

# COMPLAINTS FRAMEWORK: SIX MONTH REVIEW

May 2013

## Summary of Trust Conclusions

The BBC Trust sets the BBC's Complaints Framework and the associated complaints handling procedures. In July 2011, Lord Patten, Chairman of the BBC Trust, stated that the BBC complaints process should be "faster, simpler and easier to understand".<sup>1</sup> A new system was implemented on 26 June 2012 with changes made as a result of audience feedback. At the Trust's request the BBC Executive have reviewed the operation of the new procedures after six months. The Executive report follows later in this document. The Executive presented their report to the Complaint and Appeals Board (CAB) and Editorial Standards Committee (ESC) of the BBC Trust. Trustees concluded that:

- the Trust noted that the preliminary evidence presented to it by the Executive suggests that the changes to the Complaints Framework and the complaints procedures are beginning to work to make the system more joined up and flexible so that serious issues are responded to sooner
- the Trust was pleased that the Executive has focused on work to ensure the most serious complaints are quickly identified and prioritised. The Executive has reported substantial progress over the year. Only five such complaints were not identified on arrival at Audience Services
- in particular Trustees welcome the evidence that the changes to the complaints website have had a positive effect on users' experience of the complaints procedure
- centralising complaints handling has appeared to reduce the burden on programme makers and allow complaints to be tracked more easily and dealt with more quickly
- there have been significant strides but that work needs to continue to ensure that as many complainants as possible have a good experience of the BBC when they complain and feel that they have been listened to and to ensure that serious complaints are quickly identified and responded to

## Next Steps

The Trust will undertake a mystery shopping exercise later this year to test the way complaints are being handled. The results of the exercise will be published in 2013. The Executive will also undertake a further review of the effectiveness of the complaints processes. The conclusions will be presented to the Trust and presented later in 2013.

---

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/about/how\\_we\\_govern/governance\\_review/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/about/how_we_govern/governance_review/)

## Background: The Governance Review

The 2011 Governance review held by Lord Patten identified ways of improving the complaints system including:

- Ensuring that the BBC has an appropriate way to listen to the views of its audiences and consider their feedback.
- Apologising quickly when appropriate and responding to the issues raised.
- Improving the coordination of complaints handling activity across the BBC.

## The Need for Change

The Trust set the Complaints Framework and procedures in 2008 to help audience members make complaints more easily to the BBC. Many do receive a good service when they complain. In 2012/13 94% of initial complaints to the BBC were replied to within 10 working days. The BBC sets a target of 93% to be replied to in 10 working days so this is above target. The changes made in 2012 were to help those audience members who found the system slow or confusing or felt that although the BBC has agreed that a mistake was made it could have said sorry earlier.

The changes in the BBC's complaints handling were made against a background of increased complaints numbers and whilst the BBC is making savings. In 2007/8 there were around 123,000 complaints to the BBC. By 2012/13 there were 217,532 complaints. Complaints numbers have fallen slightly since last year (by 14%) but even so this still represents substantially higher volumes compared to a few years ago. The BBC did not want to cut the resources devoted to handling complaints but it could not afford to increase them. So the BBC needed to improve complaints handling for no additional resource cost at a time of increased complaints. The BBC decided to do this by focusing resources on the more serious issues and by handling the simpler complaints more quickly.

## The Complaints Framework and procedures

All complaints about the BBC must first be dealt with by BBC management (stage 1). Sometimes there is more than one exchange of correspondence at stage 1. So for example, the Editorial Complaints Procedure has a stage 1a for a first reply from the BBC and a stage 1b where programme makers may give a second reply to answer complaints in greater detail.

Complainants who are still unhappy at the end of stage 1 may be able to complain to senior BBC management to have their complaint looked at in more detail at a second stage (stage 2). The BBC has set up a special unit called the Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU) to investigate editorial complaints at stage 2. It is not in a programme making division of the BBC and is independent of programme makers.

The BBC Trust is the final arbiter in the BBC for complaints. The Trust is the sovereign body of the BBC. It takes appropriate complaints on appeal. For editorial

and general complaints this is known as stage 3. Complaints about the Trust go straight to the Trust to reply to and do not go through BBC management.

