

Complaint by Mr Adnan Ahmed about *Beyond Today: How is 'pick-up' culture still a thing*, BBC Sounds, 9 October 2019 and *1Xtra Talks: Pick-up Artists*, BBC Sounds, 24 October 2019

Type of case	Fairness
Outcome	Upheld
Service	BBC Sounds
Date & time	Accessed by the complainant on or around 29 August 2021
Category	Fairness
Summary	We have upheld a complaint about unjust or unfair treatment in the programmes.

Case summary

Mr Ahmed complained about two podcast programmes on the BBC's On Demand Programme Service, BBC Sounds, which discussed "pick up culture" and the individuals who run "seduction boot camps", which were first made available in October 2019. Both podcast programmes referred to the complainant, Mr Adnan Ahmed, and said that Mr Ahmed had been arrested and convicted for threatening and abusive behaviour. The *Beyond Today* podcast additionally said that Mr Ahmed had been placed on the 'sexual offenders register' for 10 years. After he accessed the podcasts on 29 August 2021, Mr Ahmed complained to Ofcom that the podcast programmes did not reflect that his conviction had been quashed on appeal in September 2020.

Ofcom notified the BBC of Mr Ahmed's complaint on 6 September 2021 but the BBC did not update its description of the podcasts to reflect the fact that Mr Ahmed's conviction had been quashed until 22 December 2021. Because of the time the BBC took to include this correction following notification of the complaint about the podcasts, Ofcom found that the broadcaster had not taken reasonable care to ensure that material facts were not presented, disregarded or omitted in the programmes in a way that was unfair to Mr Ahmed.

Programme summary

Beyond Today: How is 'pick-up' culture still a thing, BBC Radio 4 on BBC Sounds, 9 October 2019

This programme was made available as a podcast on BBC Sounds on 9 October 2019 and accessed by the complainant on or around 29 August 2021.

The programme began with the question “*How is pick up culture still a thing?*”, before the presenter introduced Mr Myles Bonnar, a journalist who had gone undercover to “*expose pick-up culture*” and had reported on the subject in two BBC television documentary programmes, *Panorama: Secrets of the Seduction Bootcamp* and *Disclosure: The Seduction Game*¹. The programme included commentary from Mr Bonnar about the techniques and practices of so-called “pick-up artists”.

The presenter explained:

“The reason Myles knows so much about [‘pick-up culture’], is that he went on one of the courses that men pay to do. It was actually the same course that a man who got convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour towards women had himself been on. And actually, that court case is why Myles got interested in this whole story in the first place. Why he went undercover for Panorama, recording the people who do the training, and eventually confronting them”.

Later in the programme, the following discussion took place:

Presenter: *“Your investigation, I mean it led to some changes, didn’t it? And it led to a conviction.*

Mr Bonnar: *It did, yes. In January, I put out a video [on BBC Scotland’s The Social] about a pickup artist in Glasgow and he was arrested two days after my video went out, which was showing what he was doing on the streets of Glasgow. And he was remanded in custody until his trial, which was just last month, and he was found guilty of behaving in an abusive and threatening manner.*

Presenter: *What do you hope comes out of this?*

Mr Bonnar: *I hope that men realise that that’s not the way to behave and stop populating social media channels with the type of videos that these men post. I hope that social media platforms shut down explicit videos that seem to be filmed without consent. I hope that women, young women especially, because they are the people who are being targeted, realise some of the signs that they are being approached by a so-called ‘pick up artist’ and I hope the men that feel like they’re lost and have been unlucky in love, whatever it may be, don’t choose to go on a bootcamp.*

¹ Ofcom understood that *Panorama: Secrets of the Seduction Bootcamp* was broadcast on BBC1 on 7 October 2019 and *Disclosure: The Seduction Game* was broadcast on 13 October 2019 on BBC1 before being made available on BBC iPlayer until 29 August 2021. Mr Ahmed’s complaint to Ofcom which is the subject of this decision relates to the podcasts and not the television programmes.

They'd be far better concentrating on getting themselves right and getting more confidence and improving themselves before meeting men who will just tarnish them and teach them things that shouldn't be taught.

