

Graham Smith, Editor, The Herald, IPSO Glasgow Roadshow

As Rona mentioned in her introduction, I've been a print journalist for more than 28 years, working in both regional and national newspapers in Scotland and England.

I've worked at The Herald since 2010, holding several senior executive posts, and became editor in January this year after four months as Acting Editor.

So, how does Ipsos affect The Herald? Well, the first thing I would say is that, in keeping with other national newspapers in Scotland, the majority of our reporters are highly experienced journalists who have been doing their jobs for a number of years.

As such we would expect them to have a working, practical knowledge of the Ipsos Editors' Code of Practice and, indeed, compliance with the code is written into their contracts of employment.

The code is pretty clear and unambiguous – much more so than that of its predecessor the Press Complaints Commission – which can only be a good thing for both journalists and complainants.

At The Herald, any updates or alterations to the code are circulated to staff and if there was ANY doubt on their part that a story they were working on might breach the code, this would be discussed with myself or a senior executive, with close attention paid to the code.

Over and above that, like other media organisations, we have 24/7 legal advice on tap and these highly-experienced media lawyers have a good working knowledge of the Code.

I've had several conversations with lawyers over the years where the advice has been that, whilst legally sound, a story could potentially be in breach of the Ipsos code. Obviously, we have taken that advice on board and have either decided not to publish, or have amended the story to remove any elements which may have led to an Ipsos breach.

So, what are our numbers? Well, during the calendar year of 2016 there were nine complaints to Ipsos about articles in The Herald. None of these were ultimately found to have breached the editors' and that included two which were resolved with Ipsos's involvement.

The majority of our complaints are about court stories which I've always found rather odd given that it is an extremely controlled environment where a narrative is given and, as long as that is reported accurately, there should be no cause for complaint. Accused persons, however, often disagree with that narrative, but if it is what was said in court by the Crown or in evidence then perhaps it should be of little surprise that their complaints to Ipsos rarely succeed.

On the subject of court stories, it's worth pointing out that neither The Herald nor any other national newspaper in Scotland has its own designated court reporters any more. We all use the same freelance agencies which cover the main courts in Glasgow or Edinburgh or individual freelancers covering sheriff courts further afield. That means we all get the same

service but it does also mean that on the rare occasions these experienced court freelancers get it wrong, everyone who has used their copy is affected.

That was the case on the one occasion - since Ipso was set up just over three years ago - that The Herald was found to have been in breach of the code.

This case involved a dentist who had been cleared of professional misconduct after a complaint brought by one of his patients but who had then sued that patient for defamation. The court freelancer – a guy I know well and who, interestingly, has a law degree – was given incorrect information by the court clerk which led him to file a story saying the dentist had successfully sued for £50,000. In fact, the dentist had dropped the case and had been required to pay the patient's costs.

As soon as the journalist realised his error – and before any complaint had been made to Ipso – he informed us, an online version of the story was amended and we published a correction in our print edition.

Despite that prompt action, we were rightly found to have been in breach of clause 1 of the code on accuracy. In addition we were found to have breached the code further by not apologising for the error. We had carried a correction but had not said we were sorry for the mistake which Ipso said we should have done, given the potential the error had to do serious damage to the person who complained.

It was a salutary lesson and one which we have certainly learned from.

And although there has only been that one case where The Herald was found to have breached the code, we are certainly not complacent.

All complaints are handled extremely seriously. On a practical level, if a complaint has been sent to our designated complaints email address which we print in every edition of the paper along with Ipso's contact details, I will aim to reply to that within 24 hours. Checking this email is one of the first things I do every morning.

Some complainants, of course, decide to go straight to Ipso and the first we know of their complaint is when we receive an email from one of the Ipso complaints officers. Receiving these certainly focuses the mind!

Ipso usually suggests we try and resolve the matter with the complainant directly and sets a deadline of seven days to try and do this. The relative speed with which complaints are handled is one of the big pluses of Ipso – right throughout the process it is much faster than its predecessor the PCC and that can only be a good thing for complainants.

From the receipt of that initial email, it will be only 28 days before Ipso decides to investigate a case, so there is little danger of a case dragging on for months with complainants feeling they are being strung along.

At The Herald we would certainly aim and hope to resolve most cases long before that period had elapsed.

But, inevitably, there will be some cases where a resolution is not possible and where Ipso has to get more fully involved.

And as with other parts of the process, we would fully cooperate with any such investigation.

As it says in the preamble to the code, it is essential that an agreed code should not only be honoured to the letter but in the full spirit.

As editor of The Herald, I would expect all our journalists to strive to do that at all times.