## The new complaints procedures in June 2012

The complaints procedures were redrafted to make them clearer and some changes were made. The BBC also launched a corrections page, a one page complaints guide and an online video guide as part of the 2012 review. The main changes to the procedures included:

1. Complainants are asked to make editorial and general complaints via BBC Audience Services so all complaints are tracked in the system and to reduce mishandling, making the system faster for complainants. Complaints sent straight to content staff may be forwarded to Audience Services freeing up BBC producers to make programmes and online content
2. The complaints process for a number of complaints about the same subject is now speeded up by normally bringing together the handling at all stages of the BBC's processes so that one generic response is sent out to all complainants. This means key points are covered and replied to more swiftly than might otherwise be the case.
3. The BBC now ends correspondence on trivial, misconceived, hypothetical, repetitious or otherwise vexatious complaints so that resource is focused on dealing with substantive complaints more quickly. The BBC also closes complaints from those who use (and will not stop using) gratuitously abusive or offensive language. The BBC offers an appeal to the Trust so that there is a way of ensuring that complaints have not been closed down in error.
4. A new time scale has been implemented. The BBC aims to reply to complainants who come back to stage 1 to escalate their complaint (Stage 1b) in 20 working days for simple complaints and 35 working days for complex complaints. This is to speed up handling. (This was to be activated in 2013 and has now been activated. Success against this measure will be reported in the next year's Annual Report and Accounts.)
5. The BBC now normally only accepts complaints about online content within 30 working days of the date stamp on the page (but BBC management has discretion to take a complaint outside the timeframe subject to certain criteria). This is so that resources are focused on current issues. The BBC offers an appeal to the Trust so that there is a way of ensuring that complaints have not been closed down in error. (There is no limit for first party complaints about content currently published on a BBC website but the BBC may decline to consider such a complaint if it is no longer practicable and cost-effective to investigate it and adjudicate upon it fairly.)
6. The ECU no longer write letters setting out what the complaint is about prior to investigating and instead gives all complainants a chance to comment on the finding before it is finalised. This is so that resources are saved, delivering value for money as well as speeding up complaint handling.

7. The Trust Unit aims to take decisions within 40 working days on whether or not appeal should proceed to the Trust. This is to speed up complaints handling and give more certainty to complainants on timelines.

## Summary of the outcomes of the BBC Executive's Complaints Framework: six month review

The findings of this review are preliminary, and subject to revision after a longer period of operation. The system appears more joined-up, flexible and responsive than before. Most encouragingly, those using the website appear to find the experience easier to understand. There is no reduction in the determination to give the most serious complaints the attention they deserve.

**Transparency:** The new webpages, *Corrections & Clarifications*, *What Happens to Your Complaint* and *Where to Complain* offer simpler explanations than were available previously and show steady use. A redesign of the complaints website has had a positive effect on users' experience of the complaints procedure.

**Resource/Value for Money:** At stage 1 the changes to the Complaints Framework helped Audience Services to meet demand within existing resources. At stage 2 the ECU was able to deal with an increase in the number of items complained of while continuing to meet its KPI target and without extra resource.

**Focusing resources:** The BBC can now close trivial, misconceived, hypothetical, repetitious or otherwise vexatious complaints to reduce the effort devoted to such complaints and concentrate resources on substantive issues. From 8 August 2012, until 31 January 2013, Audience Services answered at least 8% of 1b complaints (294 out of 3,687) with a standard/automated response. Five complainants who repeatedly make such complaints were subject to the procedure for expedited consideration in the review period.

**Tracking complaints:** Central handling and tracking of complaints has proved to be of value. It simplifies the handling of complaints sent to more than one addressee. In the autumn serious complaints (Savile) were relayed promptly to the Investigations Unit, complainants were quickly provided with appropriate advice and the nature of the issues arising was comprehensively monitored.

**Freeing up programme makers** In some output divisions the option of advising complainants to submit centrally has reduced the strain on resources. Radio reports that the facility has been helpful to programme-makers. News has also given positive feedback.

**Web complaints:** During the period under review, no complaints about web content were rejected on the grounds that the content was more than 30 days old.

**Closing complaints at stage 1:** The facility for closure at 1b is not operating in a manner which discriminates against particular categories of complaint. But there are two exceptions where a slightly higher proportion of complaints were closed at 1b than were logged at 1a: scheduling and bias. Schedule changes rarely involve

issues of editorial standards, and that the activities of lobby groups are disproportionately represented in the bias category.

**KPIs for stage 1b:** From then 8 August until 31 January 2013, 83% of 1b complaints were answered within the 20 working day target. No complaints were assigned a 35 working day target.

## Trust Conclusions

The BBC's complaints service is there to ensure that: mistakes are acknowledged quickly; corrections are made where necessary; and complainants have a reply to their concerns in a timely way. The Trust noted that the preliminary evidence presented to it by the Executive suggests that the changes to the Complaints Framework and the complaints procedures are beginning to work to make the system more joined up and flexible so that serious issues are responded to sooner. But with increasing complaints numbers and with a variety of complex complaints it is absolutely necessary that the BBC continues to improve its complaints handling so that it can track complaints and identify swiftly those that need urgent handling. The Savile crises occurred in this period and it was essential that incoming serious issues were identified and dealt with correctly and quickly even if that meant other complaints took longer to be dealt with.

