

Analysis of complaints

From 1 April to 30 September 2014 the Unit reached findings on 237 complaints concerning 210 items (normally a single broadcast or webpage, but sometimes a broadcast series or a set of related webpages). Topics of complaint were as follows:

Table 1
Topics of Complaint

	<u>No of Complaints</u>	<u>No of Items</u>
Harm to individual/organisation	13	13
Political bias	8	8
Other bias	99	78
Factual inaccuracy	64	63
Offence to public taste	28	24
Offensive language	1	1
Sexual conduct	3	3
Sensitivity and portrayal	1	1
Bad example (children)	2	2
Racism	7	6
Offence to religious feeling	4	4
Commercial concerns	2	2
Standards of interviewing/presentation	4	4
Other	1	1
Total	237	210

In the period 1 April – 30 September 2014, 13 complaints were upheld (1 of them partly) – 5.5% of the total. Of the items investigated in the period, complaints were upheld against 10 items (5% of the total). 13 complaints, about 6 items, were resolved. This report contains summaries of the findings in those cases, except for one case in which the provisional finding still awaits finalisation and one in which the complaint related to a finding summarised in the previous Bulletin.

Standards of service

The Unit's target is to deal with most complaints within 20 working days of receiving them. A target of 35 days applies to a minority of cases (15 in this period) which require longer or more complex investigation. During the period 1 April – 30 September 2014, 87% of replies were sent within their target time.

Summaries of upheld/resolved complaints

The One Show, BBC 1, 9 December 2013

Complaint

In a studio discussion about possible economic effects of Scottish independence, a programme reporter quoted UK supermarkets as having said that, in the event of independence, the price of groceries in Scotland would rise. A viewer complained that the supermarkets had made no such statement.

Outcome

The supermarkets concerned had not said that prices would necessarily rise, but that they would be likely to do so if no offsetting measures were taken. The ECU agreed that this qualification should have been reflected, but found that an item on the programme the following evening, where the lack of certainty was emphasised, was sufficient to resolve the complaint.

Resolved

Reporting Scotland, BBC Scotland, 6 January 2014

Complaint

A viewer complained that an item on Ukrainian expatriates living in Scotland had given a misleading description of the group who had established a chapel on the site of their prisoner of war camp.

Outcome

The item described the group as "*former partisans*" who "*fought both Germany and Russia in the hope of re-establishing an independent Ukraine at the end of the war*". In fact they had been part of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician) a locally raised Ukrainian SS division which was created in 1943 and fought the Soviet Union under German command, and the item had been misleading in that respect.

Upheld

Further action

The Head of News (Acting) reminded news staff about the importance of fact-checking all historical data when researching stories such as this.

Newshour, World Service, 11 January 2014

Complaint

A listener complained that a bulletin item on the late Ariel Sharon was misleading in a number of respects, particularly in relation to Mr Sharon's role in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the beginning of the second Intifada and the construction of the security barrier.

Outcome

Although some of the item's phrasing could have been more precise, in most respects it was not materially misleading (particularly as the bulletin was in the context of a longer programme about Mr Sharon and his legacy which covered the relevant events in some detail). It was misleading for the item to say that he had commissioned a barrier "*to keep Palestinians out of Israel*", but, as the programme-makers had already acknowledged that it would have been more accurate to say that it had been built "*to prevent attacks by Palestinian militants*", the ECU considered this aspect of the complaint resolved.

Resolved

Panorama: Police: Shooting to Kill? BBC1, 20 January 2014

Complaint

The programme included footage of a raid in which two men were killed. Solicitors representing the family of one of the men complained that they were not given warning that this material would be aired.

Outcome

The programme-makers had sought to make the families aware of inclusion of the material in the programme via a third party and had been given to believe that this information would be passed along to them. However more should have been done to identify the family members and contact them directly.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor has reminded the Panorama team of the overriding importance of making direct contact with the families of the deceased in instances of this kind, and of the need to look for means of verifying contact via third-parties where no direct contact is possible.

