MAFS UK

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXTERNAL REVIEW

Introduction

On 18 May 2026, BBC Panorama broadcast an episode with a number of very serious allegations by three female contributors in different series of Married at First Sight UK ("**MAFS UK")**, a series commissioned by Channel 4 and produced by an independent production company, CPL Productions ("**CPL**"). These concerned: (i) serious allegations of wrongdoing against a small number of past contributors, allegations that we understand those contributors have denied; and, (ii) related to those allegations, claims of failures in welfare protocols by Channel 4 and CPL.

Channel 4 is not in a position to investigate or adjudicate on the first of these allegations as those would be for the police and the courts to investigate and determine.

Furthermore, any formal regulatory determination regarding compliance with the welfare obligations contained in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code would be a matter for Ofcom acting under its statutory procedures to decide.

However, Channel 4 takes the claims of failures in welfare protocols by it and/or CPL seriously and, in April 2026, in response to the allegations it commissioned a review to be undertaken by external parties. That external review (**"the Review"**) consisted of two parts which included:

Part 1. A confidential and legally privileged review by law firm Clyde & Co (**"Clyde & Co review"**) examining whether the welfare protocols in place on the relevant series of MAFS UK at the time the welfare concerns referenced in the BBC Panorama programme were raised, as well as the handling by Channel 4 and CPL of those concerns when raised, fulfilled Channel 4's duty of care obligations under the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (the **"Code"**); and

Part 2. A future-facing confidential review by former Controller of BBC One, Lorraine Heggessey (**"Heggessey review"**), to examine if any changes should be made to current protocols for MAFS UK to further strengthen contributor welfare.

The review's findings and recommendations in these regards are summarised below.

Prior to the broadcast of the BBC Panorama programme, considering Channel 4's ongoing duty of care to all contributors, the seriousness of the allegations levelled against a small number of past contributors, and out of an abundance of caution to avoid fuelling speculation or jigsaw identification, all prior seasons of MAFS UK were removed from Channel 4 streaming and linear services, alongside Channel 4's MAFS UK social channels.

Given the subsequent press reports of an ongoing police investigation into an unnamed contributor to an unidentified past series of MAFS UK, reinstatement of those past series is not being considered at this time.

For the same reasons, this summary does not contain any information which could directly or indirectly risk identifying relevant individuals or fuelling speculation regarding their identities.

Part 1 - Clyde & Co review

1. Methodology

The Clyde & Co review was conducted on a confidential and legally privileged basis. In addition, Channel 4 is mindful of its obligations not to identify any contributors or interviewees either expressly or by jigsaw identification. The review's report can therefore not be shared in full.

Channel 4 and CPL co-operated with all document requests from the review team. Following processing and reduction measures such as deduplication, the review team reviewed 31,172 documents and 20 hours of broadcast and unbroadcast footage for this review.

The review team also conducted 15 interviews with relevant individuals from Channel 4, CPL and contributors. To enable interviewees to speak freely, interviews were conducted on a confidential basis.

The Clyde & Co review's factual findings are made on the balance of probabilities and represent the conclusions of the review team having regard to the evidence available to it as a whole. They do not constitute legal or regulatory determinations.

2. Summary of Findings

2.1. The Clyde & Co review found that the contributor welfare framework on MAFS UK (including the welfare protocols) in place at relevant times was compliant with the Code. Further, with respect to the handling of issues raised at the relevant times there were no findings of a breach of the Code.

2.2. Nevertheless, the Clyde & Co review found areas where it considered that the contributor welfare framework, although compliant, could be further strengthened and made recommendations in this regard. These recommendations were shared with the Heggessey review and are reflected in the overall recommendations below.

2.3. Specifically, the Clyde & Co review identified a small number of instances in which the show's established protocols had not been fully applied. This included an instance when some contributors contravened the Code of Conduct relating to prohibited substances but were given a first and final warning rather than being removed from the programme.

2.4. Additionally, the Clyde & Co review found that CPL and Channel 4 could have undertaken a more structured longer-term review over multiple series so that any further tightening of processes and procedures could be made in response to a more holistic and long-term assessment. This included the need to better understand the welfare of contributors cumulatively, over the course of the series, as well as responding to specific incidents when they occurred.