The Trust has received annual figures for complaints handling. In the year 2012/13 the speed of complaints handling has improved at the Trust (of those editorial appeals heard at the Trust last year 91% were handled within time whereas as in 2011/12 86% were completed within time). In June 2012 the Trust introduced a timeframe within which the Trust Unit had to decide whether to take an appeal to the Editorial Standards Committee. 94% of appeal requests were handled within that timeframe. The number of editorial cases that have arrived on appeal has also increased by 15% to 285. 91% of general appeals to the Trust were also dealt with within time. The speed of response to initial complaints by the BBC has fallen slightly to 94% within ten days however it is within the target set by the BBC (93%). The Trust are aware that the speed of complaints handling is tied up with how serious and complex a complaint is. Importantly the Trust was pleased that the Executive has focused on work to ensure the most serious complaints are quickly identified and prioritised. The Executive has reported substantial progress over the year. Only five such complaints were not immediately referred within the required time.

In particular Trustees welcome the evidence that the changes to the complaints website have had a positive effect on users' experience of the complaints procedure. They noted that in Quarter 4 2012, 78% of respondents in the quarterly survey of people contacting BBC Audience Services said they found it fairly or very easy to do so compared to 64% before it was changed. The Trustees understand that not everyone will find using a website easy but would encourage the Executive to see what more could be done to get the figure over 80%.

The Trust also would continue to encourage programme makers and support staff to pass complaints to Audience Services. Trustees are pleased to note that centralising complaints handling has appeared to reduce the burden on programme makers and allow complaints to be tracked more easily and dealt with more quickly.

The Executive also reported to Trustees that the intervention of the Chief Complaints Editor had been of benefit in co-ordinating complaints handling activity (whether required because of complaints which span divisions or because complaints are using a "scatter-gun" approach) and in speeding up action when a BBC response, public or private, is required more rapidly than has been the case previously. The Chief Complaints Editor heads the Director-General's Office and is, in effect, his eyes and ears over the incoming complaints. The role emerged from the Governance review. Establishing the facts and providing a coherent and sensible answer across divisions takes effort but Trustees were pleased to learn that this role is having an impact on cases which require wider BBC co-ordination and swifter responses.

During the consultation on the proposed changes to the Complaints Framework some license fee payers expressed concern that the closing down of complaints would operate unfairly. Out of 3,678 return complaints (stage 1b) 294 were closed between 8 August 2012 and 31 January 2013 and 48 of those appealed to the Trust. Out of the 48 stage 1b complaints the ESC agreed that one appeal should receive a further response from the Executive. The types of complaints being closed at stage 1 are being published as an annex to the Executive's report. Trustees considered that from the evidence of the cases that had appealed to the Trust and from the list of issues received it was clear that the Executive were using their discretion wisely to close complaints that were misconceived and focus resource on cases that mattered.

Trustees are pleased that the Executive continues to work on improving their complaint handling. In 2013 the Trust has been informed of:

- A workshop on handling complaints where the complainant requires a reasonable adjustment due to disability
- Plans to pass News Online complaints to Audience Services to improve handling
- Plans to develop a procedure to close down abusive telephone complainants
- The redrafting of some standard replies at stage 1

The BBC is fortunate that its audiences have such a direct sense of ownership that there are over a million direct contacts from audience members in the last year alone of which complaints are just one part. We constantly need to improve the way contacts and complaints are handled. Trustees believe that there have been significant strides but that work needs to continue to ensure that as many complainants as possible have a good experience of the BBC when they complain and feel that they have been listened to and to ensure that serious complaints are quickly identified and responded to.

# Complaints Framework: six month review

## A report by the BBC Executive to the Trust

### 1. Introduction

Trustees made a commitment to review progress against the desired outcomes from the changes made to the Complaints Framework after 6 months and to publish the review in 2013. This report contains the Executive's review of progress.

The changes to the BBC's Complaints Framework were to achieve the following objectives:

- a. Faster, simpler, more transparent for our audiences with corrections page
- b. No increase in resources
- c. Focussing resource from trivial to substantive editorial complaints
- d. Tracking complaints effectively
- e. Enabling programme makers to efficiently focus on production

This report sets out to assess how far these aims have been achieved, distinguishing as far as possible between the effects of the changes to the Complaints Framework and other contextual factors.

### 2. Context

The Executive's proposals for changes to the Complaints Framework noted a rising trend in the volume of complaints, largely due to the changing media culture, and unlikely to be abated or reversed. Within this overall trend, however, the volume of complaints fluctuates according to events, with the result that year-on-year comparisons are not necessarily informative. It should also be borne in mind that the character, as well as the volume, of complaint may fluctuate with consequences for the demand on complaint-handling. These points are particularly relevant to the section of the Review dealing with impact on resources (see **4**, below).

Internally, the context is not one in which the implementation of the Complaints Framework changes was expected to produce a "big bang", with their full potential effects immediately realised, and some of them involved learning processes for complaint-handlers which are still underway. The findings of this review must therefore be regarded as preliminary, and subject to revision after a longer period of operation.

Where appropriate, the review draws on qualitative as well as quantitative evidence.

