

Fraser Steel
Head of Executive Complaints
Executive Complaints Unit
BBC
Broadcast Centre
BC2 B4
201 Wood Lane
London
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6 November 2017

Ref: CT/1700254

Dear Mr Steel,

Many thanks for your email message of 26 October 2017, notifying me of the publication on the BBC Complains website of the summary of your finding on my complaint about the interview with Lord Lawson on the 10 August edition of 'Today'. While I am glad that you have upheld my complaint, I am dissatisfied with the "further action that has been proposed. I would like your guidance on how I might have this action reconsidered.

As you know, the subject of my complaint was that Lord Lawson made a number of inaccurate claims during the interview, in breach of the BBC Editorial Guidelines on "due accuracy". I listed in detail in my complaint which of Lord Lawson's statements were inaccurate. In addition, the Global Warming Policy Forum acknowledged on Twitter a few days after the interview that Lord Lawson had been wrong on the recent trend in global mean surface temperature. Hence, I was somewhat surprised that the summary on the BBC Complains website described Lord Lawson's statements only as "at least questionable". This has reinforced my impression, which I outlined in my unanswered letter to Mr Tregear on 20 September, that the substance of my complaint has not been understood, namely that there appears to be a longstanding and systemic inability within the BBC to distinguish facts from fictions about climate change.

This persistent failure is all the more disappointing because the BBC has been grappling with this problem for many years. In July 2011, Professor Steve Jones highlighted this problem in his review for the BBC Trust of the impartiality and accuracy of the BBC's coverage of science. He warned that although there were no major problems with the accuracy of the BBC's science coverage, in its search for impartiality on scientific issues "the impression of active debate is sometimes promoted by statements that are not supported by the facts", particularly on climate change.

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Chair:
**Professor Lord Stern
of Brentford**

Although the BBC Trust's response published alongside the review did not specifically address Professor Jones's concerns about this issue, it did note the need to tackle "the questionable application of "due impartiality" guidelines in some instances". As a result, the BBC Executive proposed the following actions:

impartiality in science and the way items should be presented.

- The College of Journalism will establish an online training module for staff on this specific topic with input from BBC editorial policy; and
- The College will run two seminars in 2011/12 with a selected panel of scientists to debate current issues and their coverage in the media.

Unfortunately, these actions have not had a long-term impact, and there remains a small but significant and persistent problem of the BBC broadcasting inaccurate and misleading information about climate change, particularly when it intentionally seeks interviews with so-called climate change 'sceptics'.

Hence, on 13 February 2014, the 'Today' programme broadcast an interview by Justin Webb with Professor Sir Brian Hoskins and Lord Lawson. Lord Lawson made a number of inaccurate and misleading statements during the interview, which prompted a complaint from me and others. The BBC initially rejected these complaints suggesting that it had not taken on board pledges of action in response to Professor Jones's review. On appeal, the then Editorial Complaints Unit upheld the complaint. In your letter to me on 13 May 2014, notifying me of the Unit's provisional decision to uphold my complaint, you acknowledged that "Lord Lawson's views are not supported by the evidence from computer modelling and scientific research and I don't believe this was made sufficiently clear to the audience". The summary of the final decision, which was eventually published on the BBC Complaints website in October 2014, was a watered down version of the provisional decision, but acknowledged that "opinion and evidence should not be treated as if they were on the same footing". Unfortunately, this missed the point that Lord Lawson presented his statements about climate change as if they were facts instead of falsehoods. The summary indicated that the following further action would be taken as a result of the complaint: "The Editor of Today has reminded producers of the BBC's agreed approach to covering climate science. Senior journalists will also be offered an opportunity to attend the College of Journalism training course established after the Trust's impartiality review of science coverage, if they have not already done so."

Unfortunately, these actions proved insufficient to another breach of the BBC Editorial Guidelines on 10 August 2017 when Lord Lawson was again interviewed by Justin Webb on the 'Today' programme, and he again made inaccurate and misleading statements about the science and economics of climate change. The BBC received a number of complaints, but initially rejected them on the grounds that "[o]n this occasion we heard a minority view on the politics and the economics of the subject that has the support of the President of the United States, as well as from voices that back the consensus".

Given that the response to the complaint in February 2014 was clearly inadequate, I am not convinced that the action taken as a result of the breach on 10 August, summarised as "BBC News management discussed the issues arising from the finding with the Today team", will be sufficient to prevent further breaches.

I should stress that these breaches are not purely technical, but could have harmful consequences for the BBC's audiences. As I pointed out in my letter of 21 September to Mr Tregear, Lord Lawson's false claim that 'there has been no increase in extreme weather', could have persuaded some listeners not to listen to advice that they need to protect themselves against the rising risk of surface water flooding and heatwaves in the UK as a result of global warming.

I request therefore that the BBC reconsider the action it has taken as a result of these repeated breaches of its Editorial Guidelines and put in place adequate measures to ensure due accuracy when it chooses to interview climate change deniers in order to exercise due impartiality. Such measures should focus on editors and presenters of news and current affairs programmes as the BBC's science and environment correspondents have an excellent track record of reporting. These measures could include regular meetings between key editors and presenters with experts to discuss recent developments in the science, economics and politics of climate change.

Given the importance of this issue, I am copying this letter to David Jordan, Director of Editorial Policy and Standards.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E.J. Ward". The letters are cursive and connected, with a distinct loop at the end of the word "Ward".

Bob Ward
Policy and Communications Director

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