

The logo for Damian McCarthy, an employment lawyer. It features a dark grey square with a vertical blue bar on the left side. The name "Damian McCarthy" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below the name, the words "Employment Lawyer" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

Damian
McCarthy

Employment
Lawyer

Press Release
By GORDON RAYNER, TOM KELLY
and IAN DRURY
Last updated at 07:46 03 April 2007

Save Moira for Britain

For more than 20 years, she has been an authoritative and reassuring presence on our TV screens. Yet at the age of 55, Moira Stuart has been unceremoniously axed as a BBC news presenter, prompting widespread accusations of ageism and sexism at the heart of the corporation.

Since her 'removal' was announced last week, demands have been growing for her reinstatement. Broadcasters who have added their distinguished voices to the clamour include John Humphrys, Andrew Marr, Michael Buerk, Michael Crick, Sue MacGregor, Sir Trevor McDonald and Jon Snow, while MPs yesterday condemned the decision as a "disgrace".

If an employment tribunal were to find the BBC guilty of discriminating against Miss Stuart on the grounds of age or sex, it could order her reinstatement.

Although she does not want to speak publicly about her predicament, she is said by close friends to be "very disappointed" at the decision to remove her from presenting the news during Marr's Sunday AM programme.

It has appalled viewers and broadcasters in equal measure.

Radio 4 Today programme anchorman and TV Mastermind host John Humphrys was among those who suggested the BBC was guilty of discriminating against older women.

He said: "It may be pure coincidence but there do seem to be remarkably few women with a few lines on their faces presenting TV news or current affairs compared with the wrinkled men."

Andrew Marr said: "Whilst it's up to the BBC bosses to decide who reads the news, I have never worked with as charismatic, sharp and beautiful a colleague as Moira. I would fight any rival as her greatest fan, and I am sad to see her go."

Fellow Radio 4 broadcaster and former Today programme presenter Sue MacGregor said: "I find this decision completely baffling, though given television's predilection for youth above all in its women presenters perhaps I shouldn't.

“Moira is utterly professional, very experienced, always authoritative, and a smart and attractive woman. None of her replacements I’ve seen so far can hold a candle to her. I hope that whoever decided to axe her will quickly recant.”

Michael Crick, political editor of BBC2’s Newsnight, said: “Moira is one of my favourite newsreaders. Television can be terribly sexist when it comes to the question of age in female presenters.”

Award-winning BBC newsreader Michael Buerk added: “Moira Stuart is a national treasure and I for one would be extremely disappointed if she was no longer on the air.”

The BBC proudly trumpeted the fact that Miss Stuart was the first black female newsreader on TV when she began presenting the news more than 20 years ago, and she went on to win a clutch of broadcasting awards as well as an OBE in 2001.

The corporation has so far refused to explain its decision to remove her from the newsreading roster. Although she will still be given other presenting work, as she is on the BBC’s staff, rather than a contracted freelance like many other newsreaders, friends said she regarded reading the news as her main job and losing the role was “a source of great disappointment”.

In marked contrast, the BBC has continued to employ many male newsreaders and current affairs presenters up to and beyond retirement age, including David Dimbleby, 68, and Peter Sissons, 64.

Fellow newscaster Sir Trevor McDonald said: “I am very disappointed. I don’t know the full circumstances of her departure but I always thought she was an absolutely brilliant newsreader and I’m very sad that she’s no longer doing it.

“The remarkable thing about Moira was that she looked better and better and better every time I saw her.” Jon Snow, Channel 4 News presenter, said: “I can’t believe the BBC would want to give her up lightly.” Martin Bell, former BBC foreign correspondent and independent anti-sleaze MP said: “I am absolutely astonished by the decision of the BBC to move her on.”

Jennie Bond, former BBC Royal Correspondent, said: “It’s very sad and I really don’t understand it.” Angela Rippon, retired BBC newsreader, said: “I think age is immaterial particularly in news and current affairs.”

Esther Rantzen, broadcaster and charity campaigner, said: “The BBC have swung a demolition ball through a much loved British institution.”

Equal opportunities campaigner Baroness Howells was among a host of parliamentarians demanding the BBC reverse its decision.

“What kind of message is the BBC sending out when it decides that when someone reaches the age of 55 they are no longer capable of front-line newsreading” she said.

“Someone’s age is no longer a reason for them to be thrown on to the scrapheap.

“She is much loved by the whole country - black and white, old and young. No doubt she going to be replaced by a young, white dolly bird.

“The BBC has clearly not heard of age discrimination - or if it has it is not enforcing it. The BBC must reverse their decision and get Moira back on our screens.”

Tory MP David Ruffley, former vice-chairman of the all-party BBC group, said: “If she is being edged out - and especially if it is because of her age - that is not only short-sighted, it is a complete disgrace.”