**3. Review against key objectives: Faster, simpler, more transparent, with one-stop route and corrections page**

Implementation of the new Complaints Framework included the creation of the following webpages:

- **Corrections & Clarifications**, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections\\_clarifications/index.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections_clarifications/index.html). Contains the BBC's responses to editorial, technical and corporate issues, including apologies, significant corrections, statements and responses, and findings by the Trust, but not including routine corrections to news stories, minor on-air apologies or schedule changes.
- **What Happens to Your Complaint**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/handle-complaint/>. Contains a complaints 'user journey' which explains to audiences how their complaint is handled and why.
- **Where to Complain**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/where-to-complain/>. Contains a single-page guide to the range of options for complaining about BBC services.

We believe these pages of themselves enhance the transparency of the complaints process, and that **What Happens to Your Complaint** and **Where to Complain** offer simpler explanations than were available previously. Visitor numbers have been fairly steady, though with a dip in December which may well be due to seasonal factors:

<b>Corrections &amp; Clarifications</b>	<b>Page Views</b>
July 2012	1,387
August	1,086
September	890
October	1,098
November	1,198
December	958

<b>What happens to your complaint</b>	<b>Page Views</b>
July 2012	2,496
August	2,163
September	1,296
October	1,456
November	1,562
December	912

<b>Where to complain</b> (Single page guide)	<b>Page Views</b>
July 2012	592
August	704
September	272
October	560

November	563
December	368

For context, the figures for page views of Complaints Responses published on the website are as follows:

July 2012	17,250
August	18,157
September	17,532
October	19,151
November	12,523
December	7,845

Separately from the Complaints Framework changes, but also reflecting the priorities set out in the Chairman's Fleming Lecture in July 2011, the BBC's Complaints website was re-designed in November 2011. Before the re-design, 64% of respondents in the quarterly survey of people contacting BBC Audience Services said they found it fairly or very easy to do so. In Q4 2012, the figure was 78%. It is therefore clear that the changes to the website, taken together, have had a positive effect on users' experience of the complaints procedure.

#### **4. Review against key objectives: No increase in resources**

The resourcing impact of the complaints service is felt in four areas within the BBC:

- i. Audience Services
  - ii. The Editorial Complaints Unit
  - iii. Staff in BBC output Divisions
  - iv. The BBC Trust
- i. Audience Services handles the bulk of complaints at stage 1. Because of high volumes of complaints in 2011 three extra staff were recruited on a temporary basis in order to maintain the stage 1 10-day service. Largely on account of exceptional events, such as the Savile affair, demand on resources was maintained in 2012, including the period under review, and it was not possible to dispense with the temporary staff, as had been hoped. However, the changes to the Complaints Framework helped Audience Services to meet the increased demand within these existing resources (aside from implementation costs) so the growth was checked. The facility for Divisions to refer complaints for central handling was expected to increase the demand on Audience Services' resources<sup>2</sup>, but this seems to have been more than offset by other new provisions of the Complaints

---

<sup>2</sup> Because there is nothing to distinguish these complaints from others at the point of intake by Capita Audience Services, the increased demand cannot be quantified.

Framework, considered in 5, below – though not yet to the extent which would be necessary for Audience Services to meet a continuing increase in demand while dispensing with the additional staff.

- ii. As anticipated, the change to the ECU process (replacing the requirement for entertainment letters with an opportunity to comment before the finding is finalised) has yielded administration and process savings. In the period July-December 2011, 40% of complainants replied with comments requiring a further response after receiving their finding. In the period July-December 2012, this rose to 48%, an increase much more than offset by the reduction of entertainment letters to nearly<sup>3</sup> zero. This contributed significantly to the ECU's ability to deal with increased traffic (the most significant measure being the increase in the number of items complained of) while continuing to meet its KPI target.

	<b>July-December 2011</b>	<b>July-December 2012</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Complaints</b>	210	266	+27%
<b>Items complained of</b>	119	175	+47%
<b>KPI</b>	80% of replies within target	80% of replies within target	
<b>Performance against KPI</b>	93% of replies within target <sup>4</sup>	82% of replies within target	-11%

- iii. In some output Divisions, the option of advising complainants to submit centrally has reduced the strain on resources (see 7, below), but there is no indication that this will be on a scale which will allow Divisional resources to be reallocated to non-complaint activities. There is, as noted above, a counterpart in increased demand on Audience Services.
- iv. The BBC Trust will itself perhaps wish to review any measurable impact on Trust Unit resources.

Overall, the evidence available suggests that the complaints framework has checked growth in the resource required, but it is too early to be definitive about the absolute effect on resources.

<sup>3</sup> ECU staff retain the discretion to write entertainment letters when they think it would be helpful, and have done so in a small number of cases.

<sup>4</sup> A figure favourably affected by a large lobby of more than 70 complaints about a single item.

