# Ofcom accused of stifling classic British comedy channels with unpredictable censorship rules



The ongoing debate surrounding the broadcasting of classic British comedies has intensified as Ofcom faces accusations of censorship from smaller television networks. Channels like RewindTV and Talking Pictures TV have expressed concern that the regulatory body’s strict guidelines disproportionately impact their operations. With even the threat of a fine potentially catastrophic for these channels, industry insiders argue that such pressures compel broadcasters to adopt a stringent self-censorship approach, ultimately compromising the authenticity and integrity of vintage programming.

Leaders in the industry have pointed to a "lottery" of censorship rules that target old classics, particularly well-known films such as the *Carry On* series. While Ofcom maintains that it does not censor content outright, its frequently shifting guidelines have left smaller channels grappling with unpredictable standards. Jonathan Moore, chief executive of RewindTV, articulated the frustrations of many in the sector, stating that the threat of penalties leads to edits that dilute the raw, comedic nature of classic films. He suggested a new framework that would establish a “presumption of innocence,” allowing broadcasters to navigate these content mines more safely. This would mean that isolated incidents of potentially offensive material would not result in heavy fines, thereby protecting smaller channels from business-threatening repercussions.

This dilemma is not isolated to the current regulatory landscape but has deeper historical roots intertwined with the evolution of societal norms. For example, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) has long been involved in the editing of classic films, as demonstrated by the cuts made to the 1977 film *Carry On England* to remove language considered offensive by contemporary standards. Broadcast networks are thus navigating a complex web of historical biases that still echo through their content today.

Furthermore, the emergence of streaming platforms has added another layer of complexity to the discussion. Services like BritBox have begun displaying content warnings for numerous *Carry On* films, highlighting themes of racism and sexism. While intended to prepare viewers for potentially sensitive material, these warnings have sparked irritation among fans who argue that such films are emblematic of British cultural history and should be approached with a sense of context, rather than an overly cautious lens.

Critics of Ofcom's approach argue that it endangers the fabric of cultural genres that rely heavily on nostalgia and historical context. Censorship fears often inhibit smaller broadcasters from showcasing content that, while possibly outdated, serves as a crucial lens into the past. Mr Moore emphasized that audiences tuning into channels like RewindTV are already well-acquainted with the nature of the programming they are consuming. He suggested that viewers are more likely to be offended by modern, explicitly adult content than the comedic nuances of classic series.

In response to the grievances, a spokesperson for Ofcom reaffirmed the regulator's stance on freedom of expression, claiming that its guidelines do not prohibit the broadcast of controversial content. However, as the industry continues to grapple with these issues, the consensus appears to lean towards finding a balance that acknowledges historical context while protecting the interests and sensitivities of modern audiences. The current climate suggests that as society’s understanding of offensive content evolves, so too must the frameworks guiding how we engage with historic and cultural media.

As these discussions continue, the fate of small nostalgic channels hangs in the balance, highlighting a crucial intersection between the preservation of cultural heritage and the contemporary demand for sensitivity in media. The challenge lies in fostering an environment where audiences can appreciate the past without shackling broadcasters with fears of censorship, ultimately enriching the landscape of British comedy rather than diminishing it.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767591/Ofcom-accused-censorship-row-old-TV-comedies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.gbnews.com/celebrity/carry-on-censor-ofcom-nostalgic-tv-channels)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767591/Ofcom-accused-censorship-row-old-TV-comedies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/1467580/Carry-on-films-warning-woke-Britbox-racism-sexism-TV)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://melonfarmers.co.uk/hitsc_car.htm), [[6]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/13/ofcom-tells-bbc-stop-showing-many-old-films-daytime-repeats/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/1467580/Carry-on-films-warning-woke-Britbox-racism-sexism-TV), [[6]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/13/ofcom-tells-bbc-stop-showing-many-old-films-daytime-repeats/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767591/Ofcom-accused-censorship-row-old-TV-comedies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/oct/12/comedy-central-criticised-ofcom-crude-tv-trailers)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767591/Ofcom-accused-censorship-row-old-TV-comedies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.gbnews.com/celebrity/carry-on-censor-ofcom-nostalgic-tv-channels)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14767591/Ofcom-accused-censorship-row-old-TV-comedies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gbnews.com/celebrity/carry-on-censor-ofcom-nostalgic-tv-channels> - Nostalgia TV channels like Talking Pictures TV and Rewind TV are facing challenges in broadcasting classic British comedies due to Ofcom's evolving content guidelines. These channels, which have built loyal audiences by airing vintage films, are concerned that frequent changes in regulations may lead to excessive self-censorship, potentially altering the authenticity of classic shows. Industry figures argue for a 'presumption of innocence' approach, suggesting that isolated incidents of offensive content should not result in severe penalties, to preserve the integrity of vintage programming.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/oct/12/comedy-central-criticised-ofcom-crude-tv-trailers> - In 2015, Ofcom criticised Comedy Central for airing crude trailers before the 9pm watershed, including content deemed unsuitable for children. The trailers featured comedians using explicit language and discussing adult themes during times when children were likely to be watching. Ofcom ruled that these trailers breached broadcasting rules designed to protect young viewers from inappropriate material, leading Comedy Central to apologise and review its compliance procedures.
4. <https://melonfarmers.co.uk/hitsc_car.htm> - The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) implemented several cuts to the 1977 film 'Carry On England' to remove offensive language and suggestive content. These edits included altering dialogue and removing specific lines deemed inappropriate. The BBFC's actions reflect ongoing concerns about content that may be considered offensive or controversial, leading to censorship in classic films.
5. <https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/1467580/Carry-on-films-warning-woke-Britbox-racism-sexism-TV> - BritBox, the streaming service backed by the BBC and ITV, issued content warnings for 16 'Carry On' films, highlighting themes of racism, sexism, and nudity. These warnings aim to inform viewers of potentially offensive material, reflecting a growing sensitivity to outdated language and attitudes in classic comedies. Fans have expressed frustration over the need for such warnings, arguing that the films are part of cultural history and were not intended to offend.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/13/ofcom-tells-bbc-stop-showing-many-old-films-daytime-repeats/> - In 2017, Ofcom directed the BBC to reduce its reliance on repeating old films and daytime shows, urging the corporation to focus more on original UK-made programmes. Ofcom's guidelines aimed to encourage the BBC to take more creative risks and produce content that reflects contemporary British life, moving away from the overuse of classic films and sitcoms in its schedule.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_censorship_in_the_United_Kingdom> - The Wikipedia article on film censorship in the United Kingdom provides a comprehensive overview of the history and practices of film censorship in the UK. It details various films that have been banned or edited due to content deemed offensive or controversial, including explicit sex, violence, and themes considered distasteful at the time of release. The article also discusses the role of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) and the evolution of censorship standards over the years.