

IPSO Strategic Plan 2016–2020 and Annual Business Plan 2016

Introduction

This document sets out IPSO's over-arching strategic priorities and objectives for the next four years, up to the end of 2019. This period matches both the contracts that publishers have signed to be regulated by IPSO and the period of funding that IPSO has agreed with the industry. It also sets out IPSO's objectives, plans and budgets for 2016.

IPSO is unique in history. For the first time ever, the UK press – 90% of nationals by circulation; almost all local and regional newspapers; and all the major magazine groups – have voluntarily agreed to join an independent regulator and to be bound by legally enforceable contracts. These contracts give IPSO powers far beyond those of its predecessor organisations.

IPSO was born out of a time of crisis. Phone hacking had cast a cloud over the whole industry, affecting the guilty and the innocent. The outcome of the Leveson inquiry and Parliament's subsequent attempts to find a way of implementing it that would please all parties led to a solution – the Royal Charter – that was unacceptable to the press. Not just those that had transgressed, but almost universally all newspapers and magazines. The industry's solution was to found a regulator, IPSO, that would not seek recognition under the charter and to give it unprecedented powers.

The appointment of the Chairman and Board was undertaken by an independent appointments panel, with a lay majority. The appointment of Sir Alan Moses gave IPSO a Chairman of unimpeachable independence from the press, government and other interest groups.

Vision

IPSO's vision is for a trusted, thriving, free and responsible press, reinforced by independent, effective regulation. The vision deliberately emphasises the importance of the existence of the press and its importance to our democracy. The vision also alludes to two important things:

Firstly, IPSO's regulatory role must be weighed against the importance of freedom of expression. IPSO's powers do not include sanctions that other regulators have, such as the ability to remove or restrict the right to practise, specifically because this would be an unacceptable restraint on the freedom of expression.

IPSO also recognises that the part it plays in press standards is only one part of the systems that work to achieve high standards, important though that part is. The quality of publications is rooted in editors and their teams working proudly to the highest professional standards. Regulation also has a cost, whether that is in the fees IPSO members pay or the burden regulation places upon them. It is important that that cost is kept to the minimum required to regulate in a way that is commensurate with the risk the regulator perceives in the sector.

Our priorities for 2016-2020

Each year IPSO will set out its business plan and objectives, but they will sit under five priorities that will guide the organisation over the next few years.

Priority 1. Have the interests of the public at the heart of the organisation.

IPSO exists to enforce the Editors' Code, protecting the public and giving them a route to resolution where they feel that the press has transgressed. We recognise the imbalance in power between citizens and publishing groups and we will give support to those seeking redress.

Priority 2: Grow IPSO's influence and reach.

IPSO will seek to raise its profile with the public and important stakeholders, both so that they know what we do should they need our services, but also to reassure them that in IPSO there is a body that holds the press to agreed standards, and which offers a forum for discussions about wider standards issues in the press.

Through its standards and external affairs work, IPSO aspires to a position where IPSO membership is seen, by publishers and others, as a mark of quality and commitment to professional standards.

IPSO will attempt to extend its membership further amongst print and online publishers and will consider whether membership might be offered to other organisations.

Through the quality of its work and the comprehensiveness of its membership, IPSO will aim to be seen as the credible regulator of the press.

Priority 3. Uphold and demonstrate IPSO's independence from the press, government and other interest groups.

IPSO will always act in a way which is consciously independent of the press, government and vested interests and where appropriate will demonstrate this in public.

Having agreed a budget for the period, IPSO will hold the RFC to account for making regular payments, recognising that financial security is important to IPSO's independence.

IPSO will commission periodic arms-length reviews of its effectiveness and independence, which will be published in the name of the reviewer, not IPSO.

Priority 4. Fully develop IPSO's remit across all its functions.

In the first year, IPSO was principally known for its complaints work. Over time IPSO's other functions such as its wider work on standards and its work on alternative dispute resolution will contribute to ensure that IPSO is seen as a rounded organisation making a valuable contribution to maintaining and raising standards in the press.

Priority 5. Create a climate in which members renew their contracts.

IPSO will carry out its role in close engagement with its members, but always without fear or favour. If the organisation is respected by its members and well regarded by those that use it and observe it, there will be the highest chance of members renewing their contracts in five years' time.

