The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), as regulator, is charged with enforcing the following Code of Practice, which was framed by the Editors’ Code of Practice Committee and is enshrined in the contractual agreement between IPSO and newspaper, magazine and electronic news publishers.

Preamble

The Code – including this preamble and the public interest exceptions below – sets the framework for the highest professional standards that members of the press subscribing to the Independent Press Standards Organisation have undertaken to maintain. It is the cornerstone of the system of voluntary self-regulation to which they have made a binding contractual commitment. It balances both the rights of the individual and the public’s right to know.

To achieve that balance, it is essential that an agreed Code be honoured not only to the letter, but in the full spirit. It should be interpreted neither so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual, nor so broadly that it frustrates the fundamental right to freedom of expression – such as to inform, to be partisan, to challenge, shock or entertain – or prevents publication in the public interest.

It is the responsibility of editors and publishers to apply the Code to editorial material in both printed and online versions of their publications. They should take care to ensure it is observed rigorously by all editorial staff and external contributors, including non-journalists.

Editors must maintain in-house procedures to resolve complaints swiftly and, where required to do so, cooperate with IPSO. A publication subject to an adverse adjudication must publish it in full and with due prominence, as required by IPSO.

1. Accuracy
   i) The press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
   ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, if appropriate – an apology published. In cases involving IPSO, due prominence should be as required by the regulator.
   iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when required, before publication.
   iv) The press, free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.

2. Privacy
   i) Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, correspondence, including digital communications.
   ii) Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual’s private life without consent. In considering an individual’s reasonable expectation of privacy, account will be taken of the complainant’s own public disclosures of information and the extent to which the material complained about is already in the public domain or will become so.
   iii) It is unacceptable to photograph individuals, without their consent, in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.

3. Harrassment
   i) Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit.
   ii) They must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist, nor remain on property when asked to leave and must not follow them. If requested, they must identify themselves and whom they represent.
   iii) Editors must ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use non-compliant material from other sources.

4. Intrusion into grief or shock
   In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. These provisions should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.

5. Reporting suicide
   When reporting suicide, to prevent simulative acts care should be taken to avoid excessive detail of the method used, while taking into account the media’s right to report legal proceedings.

6. Children
   i) All pupils should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion.
   ii) They must not be approached or photographed at school without permission of the school authorities.
   iii) Children under 16 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child’s welfare unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adults consents.
   iv) Children under 16 must not be paid for material involving their welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is accepted by the person named in the material to use their consent.
   v) Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child’s private life.

7. Children
   i) The press must not, even if legally free to do so, identify children under 16 who are victims or witnesses in cases involving sex offences.
   ii) In any press report of a case involving a sexual offence against a child –
      i) The child must not be identified.
      ii) The adult may be identified.
      iii) The word “incest” must not be used where a child victim might be identified.
   iii) Care must be taken that nothing in the report implies the relationship between the accused and the child.

8. Hospitals
   i) Journalists must identify themselves and obtain permission from a responsible executive before entering non-public areas of hospitals to seek evidence.
   ii) The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions.

9. Reporting of Crime
   i) Relatives of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified without their consent, unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.
   ii) Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children under the age of 18 who witness, or are victims of, crime. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.
   iii) Editors should take care not to publish the names or photographs of children under the age of 18 after arrest for a criminal offence but before they appear in a youth court unless they can show that the individual's name is already in the public domain, or that the individual (or, if they are under 16, a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult) has given their consent. This does not restrict the right to name juveniles who appear in a crown court, or whose anonymity is lifted.

10. Clandestine devices and subterfuge
   i) The press must not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by listening devices, by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, massages or emails, or by the unauthorised removal of documents or photographs, or by accessing legally held information without consent.
   ii) Engaging in misrepresentation or subterfuge, including by agents or intermediaries, can be justified only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means.

11. Victims of sexual assault
   The press must not identify or publish material likely to lead to the identification of a victim of sexual assault unless there is adequate justification and they are legally free to do so. Journalists are entitled to make enquiries but must take care and exercise discretion to avoid the unwarranted disclosure of the identity of a victim of sexual assault.

12. Discrimination
   i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual’s race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

13. Financial journalism
   i) Even where the law does not prohibit it, journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information to others.
   ii) They must not write about shares or securities in whose performance they know that they or their close families have a significant financial interest without disclosing the interest to the editor or financial editor.
   iii) They must not buy or sell, either directly or through nominees or agents, shares or securities about which they have written recently or about which they intend to write in the near future.

14. Confidential sources
   Journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.

15. Witness payments in criminal trials
   i) No payment or offer of payment to a witness – or any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness – should be made in any case once proceedings are active as defined by the Contempt of Court Act 1981. This means a witness has been freed unconditionally by police without charge or bail or the proceedings are otherwise discontinued, or has entered a guilty plea to the court, or, in the event of a not guilty plea, the matter has been adjourned.
   ii) Where proceedings are not yet active but are likely and foreseeable, editors must not make or offer payment to any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness, unless the information concerned ought demonstrably to be published in the public interest and there is an overriding need to make or promise payment for this to be done, and all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure no financial dealings influence the evidence those witnesses give. In no circumstances should such payment be conditional on the outcome of a trial.
   iii) Any payment or offer of payment made to a person later cited to give evidence in proceedings must be disclosed to the prosecution and defence. The witness must be advised of this requirement.

The public interest

There may be exceptions to the clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:
   i) Detecting or exposing crime, or the threat of crime, or serious impropriety.
   ii) Protecting public health or safety.
   iii) Protecting the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
   iv) Disclosing a person on convicted of or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
   v) Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.
   vi) Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
   vii) Disclosing concealment of evidence.
   viii) Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.

2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.

3. The regulator will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain or is becoming so.

4. Editors involving the public interest will need to demonstrate that there was good reason to believe the public interest would be served. If, despite payment, no public interest emerged, then the material should not be published.