

Analysis of complaints

From 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015 the Unit reached findings on 340 complaints concerning 156 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	3	3
Political bias	5	3
Other bias	69	59
Factual inaccuracy	92	51
Offence to public taste	140	15
Offensive language	1	1
Violence	2	1
Sensitivity and portrayal	7	4
Bad example (adults)	2	2
Racism	3	3
Offence to religious feeling	11	9
Commercial concerns	1	1
Standards of interviewing/presentation	4	4
Total	340	156

In the period 1 October 2014 – 31 March 2015, 53 complaints were upheld (46 of them partly) – 15.5% of the total. Of the items investigated in the period, complaints were upheld against 10 items (3% of the total). 11 complaints, about 7 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 (10 in this period) which require longer or more complex investigation. During the period 1 October 2014 – 31 March 2015, 84% of replies were sent within their target time. During the reporting year as a whole, 85% of replies were within target.

Today, Radio 4, 1 July 2014

Labour - working with or against business?, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

Craig Oliver, Director of Communications at 10 Downing St, complained about coverage of a Labour Party publication, "Mending the fractured economy", in reports by Nick Robinson and news bulletins in **Today**. The publication's claim that 80% of new private sector jobs created between 2010 and 2012 were in London had been reported as _____, whereas it was incorrect and contradicted by data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and it had been erroneously said to apply to _____. In reporting the claim uncritically and inaccurately in the first instance, the BBC had supported a Labour narrative, and in later coverage it had presented the matter as a dispute between Conservative and Labour about statistics, when it should simply have admitted error and made an appropriate correction.

Outcome

The term _____ was used only in Nick Robinson's blog, though the early **Today** reports gave a similar impression that the claim in question was undisputed. When this inaccuracy was pointed out, Nick Robinson updated his blog to explain how the figures were contested, and reports later in **Today** were similarly emended. In the view of the ECU, this sufficed to resolve the issue of complaint. It was also acknowledged that the figures related to 2010-2012, not _____ (a misunderstanding which originated from an error in the executive summary of the publication, perpetuated in the accompanying Labour Party press release), and Nick Robinson's blog was corrected accordingly. However, items in subsequent news bulletins in **Today** repeated the error, and the ECU accepted that this was a breach of the BBC's editorial standards in relation to due accuracy.

However, the ECU did not accept that the figures in question, taken from the Centre for Cities report "Cities Outlook 2014", were incorrect or contradicted by the ONS. The apparent disparity arose from methodologies which differed, primarily in their definitions of the public sector and their use of different data sources. When "Cities Outlook 2014" was published in January it was prefaced by forewords by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Cities, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had cited earlier figures from the same source in his 2010 Budget speech. So, although the figures were in fact disputed on this occasion, they came from a source which appeared to have been relied on at one time or another by all three major parties, and the ECU saw no grounds for the view that reporting them implied support for the narrative of one party.

Resolved/upheld/not upheld

Further action

The Editor of the Radio Newsroom has reminded staff of the need to check press releases for factual accuracy, and of the importance of correcting errors as soon as they are pointed out.

Today, Radio 4, 14 July 2014

Complaint

The 7.30am news bulletin referred to _____ when reporting, very briefly, on events in the Gaza Strip. A listener complained that this appeared to endorse an Israeli narrative concerning those events, thus creating an impression of bias.

Outcome

The form of words in question resulted from efforts to vary the scripts of the bulletins, and _____ was used only twice in the course of the programme. If the term _____ had

been attributed to the Israeli government, there would have been no grounds for complaint. Without such attribution, however, the ECU agreed that the phrase tended to create the impression complained of.

Upheld

Further action

The Head of the Radio Newsroom has reminded staff writing scripts for news summaries that the need to be brief should not be met at the price of accuracy.

Today, Radio 4, 9 August 2014

Complaint

During a discussion about the issue of social justice in relation to the forthcoming referendum in Scotland, one of the participants said that Scotland had been a net contributor to the UK exchequer - - a claim which the presenter appeared to accept. A listener complained that the presenter had endorsed an inaccurate claim, resulting in bias in favour of one side in the referendum campaign.

Outcome

The claim in question is at least open to dispute, and it was not duly accurate for the presenter to respond in terms which might have given the impression that it was established fact. However, the issue of Scotland in relation to the UK exchequer was tangential to the topic of the discussion, and listeners would have been likely to understand the presenter's intervention as an attempt to keep the discussion on track rather than an endorsement of one side in the referendum campaign. In the view of the ECU, it did not result in a departure from due impartiality.

Partly upheld

Further action

The Editor of **Today** has discussed with the presenter the arguments around the issues of Scotland's net fiscal contribution to the UK and has directed her to research by the IFS on the statistical picture.

Richard Bacon, 5 Live, 11 August 2014

Complaint

A listener complained that Richard Bacon's statement that the Resurrection and was was offensive to Christians

Outcome

The statement, which would have been unexceptionable in some contexts, was gratuitous in the context of a discussion of the origin of Homo Sapiens, and was capable of causing offence.

Upheld

Further action

The Editor has reminded staff that religious beliefs are central to many people's lives and care should be taken to avoid unjustified offence.

News (6.00pm & 10.00pm), BBC1, 11 September 2014

Complaint

42 viewers complained to the Editorial Complaints Unit,

Four listeners complained about some of the presenter's comments on the topic of rape.

Outcome

It had quickly been acknowledged that the comments were ill-judged and had caused offence. Nick Conrad had apologised at the beginning of the first edition of his programme to be broadcast after complaints had been received, and the BBC Executive had posted a statement of acknowledgement and apology on bbc.co.uk. Although the complainants questioned both the adequacy and the sincerity of these apologies, the ECU thought them sufficient to address the breach of editorial standards in question.

Resolved

The programme included archive footage featuring “civet coffee”, and showing a celebrity chef feeding a coffee bean to a captive civet cat in Indonesia. A viewer complained that this tended to promote a practice which was both cruel to the animals involved and against the interests of conservation.

Outcome

The footage gave the impression that the use of captive civet cats in coffee production was uncontroversial, and that their natural diet consisted entirely of coffee beans (a diet which can in fact cause illness and death).

Upheld

Further action

The finding has been shared with the TV Editorial Group, and the footage will not be re-broadcast.

A universal plug socket...at last?, bbc.co.uk

A reader of this country profile complained of a number of inaccuracies he considered derogatory towards Eritrea, including the statement that
about

Outcome

In response to the complaint, BBC News had already acknowledged that no such UN report was published in 2011 and that there was not enough evidence to support the claim that more than two thirds of Eritreans could not meet their own food needs. Noting that the article had been amended accordingly, and that the other statements contested by the complainant appeared to be accurate, the ECU considered the issue of complaint to have been resolved.

Resolved

Gaza: How Hamas tunnel network grew, bbc.co.uk

Complaint

Three readers of this article complained that the description of its author as