Presenter: *So, the great thing about all this, is that Myles' investigation does seem to have made a difference. YouTube has now deleted the channels of one of the training groups that he exposed, Street Attraction, and it also deleted the channel run by a pickup artist called Adnan Ahmed who was convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour by a court.*

We should just say that the London pickup artists that he spoke to, they all deny any wrongdoing".

The programme ended without any further reference to the complainant.

1Xtra Talks with Richie Brave: Panorama Exploring Pick-up Artists, BBC Radio 1 Xtra on BBC Sounds, 24 October 2019

This programme was made available as a podcast on BBC Sounds on 24 October 2019 and accessed by the complainant on or around 29 August 2021.

The programme discussed the *Panorama* programme referred to above and included an interview with Mr Myles Bonnar. The presenter asked Mr Bonnar what made him want to investigate so-called 'pick-up artists' and go undercover for the *Panorama* programme. Mr Bonnar said:

"So yeah, I became involved in this, kind of, a story that fell in my lap, in a sense. There was a phone call into a radio show in Scotland and Radio Scotland, and it was a woman who had said that she was aware of this 'pick up artist' based in Glasgow, or so called 'pick up artist', called Addy A-Game. So, quickly I delved into the YouTube channel that he had, and quickly realised that there was a lot of stuff on there that I found very questionable and did, like, a deep dive into the sort of videos and monologues that have been uploaded onto YouTube.

Now from that point, I moved on to, kind of, trying to get hold of Addy A-Game or Adnan Ahmed as he's actually called. And he, kind of, refused to do an interview, which went on for weeks and weeks and weeks, and eventually I got his right of reply and I decided to run the story. So, I ran it in January, and I outlined the things that he was doing; so, he apparently kept recording audio during sex, which the women seem to be unaware to that happening and uploading it onto YouTube. So, this was on one occasion there was one woman who actually appears to be asleep, and he filmed her after sex, and he uploaded what appeared to be the audio of her. And there were various other videos, you know, some others that included sex audio as well as various approaches where they seem to be extremely persistent with scores of women across Glasgow and Eastern Europe.

So, I put the video out in January, and after that video went out, he was arrested two days later. And I've been involved now in investigating this 'scene' since then, I've just kind of kept plugging away at it, finding the coaches who trained him, and then that ultimately ended up having me go undercover to attend the exact same bootcamp that he did. To try and find out whether or not the behaviour that he was seen to be proud of on YouTube was actually something that was inherent in him or had been learned through going to one of these boot camps".

Later, the presenter asked Mr Bonnar:

"Now, the thing is, a lot of people tuning in right now, the first thing that comes to their minds is 'what is wrong with anybody wanting to learn how to speak to women; get a girlfriend?'. But, in the work you did, they go beyond. There're some very questionable things that they're, even, erm—"

Mr Bonnar said:

"Yeah, so Addy A-Game, one of his choice quotes was 'listen to a woman's actions, her body, and not her words', which is like, you know, yeah, I don't need to explain how troublesome that is".

The discussion moved on and the presenter and Mr Bonnar began discussing what may be the motivations of so-called 'pick up artists' and whether it was, for example, to provide guidance to men to gain self-confidence in talking to women. Mr Bonnar said:

"I do completely appreciate that there will be some men who are lost and they need guidance on this sort of thing, but my answer to that would be, find another way than going to a pick up artist. Because looking after yourself and building up your own self confidence is going to be far more beneficial to you when you're going to meet someone that you're attracted to, or you want to engage in the conversation because you're able to read those social signals.

If you go in a boot camp, certainly the boot camps that you see online, or the one I attended, that all goes out the window and it isn't really about meeting someone that you want to live happily ever after with, it's about a 'lay count'. You know it's about getting as many 'same day lays', to use a term that, which our coach would use. It's about having as much sex as possible. And I know there will be some that say they break that rule, but when you start to scratch away at the big players in the pickup scene, you will see that there's a very common trait and it's about getting as much sex as possible and at no point do you seem to get an impression that how the woman feels or how it will be receptive by the person that you're practising on will feel about that".

