[GB] BBC publishes new complaints guidelines

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Tony Prosser
University of Bristol Law School

The BBC receives around 250 000 complaints per year. It is required by its Charter to have a complaints framework which provides “transparent, accessible, effective, timely and proportionate methods” of making sure that the BBC is meeting its obligations and resolving problems. It has issued a detailed document setting out a framework and procedures for handling complaints.

The BBC commits itself to several key principles in the handling of complaints. In summary, these are that complaints should be made to the BBC itself first in almost all cases, before they are taken to Ofcom, the regulatory body which now has oversight of the BBC. The complaints process should be easy to understand, accessible and take a reasonable amount of time. The process should be proportionate, balancing the cost to licence fee payers with the need to give people who complain a proper hearing. If the BBC agrees that it is at fault, it will say so and take action to correct it. Everybody who complains should know what they can expect from the BBC and how to appeal to Ofcom or to an independent ombudsman.

The framework sets out five different procedures for dealing with different types of complaint. The first is for editorial complaints, meaning that a particular item has fallen below the standards set out in the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines. There are three stages for dealing with such complaints; an initial response, then, if this is not satisfactory, reference to a BBC manager or member of the editorial team; then a response if necessary from the Executive Complaints Unit. The response to these complaints may also be appealed to Ofcom.

The second category is that of general complaints, meaning a complaint about the way the BBC does things but not about an individual broadcast. There are two stages of process for these complaints; an initial response and, if this is not satisfactory, reference to the Executive Complaints Unit. Most complaints of this kind will fall outside the remit of Ofcom.

The third category of complaint relates to the collection of the TV licence fee, the flat-rate fee payable by all owners of television receiving equipment and used to support the BBC. Complaints of this kind will be given an initial response from the TV licensing customer relations team and the TV licensing operations director, proceeding if necessary to a response from the BBC’s Head of Revenue

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Management. If the response is not satisfactory, a complaint may then be referred outside the BBC to the Ombudsman Service.

The fourth category of complaints are those about the allocation of Party Election, Party Political and Referendum Campaign broadcasts; such broadcasts are required by statute to be included free of charge in the BBC's services. Complaints here will go initially to the Chief Adviser, Politics of the BBC and then to its Director of Editorial Policies and Standards. Complaints may also be referred to Ofcom.

Finally, regulatory complaints are complaints that the BBC has breached a competition requirement imposed by Ofcom or miscellaneous regulatory conditions not covered by a specific Ofcom enforcement procedure. These complaints should initially be made to the BBC and then if necessary referred to Ofcom.

BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures, October 2017

https://ssl.bbc.co.uk/complaints/forms/assets/complaintsnew/resources/BBC_Complaints_Framework.pdf

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