

# Reform Thought for the Day

We would like to see the BBC move away from proselytizing, discriminatory or deferential religious programming. That should begin with a rethink of *Thought for the Day*.

## What's the problem?

*Thought for the Day* is a daily slot within *Today*, BBC Radio 4's flagship news programme, which explicitly and without pretence excludes non-religious contributors – the only demographic group to be singled out for exclusion.

Putting such a prominent discussion slot within Radio 4's flagship news programme, but outside of that programme's editorial control means that there is no right to reply when the slot is used for political or religious proselytizing.

What's more, the British public support reforming *Thought for the Day*. In 2018, an [NSS-commissioned poll](#) found that fewer than one in five British people think BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* should always feature religious content, a new poll has found.

The public apathy towards *Thought for the Day* is even shared by *Today*'s most senior presenter, John Humphrys, who [described](#) the slot as "inappropriate" and "deeply, deeply boring" in 2017. His colleague Justin Webb also criticised it, saying the content was "all roughly the same".

Reforming *Thought for the Day* to make it an ethical/philosophical discussion slot for current issues would improve overall quality, make it relevant to *Today*'s audience and remove the unjustifiable discrimination. Contributors should be picked without reference to their religious or non-religious identity.

There is a place for high quality, critical religion and belief programming on the BBC. The public broadcaster undoubtedly can promote literacy on contemporary matters of religion and belief. We think the BBC should completely move away from proselytising, discriminatory or extremely deferential programming.

## What are we doing?

- We have long campaigned for *Thought for the Day* to be opened up to non-religious voices.
- In 2009 the BBC Trust rejected a formal complaint from the NSS regarding the exclusive and discriminatory nature of *Thought for the Day*. It found that the editorial policy of only allowing religious contributors to participate on *Thought for the Day* did not breach either the BBC Editorial Guidelines on impartiality or the BBC's duty to reflect religious and other beliefs in its programming. Whilst it rejected our complaint, it did confirm that *Thought for the Day* must comply with requirements of due impartiality and that any future complaints on particular broadcasts would be judged against these standards on a case-by-case basis.

- Despite this, in 2013, a NSS complaint about a Thought for the Day broadcast by Lord Singh that was used to deliver [biased commentary](#) on a topical political controversy, without any right to reply or attempt to provide due impartiality, was rejected. We have since [backed calls](#) for the Thought for the Day slot to be converted into a "philosophy slot".
- In 2012 we [responded](#) to BBC'S review of "breadth of opinion", arguing that the BBC has still not shaken off the influence of Lord Reith in its over-respectful approach to religion.
- In 2016 our spoof [app to allow Radio 4 listeners to avoid Thought for the Day](#) when listening to the Today programme proved incredibly popular, while in 2018 an [NSS-backed poll](#) revealing that the public backs reforming Thought for the Day received media coverage.

## What you can do:

\* Required Field

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Messages of support help inform our future work on this issue.

Name\*:

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Your message of support:

Please leave a message of support for the campaign. Responses may be used in accordance with our supporter comment policy.

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[#BBCRadio4's Thought for the Day is discriminatory. I support the NSS campaign to open TftD to non-religious views or abolish it.](#)

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## More information

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## While you're here

Our campaigns, policy and casework cover a wide range of areas where religious privilege intrudes on people's rights. Please consider a donation to help support our work.

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