Audio of the voice of a man, unidentified in the programme, was played. He said: *“Plausible deniability they want you to take the lead. Remember this is not rape. Listen to her actions, or body, not her words”*. The voice belonged to Mr Ahmed, the complainant, and the audio had been taken from one of his YouTube videos.

Mr Bonnar went on to say that the *Panorama* television programme did not demonise *“people having as many relationships as they want”*. He continued:

“The difference is, it’s, it’s the consent isn’t it? You know, if you’re having consenting sexual relationships you know, there’s nothing wrong with that. But, where it becomes a problem for me is, where you’re teaching people to push through, and overcome last minute resistance to sex. When you’re telling men that they should just look out for their own interests, and ignore the signals, or what a woman’s saying to you. And when that gets all the way to the way to the bedroom, and a woman’s ‘no’ could never be really perceived as a ‘no’, because you’re being taught by these coaches that it’s just a token. It’s a token bit of resistance that all men need to push through. You’re already getting into dangerous territory, and therefore [it] becomes a problem. Because you don’t know what they’re gonna go and do”.

At the end of the segment, the presenter said:

“Thank you, Myles and the BBC Panorama documentary exploring the seduction industry is up on the iPlayer now. I really recommend you go and give it a watch.

Since this interview Addy A-Game has been sentenced to a two-year custodial sentence and has been placed on the sexual offenders register for 10 years”.

There were no further references to the complainant in the remainder of the programme.

Summary of the complaint and broadcaster’s response

Complaint

Mr Ahmed complained on 29 August 2021 that he was treated unjustly and unfairly in two BBC programmes accessed via BBC Sounds. In particular:

Beyond Today: How is ‘pick-up’ culture still a thing

- a) Mr Ahmed complained that he had been treated unjustly or unfairly in the *Beyond Today* programme because the programme stated that he was *“convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour towards women”*, when in October 2020, his conviction was quashed on appeal. Mr Ahmed said that the programme remained accessible on BBC Sounds on 29 August 2021 and did not reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed.

1Xtra Talks: Pick-up Artists

- b) Mr Ahmed complained that he had been treated unjustly or unfairly in the *1 Xtra Talks* programme because the programme stated that *“Since this interview, Addy A-Game, has been sentenced to a two-year custodial sentence and had been placed on the sexual offenders register for 10 years”* when in October 2020, his conviction was quashed on appeal. Mr Ahmed said that the programme remained accessible on BBC Sounds on 29 August 2021 and did not reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed.

Broadcaster’s response

The BBC were notified of the complaint on 6 September 2021. It said that it did not accept that either programme treated the complainant unjustly or unfairly or that his reputation has been damaged as a result.

The BBC said that the podcast gave an accurate account of the events and judicial decisions at the time of publishing. The broadcaster said that viewers would understand that “podcasts, like programmes, reflect what is known at the time they air/are published and are not normally re-edited to reflect subsequent developments, remaining available simply as part of the BBC’s vast public archive of previously published content stretching back many years”. The BBC said that it believed that the risk of listeners being led by the absence of updates to an unfair understanding of Mr Ahmed’s actions must be understood in this “important context”.

The BBC accepted that Mr Ahmed’s conviction had been quashed on 18 September 2020. However, the BBC said that it stood behind its reporting of Mr Ahmed’s behaviour towards women, which the BBC said: “most listeners would regard as wholly reprehensible, irrespective of whether they also breached the criminal law”. The broadcaster argued that the view of Mr Ahmed’s self-confessed actions in pressuring women into sex would not be based solely on the decisions of the court, but on the actions themselves.

The BBC said that Mr Ahmed, or “Addy A-Game”, styled himself as a “pick-up artist”. The BBC said that the complainant met women at random and put them under pressure to have sex with him; and further, the BBC said the complainant secretly recorded dozens of these encounters, apparently including, on at least two occasions, audio during sex. The BBC said Mr Ahmed uploaded more than 250 videos to YouTube which encourage other men to emulate him. The broadcaster provided a quote from Mr Ahmed, taken from one of Mr Ahmed’s YouTube videos:

“Who gives a fuck what some fucking random person, some random girl thinks, about you playing the game and getting what you want in life? You shouldn’t care. Her opinion doesn’t matter”.