Outnumbered, BBC1, 29 January 2014

Complaint

A viewer complained that a character's reference to a frustrating and inflexible computer system as being "*on the autistic spectrum*" perpetuated a negative stereotype.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that, on this occasion, there was insufficient editorial justification for alluding to a disability in this way.

Upheld

Further action

The commissioning team have discussed the finding and the issues it raises in relation to the treatment of disability in comedy. The episode will be edited prior to any repeat.

Newshour, World Service, 4 February 2014

Complaint

An item on John Kerry's first year as US Secretary of State referred to "*the Israeli government calling him an anti-Semite*". A listener complained that this was untrue, and that in fact no Israeli politician had accused him of anti-Semitism.

Outcome

The item's reference rested on comments by Naphtali Bennett and Adi Mintz in response to Mr Kerry's comments about a possible boycott of Israel. The complainant took the view that these comments didn't amount to direct accusations of anti-Semitism, but the ECU noted that the Israeli Foreign Minister had defended Mr Kerry on the premise that he had been so accused. In any event, however, as Mr Bennett represents the second-smallest of the parties in Israel's governing coalition, and as Mr Mintz is not a member of the government, it was misleading for the item to present their views as those of the Israeli government.

Upheld

Further action

The programme's Editor discussed with the production team the importance of accuracy in the representation of views when writing cues.

Reporting Scotland, BBC Scotland, 10 February 2014

Complaint

A viewer complained that a report on legal action being taken to clarify the existing law on assisted suicide/assisted dying failed to reflect the views of those opposed to euthanasia.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that assisted suicide is a controversial subject and so the report should have reflected an appropriate range of views. The report therefore failed to achieve the necessary due impartiality.

Upheld

Further action

The Head of News discussed with the Reporting Scotland team the importance of reflecting an appropriate range of views in coverage of controversial subjects.

Today, Radio 4, 13 February 2014

Complaint

The programme included an item in which Lord Lawson of Blaby and Sir Brian Hoskins, Professor of Meteorology at Reading University and Director of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change at Imperial College, London were invited to discuss the relationship between global warming and the recent severe flooding in parts of the UK. Three listeners complained that the item had given undue weight to Lord Lawson's views, and had conveyed a misleading impression of the scientific evidence on the matter.

Outcome

The BBC's position (as formulated by the BBC Trust in 2011) is that there is general agreement among climate scientists that the evidence is in favour of anthropogenic global warming, that the BBC's coverage should reflect this, and that opinion and evidence should not be treated as if they were on the same footing. That does not mean scientific research should not be properly scrutinised through scientific debate. Nor does it mean that sceptical views should be excluded from BBC programmes. Inviting Lord Lawson (who chairs a climate policy campaign group) to appear on the Today programme was entirely consistent with that position, but the handling of the item gave the impression that his views on the science of climate change stood on the same footing as those of Sir Brian, and introducing him as "*the founding chairman of the Global Warming Policy Foundation which is an all-party think tank*" did not make sufficiently clear that he represented a particular viewpoint.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor of **Today** has reminded producers of the BBC's agreed approach to covering climate science. Senior journalists will also be offered an opportunity to attend the College of Journalism training course established after the Trust's impartiality review of science coverage, if they have not already done so.

Sunday Politics, BBC1, 16 February 2014

Complaint

A viewer complained that Andrew Neil, interviewing John Swinney of the SNP, had given a misleading impression of what the Spanish Foreign Minister had said about the prospect for Scottish membership of the EU in the event of independence.

Outcome

The occasion of the interview was the doubt about the success of any Scottish application expressed by Manuel Barroso on **The Andrew Marr Show** that morning. Mr Swinney said *“what Mr Barroso didn’t say is that absolutely no member state of the European Union has indicated that they would veto a Scottish membership of the European Union”*, to which Andrew Neil responded *“Well, the Spanish Foreign Minister has”*. In fact, the Spanish Foreign Minister was reported by the Financial Times to have said that Spain was willing to consider an eventual application by Scotland, and Andrew Neil’s response was misleading in that respect.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor has reminded staff that, while complex political subjects that are dealt with in short format interviews inevitably involve an element of compression, it is, of course, important to phrase questions as accurately as possible, either when trying to formulate them beforehand or doing so live on air.