The strategies that will support the achievement of our priorities

1. Be true to our values

IPSO has five values. It will be:

Independent: IPSO will carry out its work free from control or interference by the press, parliament, interest groups or individuals

Bold: IPSO will act without fear or favour

Fair: IPSO will reach judgements according to its rules based on the evidence it has gathered and its actions and sanctions will be proportionate

Accessible: IPSO will make it as easy as possible to access its services and to engage with it.

Transparent: IPSO's work will be in the public domain, ensuring its actions and processes are clear and visible, and fulfils any duty of confidentiality.

It is important that IPSO is prepared to be held to account by others for behaving in accordance with these values. It is also important that anyone within IPSO feels able to hold anyone else, no matter how senior, to account for upholding the values.

2. Run an exemplary complaints function

For many people their contact with PSO will come through making a complaint, and complaints will always make up the bulk of IPSO's operational activity and staff responsibilities. IPSO will benchmark its complaints function with other regulators, where appropriate, and will seek to be upper quartile.

3. Carry out standards work that is valuable to both civil society and the press

Standards is a function that marks IPSO out as a regulator, rather than a simple complaints handler.

IPSO's compliance work will only be as burdensome as necessary and will be analysed and published to be as valuable as possible and, where warranted, to provide reassurance to the public.

If IPSO has cause to launch a Standards Investigation it will do so based on evidence and in a way that is clear and fair to the publisher concerned.

IPSO's standards work will provide a space to consider standards issues, and it will issue advice and guidance, where appropriate. It is important that industry feels this work is helpful and valuable and that civil society feels that IPSO is willing and able to provide a forum to discuss difficult or contentious issues.

4. Communication and engagement as a core function

IPSO will raise its public profile by communicating its work pro-actively, without leaping at every opportunity to comment, especially where no regulatory intervention is appropriate.

IPSO will continue its high level of engagement with its members, visiting them where they are, being held to account and developing further its understanding of the industry.

IPSO will offer opportunities to interact in both face-to-face forums and through digital means.

IPSO will ensure that interested parties and commentators in politics, academe, the law and industry are aware of what it is doing and why. It will also counter incorrect and misleading assertions. Representative groups will have opportunities that they did not have previously to engage with IPSO to raise press standards in specific areas. IPSO will engage closely with them to ensure that they are aware of their rights and that IPSO is aware of their concerns and issues.

5. Be well run

IPSO will have good governance, will take decisions according to its regulations and will record them properly.

IPSO will stay within its agreed budget and abide by its financial procedures.

IPSO will recruit and retain the best people and will be committed to their development.

Business plan 2016

Introduction

This business plan spells out what IPSO intends to achieve in 2016. In 2015 the business plan saw IPSO being fully established as an organisation and developing its functions. In 2016 the organisation will develop its effectiveness and raise its profile, while staying true to its values and keeping the interests of the public at its heart.

2015 and achievement of the 2015 business plan objectives

2015 was a year of rapid development for IPSO. Nearly half of our staff joined us this year, meaning that we are now fully resourced across our functions and ready to build their effectiveness over 2016. We received over 12,000 inquiries and complaints, which translated into over 3,500 substantive complaints under the Editors' Code (although a large number of these were complaints about a single article).

2015 saw a General Election in which a majority Conservative Government was elected. The new Secretary of State was previously Chairman of the Culture Select Committee and is therefore very knowledgeable about the press and press regulation.

The Press Recognition Panel consulted on its recognition process and declared itself open for applications. IMPRESS declared an intention to seek recognition, although not actually regulating anyone. The exemplary damages provisions of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 came into effect, but the Secretary of State indicated that he was not minded to commence the cost shifting provisions at this time.

During the year, the Editors' Code Committee (including the IPSO Chairman and Chief Executive and three lay members) agreed changes to the code, based on a consultation undertaken in response to recommendations in the Leveson Report. It also agreed to have a new consultation on further changes in the latter part of 2016.

