

**Management's Response
to the 2005-06 Annual Reports
of the Offices of the Ombudsman
for the English and French Networks
of CBC/Radio-Canada**

September 2006

INTRODUCTION

Senior Management has received and reviewed the annual reports of the Offices of the Ombudsman for the English and the French Networks of CBC/Radio-Canada and is hereby replying to their recommendations.

This past year, the Office of the Ombudsman for English Services received 1,868 complaints, communications and expressions of concern (compared to 2,050 last year), out of which 1,391 were about information programming and fell within the Ombudsman's mandate. The Office of the Ombudsman conducted independent reviews in 40 cases (compared to 69 last year).

The Office of the Ombudsman for French Services received 1,433 communications from the public (compared to 1,608 the year before), out of which 1,019 were related to information programming, a figure approximately 10% higher than year. The Ombudsman conducted 21 independent reviews, two of which were deemed to be founded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

English Services

The report of the Ombudsman, English Services, contains the following recommendations:

- *Improve public access to the Ombudsman's website.*

Senior Management agrees with this recommendation. In fact, last year, David Bazay had made similar recommendations to increase public awareness of, and access to, the services of the Ombudsman. We encourage both Ombudsmen to pursue the initiative.

- *Publish as many reviews as possible.*

Senior Management agrees with this recommendation, as it will better showcase the role of the Ombudsman as well as journalistic policies.

- *Establish clear ground rules on privacy issues both in regards to complainants and CBC staff.*

We support the recommendation but encourage the Ombudsman to work with CBC/Radio-Canada's Law Department. The Corporation has a policy on privacy and new endeavors in this area should be in line with any existing policy.

- *Expand the visibility of the Ombudsman's office, perhaps including a column on the website dealing with issues of note.*

Again, we agree with this recommendation.

With regard to response time, we are concerned with the slippage in English Radio, where the response has gone from 21 days in 2003-04 to 28 days in 2005-06. We are asking the Vice-President of English Radio to look into it with the view of complying with the agreed reply standard. Senior Management remains committed to the 20-day standard response time implemented a few years ago.

French Services

The report of the Ombudsman, French Services, contains the following recommendations:

- *Examine whether it's relevant to indicate the name of the writer of Web news copy.*

Senior Management agrees with this recommendation and asks Chief Journalists for the English and French Networks to look into it and find a way to make it work given that the New York Times and Le Monde websites have a similar rule in place.

- *Re-examine the criteria for selecting party leaders for the televised debates, in light of the current social and political context and with an eye to overhauling the format.*

Both Ombudsmen in their joint review of this issue have recommended that, with the evolving landscape, new approaches should be considered to ensure all significant players have access to our airwaves. If the Consortium of broadcasters does not agree to reexamine its selection criteria, CBC/Radio-Canada should look as to whether it should develop its own format in addition to the regular Leaders Debates.

- *Examine whether commercials could be aired:*
 - *before or after (but not during) a report within a news program;*
 - *outside magazine-style news programs.**The idea being not to interrupt a report or to intersperse it with commercials.*

While the issue of advertising does not fall within the mandate of the Ombudsman, the scheduling of advertising should not distract from the flow of a serious report. The decision should be made with the Head of Scheduling and Head of Sales. However, the decision announced in June not to broadcast commercials in documentaries during the upcoming season of *Zone Libre* should address some of the Ombudsman's concerns.

- *Send a memo to radio, television and website managers in the regions and at network centers to remind them that recordings of programs subject to a complaint must be kept in a safe place for future review, as soon as management has been informed of said complaint.*

Senior Management agrees with this recommendation. It is our understanding that this has already been done and will be reinforced on a regular basis.

- *Inform website users who want to post a comment that Radio-Canada reserves the right to condense or refuse publication of any messages received.*

Senior Management agrees with this recommendation. This should be clearly indicated on both websites.

With regard to response time, we are very pleased with the average 12-day response time in French Services, a very significant improvement over the last few years. The Head of the integrated News and Information Department has indicated that the integration would go a long way to better deal with and manage all complaints received.

CONCLUSION

This year was marked by the untimely passing of David Bazay, who held the position of Ombudsman for English Services for 10 years. David was a dedicated colleague and true friend of all of us at CBC/Radio-Canada. He will be deeply missed and his contribution in his various roles continues to live on.

As a consequence, Vince Carlin stepped into his new role earlier than planned at the beginning of a federal election. We are grateful to him in that respect. As he mentions in his report, we wish to thank Laura Marshal, Assistant to Ombudsman, for maintaining the Office operational and facilitating the transition in these trying times.

We have also asked Claude Saint-Laurent to continue to lead the Committee on Journalistic Standards and Practices for at least another year.

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 Vince and Renaud for their work, integrity and dedication. We also thank our dedicated journalists and programmers for their co-operation in this very important process.