

## **Hearst Networks: Alien and UFO Guidance Notes**

- When assessing alien/UFO related matters in programming, the main section of the Ofcom Code concerned is **2.2: (Harm and Offence) Factual programmes or items or portrayals of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience.**
- Alien and UFO related content does not come under Ofcom's definition of 'paranormal' (see : <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-guidance/programme-guidance/broadcast-code-guidance/section1.pdf?v=328674>) and therefore Rule 1.27 (*Demonstrations of the paranormal which purport to be real, must not be shown before the watershed*) and 2.6 (*Demonstrations...of the paranormal...or practices related to any of these that purport to be real (as opposed to entertainment) must be treated with due objectivity*) do not apply here.
- If a programme discusses conspiracy theories around the existence of aliens and other life forms, it's important to make attempts to be balanced wherever possible. Ideally this would include contributors (scientists or sceptics) who offer alternative explanations and cast doubt upon some of the more 'out there' theories.
- If the programme has a narrative voice, it is helpful if they take a neutral position on the subject matter. For example, by posing rhetorical questions (*Why did they believe aliens landed here and who were they looking for?*) and using speculative language (e.g. *X believes...*) Alternative viewpoints are helpful but it is important to remember they are not mandatory. As the programme is for entertainment rather than news, due impartiality rules do not apply.
- If a contributor asserts fringe theory/conspiracy theory as fact (e.g. "They [aliens] are real"), it can be argued this is merely their own opinion. However, to ensure compliance with Ofcom Rule 2.2, a carefully worded disclaimer can be added to the beginning of the programme:

***For Example: "The views and opinions expressed in [Programme Name] are the contributors' own. Whilst speculation and conjecture about alien life forms persists, there remains no incontrovertible evidence of their existence."***

A disclaimer such as this can provide a robust defence against Ofcom, should there be any complaints. It shows that the programme is not depicting the views of the channel and is merely discussing alternative theories. (inclusion of disclaimer subject to Compliance approval)

- To achieve a daytime playable version, you will need to take in to account whether or not the content has the potential to be harmful to a child. By taking precautionary steps such as inserting balance and including a disclaimer, it is likely the content can be played in daytime on both subscription and on free-to-air channels. However, some alien-programming can

discuss dark topics such as abduction, torture or sexual violence. It is also worth looking out for conspiracy theories that perpetuate stereo-typical tropes. In such cases, it would be advisable to rate the programme for Post-Watershed.

- The nuances between a SAT and a restricted daytime (SDNSH) rating for Alien/UFO programming will need to be decided on a case-by-case basis. Please refer to the internal Compliance team before providing a rating.