Part 2 – Heggessey review

1. Methodology

The Heggessey review considered the welfare protocols for series 3-6 of MAFS UK and other extensive documentation relating to series 6 (the current series filmed in 2026 but not broadcast). It also conducted confidential interviews with individuals involved in its production, welfare processes, commissioning and compliance.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Heggessey review was not asked to determine whether MAFS UK should continue to be commissioned. Its remit was to advise on what enhancements could be considered by Channel 4 to strengthen contributor welfare and further mitigate the risks of producing MAFS UK if it were to be recommissioned.

2. Summary Observations:

2.1. The Heggessey review concluded that, with enhancements to the existing contributor welfare framework and adjustments to the format, it would be reasonable to continue to produce future series of MAFS UK.

2.2. The Heggessey review found that the show was appropriately assessed as high risk and that the welfare protocols for MAFS UK are extensive, extremely thorough and of a high standard from which other productions in the industry have learnt.

2.3. In addition, it observed that Channel 4 and CPL take contributor welfare extremely seriously and that they have consistently sought to develop the welfare framework from series to series. Nevertheless, it concluded that there were areas where the existing welfare framework could be further strengthened.

2.4. Key observations by the Heggessey review include:

2.4.1. Certain elements of the current format create additional complexity, including there being multiple editorial objectives alongside the central premise of the programme of matching contributors with long-term partners. Some format elements support relationship development, while others heighten tension or conflict and consequently the risk profile of the show. Since changing to the current format in 2021, the increase in the number of couples and the number of episodes in each series has also increased the risk profile.

2.4.2. Intimacy is a key focus. Although some of this is necessary from a welfare perspective, for example during welfare checks, some elements of the show could implicitly put pressure on contributors to be intimate.

2.4.3. Because production handles most of the contributor's daily lives, and contact with the outside world, and family and friends in particular, is limited, contributors can become dependent on production and lose touch with reality, which can affect contributors' decision making.

2.4.4. Despite extensive background checks and other enquiries, relevant information can be missed or withheld by applicants, only coming to light after filming starts.

2.4.5. In addition, contributors' motivations for participating in the show may vary significantly and the primary motivation may not always align with the programme's central premise of seeking a long-term romantic partner.

2.4.6. The complexity of the production means that it requires an experienced production team and significant oversight by Channel 4. While the close involvement and influence of Channel 4 has some benefit it has at times led to a lack of objective scrutiny over some production decisions.

Summary of Key Review Recommendations

The key recommendations made by the Review include:

Format recommendations

1. Changes to consider with a view to reducing the emphasis on intimacy:

   1.1. Putting couples in separate bedrooms on wedding night and honeymoon, turning the honeymoon into a 'getting to know you' phase with couples subsequently having to 'opt in' to share a room before doing so.

   1.2. Reviewing the frequency with which couples are asked about the physical side of their relationship outside the context of the welfare consent checks.

   1.3. Removing Intimacy Week and Partner Swap Week.

2. Other changes to consider:

   2.1. Changing the leave/stay mechanism so that if one person chooses 'leave', the couple leaves the show.

   2.2. Reducing the number of couples cast and the number of episodes in each series.

   2.3. Exploring ways of encouraging the contributor to keep in touch with their real lives, friends and families outside the show for example by allowing them to return home unsupervised for at least one weekend during production or keeping their own mobile phone subject to appropriate guidelines.

Welfare framework recommendations

1. General welfare measures to consider:

   1.1. Installing CCTV and sound recording equipment in all areas of the apartments which is monitored 24/7 by a welfare-trained team. This would be used for welfare monitoring purposes only and not for broadcast or any other editorial purpose.

   1.2. Using individual 'safe words' for each contributor and panic buttons to alert a monitoring team and/or the welfare team to a contributor's immediate welfare concern.

   1.3. Providing two lockable ensuite bedrooms or (if no ensuite) a lockable bathroom with an extra bolt inside.

1.4. Whether additional mandatory questions could be added to the daily welfare check-ins.

2. Staffing recommendations to consider:

2.1. Although the complexity of the format requires continuity of staff, rotating staff in all Channel 4 and CPL teams working on the show periodically to allow for a fresh perspective particularly on assessment of risk.

2.2. Enhanced training for the welfare team to include more bespoke training on specific relevant welfare issues, with such training being defined and documented.