The broadcaster said that Mr Ahmed was investigated by the BBC in an episode of *The Social*², which it said, in turn, led to a police investigation and criminal prosecution. The BBC also provided an article published on the website of BBC Scotland on 25 September 2019, which reported that Mr Ahmed was found guilty of five offences under Section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, for threatening or abusive behaviour towards five women aged between 16 and 20, with two of the

² [BBC The Social Investigates Pickup Artist A-Game](#), *The Social*, 9 January 2019.

victims being schoolgirls and another being classed as vulnerable.³ The broadcaster said that both BBC podcasts were published the following month.

The BBC said that, while Mr Ahmed was cleared on appeal of criminal behaviour⁴, there is “no dispute these approaches were made towards the women”. The broadcaster said that during court proceedings, the women described themselves as “feeling overwhelmed, or uncomfortable, shaken up, intimidated or stressed”. The BBC said that “Mr Ahmed has shown no regret or remorse for his behaviour”.

The BBC further said that neither podcast was focused on Mr Ahmed, and that he barely featured. The broadcaster said that each programme was a wider discussion about so-called “pick-up artists” and the associated misogynistic culture. The BBC said that the *1Xtra Talks* episode has only one reference to Mr Ahmed and the *Beyond Today* podcast contained two references.

The BBC said that although it opposed Mr Ahmed’s demand to have the podcasts deleted, it would have added a line of text to the podcast information to the effect that his conviction was quashed, had the relevant programme teams been made aware of this development. The BBC explained that in a parallel complaint which Mr Ahmed lodged against BBC Scotland’s news website, relevant pages had the following note added: “Update: Adnan Ahmed’s conviction was quashed on appeal after three judges ruled the verdict was a miscarriage of justice”⁵.

The BBC said that Mr Ahmed’s complaint regarding the accuracy of BBC Scotland’s news pages did not reference either podcast. The broadcaster said that had Mr Ahmed put his complaint about the podcasts to the BBC, it would have updated the text. However, the podcasts had been published 11 months prior to Mr Ahmed’s complaint regarding BBC Scotland’s news website, and “there was simply no reason producers on either programme would have been expecting or would have been aware of any developments in the case”. BBC noted that the podcast, *Beyond Today* was no longer in production.

The BBC said that as soon as it became aware of Mr Ahmed’s complaint regarding the podcast, as a consequence of his complaint to Ofcom, it added text to the introductory show notes for both podcasts. In an email to Ofcom received on 17 May 2022, the BBC confirmed that the podcast descriptions were updated on 22 December 2021. The update text added was as follows:

“Update: Adnan Ahmed's conviction was quashed on appeal after three judges ruled the verdict was a miscarriage of justice”.

The broadcaster said that it would have willingly updated the text sooner, but, in any case, its position was that “very little harm, if any, has been done to Mr Ahmed by not doing so”. The BBC said that the name “Adnan Ahmed” was not included in either the text or the podcast’s metadata, so it was “impossible” to find the podcasts by searching for his name. The broadcaster said that this was no

³ ['Predatory' pick-up artist Adnan Ahmed found guilty](#), BBC News, 25 September 2019.

⁴ [Adnan Ahmed: 'Pick-up artist' conviction quashed on appeal](#), BBC News, 18 September 2020.

⁵ ['Predatory' pick-up artist Adnan Ahmed found guilty](#), BBC News, 25 September 2019.

longer the case as a consequence of the addition of the update reflecting Mr Ahmed's successful appeal; the BBC said that the "overwhelming majority of listeners would have accessed these podcasts well before that moment".

Ofcom's Preliminary View

Ofcom prepared a Preliminary View that Mr Ahmed's complaint should be upheld. Both parties were given the opportunity to make representations on the Preliminary View, but neither chose to do so.

Decision

Ofcom's statutory duties include the application, in the case of all television and radio services, of standards which provide adequate protection to members of the public and all other persons from unjust or unfair treatment in programmes in such services.

In carrying out its duties, Ofcom has regard to the need to secure that the application of these standards is in the manner that best guarantees an appropriate level of freedom of expression. Ofcom is also obliged to have regard, in all cases, to the principles under which regulatory activities should be transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed.