The Mark Forrest Show, BBC Radio Leeds, 6 March 2014

Complaint

The programme included an interview with a representative of the company BritainsDNA, about genetic evidence of Viking ancestry in the population of the UK. A listener, noting that an earlier interview with the same contributor in Radio 4’s **Today** programme had been the subject of an upheld finding, complained that this item had again been inaccurate in relation to genetic ancestry testing and inappropriately promotional in character.

Outcome

In the ECU’s view, the impression given on this occasion had not been unduly promotional, and the programme-makers’ previous acknowledgement that the interview had not been challenging enough sufficed to resolve the complaint in relation to accuracy.

Resolved

Top Gear Burma Special, BBC2, 16 March 2014

Complaint

Two viewers complained that Jeremy Clarkson’s use of the phrase *“there’s a slope on it”* at the point where an Asian man began to cross the bridge which the team had just constructed, was offensive.

Outcome

As the BBC had already acknowledged, publicly and to Ofcom, that the use of the term had been offensive in a way not justified by the context, the ECU considered the issue of complaint to have been resolved.

Resolved

Morning Call, Radio Wales, 26 March 2014

Complaint

The programme was devoted to issues arising from a teachers' strike occurring that day. A listener complained that during an exchange with the presenter of the following programme, that presenter made remarks which appeared to reveal his opposition to the strike.

Outcome

The ECU found that the presenter of the following programme had spoken in terms which could only be taken as expressing disapproval of the strike, thus taking sides on a controversial issue.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor, Radio Wales, discussed the issues arising from the finding with both programme teams.

Newsnight, BBC 2, 22 April 2014

Complaint

The programme included a report from the NUT's Annual Conference, followed by a studio discussion. A viewer complained that the item had "*a partisan, union-knocking, red scare approach*", that tweets posted by the Editor of **Newsnight** indicated bias, that a participant in the discussion (described as a moderate teacher) had been misleadingly portrayed as representing an organisation with official links to the Labour Party, and that the presenter of the discussion had inaccurately suggested he had been "*forced out*" of the NUT when he had in fact resigned.

Outcome

The item as a whole was duly impartial and the Editor's tweets, while not an entirely accurate characterisation of its contents, did not indicate bias. The presenter did not state that the teacher in question had been forced out of the NUT, but put it to him that he was "*one of the moderates in the union who believe that you were forced out because of this rising tendency of militancy*", which was an accurate description of a situation in which he felt he had no alternative but to resign. However, the caption "*Labour Teachers*", together with the terms in which he was questioned, tended to give the impression that he spoke for a group affiliated to the Labour Party, whereas "*Labour Teachers*" is simply a blog and website for the discussion of educational matters, with no policy stance of its own and no links to the Labour Party. The item was misleading in that respect.

Partly upheld

Further action

The programme's Deputy Editor discussed with the production team the use of captions and descriptions to ensure that audiences are provided with accurate information about guest speakers.

News at 9, News Channel, 17 July 2014

Complaint

As part of its coverage of the Israeli ground offensive in Gaza which had begun that day, the programme interviewed Davis Lewin of the Henry Jackson Foundation. In response to complaints, BBC News had acknowledged that the Foundation's pro-Israeli position should have been made clear. Seven viewers complained that this acknowledgement was insufficient, and that a public correction was required.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that the speaker's pro-Israeli affiliation should have been made clear. However, the content of his contribution was not such that viewers would have been materially misled if they had understood him to be a neutral commentator, and there was no occasion for the kind of correction requested by the complainants.

Resolved**Trending: Eritrea's "Bob Marley" moment?, [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-55811111)****Complaint**

A visitor to [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.com) complained that an article on a singer from Eritrea referred to the country as "*tiny*" when it is not.

Outcome

BBC News Online acknowledged that "*tiny*" was not the most appropriate term to use given the size of the country, and the word was removed from the article. The ECU considered that this was sufficient to resolve the issue of complaint.

Resolved