**5. Review against key objectives: Focusing resources from trivial to substantive editorial complaints**

The Complaints Framework changes included provisions to reduce the effort devoted to complaints which are “trivial, misconceived, hypothetical, repetitious or otherwise vexatious” by answering them with a standard/automated letter closing the correspondence subject to review by the Trust (complainants who repeatedly make such complaints also being subject to the procedure for expedited consideration). Because Audience Services was unable to collect data in this connection until appropriate IT became available on 8 August 2012, we report the figures from that date until 31 January 2013, as the closest approximation to the first six months of operation (volumes in the output Divisions are not thought to be significant, and are not reported here). In that period, Audience Services answered 8% of 1b complaints (294<sup>5</sup> out of 3,687) with a standard/automated response. The saving of time and effort is estimated to be roughly equivalent to six working weeks for one member of staff, but information emerging from the review process suggests that the 8% figure understates the potential gain. In a number of cases, Audience Services staff have been able to use modified versions of the standard responses, which are then processed manually rather than automatically, and each such case represents a saving of time – a possibility which was not foreseen when the new Complaints Framework provisions were implemented. Because these responses are not sent automatically, Audience Services’ IT system does not capture data about them, and a sample-based analysis to establish the scale of the savings they generate will be included in a later review.

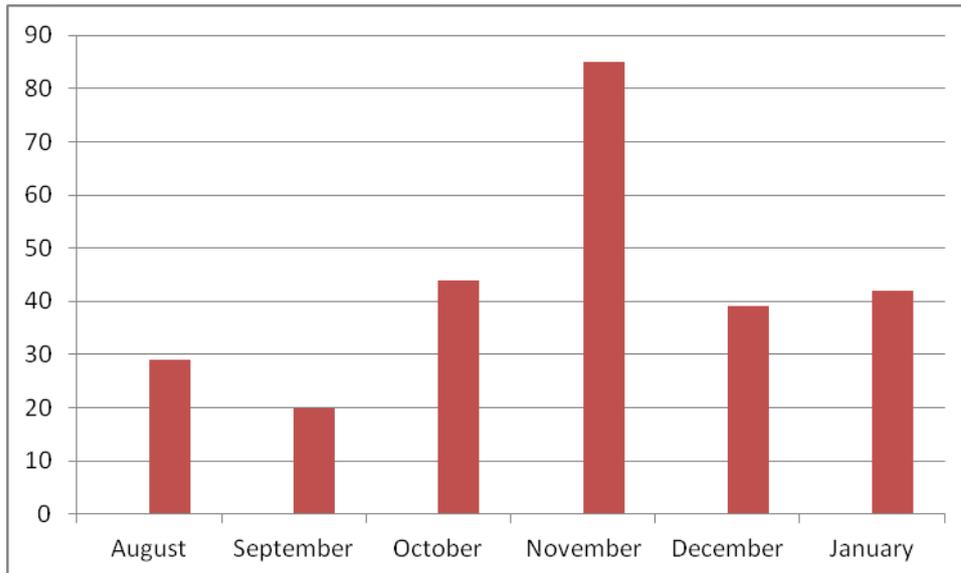
From 1 July to the completion of the review, Audience Services has applied the expedited process to five complainants, in addition to the 15 who were already subject to it. Because frequent complainants often use multiple variants or their names and more than one email address, it is difficult to be certain that all their strands of correspondence have been identified, and estimates of potential resource savings are therefore approximate. Audience Services aims to review the situation in six months’ time, when the impact on resources will be clearer, but an indication of the order of magnitude is given by the fact that the complainants currently subject to the expedited process have made an average of over 80 complaints each in the previous two years – a total of more than 1,600 complaints.

We have referred (see **2**, above) to “learning processes for complaint-handlers which are still underway”, and we believe the facility for closing stage 1b complaints to be the primary case in point. Audience Services staff report that, with growing experience, they are more confident in deploying this facility appropriately and consistently, but learning will continue until Trust decisions at review have built up sufficient case law to inform judgement on the executive side. However, a month-by-month analysis of the figures (see bar chart below) yields no clear trend, and it is probably too early to be able to distinguish any underlying trend from the effects of particular events.

---

<sup>5</sup> Including 259 cases denied escalation at 1b and 35 cases which raised no issue for escalation.

Stage 1b closures, by month, August 2012 – January 2013



If the proportion of complaints answered with a standard/automated response rises significantly above 8%, this would make an important contribution to the resilience of the complaints system in the face of a recent trend of rising demand and resource constraints. However, if there is no significant increase, we anticipate long-term resource issues for Audience Services.

Given continuing high volumes of complaints, along with the need to concentrate resources on substantive issues but also maintain the stage 1 service, we propose that Audience Services should use a further option available in the complaints framework by not always replying in detail to stage 1a complaints about minor issues. This would increase the incidence of short, simple or standard responses to minor issues raised in some complaints. Audience Services would decline further investigation on the grounds of disproportionality if complainants sought escalation to stage 1b, but would maintain the safeguard of offering a right of review by the BBC Trust. As with appeals arising from 1b closures, this would have a counterpart in additional work for the Trust Unit, which would need to be monitored. It is the intention going forward to make full use of this facility in answer to minor complaints and enquiries.

