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Analysis of complaints

From 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020 the Unit reached findings on 376 complaints.
19 complaints were wholly or partly upheld. 33 complaints were resolved. The bulletin
includes summaries of these cases.

Standards of service

çõò èûöāıĀ āîÿôòā öĀ āü ñòîù Ąöāõ úüĀā ðüúýùîöûāĀ Ąöāõöû 20 Ąüÿøöûô ñîĆĀ üó ÿòðòöăöûô
them. A target of 35 days applies to a minority of cases (78 in this period) which require
longer or more complex investigation. During the period 1 October 2019 to 31 March
2020, 84% of replies were sent within their target time.

Summaries of upheld/resolved complaints

A guide to Labour Party anti-Semitism claims, bbc.co.uk
Complaint
A ÿòîñòÿ ðüúýùîöûòñ āõîā, āõüĂôõ āõò îÿāöðùòıĀ òÿÿüûòüĂĀ Āāîāòúòûā āõîā LîïüĂÿ õîñ
“never confirmed the number of anti-Semitism cases it is investigating” had been
corrected, no adequate explanation for the origin of the error had been given.
Outcome
Irrespective of the inadequacy of the explanation in the eyes of the complainant, the
correction sufficed to resolve the issue of complaint.
Resolved

Anti-Semitism: May and Corbyn clash over anti-racism records, bbc.co.uk
Complaint
A reader complained that the original version of this article was inaccurate in stating
that the Labour Party had “never confirmed” the number of complaints about anti-d Thenauion

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contradicted by an Office for National Statistics on the same day which showed 3.3%
growth in consumer spending in the year to July.
Outcome
The ONS report was not directly commensurable with the BRC/KPMG survey, and could
not be said simply to contradict it. However, the article framed the survey results with
two case studies where anxieties about Brexit had caused consumers to decrease their
spending and a quote from the Head of Banking at KPMG UK which tended to give the
impression that they represented a general trend. The result was to give a more
negative impression of the impact of Brexit than would have been the case if the survey
results had been properly contextualised.
Upheld
Further action
çõò óöûñöûô õîĀ ïòòû ñöĀðĂĀĀòñ Ąöāõ āõò BBCıĀ ïĂĀöûòĀĀ üûùöûò āòîú îûñ āõòĆ õîăò ïòòû
reminded of the importance in ensuring that stories which are based on a single survey
are also careful to report the wider context. The article has been edited in light of the
finding.

Good Morning Scotland, Radio Scotland, 15 July 2019
Complaint
The programme included an interview with an advocate of wind power, prompted by
recent data showing that Scottish wind turbines had generated enough electricity in the
first half of 2019 to power 4.7 million homes. A listener complained that the
interviewee was allowed to promote wind power without critical questioning and had
incorrectly described it as “the cheapest form of energy”.
Outcome
On two occasions, the interviewee referred to onshore wind power as the cheapest form
of electricity generation, and in relation to the widely-îððòýāòñ ĳùòăòùöĀòñ ðüĀāĴ úòāõüñ
of calculation these references were duly accurate. However, the guidelines provide
that, when a contributor provides a single or partial view, “the existence of a range of
views and their respective weights should be acknowledged”, and that did not happen on
this occasion.
Partly upheld
Further action
News teams have been reminded of the importance of critical questioning, particularly
when the subject under discussion is potentially contentious.

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Upheld
Further action
The programme has been amended in light of the finding.

Jeremy Vine, Radio 2, 19 September 2019
Complaint
çĄü ùöĀāòûòÿĀ üï÷òðāòñ āü î ðùöý üó DîûûĆ DĆòÿ Ąõöðõ öûðùĂñòñ āõò Ąüÿñ ĳāĄîāĴ, öû
connection with an interview with David Cameron. One complained that Jeremy Vine
had taken an inappropriate approach to the interview.
Outcome
JòÿòúĆ éöûòıĀ îýýÿüîðõ ĄîĀ òûāöÿòùĆ îýýÿüýÿöîāò óüÿ îû öûāòÿăöòĄ Ąöāõ î óüÿúòÿ Pÿöúò
Minister on a contentious topic, and the clip, which had been very widely circulated and
reported at the time, illustrated a widespread reaction to the aftermath of the decision
to hold a referendum on EU membership, and the ECU considered the first occurrence
üó āõò Ąüÿñ ĳāĄîāĴ āü ïò òñöāüÿöîùùĆ justified in that context. However, its second and
more forceful use at the end of the clip was gratuitous, but an apology for the language
was broadcast later in the programme.
Resolved

