

Letter from Sir Christopher Bland, 4th June 2001

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From The Chairman

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June 4 2001

Lord Pearson of Rannoch
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Dear Malcolm,

Thank you for your further letter of 11 May, enclosing a copy of a letter from Chris Smith of the same date.

The Secretary of State is quite right in saying that it is the responsibility of the Governors to ensure that the BBC's obligations to treat controversial subjects with due accuracy and impartiality are met. However there is a distinction to be drawn between the Governors' responsibility to set the BBC's strategy and standards, to monitor the observance of its guidelines, and to assess overall performance; and the executive role of management to deliver programmes which fulfil these commitments

The Governors therefore set the framework within which these responsibilities are delivered, principally through the *Producers' Guidelines* and their amendments, all of which are endorsed by the Board.

The Governors are also responsible for ensuring that an appropriate process is in place for handling serious complaints. In the first instance these are investigated by the Programme Complaints Unit, which investigates them independently of the production departments. The Programme Complaints Committee of the Board of Governors is there as a court of appeal to review the finding of the Head of Programme Complaints, should a complainant be dissatisfied with his conclusions.

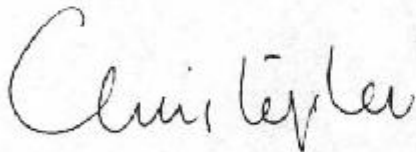
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It is also a responsibility of the Governors to appoint the Director-General and other members of the Executive Committee, including the Director of BBC News, who has direct responsibility for ensuring that controversial subjects in our News and Current Affairs output are covered with due accuracy and impartiality.

In addition, the Governors are responsible for keeping all aspects of the BBC's performance under continuing scrutiny throughout the year. An annual cycle of business ensures that the key processes and objectives for the year are properly reported on and discussed by the Board, with a half-year editorial report by BBC News in October and an annual performance review in March. The BBC's Annual Report in May includes a section on compliance with the BBC's impartiality code, which is part of the *Producers' Guidelines*.

In short, as trustees for the licence payer the Governors are responsible for ensuring that the BBC's strategy and objectives are firmly in the interests of viewers and listeners. We would expect any shortcomings to be reported during the performance review process and dealt with in the objectives for the year ahead. As I said in my letter of 8 May, I do not believe that the BBC is failing in the way you suggest, and I would expect to be alerted by BBC News to any editorial concerns.

Yours ever,



Sir Christopher Bland



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