In 2015 IPSO:

- Processed around 10,000 complaints
- Required eight front page corrections
- Developed and implemented a brand
- Recruited staff to fill the agreed structure, with excellent fields for most roles
- Negotiated changes to the regulations

- Negotiated a four year budget
- Received the first annual returns from publishers (for the end of 2014)
- Revamped the existing website to be clearer and have more content
- Found and moved to new offices and assigned the lease of the old office
- Undertook a stakeholder survey and public polling
- Developed an arbitration scheme and consulted on it
- Commissioned a review of the complaints process

2016 overarching objectives

For 2016 IPSO will have five over-arching objectives

1. To be an effective, independent press regulator, with all functions fully developed
2. To increase the role readers and citizens have in our work
3. For IPSO membership to increasingly be seen as a quality mark
4. For commentary on press regulation to move from 'which model?' to 'how well is IPSO doing its job?' and 'how well is IPSO known?'
5. To be a well-run organisation

Standards

IPSO engaged in some standards-raising work in its first year; in particular, the submission of the first set of annual statements was a landmark moment. With the successful recruitment of the Head of Standards, shortly to be joined by a Standards Officer, and the anticipated resolution of negotiations over Regulations changes, we anticipate a rapid further development of this aspect of IPSO's work.

In 2016 IPSO must demonstrate that it is actively engaged in monitoring and improving compliance with the Editors' Code and that we are unafraid to challenge serious failures of standards and have the tools to do so. However, we must avoid appearing to act only to "flex our powers" and must communicate clearly about our core remit. As we expand our reach into the new areas that mark IPSO out as a more powerful organisation than any of its predecessors, it is essential for us to engage with member publishers and other stakeholders to ensure that we continue to enjoy their broad cooperation and support, even where they disagree with us on individual issues.

IPSO will:

Complete successfully the first full cycle of annual statements covering 2015, with over 75% of submissions received by the deadline.

Issue guidance on IPSO's application of the Editors' Code of Practice in at least two key areas, and coordinate with the Editors' Code of Practice Committee to ensure that the Editors' Codebook is reissued within the first 6 months of 2016.

Put in place detailed written procedures for the conduct of standards investigations and successfully recruit for external participants.

Put in place detailed procedures for the whistle-blowers' hotline along with a communications strategy to raise awareness of it within the industry.

Complaints

The initial challenge to IPSO's complaints function was resilience: ensuring that it remained functional and viable in the difficult transitional period. It is now growing in authority and experience. The tasks for 2016 are to refine it by making adjustments to improve its efficiency and effectiveness; to integrate it effectively with the developing standards function; and to improve reporting and communication with the Complaints Committee and Board on its work.

IPSO will:

Implement the accepted recommendations of the Complaints Review.

Increase the proportion of complaints investigations concluded within the target of 90 days from 50% to 65% (working toward an eventual goal of 75%).

Initiate monitoring of complainant satisfaction and achieve a 5% improvement on overall satisfaction against an initial benchmark.

Create and develop a Liaison Committee, to incorporate members of the Board, Complaints Committee and Executive, to facilitate cross-working on standards issues that arise in a complaints context.

External Affairs

IPSO's Communications Strategy outlined four broad areas of focus:

Developing our digital presence by launching a new website with improved functionality, such as the ability to host blogs and video, and extending our twitter presence by gaining followers and holding twitter Q&As.

Improving our education and outreach work by engaging with third-party organisations to extend our reach to communities who may need to access our

services, including appropriate charities, advice organisations, and pressure groups.

Implementing a targeted public affairs strategy, working in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and with political parties and think tanks.

Improved communications with the Board and Complaints Committee and developing their role in speaking for IPSO in the networks in which they are established figures.

Arbitration

Following an extensive consultation, the Board decided in principle to exercise its power to run a pilot arbitration scheme as an alternative dispute resolution scheme for those that were considering civil legal action against a publisher. IPSO is keen to use this opportunity to test how good a solution arbitration is to this undoubted issue.

Corporate

While IPSO will, rightly, be best known for the work it carries out as a regulator, it is also vital to IPSO's reputation that it is well run. Being able to recruit and retain high quality staff and to motivate them and keep them focussed on their work is essential to IPSO's success. Having negotiated a budget with the RFC it is important that we do the things we have said we will, within the budget we have asked for.

IPSO will:

Commission an arms-length review of IPSO's independence and effectiveness (to be published in the name of the reviewer).

Carry out an annual staff survey, which will be bench-marked year on year and also, if possible, with other similar organisations.

Work within the budget agreed with the RFC.

Comply with its legal requirements.

Work collaboratively with the Secretary of the Editor's Code Committee on a new edition of the Editors' Code Handbook and a consultation on possible changes to the Code.