



To protect
the public and
freedom of
expression

STRATEGY
2023 - 2028

Foreword

We are delighted to present a new five-year strategy for the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) for the years 2023 to 2028.

In the eight years since we were established there have been radical changes in the industry we regulate. The way in which people access news and information has changed significantly, with many going to unregulated sources.

We think the value of being regulated has never been greater. Readers can have more confidence in the accuracy of what they read when it carries the IPSO mark.

As a non-statutory regulator, IPSO can, and needs to, adapt to the scale and pace of change. But certain principles remain at the heart of what IPSO does and are reflected in our new strategy. These principles – independence, transparency, accessibility – are as important as they ever were.

Good journalism, produced in accordance with high standards, has a vital role which persists in the face of all the changes in the way news is consumed.



View from the chair, Lord Faulks KC

We think that our strategy will ensure that IPSO's credibility and accountability can be preserved in a way that is both in the interests of the public and of those whom we regulate.

By addressing editorial standards and enforcing the Editors' Code of Practice we can help people trust what they read.

We can also help to support high quality journalism, of which there is a great deal, and foster a culture in which freedom of expression is strengthened by fair and consistent regulation.

Independent regulation by IPSO will continue to be a mark of quality, credible and accountable journalism over the next five years, and beyond.



Introduction

The Independent Press Standards Organisation – IPSO – is the regulator of most newspapers, magazines and digital media in the UK.

IPSO launched in 2014 in the wake of the Leveson Report. Underpinned by commercial contract to reinforce its independence, it had significant new powers and functions, most of which were drawn from the Report's recommendations. Over its first five years, the organisation's focus was on establishing and testing its new functions, which were scrutinised in an independent [External Review by Sir Joseph Pilling](#) in 2016.

There then followed the Covid period, during which IPSO negotiated the operational challenges of the pandemic and the regulatory demands of monitoring and intervening in real time as editors and journalists grappled with this unprecedented story. This work culminated with the publication of [The Covid Report](#) in 2021.

With the acute period of the pandemic behind us, we embarked on a period of reflection on IPSO's purpose and priorities, resulting in this document.

This strategy been written by IPSO's Chief Executive working closely with the senior management and Board. This process was informed by a full re-examination of IPSO's guiding principles, governance arrangements, purpose and day-to-day activities.

We also consulted a range of internal and external stakeholders, including groups that have represented individuals who have complained to IPSO and made use of its privacy notice services; publishers regulated by IPSO and publishers who remain outside the regulatory system; our staff who deliver IPSO's remit; external groups with an interest in editorial standards; and journalists. We are grateful to all of those who spoke to us and otherwise contributed to this project. Their contributions were invariably candid, constructive, and thoughtful. We are also grateful to Simon Terrington and Jeremy Olivier of Dot Vector for their advice and support on this project.

A separate, independent review of the organisation is being carried out by the former senior civil servant Sir Bill Jeffrey, who is considering the governance, independence and effectiveness of IPSO, changes in the strategic context, and what IPSO should do to prepare for the future. This strategy intends to be flexible to respond to the findings of Sir Bill's review and the recommendations he makes.

About ipso.

We work to uphold high editorial standards by considering whether the Editors' Code of Practice has been breached in individual cases; monitoring trends in editorial standards; and making interventions to improve standards where we identify concerning patterns of activity by individual publications or across the sector.

Using the Editors' Code of Practice, we examine the complaints we receive and try to seek a resolution between the complainant and publication. If this is not possible, the complaint is passed to the Complaints Committee for a decision on whether the Editors' Code has been breached. These rulings help set the standard for editors and journalists in the future.

- **We monitor standards**

We produce quarterly reports on trending topics and continuously sample complaints received to identify potential concerns, issues, and themes. We also require member newspapers and magazines to submit an annual transparency statement.

- **We can investigate standards failings**

We work actively to identify standards issues and can intervene to address patterns of editorial concern. For the most serious cases we have powers to fine publishers up to £1 million.

- **We work with other interested organisations**

We listen to perspectives on editorial standards issues and promote the public understanding of the influential role of the media and how journalism works.

We connect journalists and editors with experts and representative groups to discuss sensitive and difficult topics.

- **We offer advice and guidance**

We produce guidance for editors and journalists and the public. These cover relevant areas such as deaths and inquests, Islam, children's rights, and sex and gender identity. We also provide advice on Editors' Code issues to journalists and members of the public.

