



Question time: John Reid, the health secretary, has challenged the BBC to state whether it believes its WMD dossier story to be true

BBC

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Reid seeks BBC statement on dossier claims

By James Blitz and Tim Burt

John Reid, the health secretary, has pressed home the government's attack on a BBC report alleging that Downing Street embellished a dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction by inviting the corporation to state publicly whether it still believes the story to be true.

As the row between Downing Street and the BBC showed no sign of abating yesterday, Mr Reid argued

that No 10 added information to the dossier suggesting Saddam Hussein could launch weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes of giving an order.

Instead, Mr Reid said the BBC must go farther and state categorically that it believes the substance of the story to be true.

"What we need from the BBC is a simple statement," he said. "Do they [the BBC] believe these allegations to be true? They've been broadcast for a month now."

minute claim - broadcast on BBC Radio's *Today* programme on May 29 - was credible and well-placed.

Mr Sambrook said the source had suggested that the 45 minute detail came from an Iraqi official and underlined this has now been confirmed by the government. The source had also claimed that the 45-minute information was inserted late into the dossier, and government comments have also confirmed this.

But Mr Sambrook did not

claim was correct. "The real question for the BBC is were we right to report what we actually said when we said it," Mr Sambrook said. "We believe the answer is Yes."

The Commons all party foreign affairs select committee will this week finalise its verdict on whether the government incorrectly handled the WMD dossier, published in September, and a briefing paper published last February.

The committee may admonish Alastair Campbell

likely to exonerate Mr Campbell, on the 45 minute claim. One Tory committee member said last night "Andrew Gilligan [the BBC reporter] was a solid witness and he clearly had a good source in the intelligence agencies. But Campbell is in the clear on the accusation that he added the 45 minute stuff to the dossier or inserted it into the executive summary."

The BBC has held out the prospect of independent arbitration in the separate dispute between Mr Gilligan

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