

BBC is ordered to reveal staff's social class

Times
15.9.17

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The BBC and other broadcasters will be told to publish information on the social background of their employees in an attempt to break the middle-class stranglehold on the media.

Women, ethnic minorities and the disabled are under-represented in the television industry, figures released yesterday confirmed. However, there are concerns that the focus on gender and race inequality is failing to address a shortage of working-class and regional voices on and off-screen.

The chief executive of Ofcom yesterday said that she would require broadcasters to begin collecting and providing information on the social background of their employees. Precise measures have yet to be agreed, but they could include whether staff attended private schools or were raised by parents with professional jobs.

Sharon White told the Royal Television Society convention in Cambridge: "It's a really important issue because you want diversity of thinking not just visible diversity. We are in a creative industry where you want great ideas from people of different backgrounds, different classes, different colours, different parts of the country, Scotland as well as north London.

"Next year we are going to ask the broadcasters to start providing us with more data on social class so that we can start to get a better collective understanding of where we currently sit."

Challenged on the potential difficulty in establishing whether individual employees were working-class or middle-class, she said that it was "complex but not impossible".

In July the first socio-economic census of the BBC's staff found that they were three times more likely than average to have middle-class parents and more than twice as likely to have gone to a fee-paying school. It found that 17 per cent of staff attended fee-paying schools and 61 per cent had parents who were in the "higher managerial and professional occupations".

The new drive to expose the middle-class domination of the media was backed by Karen Bradley, the culture secretary. She said: "Diversity and discrimination can be on a number of characteristics and the more transparency we have on all of these matters the better it is for society."

Ms White also called for an end to unpaid internships in the media, warn-

ing that they effectively excluded poor and working-class young people from starting their careers.

"Unpaid internships in my view have the strong potential to reinforce and propagate inequality and the disjuncture between the social class of the media and the audiences that we are serving," she said. "I would love to see a position in which we no longer have unpaid internships in the TV and radio industry." Whether unpaid internships should be banned by law was a matter for government, she added.

The BBC is already taking steps to recruit from a broader pool of applicants, offering hundreds of apprenticeships to non-graduates. A BBC spokesman said: "In the autumn of 2013, the director general set a target for 1 per cent of the BBC's workforce to be apprentices by the end of the licence fee period. We met this target two years ahead of schedule in November 2014. In the past year we had 237 apprentices based all across the UK and we're aiming to have more than 400 by 2018."

Ofcom found that women account for 48 per cent of employees across the five main broadcasters, versus 51 per cent of the wider UK population. The regulator's report said: "Employees of the BBC are increasingly likely to be male the more senior their role."

Members of ethnic minorities make up 12 per cent of employees across the main broadcasters, lower than the UK population average of 14 per cent. Ms White spoke of a "woeful" lack of diversity and criticised the BBC for failing to lead the way. An Ofcom spokeswoman said: "We'll be working with broadcasters to explore how the social, geographic and educational make-up of the industry can be measured and potentially widened."

Ms White also said that internet giants like Google and Facebook were now media companies, but said they should not be regulated by Ofcom because it's "really hard to negotiate the boundary between regulation and censorship of the internet". She added: "I do think though that the companies need to take more responsibility as publishers as well as platforms."

● The Conservative manifesto pledge to move Channel 4 out of London was watered-down yesterday when Ms Bradley said that it "may not mean the whole business". She hoped to reach a deal by next year. Channel 4 has said that the cost of moving would hit its programming budget.