

Management's Response
to the 2007-2008 Annual Reports
of the Offices of the Ombudsmen
for the English and French Services
of CBC/Radio-Canada

November 2008

Reply from English Services

We are pleased to see the number of complaints received by the Office of the Ombudsman regarding CBC News and/or information programming continued to decline this year, for the fifth year in a row. The introduction of the Comments section of *cbcnews.ca* contributed significantly to the number of enquiries or complaints and new guidelines have helped clarify whatever issues emerge before they reach the Ombudsman's office.

With respect to the specific concerns about the policy implications of evolving program formats, CBC News is stepping up its efforts to ensure that programs that fall out of the jurisdiction of news and current affairs adhere to the relevant sections of the *Journalistic Standards and Practices*. Last year we committed to an information and education campaign with the head of Factual Entertainment and the producers of *The Hour*. With the proliferation of new programs this year, it has become clear that the issue has to be addressed formally in a new version of the *Journalistic Standards and Practices*. We are undertaking to make sure that happens.

The Ombudsman also questions the use of provocative language and marketing techniques possibly being incorporated into news journalism. We have been monitoring the situation ourselves over the course of our news renewal process and can commit to finding ways to make our journalism appealing without resorting to language and techniques that go against our news values. In addition, this year we have more tightly integrated our local operations under one leadership structure and introduced new training courses. Both of these should help mitigate this issue.

Finally, every time the Ombudsman officially responds to a complaint or request we continue to ensure all those involved are aware of the decision and have procedures in place to prevent similar complaints down the road.

Reply from French Services

This is the first report issued by the new French Services Ombudsman, Julie Miville-Dechéne. We find her initial report highly relevant. Like Ms. Miville-Dechéne, we are pleased to see that 91% of complaints were settled without requiring an Ombudsman's review.

A few thoughts:

➤ Opinion

The Ombudsman rightly points out that in the world of journalism, given the breakdown of traditional media, opinion is becoming more and more prevalent. Radio-Canada has attempted to act on this development, particularly on the Web, by creating not blogs to provide opinion, but rather columns to deliver analysis. CBC/Radio-Canada's *Journalistic Standards and Practices* permit analysis, but not opinion.

The Ombudsman notes on page 18 of her report that she undertook only one review about column content, and received but one complaint about this issue. In any case, we're keeping a watchful eye on this emerging practice that many of our on-air personalities have taken up, and we're actually looking to define limitations for it. In the interest of corporate coherence, CBC and Radio-Canada must examine this issue together.

➤ Confusion between news and general-interest programming

The Ombudsman reviewed certain complaints related to content or programming that could blur the lines between news and entertainment. On page 31, the Ombudsman ponders the program *Fric show*:

"When a program concept is approved, even if the News department is not responsible for the program, the rules of the game should be made clear. Do the CBC/Radio-Canada *Journalistic Standards and Practices* apply? If so, is everyone involved with the program aware of them?"

The English Services Ombudsman raised the same type of question on the role hosts play in current affairs programming: "If the Corporation decides to follow that path on the air, or online, we must make serious effort to ensure that our hosts represent a range of views in keeping with our policies.

We welcome the two Ombudsmen looking into this issue. There is cause to further specify certain procedures with the programming units concerned. Radio-Canada must demonstrate coherence in its policies and practices on the air, while ensuring that the public broadcaster is what it should be—a vital space for Canadians to express themselves. We must openly encourage diversity of opinion, topics, treatment, and culture.

Both the English- and French-language news services will need to include a clarification on the scope of our news policies. Moreover, given the breakdown of traditional media, CBC/Radio-Canada's *Journalistic Standards and Practices* are in dire need of a review. New types of content, formats and programs dot the horizon. We must carve out a place for ourselves, but first we need to define how to go about it. We're currently working on this.

➤ The Ombudsman's role

In her report, the Ombudsman writes that she wishes to better define her role at Radio-Canada by, among other things, having people perceive her as a mediator. This is surely a compelling way to establish a relationship of trust between the newsroom and the public.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the fact that on a few occasions, other media organizations have attempted to use the Ombudsman's public interventions as a competitive advantage against Radio-Canada. Even though it is difficult to curb this phenomenon, we believe it deserves special attention.

Conclusion

We thank the Head of News in English and French Services for the respect and consideration afforded to the Ombudsman's decisions and report, as well as the measures taken following the Ombudsman's reviews. We also note that both news services abide by the response deadline set a few years ago and we wish to thank them.

Given that several observations made by the Ombudsmen underline the need to update the Corporation's *Journalistic Standards and Practices*, both news services will be undertaking this review which is expected to take approximately eighteen months and will be led by the Journalistic Standards Committee. Once approved by the Senior Executive Team, the revised standards will be submitted to the Board of Directors.

The review aims to achieve the following objectives:

- CBC/Radio-Canada's *Journalistic Standards and Practices* (JSPs) define our journalism brand and identity. They should encourage our journalists to strive for excellence.
- The JSPs must be drafted in a clear, direct, contemporary and easy-to-read style in both English and French.
- Journalistic principles should be enshrined in the JSPs, which will be complemented by a living, practical interpretation guide, to ensure journalists' ongoing training.
- The JSPs must be expanded to incorporate the new realities of online journalism, the use of emerging platforms as well as citizen-generated content.

Consultations will be held throughout the process with the Law Department and the two Ombudsmen. Other outside experts may also be called on as needed. Although the JSPs primarily concern the Corporation's journalistic staff, they also apply to hosts and contributors on other programs with a current-affairs component. Programming units will therefore be consulted on aspects that directly impact their teams and productions.

Senior Management once again reiterates its full support to the institution of the Ombudsman. As a public broadcaster, we believe CBC/Radio-Canada is, and should be, held to higher standards with respect to accountability to the public and to the cause of public interest. The Ombudsman plays an essential role in ensuring that our listeners, viewers and Web users can and will be heard if they do not agree with our programs. We thank Julie and Vince for their work, integrity and dedication. We also thank our journalists and managers for their co-operation in this very important process.