

## THE GOVERNORS' PROGRAMME COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE REMIT (Revised July 2002)

### SECTION 1: The remit of the Governors' Programme Complaints Committee

- 1.1 The Governors' Programme Complaints Committee (GPCC) is responsible for fulfilling the Charter requirement that the BBC Board of Governors "*ensure that any comments, proposals and complaints made by viewers and listeners of the Home Services are given due consideration by and are properly handled by the Corporation*". The GPCC reports its activities to the full Board of Governors.
- 1.2 In fulfilling this remit, the GPCC undertakes regular reviews of the BBC's processes and performance in relation to audience comments, proposals and complaints as outlined in Section 2.
- 1.3 The GPCC is responsible for the independent oversight of the BBC's strategic approach to complaints handling, and for monitoring the effectiveness of its processes, to ensure both serve the public interest and reflect best practice.

In relation to serious programme complaints the GPCC requires that:

- complaints are handled promptly and are investigated rigorously and impartially;
- where a complaint is upheld, the BBC not only apologises for the breach in programme standards but takes remedial action to guard against the breach occurring again and/or to discipline individuals responsible for the breach;
- where the complainant is not happy with the BBC's initial finding, he/she is appropriately informed about how to escalate the complaint, including the ultimate right of appeal to the GPCC.

- 1.4 In line with the GPCC's responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of complaints handling by BBC management, it is also the specific function of the GPCC to consider appeals against decisions and actions of the PCU or of the Directors of BBC Divisions in dealing with serious editorial complaints. In considering appeals, it receives independent advice on editorial matters from an external adviser (see Section 4.2). Section 3 outlines the arrangements in relation to taking appeals.

## **SECTION 2: How the Committee maintains oversight of complaints handling**

2.1 The supervisory role of the Committee is fulfilled by:

- monitoring the BBC's processes for handling audience comments and proposals;
- an understanding of good practice in complaints handling;
- an annual review of the BBC's complaints-handling processes and performance, with the periodic review of the complaints-handling strategy resulting from issues raised in the annual reviews;
- review of the Quarterly Complaints Bulletin submitted to the Board of Governors by BBC Information;
- review of the quarterly Complaints Bulletin published by the Programme Complaints Unit.

In addition, the GPCC raises broader editorial issues raised by appeals as is appropriate either directly with the Director-General or with the full Board.

## **SECTION 3: Rules relating to appeals taken to the GPCC**

3.1 **Which areas of BBC output are covered by the GPCC?**

The GPCC considers appeals in relation to complaints about programmes transmitted, or material carried, by the BBC's domestic public services on radio, television and online.

3.2 **Who can make an appeal?**

The GPCC will usually only consider appeals from persons normally resident in the United Kingdom, but it will consider appeals from individuals who live outside the United Kingdom if the original complaint is based on an allegation that the complainant has personally suffered unfair treatment or infringement of privacy.

3.3 **How should appeals be made?**

Appeals to the GPCC must set out the reasons why the person making the appeal is dissatisfied with the response received from the PCU/Director. If the appeal concerns material transmitted on BBCi, the GPCC will normally only consider an appeal if a copy of the material concerned is supplied with the appeal.

### 3.4 **What are the criteria for a request for an appeal?**

The GPCC will consider appeals concerning complaints which allege

- that the complainant has suffered unfair treatment in a transmitted item;
- that the complainant's privacy has been unjustifiably infringed, either in a programme or item as transmitted or in the process of making the programme or item; or
- that there has otherwise been a failure adequately to observe the BBC's editorial guidelines;

The GPCC will also consider appeals concerning decisions or actions by the PCU or Directors of Divisions in relation to the handling of a serious complaints. This includes appeals against the decision by the PCU that a complaint does not fall within its remit.

### 3.5 **Which requests will the GPCC not consider?**

The GPCC will not consider an appeal which

- in its opinion, is vexatious;
- relates to the content of a programme or item which has not yet been broadcast;
- relates to matters which are, or are likely to be, the subject of, or relevant to, legal proceedings;
- is currently under active consideration by the Broadcasting Standards Commission; or
- is brought by or on behalf of a complainant not normally resident in the United Kingdom and who is not alleging unfair treatment (as in 3.4 above).

### **3.6 What action is taken if the GPCC upholds an appeal?**

If the GPCC upholds an appeal it notifies the programme executives and the divisional management of its findings, and requires that the complaint and the finding of the GPCC are taken into account in the framing of future programming.

Where appropriate, the GPCC may require an on-air apology or correction, or direct BBC management to advise it of the remedial action taken to guard against similar breaches of programme standards and/or to discipline the individual(s) responsible for the breach. The GPCC requires that BBC management report back as appropriate on the remedial action taken.

If the GPCC considers the remedial action taken to be inappropriate or insufficient, it can inform the Director-General who will review the issues raised and report back to the GPCC.

### **3.7 Are there time limits on a request for an appeal?**

The GPCC will not normally consider an appeal unless it is made within two months of the final correspondence with the PCU/Director on the original complaint. The date of final correspondence is the date when the PCU/Director informs the complainant of the right of appeal to the GPCC.

### **3.8 How long does it take for the GPCC to hear an appeal?**

In order to give full consideration to an appeal, the GPCC will make any further enquiries of the complainant or those responsible for making the programme which it considers necessary to determine the appeal fairly. The GPCC will aim to reach a final decision on an appeal within 12 weeks of receiving the request.

### **3.9 How does the GPCC communicate its decisions?**

Decisions of the GPCC will be communicated to those making the appeal, and to those responsible for the programme or material concerned, in writing. The GPCC will set out the reasons for its decision.

Decisions of the GPCC are final.

Decisions on appeals given full consideration by the GPCC are also published in the quarterly bulletin, "Programme Complaints: Appeals to the Governors". This bulletin includes a statement on any remedial action taken. The bulletin is published on BBCi ([www.bbc.co.uk/info](http://www.bbc.co.uk/info)) or available from:

The Secretary to the Programme Complaints Committee  
BBC  
Room 3080  
Broadcasting House  
Portland Place  
London W1A 1AA

## **SECTION 4: How the GPCC is constituted**

### **4.1 Representation of Governors on the GPCC**

The GPCC consists of five Governors of the BBC, to whom the full Board of Governors have delegated the power to ensure that complaints are properly handled and to consider appeals. The GPCC's conclusions will be reported to the full Board. The quorum for meetings of the GPCC is three, and its meetings are held in private. The GPCC will decide on the details of the procedure to follow in dealing with any particular appeal.

### **4.2 Independent Editorial Adviser to the GPCC**

An Editorial Adviser to the GPCC is appointed to inform the Committee about the concerns and/or considerations raised by the complainant, and the range of editorial issues relating to the complaint.

The Editorial Adviser is appointed by the GPCC. The Editorial Adviser is invited to serve for a three-year term, renewable for a further two years by mutual agreement of the Chairman of the GPCC and the Adviser.

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