

Rebuttal of Hacked Off's 'Failure of IPSO'

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) was established on 8 September 2015 and in our first year we have set about establishing ourselves as an effective independent regulator. We are the only operational press regulator in the U.K. and we provide support to those who feel they have been wronged by the press and work to uphold the highest professional journalistic standards.

The claims made in Hacked Off's "Failure of IPSO" document are ill informed, which is of concern because they may discourage members of the public from making legitimate complaints to IPSO and from seeking any support they may need.

IPSO is, therefore, addressing the misleading impression given by Hacked Off in this response which is intended to set the record straight about IPSO's role, work and achievements and to make sure that the public know IPSO will continue to protect the rights of individuals and to uphold high standards of professional conduct for the press.

Christopher Ware. Mr Ware has never made a complaint to IPSO. We understand that he sued and won damages from The Sun and as part of this action a correction was included in the newspaper's corrections and clarifications column. In the document, he says he felt frightened by the press and felt that there was nothing to stop press harassment. We are sorry to hear that Mr Ware thinks that, however, there is no mention in the document of the protections IPSO offers to individuals from intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit. IPSO has supported many people who said they felt harassed by journalists and we will continue to do so if required. It is inaccurate for Hacked Off to suggest that IPSO 'does nothing' to stop press harassment and we would encourage anyone in a situation like Mr Ware's to contact us for help and redress.

Emily Brothers. In this case, IPSO's Complaints Committee found that reference to Ms Brothers in The Sun breached Clause 12 (Discrimination) and ordered The Sun to publish a lengthy adjudication alongside the journalist's weekly column. In the document Ms Brothers complains that Ipsos allowed her to be 'victimized'. Sir Alan Moses, IPSO's chair, has previously explained why this is not the case, both in direct correspondence with and in a statement he provided to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee. The reality is that IPSO takes bullying and victimisation extremely seriously and would consider this to be a serious breach of a publication's contract with us as a regulator. Understanding that some individuals may feel vulnerable if they are required to complain personally, IPSO has empowered groups to act on their behalf. This is, in fact, what happened in Ms Brother's case, where Trans Media Watch complained as a representative group acting on behalf of the trans community. In circumstances where there may not be a representative group involved, IPSO's professional team of complaints officers are sensitive to a complainant's vulnerabilities. The suggestion that IPSO allows the press to 'victimise' complainants is simply unfounded. When people ask IPSO for help they are, and will continue to be, treated sensitively and professionally.

Linda Pearson. Mrs Pearson had her complaint upheld in part by IPSO., The document says that IPSO would not help her formulate her complaint, forcing her to 'cite the relevant part of the Editors' Code', which contains the standards with which the newspaper and magazine industry must comply . Upon receiving a complaint, not unreasonably, we first invite complainants to indicate which terms of the Code they feel have been breached and our team will always provide advice and support to complainants to allow them to articulate their concerns and to frame their complaints. The document also says IPSO 'ignored' questions about compensation. IPSO makes it clear in our correspondence that it is not our role to seek compensation on behalf of complainants and this advice is reiterated if requests for compensation are made. IPSO exists to make sure that people like Ms Pearson have somewhere to go if they feel humiliated or abused by stories such as these in the press and anyone in a similar situation should certainly seek the support of IPSO.

Mike Doherty. Mr Doherty's complaints about articles 'blaming a traveller community for two deaths' were mediated by IPSO and brought to resolutions agreed between himself and the Daily Mirror. The document says that during an ongoing complaint 'IPSO bans complainants from disclosing the detail of newspapers' response to complainants', but fails to mention that a similar obligation of confidence is also imposed upon the respondent newspaper. This is an entirely proper process which allows us to investigate complaints thoroughly and fairly – this is a key part of our work as regulator. Complainants are free to express their views about the complaints process at the conclusion of the complaint. The document accuses IPSO of treating the traveller community with 'little regard'. In fact, in this particular case IPSO worked closely with the organisation Traveller Movement to provide support to those involved and was successful in mediating this issue.

Andy Miller. The document says that IPSO 'chose the side of the newspaper' in the case of Andy Miller. In fact, Mr Miller's complaint was, like all complaints, properly and thoroughly investigated by IPSO. It is not the position that the Daily Mail was 'allowed to flout the Code'; it complied with the Editors' Code by publishing reports of the findings made against it by the Court at the appropriate stage. Mr Miller's dissatisfaction with IPSO's decision and about what the Code requires is not a proper basis for the claim that IPSO is 'run by the press, for the press and is set up to work in their interests'.

Robin Williams. The document seeks to rely upon the reporting of the death of Robin Williams' as an illustration of IPSO's 'failure' to address the reporting of suicides, yet the incident occurred before IPSO was constituted. To suggest, however, that IPSO does not take the reporting of suicide seriously is unfounded. In our first year we have dealt with numerous complaints about suicide reporting and are committed to work with a number of organisations to further develop support for journalists, publications and complainants as part of our standards work.

'Mark of the devil'. The document says IPSO 'did not lift a finger' to deal with the Sun's 'Mark of the devil' story. This is not correct. In fact, IPSO worked with Sarah Wollaston MP and The Sun to mediate and resolve a complaint taken forward by Ms Wollaston about this article. As a result of IPSO's intervention, The Sun changed its processes around payments for stories and improved the way it dealt with these issues. IPSO is extremely conscious of the importance of Clause 6 of the Code and the protections which it provides to children, which it requires the industry to uphold.

Sexual Assault. The document says that IPSO's complaints process would force victims of sexual assault to resolve complaints with lawyers and editors; would have their names and contact details shared with the newspapers; and be denied anonymity. All of these assertions are untrue and it is of particular concern that victims of sexual assault may not seek the assistance of IPSO as a result of these misleading claims. Our experienced staff have investigated numerous complaints under clauses 7 and 11 of the Editors' Code and have supported many rape victims and victims of sexual assault. IPSO is deeply troubled that victims of sexual assault may not seek IPSO's assistance and appropriate redress as a result of the misinformation published. Victims of sexual assault are free to complain through representatives and to retain their anonymity, including within the complaints process. We will work with them to ensure they are able to seek redress through the IPSO system, should they choose.

Corrections. The document criticises 'IPSO's failure to deliver prominent corrections'. To illustrate this it features articles which IPSO has never received complaints about, let alone investigated or ordered corrections on. In fact, IPSO has ordered The Daily Telegraph, The Times and the Kentish Gazette to publish front page remedial action. Corrections and adjudications are always required on the same page or further forward than the original article, unless ordered to be included in a corrections column.

To conclude, IPSO's first year has seen the organisation make a number of significant rulings and adjudications based on evidence it has gathered working with individuals or groups who feel they have been wronged by the press. We have acted without fear

or favour and have carried out our work free from control or interference by the press or parliament.

We are confident that our process for handling complaints is robust and fair and we will continue to provide support, mediation and redress. Our own qualitative research shows us that the more people know about us and use us, the more positive they are about us and we go into our second year confident in our role as an effective, independent regulator.