

## **IPSO response to Press Recognition Panel annual report**

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As the Press Recognition Panel is aware, IPSO has not and does not intend to seek recognition under the Royal Charter.

IPSO is committed to transparency and publishes detailed information on its website about its work, including searchable copies of all rulings reached by the Complaints Committee, annual statements submitted by publishers, information about its standards monitoring, and regular updates on its responses to matters that arise in the course of its work, including through blogs and press releases. Its annual report includes further information including tables of upheld complaints for all IPSO-regulated publishers and statistics on the outcomes of all complaints received in the prior year.

Despite this extensive material available in the public domain, the PRP prefers to uncritically present consultation responses it has received from third parties that present an incomplete, and in some instances misleading, picture of IPSO's work and governance arrangements.

### **The independence of IPSO and its Chair**

IPSO's Chair, Lord Faulks is fully independent from both Government and the industry. He has not served in any ministerial positions for over five years and currently sits as an unaffiliated peer in the House of Lords, with no attachment to any party.

IPSO's Board and Committee both have lay majorities and no serving editors amongst the industry members. The Leveson report itself is clear that "the composition of the Board should include people with relevant expertise" (p.1803). The Chair and Board were selected by an independent appointments panel, chaired by the impartial former civil servant Sir Hayden Phillips GCB DL.

IPSO is funded by its regulated publishers through the arms-length body, the Regulatory Funding Company, which collects a levy from those publishers. IPSO's independence from the industry is protected by five-year funding agreements, the most recent of which was settled in 2019, and by enforceable contracts with its regulated publishers.

An independent external review<sup>1</sup> carried out by former permanent secretary Sir Joseph Pilling which assessed the independence and effectiveness of IPSO found that there is "no evidence of IPSO's decision-taking being improperly influenced by the industry".

### **Not just a complaints handler**

The report makes the repeated assertion that IPSO is merely a "complaints handler" despite it fulfilling a multitude of regulatory functions. As well as handling complaints, activities include:

- offering training for journalists
- producing guidance for journalists and editors

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<sup>1</sup> External Review of IPSO's independence and effectiveness, available at [https://www.ipso.co.uk/media/1325/ipso\\_review.pdf](https://www.ipso.co.uk/media/1325/ipso_review.pdf)

- commissioning research on press standards
- raising media literacy by producing information for the public
- engaging across the media environment and government
- conducting wide monitoring and analysis of editorial standards.

In 2020, IPSO issued new guidance for editors and journalists on the reporting of Muslims and Islam<sup>2</sup>; published new research on editorial standards in the reporting of transgender issues<sup>3</sup>; and conducted an in-depth analysis on complaints handling pre-and-post IPSO to track improvements in the quality, speed and prominence of corrections.<sup>4</sup> We met with over 200 organisations interested in the reporting of particular topics, on subjects as diverse as domestic abuse, suicide, antisemitism, reporting extremism and vaccines.

In 2020 IPSO issued 48 privacy notices, protecting the public from unwanted approaches by the media and made nearly 20 proactive approaches to organisations we thought could benefit from our harassment advice.

We also rose to the challenge of Covid, offering advice to front line organisations and affected individuals, dealing robustly with regulatory complaints and making public all Covid-related rulings with training points to support editors and journalists to produce Code-compliant content on this critical issue.

### **Standards investigations**

IPSO remains ready to conduct a standards investigation. It is fully funded to carry out such an investigation and the criteria for doing so are clearly and transparently set out on IPSO's website.

The independent Pilling review said that "it would be a serious mistake to launch a standards investigation on relatively flimsy grounds". Lack of a standards investigation is not evidence of a failure to regulate; rather, no publisher has currently reached the threshold required to launch such an investigation. IPSO always seeks to address standards concerns in a proportionate way.

A standards investigation should not be conflated with IPSO's complaints process, which is entirely separate, and does not include fines as an available sanction. In six years of operation, IPSO has dealt with over 100,000 complaints and required 25 front-page references to corrections and adjudications, protecting the public and upholding the highest standards of professional conduct for regulated newspapers and magazines.

### **Numbers of regulated publishers**

IPSO currently regulates 93 publishers both in print and online. This comprises over 95% of national newspapers by circulation, all major local and regional newspaper groups, and an increasing number of hyperlocal and specialist publishers. We also regulate the majority of well-known magazine brands and many specialist titles. This represents thousands of individual publications.

Although the PRP-recognised regulator IMPRESS covers 104 publishers and 174 titles, it is important to be clear that the vast majority of titles in the UK, in print and online remain regulated by IPSO.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.ipso.co.uk/member-publishers/guidance-for-journalists-and-editors/>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.ipso.co.uk/monitoring/research/>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.ipso.co.uk/member-publishers/guidance-for-journalists-and-editors/>

## **Transparency of complaints figures**

IPSO transparently reports its complaints figures in detailed annual reports<sup>5</sup> which are publicly available on its website. These include figures for complaints that have been resolved during the process; complaints where the publisher has made an offer that the Complaints Committee considers should have been accepted; and complaints which are not pursued, or which are rejected on receipt by IPSO. We also publish all complaints rulings and resolution statements.

IPSO also records as “upheld” all rulings by the Complaints Committee that a publication has breached the Editors’ Code, even in cases where the Committee has found that remedial action offered by the publication was sufficient.

## **Accessibility of IPSO’s complaints process**

IPSO is committed to running a free, fair and easy-to-access complaints process which protects individuals and freedom of expression. We offer support to complainants if required and our complaints handlers conduct impartial and thorough investigations.

It remains the case that many complaints submitted to IPSO will not identify a possible breach of the Editors’ Code. We understand that this is disappointing to complainants. All complainants receive an explanation of the reasons their complaint did not raise a potential breach.

It is disappointing to see a small number of complainants cited in the report as having negative experiences with the IPSO complaints. It is always a matter of regret if complainants have concerns about the process. We survey all complainants whose complaints proceed past the initial stages and actively seek feedback on how we can improve further. We are satisfied that our complaints process is accessible, robust and proper.

## **Social media and online harms**

The PRP report is correct to recognise that the press, and news media more widely, has been transformed in the years since the Leveson Report by the digital revolution and rise of social media. IPSO has been evolving constantly in recognition of these changes, expanding our regulation of online-only news publishers and contributing to government and industry policy discussions on future Online Harms regulation of social media platforms.

The PRP write that their recognition system should have a place in the future regulation of social media platforms; we do not believe this is appropriate. We welcome the Government’s recognition that newspapers and magazines are already properly regulated and thus fall out of scope of the Online Harms legislation.

IPSO will continue to protect the public by holding newspapers and magazines to account for their actions; protecting individual rights; upholding high standards of journalism; and helping to maintain freedom of expression.

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<sup>5</sup> Available at <https://www.ipso.co.uk/monitoring/annual-reports/>