## **6. Review against key objectives: Tracking complaints effectively**

It was hoped that giving Divisions the option of directing complaints to the central complains facility would simplify the handling of complaints sent to more than one addressee. This has proved helpful.

Central handling and tracking of complaints proved to be of value in handling the unexpected impact of Savile-related audience reaction, when the system was able to respond to a sudden influx of high-risk contacts flexibly but with confidence that all contacts could be tracked and reported appropriately. Audience Services staff helped to co-ordinate the activities of a wide range of teams across the BBC, ensuring that serious complaints were relayed promptly to the Investigations Unit,

complainants were quickly provided with appropriate advice and the nature of the issues arising from the complaints was comprehensively monitored.

**7. Review against key objectives: Enabling programme-makers to efficiently focus on production**

To a large extent, this is a counterpart of **6**, above. As Divisions have not been required to log cases where complaints have been re-directed (a requirement which would at least partly defeat the purpose of this facility), we cannot report quantitative data. However, Audio & Music reports that the facility has been helpful to programme-makers, particularly in handling the reactions to changes to presenters and programmes. News reports that its main effect so far has been at senior management level rather than among programme-makers. However, News also reports that Editors have been giving positive feedback on the facility as awareness of it spreads. Vision, by contrast, reports no discernible impact, and volumes in other Divisions are not such that significant economies would be expected.

**8. Specific reports requested by Trustees**

**Complaints made about web content more than 30 days old**

During the period under review, no complaints about web content were rejected on the grounds that the content was more than 30 days old.

**Types of complaint blocked from escalation and brought to Trust review**

An analysis according to the General Issues categories applied by Capita/Audience Services shows that, with two exceptions, the proportion of complaints falling into each category in the 259 cases declined escalation at 1b corresponds closely with the proportions at 1a. This suggests that the facility for closure at 1b is not operating in a manner which discriminates against particular categories of complaint. The exceptions are the categories of scheduling (which largely consists of complaints about changes to the published schedule) and bias, where a slightly higher proportion of complaints were closed at 1b than were logged at 1a. However, it should be noted that schedule changes rarely involve issues of editorial standards, and that the activities of lobby groups are disproportionately represented in the bias category.

**Progress against implementing KPIs for stage 1b**

The Executive undertook to implement monitoring against KPIs for stage 1b complaints on a basis consistent with ECU monitoring and reporting (a 20 working day target for most complaints, a 35 working day target for a minority of more complex complaints and a KPI of 80% of all cases to be closed by the relevant target date. Audience Services has been able to measure 1b response times since 8 August 2012. From then until 31 January 2013, 83% of 1b complaints were

answered within the 20 working day target. As yet, no complaints have been assigned a 35 working day target.

## **9. Conclusion**

After only six months the data available to give a definitive view on the effects of the Complaints Framework Review is limited. The data that does exist is positive, though the effects are not dramatic. However, in the context of the ever-increasing demand, this indicates some success and furthermore the system appears more joined-up, flexible and responsive than before. Most encouragingly, those using the website appear to find the experience easier to understand. Going forward the Executive intends to pursue these and further innovations, as outlined above. Overall, there is no reduction in the determination to give the most serious complaints the attention they deserve.

## **Complaints closed at stage 1 (60 complaints which fell into no clear category are not listed)**

### **Matters of personal preference/opinion/objection**

Standard of spoken English (8)  
Lack of news coverage during Olympics  
Too much Olympic coverage  
Negative pre-Olympic coverage  
Poor standard of musical performance  
Excessive focus on presenter  
Excessive use of station idents on 5 Live  
Objection to contributor (2)  
Irregular scheduling of weather forecast in Today  
Presenters took it for granted that American English was "somehow wrong"  
BBC Scotland schedules best programmes in graveyard slots  
F1 result announced before highlights shown (3)  
Late broadcasting of 7.30am news headlines  
Doesn't like "kids" as a term for children  
Wants an accessible archive of Beechgrove Potting Shed programme  
Match not available online  
Boris Johnson should have been referred to by his full name  
Wants serious news reporting, not celebrity chit-chat or opinion  
Failure to cover horse racing in sports report  
Football commentator lacks expert knowledge  
Tieless Presenter a symptom of dumbing down  
Objects to incessant drumming under newsreader's voice (4)  
Irritated by background music during Radio 2 interviews  
Who Do You Think You Are? Re-scheduled without explanation or apology  
Nudity wrongly censored in Andrew Marr's History of the World (3)  
Saw result of Strictly Come Dancing on TV news before he had a chance to watch the programme  
Presenter of Songs of Praise on Remembrance Sunday should not have been casually dressed (2)  
Incompetent pronunciation Machynlleth  
Tired of women presenters being young, pretty and slim  
Absurd to report Foreign Secretary saying he wouldn't comment on Leveson Report until he had read it as a news item  
Presenter announced the time incorrectly (again)  
Objects to closure of radio stations to accommodate BBC Alba  
Objects to use of "England" rather than "English" in respect of the national team and its players  
Objects to women on Breakfast wearing short skirts  
Objects to presenter shouting and eating chips (during Breakfast Christmas Challenge)  
Not enough coverage of slaughter of dolphins and whales  
Late reporting of Dundee v Celtic game by BBC Scotland  
Objects to gender imbalance on Today  
Objects to non-local programming on local radio  
TV news presenters should remain seated, and give reminders of the headlines only at the end  
Objects to the phrase "temperature-wise" in weather reports

