# BBC invests £40 million in Serco to overhaul complaint handling after Huw Edwards scandal



BBC bosses have made a significant decision to allocate a £40 million contract to Serco, a firm recognised for its controversial role in various government contracts, including immigration and prisons. This move is aimed at enhancing the BBC's handling of viewer complaints through the application of artificial intelligence. The decision comes on the heels of a scandal involving Huw Edwards, a former star news anchor, whose alleged misconduct prompted sharp criticism and raised serious questions about the BBC's internal processes.

The BBC has faced considerable scrutiny following revelations that Edwards had paid a young man £35,000, which led to uproar among viewers and serious complaints about the organisation's oversight. An independent investigation revealed that the initial complaint regarding Edwards was mishandled; it wasn't escalated to senior management for over a month, revealing systemic flaws in the BBC's complaint management processes. The broadcaster subsequently acknowledged the failures and vowed to improve its systems, signalling an imperative need for organisational change.

Serco's role, as stated in the broadcaster's announcement, will focus on processing editorial and non-editorial complaints while providing responses to viewer inquiries and engaging with BBC action lines and charitable appeals. Although AI will not directly address complaints, it is intended to support human staff in responding more efficiently. Nevertheless, this plan has been met with scepticism, particularly from those directly affected by the Edwards saga, including the parents of his victim. They expressed doubts about whether this new system would genuinely simplify the complaint process for viewers.

Concerns surrounding the handling of complaints at the BBC aren't isolated to the Edwards case. Insiders have indicated that complaints about high-profile personalities within the organisation are often overlooked. This perception that some employees are treated differently has cultivated a climate of distrust and frustration among staff members, particularly regarding HR processes designed to address bullying and harassment claims. The inefficacy of the Support at Work team has exacerbated this issue, leading to widespread disillusionment regarding the handling of sensitive issues.

Moreover, scrutiny from the BBC board of directors into the Edwards case has intensified, with demands for a comprehensive understanding of how the scandal was managed internally. It was revealed that the organisation had indeed received complaints about Edwards as early as May 2023, but the matter wasn't escalated adequately, leading to a series of missteps that have since tarnished the BBC's reputation. Despite these challenges, the BBC insists that it not only aims to improve its processing of complaints but is committed to maintaining high standards of accountability in its internal operations.

The fallout from the Edwards case has resulted in notable financial implications for the BBC, including a demand for the presenter to return £200,000 in salary payments received following his arrest in November 2023. This situation further illustrates the ongoing ramifications of the scandal, which has left the BBC navigating a complex landscape of public trust and internal integrity.

In this context, the BBC's partnerships and investments in technology, particularly through companies such as Serco, will be crucial. As the broadcaster endeavours to rectify past mistakes, it must also address the broader cultural and procedural issues that facilitated their emergence in the first place. The coming years will be critical in determining whether these measures will restore confidence in the BBC's ability to manage complaints effectively and uphold its commitment to transparency and accountability.

### Reference Map

1: Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 5 2: Paragraph 2 3: Paragraph 3 4: Paragraph 6 5: Paragraph 6 6: Paragraph 6 7: Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/34892268/bbc-ai-complaints-huw-edwards/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-68413999> - The BBC apologized for mishandling a complaint about presenter Huw Edwards. Allegations made in May 2023 were not escalated to senior managers until July 6. An independent report by Deloitte found that the complaint was not logged in the BBC's case management system, leading to a lack of visibility within the organization. The BBC acknowledged the need for process improvements and plans to enhance consistency across teams and better utilize technology to manage complaints.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/03/complaints-bbc-talent-ignored-claim-huw-edwards/> - BBC staff have claimed that complaints about high-profile figures are often ignored, as highlighted by the Huw Edwards scandal. Insiders report that concerns about senior staff are routinely frustrated, creating a perception that some employees are valued more than others. The BBC's HR processes, particularly the Support at Work team handling complaints of bullying and harassment, are described as ineffective, leading to a lack of confidence among staff in the resolution of issues.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/04/bbc-directors-demand-answers-over-huw-edwards-scandal/> - The BBC board of directors is seeking answers regarding the internal handling of the Huw Edwards scandal. Edwards, 62, was arrested in November 2023, and senior staff, including Director-General Tim Davie, were informed at that time. The board has commissioned detailed briefings on the arrest and the disciplinary process, indicating a keen interest in assessing further steps in response to the incident.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/03/huw-edwards-resigned-bbc-disciplinary-process/> - Huw Edwards resigned from the BBC during a confidential disciplinary process. The broadcaster revealed that Edwards chose to resign without notice or financial settlement after a fact-finding investigation. The BBC emphasized its commitment to listening to those who raise concerns and acknowledged the complexities and confidentiality of such processes.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/01/bbc-accused-of-sitting-on-findings-of-huw-edwards-inquiry/> - The BBC has been accused of withholding the conclusions of an internal inquiry into alleged misconduct by Huw Edwards. Whistleblowers who raised concerns about Edwards' behavior reported receiving no information about the outcome of their evidence, calling for the findings to be published. The BBC has refused to disclose details of the internal investigation but stated that it is not 'sitting on' any information relevant to the police inquiry.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/article/2024/aug/09/bbc-asks-disgraced-presenter-huw-edwards-to-return-salary> - The BBC has requested that Huw Edwards return £200,000 paid to him after his arrest in November 2023. The corporation stated that Edwards brought the BBC 'into disrepute' and should not have received salary payments during his suspension. Edwards resigned in April 2024 after being charged with possessing indecent images of children, to which he pleaded guilty.