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Steve Carson
Director, BBC Scotland
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11th September 2020

Dear Mr Carson,

I am writing to raise my grave concerns about the decision to downgrade the First Minister's daily information briefings on the Covid-19 pandemic.

These briefings are a vital tool in disseminating up to date information and guidance during a constantly evolving public health emergency.

As we are entering a period of increased uncertainty regarding the resurgence of prevalence in the community, with more specific and targeted forms of lockdown being initiated, often at very short notice, these broadcast briefings are more important than ever in maintaining public confidence, through the sharing of important messages, and changes to virus suppression measures being communicated in a timely manner

There is widespread public support for the daily news briefings, and no obvious desire for these to be editorialised by broadcasters.

The leaked internal brief, reported in The Herald, now shows the BBC downgrading these briefings to maintain a "consistent approach" across the UK, despite responsibility for health being a devolved competency.

Surely you must be aware that this could send the wrong message to the Scottish public, at a time of decreasing confidence in the BBC?

Wasn't the reason BBC Scotland was created in the first place, to respond and reflect the priorities of a Scottish audience?

Does the BBC really believe that by taking a London-centric approach to this matter it is best serving its public sector obligations to Scotland?

This decision is likely to have a disproportionate effect on communicating information to the over-75's, a group in society most likely to use the television as a source of information, and at most risk from a resurgence in the current pandemic.

On what basis does the BBC intend to make editorial assessments on what is information worthy of communication to the public in this regard? Who will be making these judgements? Will there be public health professional input into those decisions?

I am deeply concerned that in taking the line that these matters going forward are to be decided on the basis of "editorial merit" that information essential to the nation's response to this health emergency will be subject to the editorial fiat of news editors with no consideration for the essentials of public health.



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There is a world of difference between what makes a good news story and what is necessary for the promotion of good public health in a time of a global health pandemic.

I urge you to reconsider this decision and to continue to provide the valuable public service broadcasting role the BBC has fulfilled up to this point. Now, more than ever, it is important to keep open the information flow between the government and the public as the country faces a potential resurgence of the Covid-19 prevalence leading into the annual flu season.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stewart McDonald".

Stewart McDonald MP