

Summaries of upheld/resolved complaints

Today, Radio 4, 28 November 2013

Complaint

In a discussion about cigarette packaging, a contributor was introduced as the Director-General of the Institute for Economic Affairs and a smoker. A number of listeners complained that mention should have been made of tobacco industry funding for the IEA.

Outcome

The ECU agreed with the stage one response from BBC News which acknowledged that information about the political orientation of the IEA should have been provided but maintained that there was no requirement to explore sources of funding.

Resolved

Precision: The Measure of All Things, BBC4, 17 June 2013

Complaint

A viewer complained that the programme misrepresented the degree to which the weight of an item changes the further away it gets from the earth.

Outcome

The programme-makers acknowledged that a statement that an object weighing 370g would weigh 100,000 times as much if taken 100,000 metres above the earth should have referred to 100,000 kilometres. The inaccuracy was the result of human error and the relevant section of the programme was re-edited to remove the inaccuracy. The Editorial Complaints Unit considered this to be an appropriate response in the circumstances.

Resolved

Harvest 2013, BBC2, 11 September 2013

Complaint

A viewer complained that a sequence about the nutritional benefits of broccoli was inaccurate and misleading because it said that broccoli contains Vitamin D.

Outcome

The programme-makers had acknowledged that broccoli does not contain Vitamin D and had already re-edited the programme to remove this error. The Editorial Complaints Unit considered this to be an appropriate response in the circumstances.

Resolved

Vanessa Feltz in for Jeremy Vine, Radio 2, 29 October 2013

Complaint

A listener complained that the presenter displayed bias during an interview on the dismissal of Sharon Shoosmith, former head of Haringey children's services.

Outcome

A passage during the interview was inappropriately antagonistic in tone, which may have given listeners the impression that the presenter was expressing her own views on a matter of controversy.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor of the programme will discuss the finding with Ms Feltz, with a view to identifying how the interview went wrong and avoiding any repetition. The programme team will review the provisions for briefing guest presenters on the handling of controversial subjects.

Today, Radio 4, 15 November 2013

Complaint

The programme included an interview with Baroness Warsi, arising from her warning that Christians in some parts of the world faced extinction because of violence against them. Two listeners complained that the interviewer had wrongly identified Israel as a case in point.

Outcome

The interviewer posed the question: *“Are you saying . can I just ask . countries like Pakistan that you refer to, or perhaps Israel or even Iraq where there is a functioning government . is it just down to the politicians in those countries to speak out and this*]!| à^ { & [~ |â&^A [|ç^âN+. The intention of the question was to cite Israel as an example of a country where there was a functioning government, but the ECU found that, in the context of the interview, it nevertheless created the impression complained of.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor of **Today** discussed the findings with the presenter who conducted the interview and underlined the need for care when making references to specific countries in the context of controversial subjects.

Y chromosome: Why men contribute so little, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

Two visitors to the page complained that the headline was inaccurate and, together with the picture of a somewhat overweight man lounging on a sofa which illustrated the article, offensively sexist.

Outcome

The article itself was an accurate account of a study which sought to minimise the Y-chromosome contribution from male mice through assisted reproductive technologies, and which concluded that it was possible to produce mouse progeny via a Y chromosome which was limited to only two genes. As the study had no direct bearing on human reproduction, the headline was misleading. However, the ECU did not consider it or the illustration (though of little relevance) to be offensively sexist.

Partly upheld

Further action

Staff will be reminded that, while there is a place for humour in online output, headlines and associated material should be directly related to the content of the report in question.

Complaint

A viewer complained that a sequence in the programme misrepresented the extent to which traditional breakfast foods rely on bee pollination for their production. In particular, he said it was wrong to suggest that dairy products would become unavailable.

Outcome

any moves by household insurers to invalidate insurance because of proximity to fracking sites. The ECU concluded that, in broadcasting a claim which was potentially of great significance in relation to an issue of sharp controversy in the region, more should have been done to establish what basis it had.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor has reminded the team of the need to apply appropriate journalistic rigour to substantiate claims that are made about controversial topics.

The House That 100k Built, BBC2, 2 October 2013

Complaint

A company which distributes liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders complained about a sequence which showed a person cutting through a used gas cylinder with an angle grinder. It said this was extremely dangerous and could encourage imitation, putting lives at risk. It also said the act was unlawful because all LPG cylinders remain the property of the distributor.

Outcome

The ECU agreed that the sequence should not have been broadcast, and was concerned that there was no appropriate explanation of the dangers involved to prevent possible imitation by viewers. A warning was subsequently put on the programme's website but the ECU did not consider it to be sufficiently clear about the risks involved. The website did, however, make it clear that the cylinders remain the property of the distributors, so the ECU regarded this aspect of the complaint as having been resolved.

Partly upheld/Resolved

Further Action

The decision had already been taken to remove the sequence featuring the cylinder from any repeat of the original programme. However the BBC Commissioning Editor agreed with the ECU's suggestion that a warning about the dangers of dismantling LPG cylinders should be included in the series. This warning was broadcast in the last episode in the series (23 October 2013). The text on the series webpages was also amended to make the dangers clearer.