In reaching its decision, Ofcom carefully considered all the relevant material provided by both parties. This included a recording and transcript of the programme and both parties' written submissions.

When considering complaints of unjust or unfair treatment, Ofcom has regard to whether the broadcaster's actions ensured that the programme as broadcast avoided unjust or unfair treatment of individuals and organisations, as set out in Rule 7.1 of Ofcom's Broadcasting Code ("the Code"). In addition to this Rule, Section Seven (Fairness) of the Code contains "practices to be followed" by broadcasters when dealing with individuals or organisations participating in, or otherwise directly affected by, programmes, or in the making of programmes. Following these practices will not necessarily avoid a breach of Rule 7.1 and failure to follow these practices will only constitute a breach where it results in unfairness to an individual or organisation in the programme.

In assessing both heads a) and b) of the complaint Ofcom had particular regard to Practice 7.9 of the Code which states:

"Before broadcasting a factual programme, including programmes examining past events broadcasters should take reasonable care to satisfy themselves that material facts have not been presented, disregarded or omitted in a way that is unfair to an individual or organisation..."

Beyond Today: How is 'pick-up' culture still a thing

- a) Ofcom considered Mr Ahmed's complaint that the programme had resulted in unfairness because it had stated that he was "*convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour towards women*", when on 18 September 2020, his conviction had been quashed on appeal. Mr Ahmed said that the podcast remained accessible on BBC Sounds at the point at which he made his complaint to Ofcom, on 29 August 2021, and did not reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed.

In considering whether there was any unfairness to Mr Ahmed in this regard, we carefully considered what was said in this programme, as well as the context in which it was presented.

As set out in the “Programme summary” above, the programme included a discussion about “pick-up artists” and referred, albeit briefly, to the alleged activities of Mr Ahmed who had been investigated by Mr Bonnar. During the programme, the presenter said to Mr Bonnar: *“It was actually the same course that a man who got convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour towards women had himself been on... Your investigation, I mean it led to some changes, didn’t it? And it led to a conviction”*. Mr Bonnar then replied: *“It did, yes. In January, I put out a video [on BBC Scotland’s The Social] about a pickup artist in Glasgow and he was arrested two days after my video went out, which was showing what he was doing on the streets of Glasgow. And he was remanded in custody until his trial, which was just last month, and he was found guilty of behaving in an abusive and threatening manner”*. Towards the end of the programme, the presenter said: *“...and it also deleted the channel run by a pickup artist called Adnan Ahmed who was convicted of threatening and abusive behaviour by a court”*.

We took into account that the programme had referred to Mr Ahmed’s conviction four times during the conversation between the presenter and Mr Bonnar, which in our view, would have left listeners with the clear impression that Mr Ahmed had a criminal conviction, when in fact, his conviction was quashed on appeal on 18 September 2020. We acknowledged that listeners who accessed the programme were likely to have understood that it had first been made available on BBC Sounds in October 2019, and that the information included in it was accurate at this time. Further, as the BBC submitted, there was no dispute about Mr Ahmed’s conduct towards the women as reported in the podcast, which listeners were likely to regard it as reprehensible. We recognised the ongoing public interest in exposing the behaviours and attitudes towards women which were detailed in this podcast.

However, we considered that the fact that Mr Ahmed’s conviction had been overturned represented a material change of the factual circumstances relating to Mr Ahmed. We therefore considered that the omission of the fact that Mr Ahmed’s conviction had been quashed unfairly represented the facts, and as such, listeners were not able to assess Mr Ahmed’s behaviour in its full context and were likely to consider that Mr Ahmed’s conviction continued to be active, which was not the case (from 18 September 2020). This, in our view, had the potential to have materially and adversely affect listeners’ opinions of him.

