



From the Director-General

18 May 2009

John Penrose MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Our ref: 16517296

Dear John

Thank you for your letter which I received on 20 April, in which you raised the concerns of your constituent David Green of 12 Stanley Grove, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 3EB.

Mr Green wrote to you following speculation in the press that the BBC might appoint a non-Christian to the post of Head of Religion & Ethics. As you may know, the BBC has now announced that the successful candidate for this post is Aaqil Ahmed, who is Muslim.

I cannot agree with your constituent that a Muslim is not qualified for this position – either on the basis that Britain is predominantly Christian, or the belief that such faith precludes an understanding of and sensitivity towards other faiths. Aaqil was simply, in our view, the best candidate for the role. He has almost ten years experience in religious broadcasting - first at the BBC, where he was Deputy Editor for Documentaries at BBC Religion and more recently as Head of Religion and Multicultural at Channel 4 where he was responsible for commissioning many successful programmes concerning faith, including the well-regarded *Christianity: A History*.

It is BBC policy to recruit on experience and suitability to the post, not on the basis of faith. I would add that this is not only a question of BBC policy, but of UK law.

Your constituent also points to the religion of the producer of the programme *Songs of Praise*, Tommy Nagra, who is Sikh. Again, I do not believe that Tommy's religion precludes him from being able to make programming about Christianity. Tommy, like Aaqil, is an experienced programme maker, well used to serving Christian audiences with a wide range of programming.

Christianity is the majority faith of the UK, and Christian programming will remain the cornerstone of the BBC's Religion and Ethics department output.

