

Analysis of complaints

From 1 April to 30 September 2017 the Unit reached findings on 173 complaints concerning 141 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	8	8
Infringement of privacy	1	1
Bad example (adults)	2	1
Bad example (children)	1	1
Political bias	11	11
Other bias	48	33
Factual inaccuracy	61	52
Offence to public taste	12	10
Offensive language	6	4
Offence to religious feeling	4	3
Sexual conduct	1	1
Violence	2	2
Sensitivity and portrayal	1	1
Racism	5	4
Commercial concerns	6	6
Standards of interviewing/presentation	4	4
Total	173	142

In the period 1 April – 30 September 2017, 20 complaints were upheld (4 of them partly) – 11% of the total. Of the items investigated in the period, complaints were upheld against 14 items (11.5% of the total). 4 complaints, about 3 items, were resolved. The bulletin includes summaries of these cases.

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 (27 in this period) which require longer or more complex investigation. During the period 1 April – 30 September 2017, 78% of replies were sent within their target time.

Summaries of upheld/resolved complaints

Christmas University Challenge, BBC Two, 27 December 2016

Complaint

The answer to a question about Billy Connolly's banana boots attributed their design to the playwright John Byrne. The daughter of Edmund Smith complained that the answer was incorrect, her father having designed and made the boots in question

Outcome

Evidence from several sources, including a detailed account of the matter in Pamela Stephenson's biography of Billy Connolly, confirmed that the boots had been designed and made by Edmund Smith.

Upheld

Further action

The Executive Producer responsible for oversight of the series drew the finding to the attention of the independent production company which makes it.

Countryfile, BBC One, 29 January 2017

Complaint

A viewer complained that the programme gave the misleading impression that leaving the EU would mean the end of farm subsidies in the UK.

Outcome

In the last of a series of reports from New Zealand, Adam Henson visited a hill farmer and discussed the impact of the removal of agricultural subsidies in New Zealand in the 1980s. In the course of this unscripted conversation, he said "*I'm seriously concerned back home that once that support is removed, particularly from the hill farmers who farm sheep and beef, they're going to really find it very difficult and quite stressful, those who are heavily borrowed in particular*". The UK Government has said it will honour existing EU farm subsidies up to 2020, and there is as yet no certainty about what will happen after that date. The implication that farm subsidies in the UK would simply cease after a certain point was therefore misleading.

Upheld

Further action

The programme will not be re-broadcast in its current form.

News (5.00pm), News Channel, 20 April 2017

Complaint

A report on an election campaign speech by Jeremy Corbyn included the following exchange between the presenter and the reporter:

Presenter: He didn't mention Brexit, of course that's at the heart of Theresa May's campaign and interesting that she immediately starts attacking on the issue of migration.

Reporter: Yes, it is quite noticeable, again and again, Mr Corbyn does not mention the B word. He didn't really when he did a stump speech in Croydon yesterday and today, he only mentioned it when challenged by reporters.

A listener complaint that this was inaccurate, as Mr Corbyn's speech had in fact mentioned Brexit.

Outcome

Although the reporter's general point was soundly based, the exchange gave the impression that Mr Corbyn had not referred to Brexit in the body of the speech in question. As he had done so twice, albeit briefly, this impression was inaccurate.

Further action

The need for accuracy even when making a general observation about the ambition of a political speech has been stressed to the news team.

Newsnight, BBC Two, 21 April 2017

Complaint

A viewer complained that, in a package on the French Presidential election, Evan Davis's approaches in back-to-back interviews with representatives of the Macron and le Pen campaigns was so marked as to constitute bias.

Outcome

The difference was partly accounted for by the fact that the interview with the Macron representative was recorded while news of the killing of a policeman on the Champs Elysees was breaking, while the le Pen representative was recorded the following day and after Ms le Pen herself had provoked controversy with her comments on the event. However, it was indeed marked, and Evan Davis gave the impression of endorsing Mr Macron's claim that Ms le Pen had illegitimately sought to make political capital out of the incident.

Upheld

Further action

Newsnight has been reminded of the requirements of due impartiality, so that the perception of its coverage matches its intent.

