

The BBC has a duty to offer expertise - even if it's fr...

Published: January 13, 2026, 5:38 pm

Since [I'm in the Daily Mail](#) this morning I suppose I'd better mention the story here.

The Mail picked up on some tweets I wrote on Thursday evening during BBC 2's Newsnight. My point was a simple one: Newsnight was taking about tax avoidance. They were using a methodology I had developed to explore the issue and on Wednesday they had called me to ask me to suggest someone who could be on the programme to make the case for those criticising tax avoiding companies. There was just one proviso: that someone had to be female and could not, therefore, be me.

When I asked why I was told it was because Bill Dodwell of Deloitte was to present the case for tax avoidance and so anyone opposing had to be female. I made the, I think, reasonable point that given that they were using my methodology to do their work and given that I have probably written more on this issue than just about anyone that seemed rather odd, especially as (and this is true) the tax justice movement does not have that many people working for it in the UK, and had no women who had worked nearly as much as me on this particular issue. Couldn't they just swap Bill Dodwell for any number of women (I made the case for several) on the other side of the debate who could do the job equally as well as Bill, I asked, thereby creating gender balance that way?

Apparently it was impossible to change Bill Dodwell. It's intriguing to know why that was so.

I'm aware the BBC then rang other people asking for suggestions - all of whom I know suggested me to be told it had to be a woman. By the time they reached John Christensen at TJN the request was not just for a woman, but a young woman.

Now, in the end Ellie Mae O'Hagan did the job - and as I tweeted on the evening, made a good job of it. She's got a strong record as a campaigner and she's a good journalist. But she did have to, and I'm grateful to her for it, basically quite a lot of my work to make her argument. In addition, she rather wisely, made her role a commentary one. She did not, as I admit I would have done, challenge David Gauke's inappropriate

comments on methodology. Nor did she challenge Bill Dodwell on transfer pricing and nor did she say that there are alternatives to the current system that could replace the absolutely ridiculous system we have. I don't blame her for any of that: she stuck to a story and came over credibly, but I think she'd agree, she's not a tax expert, although she is an expert campaigner.

And that's what annoyed me. I felt that the BBC quite blatantly discriminated against me on the grounds of gender. If a young woman had not been allowed on for the same reason when she was more expert than a middle aged man I would have been very annoyed, and rightly so. I could see no reason why I should not be annoyed in return.

Mind you, I had no idea when tweeting that the Mail would pick it up.

And I do think that some of the comments attributed to me in the Mail are out of context of a conversation at 11.30pm on Thursday evening. It sounds as though I said, for example, that Ellie Mae was just "quite good" when I know contextually it was much more enthusiastic than that, and the claim that I was the only person doing this work was also heavily contextualised with regard to the methodology used, and this particular line of story, which I first developed when working on Microsoft in 2005 and Google in 2008. It is of course not true that I am the only person working on tax justice or tax gap issues. That though is the risk of talking to the press.

Still, let's get back to the main point which is a simple one: if the BBC is to fulfil its mandate then it has to offer debate between people best able to offer opinion. Worrying about their gender and age should not be a major criteria in that, unless there are people of equal qualification, when I'd entirely agree gender balance might then be a reason for selection, and appropriately so. But they refused that with regard to the other side of the debate. Why did it have to apply to one side only? That's the question that needs an answer.

PS: The BBC never told me David Gauke was on the show. If they had I would, of course, have suggested Catherine McKinnell MP to oppose him - his Labour opposite number: younger than me, female, master of her brief and well able to take him on. Again, the question has to be asked, why wasn't she invited?

The feeling that this was rigged to give Gauke and Dodwell an easy ride is very strong.