



Sunday World Annual Statement 2020

Introduction

The Sunday World is an all-Ireland publication with separate north and south editions. The northern edition started in March 1973 and was the first red top tabloid indigenous to the region. The current editor and Responsible Person is Brian Farrell.

We are the biggest selling newspaper title in Northern Ireland and have an established reputation for investigative journalism, we report on crime and have a long history in exposing paramilitary organisations and more recently the transition of such organisations to drug dealing and other criminality.

Our reporters carry out their jobs at no little risk. The first editor of the Sunday World Jim Campbell survived a murder attempt by the Ulster Volunteer Force. He was shot five times at the door of his home in 1984 and still has a bullet lodged in his back.

Martin O'Hagan, a crime reporter with the Sunday World was shot and killed in 2001 by the Loyalist Volunteer Force because of his work exposing that terrorist organisation.

Former Northern Editor Jim McDowell was subjected to numerous death threats which required enhanced security at his home. He was physically assaulted by a UVF gang in Belfast city centre.

We have had a bomb planted at our office and our office has been firebombed.

Staff received numerous death threats from both republican and loyalist paramilitary groups over the years. In 2020 alone, two Sunday World journalists were warned by police of "imminent threats". One journalist was contacted in the middle of the night by the police and alerted to a threat of attack by criminals and loyalist paramilitaries and both were warned to be vigilant at home and when travelling.

The Sunday World was owned by Independent News and Media which is based in Dublin but which also owns Belfast based titles the Sunday Life and Belfast Telegraph. The company also publishes the Dublin based Irish Independent, Sunday Independent and the Herald as well as numerous regional titles.

In 2019, the Independent News and Media Group was acquired by Mediahuis. Established in 2014, Mediahuis is one of the biggest publishers in the Benelux countries and is behind a wide range of cross-media brands. It is a dynamic and forward-looking media company which has expanded rapidly in recent years. Famous news brands owned by Mediahuis include NRC and De Telegraaf in The Netherlands; De Standaard and Het Nieuwsblad in Belgium; Luxemburger Wort and Télécran in Luxembourg.

In October 2020 the Sunday World relaunched a dedicated online presence with sundayworld.com and is now published content on a daily basis.

Our Editorial Standards

Editorial staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of responsible journalism. The Sunday World's approach to editorial standards is set out in the overall Editorial Code of Conduct for Mediahuis Ireland. The Sunday World North edition must also, of course, comply with the IPSO Editor's Code. T

In addition, regular legal updates and notes about best practice are issued from our inhouse counsel, some of which are specific to the Sunday World North edition.

Complaints

Readers are alerted to our adherence to the IPSO Code of Practice on page 2 of the newspaper in the following format:



When complaints are received they are escalated to the Editor and Deputy Editor for review and consideration. If deemed necessary, then in some instances the Deputy Publisher of Mediahuis Ireland and inhouse counsel may also become involved.

We aim to take a fair and balanced approach to complaints, accuracy is a fundamental aspect of building trust with our readers and if we have made a clear error then we are happy to address it.

In January 2020, the Complaints Committee made a finding against the paper in respect of Complaint Reference IPSO: #03710-19#. The Committee made a number of findings:

- IPSO found that the publication had reported the unidentified sources' claims as fact and had failed to corroborate the sources' accounts with official channels, or approach the complainants or family members for comment prior to publication.
- IPSO found that the handling of the complaint by the Sunday World fell below the standards expected of a member publication. There were repeated delays when adhering to deadlines set by IPSO and this had warranted referral to IPSO's Standards Department.
- IPSO found that the publication had failed to take care when reporting the claims of sources and when identifying a recently deceased person in breach of Clause 1.

These findings were taken very seriously by the Sunday World and in response we arranged to travel to London later that month to meet with IPSO. Brian Farrell (Sunday World Editor), Ed McCann (then Managing Editor, INM), Richard Sullivan (Belfast Bureau Chief) and Fergus Foody (Legal Manager, INM) met with Charlotte Dewar (Director of Operations), Charlotte Urwin (Head of Standards), Lauren Sloan (Head of Complaints) and Lara Fielden (Complaints Committee).

The meeting was a constructive one and provided an opportunity to discuss the unique circumstances that confront the Sunday World in seeking to report on issues of public importance affecting Northern Ireland, especially paramilitary activity, while also looking at ways to continue doing so within compliance with the Editor's Code.

In relation to the specific findings of the complaint, the Sunday World believed IPSO training for our newsroom would be timely and beneficial and while this had been planned for March 2020, the onset of Covid-19 meant that it was deferred to May 2021 when Lauren Sloan provided two training seminars to cover both the Sunday World and Belfast Telegraph / Sunday Life.

In July 2020 we also organised external legal seminars for our staff which included further reference to the IPSO code and the importance of doing the basics right, e.g. verifying facts, providing people with an opportunity to comment, give the other side.

Through 2020 a number of other IPSO complaints were received but these were all resolved either by publication of an agreed clarification, attending a meeting with complainants mediated by IPSO or withdrawal of the complaint. No further adverse findings were made against the Sunday World in 2020.