News (6.00pm), Radio 4, 1 November 2013

Complaint

The bulletin included a report on the government's announcement of changes to GCSE examinations in England. A listener complained that the impression was given that the changes would lead to the study of a substantial component of English Literature becoming compulsory, whereas the reverse was true.

Outcome

The headline "Children in England will have to study at least 15 poems – including works by poets such as Wordsworth and Keats – under a shake-up of GCSEs" was inaccurate. The requirement to study at least 15 poems pertains to GCSE English Literature, which is an optional examination. In the case of GCSE English Language, which is compulsory, the requirement to study literature is to be dropped, to enable coursework to be removed. The report itself did not repeat the inaccuracy, but it contained nothing which served to correct it.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor of the Radio Newsroom drew the finding to the attention of all Radio Newsroom staff, alerting them to the error and to the need to avoid repeating it.

Sunday Politics (London), BBC1, 7 July 2013

Complaint

Rhaglenni a Gwasanaethau Cymraeg (o gofio iddo gael ei gyhoeddi a'r sylw a gafodd yn y cyfryngau Cymraeg) yn ddigon i ddatrys y mater.

Wedi ei ddatrys

Tudur Owen, 24 & 25 May 2013, BBC Radio Cymru

Complaint

Gwilym Owen complained that extracts from an interview he had provided to the programme

Dan yr Wyneb

Upheld (Partly upheld in relation to the second complaint)

Further action

The editorial team discussed the finding and stressed the importance of limiting references to commercial interests in interviews.

Nick Ahad in for Martin Kelner, Radio Leeds, 5 September 2013

Complaint

During a discussion on the life and death of Diana, Princess of Wales, a guest described his meeting with her in London on the day before her death. A listener complained that this account could not be true, as on the day in question the Princess had been in Sardinia. On the basis of information from recognised authorities on the life of the Princess, the listener also questioned whether the guest had been a friend of hers, as he claimed.

Outcome

There is a limit to which programme-makers can be held responsible for the claims of guests. However the circumstances of the Princess' death are a matter of public record and the claim to have met her the previous day should at least have been questioned. It went to the heart of the matter under discussion and listeners would have been misled - via the recollections of a contributor - on what was a material point. The ECU was unable to find corroboration of the guest's claim to have been a friend of the Princess.

Upheld

Further action

The Acting Editor of Radio Leeds spoke to the programme team about the finding and reminded them about the importance of both rigour in research and the appropriate on-air challenge to contributors.

Inside Out (Yorkshire & Lincolnshire), bbc.co.uk:

Call me Motherwell Football Club, bbc.co.uk:

Nottingham superhero fans may have longest UK names, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

The director of a company which offers services to those wishing to change their names by Deed Poll complained that three unconnected articles about changing a name by Deed Poll each included a link to a company which provides this service, with the effect of giving the companies concerned an advantage over others in the field.

Outcome

The BBC's guidelines allow links to the websites of commercial companies when there is sufficient editorial justification. In the instances in question, the Editorial Complaints Unit found there was insufficient editorial justification to offset the potential promotional effect of the links.

Upheld

Further action

Online writers will be reminded of the need to take careful account of BBC guidelines when considering adding links to commercial organisations.

Today, Radio 4, 9 July 2012

Complaint

The programme included an interview with a representative of BritainsDNA, a company which offers genetic ancestry testing. A listener who occupies a Chair of Statistical Genetics complained that the interview included inaccurate and misleading claims (which went unchallenged) about the results of tests recently conducted by BritainsDNA, and that it had the effect of endorsing or promoting a commercial enterprise (particularly by describing BritainsDNA's services as "massive subsidy" and by including the URL of the company's website).

Outcome

The ECU found that, in a number of instances, the representative of BritainsDNA had spoken in terms which went beyond what could be inferred with certainty from the evidence, or were simply mistaken. Even allowing for an element of shorthand arising from the need to render technical information comprehensible to a non-specialist audience within the compass of a short interview, the result was to give an exaggerated impression of what could be established about the remote ancestry of individuals by the kind of testing offered by BritainsDNA, and the programme team should have done more to guard against this.

In relation to an impression of endorsement or promotion, the ECU noted the explanation of the term "massive subsidy" subsequently offered by another representative of the company, who said "The sentiment was that many people were working for free to get the results". While there are contexts in which references to subsidy in that sense would be unexceptionable, the context in this instance was one in which it was not made clear that BritainsDNA is a commercial undertaking. In that context the reference to massive subsidy may have contributed to an impression that BritainsDNA is a disinterested research study (an impression which the interviewer's description of the company as a "disinterested research study" and his reference to "massive subsidy" would have tended to reinforce). Against this background, the mention of the company's URL towards the end of the item contributed to an inappropriate impression of promoting what is in fact a commercial enterprise.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor of **Today** discussed the findings with the team and emphasised the need for careful scrutiny of the claims of commercial companies and the avoidance of undue on-air promotion.