

Panel Complaints Note

BACKGROUND

1. The nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the prominent role of the BBC in its reporting are reflected in a sizeable number of complaints about coverage of the conflict.
2. The Panel read BBC complaints logs and analysis on Israeli-Palestinian coverage for each month from August 2005 and January 2006. We are grateful to BBC Information, the department which handles complaints from the public, for providing this analysis for the Panel.
3. We also examined a few complaints case studies which had reached the Governors' Programme Complaints Committee level to see how they had been handled and concluded.
4. The Panel requested and received a paper from the BBC on the handling of complaints on coverage of the conflict¹.
5. The BBC has a complaints website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/complaints/> and there are various other ways of making a complaint by letter, phone or email.
6. We were told that written complaints to the BBC should receive a response within 10 days. However, on a test email, no response was received.
7. Some people who submitted evidence said the complaints procedure was unsatisfactory although many of these referred to the past, sometimes several years ago. Some people commented on the recent improvement in the handling of complaints. One or two suggested complaints should be handled outside the BBC though it is difficult to see how this could be achieved.
8. The data we have seen on complaints, and how they are handled, underlines the depth of feeling and anxiety among the small but significant section of the audience about the BBC's perceived deficiencies on this issue.

FACTS & FIGURES

9. According to BBC Information, there were around 309,000 complaints and comments to the BBC in 2005.
10. For this Review's research period, from August 2005 until the end of January 2006, there were around 114,000 complaints and comments, 2.5% of which related to coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

¹ See Appendix F iii

11. These contacts on the conflict included lobby group activity and some individuals made a number of complaints.
12. We noted that, during the research period, more people said the BBC was biased against Israel than against the Palestinians except, interestingly, for the month of January 2006 when the trend was reversed.

The Panel