

Mr Cathal Goan  
Director-General  
RTÉ  
Donnybrook  
Dublin 4

2 April 2008

Dear Mr Goan

A key point of my complaint about RTÉ's Coolcrease programme is failure to employ a standard method of historical quality control – a Consultant Historian.

RTÉ's response (27 Nov 2008) to my broadcasting complaint describes Dr Paul Rouse as the programme's Consultant Historian.

Dr Rouse confirmed my point, and said that the programme credits described him correctly as researcher, as distinct from Consultant Historian.

The producer's response (18 Jan 2008) is that she did not have historical quality control in the form of a Consultant Historian and was under no obligation to have historical quality control in the form of a Consultant Historian.

Can you please tell me what has been the policy of RTÉ in regard to employment of Consultant Historian in history programmes, including programmes of a contentious character?

Also, can you please tell me:

(a) whether RTÉ believed that the Coolcrease programme had a Consultant Historian?

(b) whether it believed the Dr Rouse was the Consultant Historian?

(c) and if so, how did it happen that RTÉ was misinformed on this matter? What was the source of the misinformation?

(d) What is RTÉ's policy with regard to the use of a consultant historian, going forward, and have there been changes in the policy that required this form of programme quality control?

Yours sincerely

Pat Muldowney

2.

Feeney Peter to Goan, me, eamon.ryan

8 Apr

Dear Dr Muldowney

The Director General has forwarded to me your email and has asked me to reply on behalf of RTÉ..

In regard to Consultant Historians RTÉ does not have any requirement that a consultant should be contracted when making history documentaries. If a production team feels it would be of value to contract a historian they may of course do so. But if this happens the consultant is only there to give advice and guidance (i.e. doesn't have the right to determine what is broadcast)

In regard to the "Hidden History: Killings at Coolacree" documentary it is RTÉ's view that we have commented sufficiently already on that programme. The seven complaints made to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission were responded to at great length and everything that RTÉ wishes to say about that programme is contained in our submissions to the BCC. Suffice it to say that given the decision of the Commission not to uphold the seven complaints RTÉ believes there was no issue about quality control in the programme.

I note that you have copied your query to the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Therefore I am copying him my response.

Yours sincerely

Peter Feeney  
Head of Public Affairs Policy  
RTÉ  
Donnybrook  
Dublin 4

Dear Mr Feeney

Thank you for your letter confirming that RTÉ policy does NOT require expert historical quality control, in the person of Consultant Historian, in its history productions.

In the light of the recurring controversy surrounding, especially, independent productions for RTÉ, the wisdom of this policy is questionable.

My other questions, which you have not answered, are concerned with the conduct of the statutory procedure for dealing with broadcasting complaints.

(a) Why did RTÉ believe that Dr Rouse was the Consultant Historian on the Coolacree programme?

(b) How did it happen that RTÉ was misinformed on this matter to the extent that RTÉ then misinformed the BCC when responding to my complaint? What was the source of the misinformation? Failure to answer this question leads to the reasonable conclusion that RTÉ lied to the BCC on this point.

Given the problems faced by RTÉ with regard to the High Society programme, the controversy over the name and the content of the Coolcrease programme, and other independent productions, is RTÉ undertaking any review of quality control with regard to its Independent Programming Unit and the personnel in charge of commissioning and monitoring projects?

Yours sincerely

Pat Muldowney