Points West, BBC One (West), 13 April 2017

Complaint

The programme included an item on the campaign in Bristol for a cannabis café. A viewer complained that it left the impression that use of cannabis was legal and included footage of cannabis use which would have facilitated imitation at a time when children would have been watching.

Outcome

The item made clear at several points that the use and cultivation of cannabis were illegal, but there was no editorial justification for the explicitness with which cannabis use was illustrated.

Partly upheld

Further action

Radio 1's Big Weekend, Radio 1, 27 May 2017

Complaint

A listener complained about the use of the f-word by one of the acts, shortly before 5pm in this live broadcast.

Outcome

The use of the word was unacceptable at a time when children were likely to have been listening. However, it was promptly followed by an apology by the presenter, which the ECU regarded as sufficient to resolve the issue of complaint.

Resolved

Sarah Champion quits Labour front bench over rape article, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

This online item focused on Sarah Champion MP's resignation from the Labour front bench as a result of controversy over her reference to "*a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls*" in a column she had written for the Sun. It reported that the column had been accompanied by a piece by Trevor Kavanagh, the Sun's former political editor, which had also caused controversy on account of its reference to "*the Muslim problem*". A reader complained that the item's quotation of Mr Kavanagh was misleading, because it used a lower case initial for the word "*problem*" whereas it was precisely the use of upper case in the Sun piece which had caused controversy.

Outcome

The item had used lower case in accordance with BBC News Online house style but, as it was the original use of upper case which had led to complaints of similarity with Nazi references to "the Jewish Problem", the application of house style had a misleading effect in this instance.

Upheld

Further action

The need for due accuracy in quoting source material has been emphasised to the team.

Stacey Dooley Investigates: Kids Selling Drugs Online, BBC Three

Complaint

The programme investigated the growing phenomenon of young people trafficking in drugs via mobile phone apps. The father of a 15 year-old boy, filmed in the course of an abortive transaction with Stacey Dooley, complained that the programme had led to his being identified, and that the claim that he had been attempting to sell drugs was untrue (the items in question being mints, not pills).

Outcome

As the 15 year-old had been purporting to sell drugs, little hinged on whether the items he offered were genuine. However, the steps taken by the programme-makers to prevent his being identified were not fully effective, which was inconsistent with the requirements of the BBC's Editorial Guidelines on safeguarding the interests of people under the age of 18.

Partly upheld

Further action

The importance of properly disguising an identity to safeguard the interests of young people has been emphasised to the production team.

Start the Week, Radio 4, 23 January 2017

Complaint

Discussing his recent book on Wagner with Andrew Marr, the actor Simon Callow said of Wagner's anti-Semitism "*It really is a psychopathological situation, it's almost like Asperger's or something*". A listener with Asperger's Syndrome complained that the suggestion that the condition was comparable with anti-Semitism was deeply offensive.

Outcome

It was clear from Simon Callow's subsequent remarks that the point of comparison he had in mind was Wagner's tendency to obtrude his anti-Semitic views into conversations on unrelated topics, rather than any supposed similarity between anti-Semitism and Asperger's Syndrome. Nevertheless, the comparison was inappropriate and capable of causing offence.

Upheld

Further action

The programme has been removed from the available iPlayer archive.

The Nolan Show, Radio Ulster, 7, 13, 14, 16 & 19 December 2016

A Nolan Show Investigation, BBC One Northern Ireland, 15 December 2016

A Nolan Show Investigation (radio repeat), Radio Ulster, 27 December 2016

Complaint

The programmes in question were concerned with the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme, and reported the emergence of conflicting accounts of the actions taken by Northern Ireland Ministers, officials and special advisers after a serious flaw in the scheme had become apparent. On behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, Nigel Dodds MP complained that the programmes had been in various respects inaccurate, biased and (principally in the case of the **Nolan Show Investigation** in both its television and radio versions, but also in references in the 7 December broadcast to her absence in China) unfair in its treatment of the First Minister, Arlene Foster.

