



## Freedom of Information Internal Review Decision

**Internal Reviewer** Simon Pickard  
Information and Compliance Manager

**Reference** IR2008027

**Date:** 25 August 2008

**Original Request:** 1. Has Mark Thompson, Director-General of the BBC ever attended a Common Purpose training course? If so, please list the courses they have attended, their dates, their cost and details of who paid for them.

2. Is Mark Thompson, Director-General of the BBC a Common Purpose "graduate"?

**Issues on review:** The BBC responded confirming that Mark Thompson, Director-General of the BBC has not attended a Common Purpose training course during his employment at the BBC, nor has he become a 'Common Purpose graduate'.

The requester believes that the BBC's reply does not answer the questions and believes that as Mr Thompson's employment has not been continuous at the BBC he may have undertaken Common Purpose training whilst employed elsewhere. The requester continues that as Mr Thompson is a public servant and has spent the greater part of his working life at the BBC (being paid for by the BBC Licence fee payer....and that it is 'perfectly reasonable' for the licence fee payer to know details of the level of qualifications held by employees of the BBC.

### Findings

Under section 1 (1) of the Freedom of Information Act,

(1) Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled –

(a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and

(b) if that is the case, to have the information communicated to them.

The BBC's response to the original request was dated 15 July 2008, and explicitly stated;



The Director-General's Office searched through relevant information and determined that there was no recorded information about whether Mr Thompson attended a training course with Common Purpose, and that had he done so there would be a record of such an attendance occurring. They also undertook a search of Mr Thompson's work diary and determined that he spoke at a Common Purpose anniversary event. This information was volunteered to the requester although it was not covered by the remit of the original request.

The BBC applied the FOI Act and advised that Mark Thompson hadn't attended any Common Purpose training, or had become a 'Common Purpose graduate' while he was employed at the BBC, as the Act only applies to information that the BBC holds. To confirm further aspects of Mark Thompson's life outside the BBC encroaches further on his personal information under the Data Protection Act 1998. Mr Thompson's attendance or otherwise of Common Purpose training would not have had any bearing on his appointment as Director-General of the BBC, nor on his ongoing capability in this role.

As the BBC has no record of Mark Thompson having undertaken Common Purpose training whilst employed at the BBC, the BBC would need to verbally confirm with Mr Thompson whether he had taken part in Common Purpose training whilst not employed at the BBC. This is clearly not a requirement of the BBC under the remit of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The BBC has decided not to volunteer the additional information as this could set a precedent where they would have to ask individuals similar questions in the future to answer requests where the BBC didn't actually hold the information.

### **Decision**

I uphold the BBC's original findings and believe that the BBC's response was written in good faith and a fair interpretation at the time of the original request.

### **Appeal Rights**

If you are not satisfied with this internal review you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545 700 or see [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).