

Kate M.

Jane Gerson

Philippa Staff
Public Service Broadcasting Branch
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Yr. ref: 03/15650

16 January 2004

Dear Philippa Staff,

Department for Culture, Media and Sport	
DATE RECEIVED	19 JAN 2004
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Deadline	21/02/04
Action	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trust Official Feedback
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Thank you for your letter of 9 January. However, I think you have misunderstood the nature of my complaint. I do not want to complain to the BBC, I want to raise concerns about the BBC with the DCMS. I hope that you will consider my comments in the light of the DCMS's forthcoming review of the BBC, in preparation for which I understand you are taking soundings from the public.

I am well acquainted with the procedures for complaining to the BBC and due to dissatisfaction with the process do not intend to complain to them again. I sent a letter to the Governors last July, concerned about the accuracy of Andrew Gilligan's reporting, before the death of David Kelly and the Hutton Inquiry. The exercise proved to be a time consuming waste of my time.

The letter was dealt with by a member of BBC staff, who clearly did not hold independent views on the subject. In addition, he misunderstood the nature of my complaint, which he thought was about bias in BBC coverage of the Iraq war, when in fact I was concerned about the probity of BBC reporting in general and the Governors' lack of effectiveness in maintaining proper regulation. I sent a second letter and got an equally uncomprehending reply which could be summarised as "we are right - you are wrong." At this point I gave up on this particular issue, but did have the gratifying experience of the Hutton Inquiry raising the concerns that I held. However one clearly can't rely on that happening too often!

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In addition I sent several emails to the *Today* programme website, criticising BBC management for their handling of Andrew Gilligan's questionable reporting skills. None of these emails were published. However when I sent a private email querying their policy on publishing emails and asking if I was wasting my time, they didn't reply (which I wanted) but did publish it! I took this to be an act of provocation and wrote once again to the Governor's to complain, this time about evident bias in website management. The letter was passed on to Kevin Marsh, editor of the *Today* programme, who replied personally. He claimed the letter they published had been "valuable feedback" and then stated "I am however happy to undertake not to publish any further emails from you in future." I am sure you will agree, that since

✓ { my complaint was precisely about not publishing my emails, this could only be interpreted as more wilful provocation. Up until then I had been a great admirer of the BBC and always listened to the Today programme. After this offensive letter, however, I felt forced to revise my attitude. It is for this reason I was particularly sensitive to the programme's treatment of Margaret Hodge. I believe Margaret Hodge was misguided in sending her letter to Gavyn Davies. However, I understood she had been provoked into doing so, following a relentless campaign against her, and I was dismayed that this was then exploited by the BBC to further their highly personal campaign.

I hope you now understand why I will not make any further complaints to the BBC. They are mishandled, they distort public opinion and they seem to have no mechanism to judge complaints impartially, let alone take action in the interests of the public.

I have come to the conclusion it is necessary to introduce some kind of independent BBC watchdog, acting in the interests of the public, in order to preserve the integrity of what I have always regarded as a fine British institution. I hope the DCMS will take note of my views.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Gerson

cc: Tessa Jowell