Objects to BBC employing a commentator  
 Not enough alternatives to Olympic coverage on TV  
 Sporting coverage should be confined to one channel, not swapped between them  
 Wants entire Jane Austen oeuvre adapted in mini-series format  
 Objects to simultaneous Olympic coverage and childrens' programmes on more than one channel  
 Poor quality of analysis by pundits on Match of the Day  
 Too much sport  
 Too many repeats (7)  
 Wants a third series of Survivors (2)  
 BBC failing to lead the way in High Definition TV  
 Why no specially-commissioned BBC1 Olympics ident?  
 Objects to Robbie Savage's Olympic commentary  
 Poor sound, dramatisation and direction in Parade's End  
 Wants EastEnders Omnibus to return to Sundays (2)  
 Objects to Egghead presenter saying "The question is, can they be beaten?". They can, so should say "will they be beaten?"  
 Far too much promotion of Strictly Come Dancing  
 Farnborough Air Show ignored by BBC  
 Popular programmes should not be cancelled in favour of sport  
 Objects to perpetual re-runs of Dad's Army  
 Mystified by departure of James Bolam character from New Tricks  
 News reports of "topless photos" of Kate Middleton implied it was the photos which were topless  
 Not enough attention to Black History Month  
 Too much attention to Team GB in coverage of Olympic opening ceremony  
 Objects to judge on Strictly Come Dancing  
 University Challenge teams should have equal numbers of men and women  
 Too many antiques/auction shows  
 Programme started two minutes early  
 Repeats should be identified as such in digital listings  
 Childish anthropomorphism and lazy choice of presenters in science programmes  
 Commentary lacks the necessary expertise  
 Audience clapping and whooping detracted from programme  
 The Persian Gulf should not be referred to as the Arabian Gulf  
 Objects to announcers talking over closing credits (2)  
 Cameras showed too much of the commentators and too little of the action  
 Too many antiques/property programmes  
 Strictly Come Dancing is becoming silly  
 Appalled by rudeness  
 Presenter of The Spitfire: Britain's Flying Past ill-informed  
 Too much companion programming around Strictly Come Dancing  
 Favourite programme shortened to accommodate dance programme  
 Early Sunday morning presenters on Radio 3 and 4 are ghastly  
 Never Mind the Buzzcocks is not funny any more  
 Objects to Strictly Come Dancing clashing with X Factor  
 Wants Merlin to continue  
 Intrusive clapping by Strictly Come Dancing audience during musical numbers (2)  
 Unacceptable for heavily pregnant woman to wear lycra  
 Objects to constant announcements that programmes are available on HD  
 Preston North End FC should be shortened to PNE(as in QPR)  
 Poor quality of French and Saunders radio show on Boxing Day

Episode of Mrs Brown's Boys repeated at the same time three days later (2)  
No justification for a 24-hour news channel  
Wants Eggheads moved to daytime slot, with new presenter (2)  
EastEnders poor quality  
Objects to Paul Martin standing with his hands in his pockets  
Objects to use of metric measures  
Objects to TV programmes over Christmas  
Internet voting for Sports Personality of the Year should be allowed, because it's free  
Too much pop music – wants an eclectic mix  
Call the Midwife deliberately scheduled to reduce ITV's ratings

### **Controversial topics**

BBC Scotland biased in favour of independence (2)  
BBC Scotland biased against independence (8)  
Ongoing anti-Palestinian bias in BBC news (7)  
Ongoing anti-Israeli bias in BBC news (2)  
Bias in favour of man-made climate change  
Too many negative EU stories  
Attitude of Radio Merseyside to UKIP complainant  
Pro-Labour bias  
Andrew Marr biased towards the Conservative Party  
Bias against drugs law reformers  
BBC biased in favour of assisted suicide  
BBC biased towards "socialist/communist principles" for the last 30 years  
5 Live news biased against the Coalition  
Left-wing bias,  
Bias against Scientology  
Pro-Romney bias in coverage of US Presidential Election