We took into account that, Mr Ahmed’s conviction was quashed on 18 September 2020, and that this fact was reported by BBC Scotland on the same day. We also noted that the BBC updated the *Disclosure: The Seduction Game* programme on 29 September 2020, to reflect this significant development regarding Mr Ahmed but did not make a similar update to the podcast at that time. We recognised however that it can be challenging for broadcasters when there are changes to material facts in archival content, such as podcast material made available on services like BBC Sounds. We also took account of the burden that on-going oversight of a large and growing archive might entail and the impact that this could have on the freedom of expression of the broadcaster and the audience in respect of this material. In light of the BBC’s explanation about why it had not updated the podcast at the same time as its update to other related material and the absence of a specific complaint about the podcast from Mr Ahmed in September 2020 and at

the point he accessed the material in August 2021, we did not consider in all the circumstances that it had failed to exercise reasonable care in satisfying itself that material facts had not been omitted or disregarded in a way that was unfair to Mr Ahmed.

However, once the BBC was notified of Mr Ahmed's complaint about the podcasts on 6 September 2021, we considered that the BBC should have taken prompt action to reflect the change as regards his conviction so as to ensure compliance with Rule 7.1. The BBC did not do so, since it was not until 22 December 2021, over three months later, that the podcast's programme description was updated to reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed. We noted that this was more than a month after it made a correction to online articles following receipt of a complaint by Mr Ahmed about these on 4 September 2021.⁶ Taking account of the unfairness to Mr Ahmed resulting from the omission of any reference to the quashing of his conviction in the podcast, and the absence of any further explanation from the BBC about the time it took to make the correction, we considered in all the circumstances that the broadcaster had not taken reasonable care to satisfy itself that material facts had not been presented, disregarded or omitted in a way that was unfair to Mr Ahmed.

1Xtra Talks: Pick-up Artists, BBC Sounds

- b) We next considered Mr Ahmed's complaint that the programme resulted in unfairness to him because the programme stated that *"Since this interview, Addy A-Game, has been sentenced to a two-year custodial sentence and had been placed on the sexual offenders register for 10 years"* when on 18 September 2020, his conviction was quashed on appeal. Mr Ahmed said that the programme remained accessible on BBC Sounds on 29 August 2021 and did not reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed.

In assessing this head of the complaint, we took into account the context set out above, as well as what was said about Mr Ahmed in this programme.

Towards the end of this programme, the presenter referred to Mr Ahmed as being *"sentenced to a two-year custodial sentence and had been placed on the sexual offenders register for 10 years"*. This, in our view, would have left listeners with the clear impression that Mr Ahmed had a criminal conviction, had served, or was serving his sentence in prison, and that he had been placed on the 'sexual offenders register', when in fact, his conviction and sentence had been quashed on appeal on 18 September 2020. As above, we acknowledged that listeners who accessed the programme were likely to have understood that it had first been made available on BBC Sounds in October 2019, and that the information included in it was accurate at the time it was first made available. However, we considered that the fact that Mr Ahmed's conviction and sentence had been overturned represented a significant material change of the factual circumstances relating to Mr Ahmed. We therefore considered that the omission of the fact that Mr Ahmed's conviction and sentence had been quashed unfairly represented the facts, and as such, listeners were not able to assess Mr Ahmed's alleged behaviour in its full context and were likely to consider that Mr

⁶ Mr Ahmed complained to the BBC about online news articles which referred to his conviction on 4 September 2021, two days before the BBC were notified of his complaint in relation to the podcast. On 24 November 2021, the BBC gave its final view on Mr Ahmed's complaint about the online news articles and confirmed that an update had been applied to them.

Ahmed's conviction and sentence continued to be active, which was not the case (from 18 September 2020). This, in our view, had the potential to have materially and adversely affected listeners' opinions of him.

As above, for the reasons already set out in detail, we considered that once the BBC were notified about Mr Ahmed's complaint in relation to the podcast, it should have taken prompt action to reflect the change as regards his conviction so as to ensure compliance with Rule 7.1. The BBC did not do so, since it was not until 22 December 2021, over three months later, that the podcast's programme description was updated to reflect the fact that his conviction had been quashed. Taking account of the unfairness to Mr Ahmed resulting from the omission of this fact, and the absence of any further explanation from the BBC about the time it took to make the correction, we considered in all the circumstances that the broadcaster had not taken reasonable care to satisfy itself that material facts had not been presented, disregarded or omitted in a way that was unfair to Mr Ahmed.

Ofcom has upheld Mr Ahmed's complaint of unjust or unfair treatment in the programme.