My Pakistani relatives thought my cancer was infectious, bbc.co.uk
Complaint
çõò îÿāöðùò óòîāĂÿòñ îû îððüĂûā ïĆ î úòúïòÿ üó æùüĂôõıĀ PîøöĀāîûö ðüúúĂûöāĆ üó õòÿ
treatment by her then-õĂĀïîûñıĀ óîúöùĆ Ąõòû āõòĆ ïòðîúò îĄîÿò üó õòÿ ïÿòîĀā ðîûðòÿ
diagnosis. The former husband complained that her account was inaccurate, that he
and his family had been given no opportunity to reply to her claims, and that the

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News for You scheduled for 10 May, with the then leader of Change UK as one of the
guests.
Outcome
Arrangements for the automatic scheduling of podcasts led to this programme being
broadcast during the run-up to the European Parliament election. In cases where
balance cannot be achieved within a single programme, the guidelines for election
periods require that it be maintained over the campaign (with appropriate cross-trailing
between linked programmes). In this instance, the length of the campaign did not
provide sufficient opportunity for proportionate representation of the parties standing

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the report of Sir Desmond de Silva QC in support of his statement. In fact the de Silva
Report, though it found collusion between the Force Research Unit and loyalist
paramilitaries, dismissed the view that the killings in question were actions of the
British State, while evidence from other sources does not suffice to establish the truth
üó āõò ðüûāÿöïĂāüÿıĀ ÿòóòÿòûðò āü “state murder and state terror” in connection with the
Brigadier. In the context, it would have struck listeners as a statement of fact rather
than an expression of opinion and, having passed uncontested, it gave a materially
misleading impression.
Upheld
Further action
BBC news teams in Northern Ireland have been briefed on this finding and on the need
to ensure that claims of disputed fact by programme guests are appropriately qualified
or challenged.

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fans trying to get into the ground could reasonably be described as “trapped”, but

ñòĀðÿöïöûô îû îĀýòðā üó CùĂï 1872ıĀ statement as “execrable stuff”

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independent commentator (having signed the nomination papers of his SDLP
opponent) and that the item was unfair to him and lacked impartiality in relation to his
party.
Outcome
The guest in question was not presented as an independent commentator, and the
description of her as a “former SDLP MLA” gave listeners sufficient indication of her
likely viewpoint. However, she was given considerable opportunity to dispute Mr
OıDowdıs statement in the report that “There’s only two parties that can win this seat.
It’s either the DUP or Sinn Fein” and to put the case for voting for the SDLP in the
constituency. While this did not amount to unfairness to Mr OıDowd personally, it fell
short of due impartiality in relation to his party.
Upheld
Further action
The management of BBC Northern Ireland briefed the teams involved on key learnings
as these related to due impartiality and the handling of discussions of this sort. They
subsequently took care to ensure that commentators who had signed the nomination
papers for candidates in the general election were not invited to take part in
constituency-specific discussions and also that any relevant party political affiliations
were made clear to BBC audiences.

Points West, BBC One (West), 27 November 2019
Complaint
The programme looked at the general election campaign in Stroud and included a
discussion between three candidates standing in the constituency, representing the
Conservatives, the Labour Party and the Green Party. A representative of the Brexit
Party complained that its candidate had been wrongly excluded from the discussion.
Outcome
The Brexit Party candidate was represented in the item only by a brief clip from a pre-recorded interview. Although the party did not meet the criteria which would have
required the programme to offer its candidate the opportunity of participating in the
discussion, its claims to do so were no less than those of the Green Party, and it was
inconsistent with the BBCıs guidelines on election coverage that the Green Party was
represented in the discussion while the Brexit Party was not.
Upheld
Further action
The finding has been discussed with the programme team and they have been reminded
about the guidelines which apply during election periods.

Watchdog, BBC One, 19 September 2019
Complaint
The programme featured an analysis of the performance of UK train-operating
companies based on publicly-available data on punctuality, cancellations and numbers
of complaints. Virgin Trains complained that āõò ýÿüôÿîúúòıĀ ðüúúòûāîÿĆ ĀĂï÷òðāòñ
them to criticisms to which they had not had an opportunity to respond, failed to
contextualise the statistics it used and focused unfairly on them rather than on worse-performing operators.
Outcome

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Watchdog notified Virgin trains of its intentions in an email which indicated that Virgin

T rains might be the subj ect of criticism in rel ation to the data whi ch i t attache d.

However, it did not indicate that there might be adverse comment on other areas of

perf o rmance, such as on -bo ard facil i ties, overcrowding and v alue for money , an d Virgin

T rains should hav e been giv en a cleare r indi cation of the nature and exte nt of the

criticism to be levelled at them. As the data used by the programme assigned Virgin

T rains an overall ran king of 19

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out of 23, the ECU did not consi der they ha4(n TJ 99(m-4(n) TJ ET BT 1