### **Bias on non-controversial matters**

Bias against Glasgow Rangers FC (9)  
Pro-Manchester bias (2)  
Pro-monarchist bias in Diamond Jubilee coverage  
Bias against Manchester City FC, towards Manchester United  
Online football coverage biased towards England and against Scotland  
Unduly sympathetic coverage of Glasgow Rangers FC story

### **Sensitivity and portrayal**

"Racist" comment by newsreader  
Insensitive scheduling of programme of interest to Jews  
Objects to member of BBC Staff  
Advances in women's sport wrongly linked to availability of contraception  
People with learning disabilities mistakenly referred to as "patients"  
Objects to omission of Jesus from episode 3 of Andrew Marr's History of the World (3)

Presenter condemns sectarianism on Radio Scotland but, off the air, is biased  
Presenter inciting racial hatred by his comments on Abu Qatada  
Incorrect to describe people as "black", there being no such thing as black skin  
Objects to reference to same-sex "wedding" in River City  
Insulting reference to the Pope  
Wrong to say there is no connection between homosexuality and paedophilia  
Objects to perpetual bias against men  
Use of black pundit with "gangsta" hairstyles perpetuates racial stereotypes  
Casting of thin actress as role model character in EastEnders promotes poor body image for girls  
Wrong to promote tolerance of gays and lesbians, who are the source of HIV and other ills  
Objects to ongoing gay storyline in EastEnders  
Discrimination in favour of women has gone too far with female rugby commentators  
Male professional dancers over-represented in Strictly Come Dancing  
Ethnically insensitive casting of black actress as mixed-race character in EastEnders  
(2)  
Why no women experts on Winterwatch?  
Undue focus on race in reporting of sexual abuse gang

## BBC Trust note of complainants on the expedited Procedure at stage 1 and 3 in May 2013

The Complaints Framework contains a provision for dealing with complainants who repeatedly and persistently complaint about certain matters. This Expedited Complaints Procedure may be used at any stage of the BBC's Complaints Procedures. Complainants are generally expedited for a period of up to two years. Correspondence from expedited complainants must be read but do not require acknowledgement. A complaint which raises an issue of breach of any relevant Guidelines or Policies should be investigated in accordance with the usual procedure.

The BBC Executive and the Trust may use this Procedure only where a complainant has a history of persistently or repeatedly making complaints which:

- (a) Are trivial, misconceived, hypothetical, repetitious or otherwise vexatious
- (b) Fail to raise an issue of breach of any relevant Guidelines or Policies
- (c) Use gratuitously abusive or offensive language
- (d) Are shown in investigation to have no reasonable prospect of success or
- (e) After rejection of the complaint at an earlier stage, are persistently and repeatedly appealed unsuccessfully at the next stage

### Five complainants have been expedited at stage 3:

1	Complainant A	Repetitious allegations regarding programmes which present what the majority of scientists believe about the origin and the evolution of the universe.
2	Complainant B	Unsuccessful appeals to the Trust on four previous allegations against the BBC of a lack of impartiality in political programmes or News based on measurements of time/content apportioned to a person or party.
3	Complainant C	Repetitious and substantively identical complaints that had already been resolved, had no reasonable prospect of success and/or repeatedly appealed unsuccessfully to the BBC Trust. Repeated accusations of dishonesty levelled at BBC staff with no evidence to support the serious accusations.
4	Complainant D	14 complaints since 2008 which had been unsuccessfully appealed to the BBC Trust.
5	Complainant E	7 appeals to the BBC Trust in 4 years, five of them were either not upheld or not accepted for consideration on appeal.

### 19 complainants have been expedited at Stage 1

1	Complainant F	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success
2	Complainant G	Volume of complaints alleging foreign news reports reflect US foreign policy without reasonable prospect of success
3	Complainant H	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of

		success
4	Complainant B	Volume of complaints (also expedited at stage 3) without reasonable prospect of success
5	Complainant I	Repetitious allegations without reasonable prospect of success that Farming Today's reporting is influenced by NFU
6	Complainant J	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success
7	Complainant K	Volume of complaints about aspects of Middle East coverage without reasonable prospect of success
8	Complainant L	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about bias towards references to male nudity across BBC output
9	Complainant M	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about his requests not being played on BBC Radio 1
10	Complainant N	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success
11	Complainant O	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about various uses of the terms "English", "Scottish" or "Welsh"
12	Complainant P	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success alleging BBC Look North is biased against covering South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire
13	Complainant Q	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success
14	Complainant R	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about scheduling of Click
15	Complainant S	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success alleging the BBC fails to cover horseracing adequately
16	Complainant T	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about alleged anti-English bias
17	Complainant U	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success about topics covered by BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine Show
18	Complainant E	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success (also expedited at stage 3)
19	Complainant V	Volume of complaints without reasonable prospect of success alleging too many reports and contributors in favour of the Roman Catholic church