2.3. Establishing formal welfare team reporting lines: (i) within CPL to someone separate from production/editorial and (ii) for the Head of Welfare at CPL to report directly to a nominated individual within Channel 4 on a par with or more senior than the commissioning editor for the show without going through production.

2.4. Separating the casting and welfare teams and more clearly delineating the role of the welfare team.

2.5. During production, having a large enough team to ensure two senior welfare staff on site at any time and to enable all team members to have regular breaks and a reasonable shift pattern. Include supervision/debrief sessions for welfare staff at the end of each shift.

2.6. Obtaining an external professional assessment of the type of psychologists required for the programme and refresh the psychological team periodically.

3. Recommendations to consider relating to information for contributors:

3.1. Measures to enable contributors to more easily distinguish the welfare team from production, including by the welfare team wearing a uniform, and displaying in the apartment block, and providing contributors with, a sheet containing photographs of all welfare team members and the direct telephone via which to contact the Head of Welfare.

3.2. Reviewing participant-facing documentation and briefings to ensure that they explain all relevant information (including the code of conduct, consent training, the practical realities of participation, the roles of different teams involved in production, and direct routes for raising concerns/seeking specialist support) in clear and accessible language. Whether (and if so, how) the Contributor Experience Chats should be repeated at different stages of the production process with an emphasis on the information relevant to that particular stage.

3.3. Expanding the current training on consent and taking contributors through the Code of Conduct in person and in detail with emphasis on the contributor's personal responsibilities, the limits of production's responsibilities and oversight. Contributors could be asked to agree in writing to abide by the Code of Conduct and, as part of that, to reconfirm every previous material disclosure. Any inconsistencies or new disclosures should be noted and the individual's suitability reassessed taking the new information into account.

4. Recommendations to consider for the casting process:

    4.1. Establishing an independent casting group including senior staff at Channel 4 and CPL not involved in the casting process who, prior to final casting, will scrutinise the suitability of the proposed cast before a final decision is made.

    4.2. Imposing a deadline for casting of 6 weeks before shooting with no contributors re-matched beyond that and exploring whether it is possible to find ways of publicising the cast prior to the start of filming rather than just before broadcast.

    4.3. Undertaking psychological testing and profiling of final contributors (or those being seriously considered) in person rather than via video call.

    4.4. Whether psychological assessments should take into account current societal trends (e.g. misogyny, attitudes to consent)

    4.5. Setting clear parameters for specific personality traits identified in psychological assessments to guide casting decisions and circumstances in which reference should be made to the independent casting group.

    4.6. Whether casting people who have been in or applied to participate in other reality shows should be avoided.

    4.7. Retaining flexibility over the size of the cast and the number of episodes in each series.

    4.8. Having back up couples fully vetted at the same time as the first choice contributors so that if an individual cannot participate, that individual and their matched partner is removed and replaced by a backup couple rather than casting a new match for the other half of the original couple.

5. Recommendations to consider for the filming process:

    5.1. Making more use of placing any contributor in a separate apartment for welfare considerations.

    5.2. Ways of ensuring that, when contributors are at their most vulnerable or likely to be triggered by certain circumstances or events, they are not further upset or put under undue pressure including being excused from certain workshops or other filming commitments.

    5.3. Building into the production schedule a pre-agreed schedule of regular opportunities for contributors who are parents to see their children in person, and for all contributors to be able to attend special occasions such as family birthdays.

6. <u>General process and record-keeping recommendations to consider:</u>

    6.1. All mandatory requirements in protocols should be strictly adhered to by contributors with sanctions applied for any breaches. Any departure from mandatory requirements should require approval from an executive at Channel 4 with senior editorial authority and be recorded.

6.2. Building on the current practice of reviewing protocols after each series to carry out and document a thorough post-series review of all aspects of the production.

6.3. Having the current template format of psychological reports reviewed by a relevantly qualified psychologist.

6.4. Reviewing and expanding welfare plans and logs to reflect cumulative assessment of each participant's welfare in the round including recommended welfare support, and to enable the identification of any patterns over time and areas where extra vigilance might be needed.

6.5. Maintaining a separate log to record material welfare incidents and how they were handled, including where material new information arises after production or broadcast.

7. Industry recommendations to consider:

7.1. Initiating an industry-wide collaboration to establish a recognised training programme and qualifications for those working in welfare teams, with advanced levels for senior welfare staff.