows:

1. Individuals are introduced onto the programme without; it would appear to us, full disclosure of their affiliations and prior contributions to the debate on faith schools and the Saudi teaching curriculum. For example, John Bald is introduced with a by-line which reflects his role as a former Ofsted lead inspector twice before at 19.06 minutes into the programme, he is introduced as co-author of the Policy Exchange report, 'Faith Schools We Can Believe In'.

Similarly, Professor Neal Robinson is introduced as a world renowned authority on the Qur'an but is not accredited as co-author of the same Policy Exchange report.

Lastly, Ali Al-Ahmed is introduced by affiliation to the Institute of Gulf Affairs but the IGA's own publication of July 2010, 'A State of Deception,' which focuses on the content of Saudi teaching curricula and textbooks (including images broadcast in the Panorama programme), is no where mentioned in the programme.

It is also important to note that Mr Gove himself was previously chairman of Policy Exchange.

Given the notoriety of the Policy Exchange report, 'The Hijacking of British Islam' uncovered by a BBC Newsnight investigation, and the legal challenges it has warranted against the think tank, it would appear disingenuous that details of affiliation to the organisation were omitted in the case of Professor Robinson, Mr Gove and latterly included in the case of John Bald.

2. The programme goes to some lengths to demonstrate, through what we would consider weak causal connections and wild inference, purportedly disturbing practices in certain Muslim faith schools in the UK.

On the school in Leicester:

We are greatly disappointed that the opinions of the Darul Iftaa, conservative though they may be, are used in a manner as to portray al-Risaalah Girls School as being unduly influenced by them or endorsing them. Proximity of institutions is not sufficient grounds to infer overlap of teaching materials or attitudes in our view.

It seems surprising that Mr Ware should conclude that because al-Risaalah school and Darul Iftaa are both affiliated to the Jame'ah mosque in Leicester that somehow all roads lead to the same outcomes.

Jame'ah mosque is not alone in being an institution that has multiple affiliated bodies all of which are run as autonomous units under its umbrella. Many conglomerates are organised in similar ways as are agencies that have agreements on service delivery with multiple actors.

A final point on this matter rests with our concern on what is inferred from the conservatism of some scholars of Islam. We may not agree with all opinions espoused by various scholars of Islam, in the UK or elsewhere, but it is indefensible, in our view, to suggest that conservative social attitudes are a threat to social cohesion. The right to a moral conscience on issues pertaining to religious beliefs were among the rights of citizens of democratic societies that were reiterated by Pope Benedict during his recent visit to the UK. It is not without irony that we recall another report 'Music, Chess and other Sins' (published by Civitas), which makes similar specious links between social conservatism and social cohesion.

3. We note with alarm the comments made by Dr Usama Hasan on single sex schools and single faith schools and the claim that somehow these qualities render Muslim pupils ill-equipped for life in modern Britain.

We would remind that Muslim faith schools are not alone in being organised around single sex or single faith. Indeed, Muslim faith schools form a small proportion of faith schools in the UK and we don't recall allegations of Christian or other faith schools that are single sex, and not co-educational, disadvantaging their pupils in any way. It is puzzling to us that such claims should then be levelled against Muslim faith schools. We cannot but put this down to blatant discrimination.

4. On the Tooting Islamic Centre:

Again, the inference made here seems to be that the joint trusteeship of certain individuals of the school and the centre implies that activities of the centre cannot but impact on what pupils are exposed to. The example used in the programme is that of Riyadh ul-Haq and a talk he is said to have given to pupils at the school which was also subject of a school newsletter article. John Ware goes on to reference speeches given at different times, some years earlier, by Riyadh ul-Haq suggesting that such views should have no place in a classroom setting.

Given that the speeches referenced were not delivered to school children and the fact that they were delivered some years before, it is a pretty weak argument to suggest that the pupils of the school were exposed to unpalatable views.

If the best Mr Ware can do to exemplify his claims is to unearth speeches from seven or eight years previously, then the weakness of the argument presented is apparent in the implausible evidence used to demonstrate it.

We also wonder at the lack of inclusion of a comment by the MP for Tooting, Sadiq Khan, who, as a Muslim Member of Parliament, would be well placed to comment on matters arising in the Muslim schools located in his constituency.

5. The same sort of far-fetched accusations are used in relation to Apex school in Ilford where the hosting of Sheikh Haitham Al-Haddad at a school fundraising dinner is used to suggest that pupils at the school were exposed to intolerant and discriminatory views impacting on their learning experience and attitudes towards others.

Apex school is clear that the pupils were not in attendance at the fundraising dinner. But more significantly, the views of Haitham Al-Haddad which were broadcast in the programme were devoid of context and history omitting important details of when and where they were spoken.

6. The graphic imagery of the riots in northern towns in the summer of 2001 used during the documentary is exactly the sort of alarmist reportage for which John Ware is known and in our view the images were misplaced. To summarily put the riots down to segregation or the teaching of 'separatist ideologies' in Muslim faith schools is incredible and would not be borne out by the conclusions reached by the inquiry and subsequent report produced by Professor Ted Cantle. Moreover, we would be interested to see evidence procured by John Ware and the Panorama team on the numbers of those who were arrested and imprisoned for their part in the riots and their educational background. We would venture that few, if any, were products of local Muslim faith schools.
7. The concluding section of the programme focused on the Saudi teaching curriculum in various voluntary sector weekend schools. We are not able to speak for the Saudi Ministry of Education or schools that use the curriculum but we do have certain concerns on the presentation of this material in the documentary.

Given that the teaching material is in Arabic and the textbooks were to be studied by pupils it would seem to us important to offer statistics on the number of pupils that are registered students of such schools. The overwhelming majority of British Muslims are not Arabic-speaking and it would seem to us significant that this fact be included in the documentary.

The documentary concludes with Ware exhorting a more robust inspection system to ensure that "British schoolchildren are no longer exposed to religious fundamentalism in the classroom."

Mr Ware's documentary does little to substantiate the inferences that religious fundamentalism is a particular problem in Muslim faith schools in the UK. In fact, the mistranslation of the Qur'anic verse presented in the programme as "[Jews] look like monkeys and pigs," by the young man used by Ware to procure copies of the Arabic textbooks augments divisions and communal tensions by misrepresenting Muslim views, improperly translating Qur'anic verses and reciting them devoid of context.

We would add in closing that Mr Ware has been privileged to present a number of Panorama programmes on British Muslims each of dubious quality and it is with amazement that we register his continued ability to do so at license-fee payers' expense, Muslim fee-payers among them.

We look forward to your reply on the matters raised above.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif  
CEO