

Analysis of complaints

From 1 March to 30 September 2013 the Unit reached findings on 235 complaints concerning 187 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	18	18
Infringement of privacy	2	2
Political bias	3	3
Other bias	59	35
Factual inaccuracy	100	84
Offence to public taste	26	24
Sensitivity and portrayal	2	2
Bad example (children)	1	1
Bad example (adults)	2	1
Racism	6	4
Offence to religious feeling	7	5
Commercial concerns	3	3
Standards of interviewing/presentation	6	5
Total	235	187

In the period 1 March – 30 September 2013, 26 complaints were upheld (10 of them partly) – 11% of the total. Of the items investigated in the period

Reporting Scotland, BBC1 Scotland, 24 September 2012 (6.30pm)

Complaint

A viewer complained that a report on the deaths of three people in a canoeing accident confused the distinction between life jackets and buoyancy aids.

Outcome

The piece was edited in a way which gave the impression that a representative of the RNLI was demonstrating the benefits of a buoyancy aid, when in fact he was talking about (and showing) a life jacket. The programme team quickly recognised that this impression was misleading, and the version of the item broadcast later that evening was edited to remove it, but the original broadcast could have caused confusion over the correct use of safety equipment, in a context where the use of life jackets rather than buoyancy aids might have made the difference between life and death.

Upheld

Further action

News teams have been reminded of the need to ensure absolute accuracy of description, particularly when the subject matter is safety equipment and its use.

BBC News, 14 November 2012

Complaint

The programme included a studio interview with Jonathan Sacerdoti about recent Israeli actions in Gaza. Two viewers complained that he had not been identified as a pro-Israeli speaker, which was misleading and resulted in bias.

Outcome

Mr Sacerdoti was introduced as the Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern Democracy, and it was not made clear that he is an active proponent of the Israeli viewpoint. What he said in the course of the interview was a legitimate expression of that viewpoint, and his appearance in the programme was in keeping with the requirements of due impartiality. However, as a matter of due accuracy, viewers should have been made aware that he was not a neutral commentator.

Partly upheld

Further action

The production team have been reminded of the importance of clearly summarising the standpoint of any interviewee where it is relevant and not immediately clear from their position or the title of their organisation.

#Gaza militants launch missiles at Tel Aviv in 1st rocket attack on Israeli capital since 1991 Gulf War <http://bbc.in/QJkWK7>, BBC News, 15 November 2012

Complaint

This was a tweet posted to draw attention to an online article. A reader complained that it referred to Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that this was inaccurate (the inaccuracy was not repeated in the article itself) but found that the correction and apology already made by BBC News was sufficient to resolve the issue.

Resolved

Judi Spiers Show, BBC Radio Devon, 20 May 2013

Complaint

A listener complained that a homeopath who was interviewed on the programme was allowed to make the misleading claim that an organisation working in Tanzania had successfully treated patients using homeopathic remedies.

Outcome

The presenter appeared to endorse the claims that were made for the efficacy of homeopathic remedies and failed to challenge the assertion that homeopathic remedies had been effective in treating patients with a range of medical conditions, including the side effects of HIV medication. As there is no scientific support for them, such claims are controversial and the item fell short of due impartiality

Upheld

Further Action

The finding was discussed with the presenter and producer, and all the station's non-news programme teams have been reminded of their commitment to due impartiality in all interviews.

News (7.00pm), Radio 4, 21 May 2013

Complaint

A listener said that an item on the impending retirement of Sir David Nicholson, Chief Executive of NHS England, gave the inaccurate impression that the Francis Report had found that there had been hundreds of avoidable deaths at Stafford Hospital. In fact it had concluded that it would be unsafe to infer from the figures that there had been any particular number of avoidable or unnecessary deaths.

Outcome

The report had been commissioned in the light of concerns about mortality rates, and had found evidence of very serious problems at the Trust. However it did not conclude that there had been "hundreds of avoidable deaths" and had warned against drawing such conclusions from the data. The ECU concluded that the reference to "*the inquiry report into hundreds of avoidable deaths at Stafford Hospital*" had inaccurately characterised the Francis Report.

Upheld

Further action

News teams have been re-briefed on the importance of clarity when discussing an issue as complex as this in a short summary.

Sadie J, CBBC, 16 June 2013

Complaint

A viewer complained that the reference to a character as "a small-minded, OCD neat freak" was offensive because it trivialised a recognised medical condition and perpetuated a negative and inaccurate stereotype of people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

the forthcoming report would include specific figures for the number of deaths above the national average which occurred in the 14 Trusts between 2005 and 2010.

Outcome

The ECU did not uphold the main points of complaint. It concluded that it was accurate to describe Sir Brian as an *“independent expert on mortality rates”* and reasonable to report his views in advance of the publication of a major report on standards of health care. However it agreed the original version of the article which suggested the report would contain specific figures for the number of deaths above the national average was incorrect because it was known that no such figures would be included. The article was subsequently corrected once the error had been brought to the attention of the journalist. In the view of the ECU, this was sufficient to resolve the issues of complaint

Resolved

The Gaza Surf Club, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

This programme page accompanying the online version of a Radio 4 piece dealt with a group of young surfers in Gaza and their efforts to pursue their sport despite difficulties arising from the Israeli blockade. A reader had complained of inaccuracies, all tending to give an unfavourable impression of Israel, and the wording of the article had been changed as a result. He complained to the ECU that the page still created a misleading impression, and argued that it should indicate that changes had been made and explain why.

Outcome

The ECU found that the impression created by the amended article was not misleading, and that the original inaccuracies were not serious enough to warrant the addition to the page suggested by the complainant.

Resolved

Why Do Some UK Jews Settle in Israeli-occupied land?, BBC News Online

Complaint

This article was about the experiences of two men from the UK (and their families) who had chosen to move to settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Seven readers challenged the accuracy of what the settlers were quoted as saying.

Outcome

In most instances, the ECU found either that there was no inaccuracy or that the matter was one of opinion rather than fact. However, the statements by one of the settlers that *“About 90% of settlements are right on the border of the Green Line”* and *“It is relatively rare to find a hilltop settlement”*, singled out by four of the complainants, were inaccurate in a way which, in the context, was materially misleading

Partly upheld

Further action

Writers will be reminded of the need to ensure that a misleading impression does not arise from the use of quotes from interviews.