- **We offer training**

We talk to newsrooms across the country about key issues, editorial standards and the latest rulings by the Complaints Committee. This engagement work is supported by external communications through our website, our own press and media work, comment pieces and blogs, as well as podcasts and social media.

- Confidential support for journalists

We run a whistleblowing hotline for journalists who feel they are being pressured to act in a way that is not in line with the Editors' Code.

- We help those worried about harassment

We run a 24-hour helpline for people who are concerned about press intrusion. IPSO Privacy Notices can be issued swiftly and flexibly to address people's worries, especially at times of grief or shock.

- We run an arbitration scheme

Members of the public can make low-cost legal claims against participating publishers to provide an alternative to expensive litigation.

- We promote the IPSO mark

For five years, the IPSO mark has been a simple visual symbol that can be used by all of our member publications to demonstrate that their journalism is regulated and it is distinguished from other content.



Over the past eight years IPSO has built an unparalleled understanding of editorial processes and gained unique insight into the concerns of the public about journalistic practice.

No other organisation has the breadth and depth of IPSO's regulatory experience on matters relating to editorial standards. By reviewing tens of thousands of complaints, we have considered a huge range of issues. We have met interest groups to discuss the quality and standards of journalism as it is practised in newsrooms across the UK.

This work has transformed IPSO over time. Our structure, experience, and processes provide members of the public with clear, well-tested routes to seek accountability if standards are breached. And they have driven up industry standards and embedded good practice across the multitude of issues journalists face every day.

Recognising this unique perspective and expertise, this strategy capitalises on the opportunity to strengthen our value to the public and the publishers we regulate.

Importance of independence

Independence is critical to IPSO's credibility:

- IPSO is independent of Government and Parliament. We are not governed by Royal Charter, which can be amended by Parliament or through changes to primary legislation.
- IPSO is independent of the publishers it regulates. Publishers contribute to the funding of IPSO through a five-yearly settlement reached through a separate arms-length body that has no say in the running of the organisation.
- IPSO is independent of complainants and pressure groups. In delivering this strategy, we will engage with the public and seek to ensure that the fullest possible range of voices are heard.
- We hold ourselves to account through independent review – such as Sir Bill Jeffrey's review. A similar review by Sir Joseph Pilling in 2016 found IPSO to be independent and effective.



Our key strategic objectives

Our aim is that independent regulation by IPSO is a mark of credible and accountable journalism.

Our purpose is to protect the public and freedom of expression by upholding high editorial standards. By protecting the public, we also protect freedom of expression, because we demonstrate that the press can uphold high standards without the need for further measures that would undermine press freedom.

At the same time, we protect the public by protecting freedom of expression: a robust and trusted newspaper, magazine and digital news industry is a cornerstone of democracy and a shield for the public against corruption, abuse and misconduct by individuals and institutions, public and private.

To achieve this over the next five years, our priorities are to:

- 1 Consolidate our position** as the authoritative press regulator of the UK newspaper, magazine and digital news industry, and communicate the relevance of the principles embodied in the Editors' Code and IPSO regulations to new types of journalism, regardless of medium or channel.
- 2 Act proportionately** and flexibly to address editorial standards issues, tailoring our approach to the context.
- 3 Build understanding** of our purpose and effectiveness among policymakers and other stakeholders.
- 4 Leverage our expertise** and network to promote engagement between the public and journalists around press standards issues.
- 5 Target effort and resources** in areas that maximise our impact.

Our key strategic principles

In developing this strategy, we reviewed and defined the principles by which we will deliver these objectives. These principles underpin this strategy and together will help to underpin our drive to improve standards and promote high quality journalism. They will guide how we conduct ourselves and implement the strategy in our day-to-day activities over the next five years:

- 1 Demonstrate independence from government, regulated publications, and other stakeholders.** Independence is critical to IPSO's credibility and must be evident in all aspects of IPSO's governance and operations.
- 2 Build transparency to improve trust and understanding of our regulation by the public and by policymakers.** IPSO already operates transparently, but the information it places in the public domain is not always easy to find or interpret. It can make that transparency more effective, and build support for its regulatory model, by ensuring that the information that it makes available is more engaging and accessible to a range of stakeholders.
- 3 Be responsive to the changing media landscape.** Media is becoming far more complex; our publishers are now engaging with audiences through an ever-increasing diversity of channels and platforms. IPSO must ensure that its regulation applies in a credible way to the full range of content that falls within its remit, and that its overall approach is adaptable to technological and financial changes in the industry.
- 4 Become an ever more inclusive organisation that is open, accessible and fair.** IPSO's work is complex and intersects with challenging social and political issues. To reflect the world in which we work, we will promote and maintain a diverse, inclusive culture. We continue to listen to our staff to evolve our structures and ways of working and ensure we retain and attract exceptional talent. This will support our efforts to fulfil our remit fairly, robustly and without bias.
- 5 Be more accessible and accountable to a diverse public.** IPSO must communicate its openness to all sectors, and ensure that its services are accessible and welcoming to everyone.

Evolution & revolution

The digital economy is driving trends in the publishing industry and IPSO.

The growth in digital technology and the competition from new platforms continues relentlessly to change publishers' business models.

This presents the opportunity for publishers to expand into new markets and offer new services across the media landscape; but it also increases competition for attention and revenue – especially from social media platforms. This can make it more challenging for publishers to sustain some of the most important and resource-intensive kinds of journalism.

Fake news and disinformation from unregulated online outfits are deeply damaging both to the regulated publishing industry and wider society. People should be able to make informed decisions about the different news they access.

They should be able to recognise and avoid harmful fake news and disinformation. They should also be able to identify high quality online content which is curated and edited. By raising the profile of IPSO regulation as an indicator of quality and accountable journalism, we can help regulated publishers maintain and demonstrate their value to the public, in print and online.



We will continue to argue that journalistic digital content is separable from other online material and should be considered differently. It is essential that our processes are flexible and relevant when applied to different publications and channels.

IPSO will cooperate with other regulators to consider areas where our work overlaps – for instance, the regulation of social media content and podcasts produced by regulated publications. It will be most important for us to define clearly IPSO's role and scope.

This growth in opportunities for publishers to create new services at speed may increase the pressure on IPSO and our processes. IPSO is well placed to meet this challenge.

Final word

Standards and accountability set the regulated news media apart from unregulated online content. We will continue to make the case for independent press regulation over the five years ahead.

Building on the foundations we have laid over the last eight years, we will continue to make the case for high quality journalism. We will engage our audiences and key stakeholders to ensure that our work is relevant and protects the public interest.

We will promote the public interest by raising accountability, standards, and trust.

We face a turbulent and evolving environment. Online competition is a significant challenge to high quality journalism. By improving trust, we can help protect good journalism in an uncertain world.

Protecting freedom of expression and protecting the public are therefore mutually reinforcing pillars of our work. Shielding the public from instances of press abuse – and



Charlotte Dewar, CEO

providing robust and transparent accountability for shortcomings when they do occur – is essential if we are to protect freedom of expression and thereby defend and serve the public interest.

A handwritten signature of Charlotte Dewar in blue ink, written in a cursive style.

“ We will continue to make the case for high quality journalism.”

Appendix on consultees

With thanks to the following for their contributions to this strategy.

Geraldine Allison (Iiffe Media), Neil Basu (College of Policing), Lord Black (Telegraph Media Group), Mark Bunting (Ofcom), Ian Carter (Iiffe Media), Fiona Fox (Science Media Centre), Will Lexton-Jones (Metropolitan Police Service), Jeremy Olivier (Dot Vector), Teresa Parker (Women's Aid), Guy Parker (Advertising Standards Authority), Matt Rogerson (The Guardian), Gary Shipton (National World), Mike Soutar (Perfect Storm), Simon Terrington (Dot Vector), Daniel Wimpole (Counter Terror Policing), Peter Wright (Associated Newspapers)

Internal interviews: Lord Faulks KC (Chairman), Jane Debois (Head of Standards and Regulation), John Davidson & Vikki Julian (Heads of Communications), Tonia Milton (Head of Systems), Robert Morrison (Head of Complaints and Pre-publication Services)

Contact

Phone

0300 123 2220

Out of hours emergency harassment line

07799 903 929

Email

inquiries@ipso.co.uk

Address

Gate House,
1 Farringdon Street,
London EC4M 7LG

Twitter

@ipsonews

Facebook

ipsonews