



FSU
FREE SPEECH UNION

THE FREE SPEECH UNION
85 GREAT PORTLAND ST.
LONDON W1W 7LT
[FREESPEECHUNION.ORG](https://www.Freespeechunion.org)

Free Speech Union Press Release

1 September 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Free Speech Union welcomes Ofcom’s decision that Piers Morgan’s comments on *Good Morning Britain* about the Duke and Duchess’s interview with Oprah Winfrey did not breach the Broadcasting Code. Nevertheless, we are concerned that Ofcom has described this judgement as “finely balanced”, suggesting it could have gone the other way. In a liberal democracy, journalists should be free to question the truthfulness claims made by powerful people.

We were delighted that Ofcom has decided not to uphold any of the complaints about Piers Morgan’s remarks on *Good Morning Britain* concerning Meghan Markle’s interview with Oprah Winfrey. The Free Speech Union sent a [letter](#) to Dame Melanie Dawes, the Chief Executive of Ofcom, on 10 March, defending Piers Morgan’s right to free speech and we are pleased that Ofcom has done so.

In that letter, we suggested that far from Mr Morgan breaching the Broadcasting Code, ITV might be in breach of section 5 of the Code, which sets out the circumstances in which a broadcaster can legitimately restrict a journalist’s freedom of speech. We believe it was wrong of ITV to ask Mr Morgan to apologise for his remarks, a demand that set in motion a series of events that led to his departure from *Good Morning Britain*.

We are alarmed that Ofcom described its decision not to fine *Good Morning Britain* as “finely balanced”, implying it could have concluded the programme was in breach of the Broadcasting Code. That will have a chilling effect on press freedom since it sends a message to broadcasters that challenging the claims of powerful public figures might in future lead to a swingeing fine being imposed by Ofcom. For that reason, we would not describe today’s decision as a victory for free speech.

In our letter, we said the following:

Journalists in a liberal democracy should be free to doubt the veracity of statements and claims made by powerful people. No journalist is obliged to accept an interviewee’s account of events as “their truth” just because that interviewee happens to be a celebrity or a member of the Royal Family. To

say otherwise would be to resurrect a long-dead form of deference, now wholly anachronistic in this country.

The interview given by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex was controversial and intrinsically political. It concerned the funding of the Royal Family, the duties it expects of its members as public servants, and its attitudes to race (and therefore indirectly, the Commonwealth). Moreover, the interviewees had reputational and commercial interests at stake. Journalistic questioning and scepticism were entirely warranted, even if expressed in the provocative and colourful language for which Mr Morgan is well known and which has been partly response for the commercial success of *Good Morning Britain*.

For all media enquiries, please contact Alistair Thompson on 07970-162225 or email him at alistair@teambritanniapr.com.