

## **Response to: How Ofcom regulates the BBC**

I wish to respond to question 3 in your review: *'Do you have any views on how to measure the BBC's performance?'*

Basically, I think more formal measures of the BBC's performance in responding to complaints should be introduced because, in my view, current performance is very poor.

### **Does BBC First deliver?**

I note that in paragraph 3.31 of your review document, it says Ofcom *'will consider whether BBC First continues to deliver for audiences.'* From my perspective, BBC First only delivers frustration. It seems to be impossible to get the BBC to take complaints seriously enough to act upon them.

### **Transparency of handling serious complaints**

In recent years I have made several complaints about bias in BBC News reports on their website concerning events in and around Israel. I consider these to be serious complaints, in line with paragraph 3.38 of your review document, because the relevant articles misled the British public about the actions of Israelis and portrayed them as overly aggressive towards their neighbours. This portrayal carried the substantial risk of prompting verbal and physical abuse of British Jews.

Although I have received responses from the BBC, I have no idea whether they have categorised my complaints as 'serious'.

### **Long Delays in BBC Responses**

Paragraph 3.39 also says that Ofcom is aware that *'the timeframes for receiving a response from the BBC can sometimes be lengthy'*. This has been my experience with most of the complaints I have submitted. By the time one works through Stage 1 of the BBC complaints process, the subject of the complaint has dropped out of the news, and one wonders whether it is worth pursuing the complaint on to Stage 2.

Indeed, the delay on one recent complaint was so long that I felt it necessary to complain to Ofcom. This was on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and due to the delay in the BBC responding at Stage 1 (Ofcom Standards Complaint Reference 01308959).

### **Overall Experience**

My overall experience of the BBC complaints process is that it is heavily geared towards rejecting complaints. I recently complained about the BBC's refusal to use the word 'terrorists' in relation to groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

My point was simple, that any groups which fired more than 4,000 rockets indiscriminately at a neighbouring civilian population are clearly intent on terrifying that population, thus warranting use of the word 'terrorists' for those groups.

The BBC Editorial Complaints Unit's final response to my complaint seemed completely inadequate on this most serious point, prompting my second complaint to Ofcom on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021 (Ofcom Online Material Complaint Reference 01342635).

### **Complaint-handling methods**

- (a) A tactic that I have noticed the BBC use repeatedly is to quote phrases from their lengthy set of editorial guidelines in defence of their articles, even when the simple logic of the complaint should win the argument.

It is not reasonable to expect complainants to be familiar with these complex editorial guidelines and argue for a change in them. The BBC's expectation should be that complainants will use straightforward logic and the BBC should respond in a similar manner. Any need to amend editorial guidelines should be an internal BBC matter.

I still find it impossible to understand why the BBC is so sensitive about the feelings of terrorists.

- (b) Another tactic the BBC uses is to admit that not everyone will agree with their editorial decisions. Clearly this is true. But when they follow-up excessive criticism of Israel with a failure to report Hamas breaking a ceasefire agreement, there is something deeply concerning about such editorial decisions.

While I acknowledge that it is difficult to quantify, I think that the BBC fail to meet the requirement for due impartiality when it comes to reporting about Israel.

### **Summary**

Overall, I think there is a great need for the BBC's handling of complaints to improve, and more performance measures should be put in place to assess any improvement.

A simple technique would be to ask each complainant about their level of satisfaction with the way their complaint was handled.