Outcome

The ECU found no grounds for upholding the complaints of bias or unfair treatment in relation to any of the programmes, and found that the BBC's standards of due accuracy had been breached in only one respect, in connection with the 27 December broadcast. This, like the original television version broadcast on 15 December, consisted of interviews with Jonathan Bell, who had inherited ministerial responsibility for the RHI from Mrs Foster in her previous position as Minister at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and with Mrs Foster herself, framed by some explanatory material. Mr Dodds complained that, in the course of his interview, Mr Bell had been allowed to make claims which were baseless and demonstrably inaccurate, pointing out that a senior official at DETI had publicly contradicted them. As the official's account of the matter was not published until 18 December, the ECU took the view that it had legitimate to broadcast Mr Bell's claims (both in the original interview and the 16 December programme, in which the claims were repeated). The ECU accepted, however, that it was a mistake not to have drawn attention to the official's statement in the explanatory material of the 27 December programme. It amounted at least to a significant challenge to the accuracy of Mr Bell's account, and, in the absence of any allusion to it, listeners might have drawn the inaccurate conclusion that Mr Bell's claims had been answered only by uncorroborated denials.

Partly upheld

The finding has been discussed with the senior editorial team involved, and they have been reminded of the need to ensure that repeat broadcasts or interviews are accompanied by any relevant updates about people and/or events featured within them.

The Travel Show, News Channel, 10 June 2017

Complaint

A viewer complaint that an item on an all-night hairdressing salon gave undue prominence to a commercial undertaking.

Outcome

There was editorial justification for the item as part of a series of features on London as a 24-hour city, but the name and branding of the salon were more prominent than was warranted.

Upheld

Further action

The programme team has been reminded of the need to reflect the world as it is without giving the impression of undue prominence.

The World at One, Radio 4, 27 March 2017

Complaint

A listener complained that Nick Bryant, in a report from Florida, had overstated the effect of global warming on sea levels.

Outcome

Nick Bryant's statements about rising sea levels were soundly-based, except for the claim that the sea level at Miami was rising at ten times the global mean. Data from the measurement stations closest to Miami show little divergence from the global mean.

Partly upheld

Further action

The World at One has been advised not to repeat scientific claims about a specific event without confirming them.

Three Palestinians killed after deadly stabbing in Jerusalem, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

Three readers of the article complained that the headline gave the misleading impression that Palestinians had been the victims of the stabbing in question.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that the headline might have given the impression that the Palestinians in question had been victims of the stabbing (whereas they were in fact the perpetrators), but considered that the change to "Israeli policewoman stabbed to death in Jerusalem" shortly after publication sufficed to resolve the issue of complaint.

Resolved

Today, Radio 4, 10 August 2017

The programme included an interview with Lord Lawson, occasioned by the release of Al Gore's second film about climate change. Nine listeners complained that Lord Lawson was not an appropriate speaker on climate change issues, and that his contribution had contained inaccuracies on the topic.

Outcome

The programme was justified in interviewing Lord Lawson in a context which did not imply that his views stood on the same footing as those of climate scientists, but the particular position in the debate occupied by Lord Lawson and the Global Warming Policy Foundation should have been made clear to listeners, either in the introduction to the interview or early in the questioning, and some of his statements in relation to climate change were wrong as the Global Warming Policy Foundation subsequently acknowledged) and should have been challenged.

Partly upheld

Turkey with Simon Reeve, BBC Two, 26 March 2017

Complaint

A viewer complained that Simon Reeve's statement that the Ottoman Empire at its full extent "*Stretched from the Middle East to Spain*" was inaccurate.

Outcome

The Ottoman Empire did not extend to Spain. In the context of a programme dealing with the history and culture of Turkey, this was a material inaccuracy.

Upheld**Further action**

The programme has been edited to remove the inaccuracy.

Tweet about Jeremy Corbyn at Glastonbury, 24 June 2017**Complaint**

A listener complained that a tweet showing a picture of Jeremy Corbyn addressing the crowd at Glastonbury accompanied by the words "*When you ace the chorus*" was biased.

Outcome

On the basis that senior members of the Radio 1 social media team had the tweet deleted as soon as they became aware of it – some seven minutes after publication, and before any complaints had been received – the ECU considered that the issue of complaint had been resolved.

Resolved