

Jewish Chronicle IPSO annual report

The Jewish Chronicle is the oldest continually published Jewish newspaper in the world, having been established in 1841. It is a leading authority on matters relevant to the Jewish community in Britain, the diaspora and Israel's role in the Middle East. It has a website (thejc.com) and a weekly print edition, plus glossy magazines and supplements. It is based in London, but its scope and readership is global.

It takes pride in its strong, independent editorial stance and its opposition to anything it sees as a threat to its readers, their institutions, their way of life and, in extreme levels, their right to exist. It breaks exclusive stories every week, often exposing people who hold extreme antisemitic views. As a result, it faces a level of challenges disproportionate to its size and circulation, although not its reach and influence.

This year the small team who produce the JC have faced the additional challenge of reporting the October 7 atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel, the subsequent war in Gaza and the many social and political ramifications. This has also provoked a barrage of IPSO and other complaints to deal with.

This year the JC decided to bring the complaints process in house, handled by its managing editor Keren David. It thanks Richard Burton who was its IpsO consultant for many years and who continues to provide advice and guidance.

News process

Much work this year has gone into strengthening the news-gathering process and making it more tuned to a web-first, daily process and move away from a weekly print focus.

New reporters have been brought onto the team, and a central news desk assigns stories and checks the provenance of exclusives. A managing editor has been appointed.

Regular meetings are held between the editor and section heads, to discuss all aspects of the editorial process. The editor, his deputy or assistant leads these and senior staff are present throughout. All may raise legal or ethical questions. Some of these may be answered by asking a writer to discuss directly. On other occasions, they may involve a conversation with a lawyer. All potentially contentious stories are checked by lawyers. The managing editor is present at all these meetings and raises any issues to do with the IpsO editors' code.

Complaints process

If a complaint is made it is handled by the Managing Editor. She will discuss with the writer involved and work quickly to resolve the matter.

It is always the intention of the newsroom to resolve complaints as quickly and amicably as possible but there is a realistic awareness that it will face regular opposition merely because of its strong and unapologetic investigative stance, who it is and the stories it covers.

Many bypass direct routes and complain to Ipso in the first instance. Thus, the Ipso number is advertised at the foot of the For the Record column which is reserved for making corrections and clarifications as and when required. Complaints made to Ipso are handled by the managing editor.

The majority of complaints that reach Ipso cite Clause 1(i) which relates to accuracy and involve simple matters of dispute over facts but there is a strong tendency to add issues of privacy and harassment which question the paper's publishing motives.

Readers with differences of opinion are regularly invited to state their case on the letters page, although the paper reserves the right to edit in line with good publishing practice.

If the paper considers a complainant to be fuelled by antisemitism, or vexatious in terms of the volume and tone of their complaints it may take action including reporting them to the police (for specific threats) or simply telling them that their complaint has been logged and will be acted on if necessary.

The website www.thejc.com has a permanent link titled *How to Complain*. It sets out a simple step-by-step process, explaining how to do it, gives examples of the sort of issues that will and will not be considered and links to the Editor's Code of Practice and the IPSO home page. There is a link to a dedicated Complaints inbox. There is also a reference to this in the newspaper's comment page. This page is being reviewed and will be rewritten next year.

The Company Handbook includes the following assertion:

13.6 Press Regulation

The JC is a member of the newspaper industry's new regulatory body, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). All journalists who write regularly for the newspaper (staff and retained correspondents) are expected to be aware of the IPSO rules and, in particular, the Editor's Code of Practice, as stipulated in the contract between IPSO and the JC. All are required to sign a disclosure that they have read and understood the Code and agree to comply with its conditions.

A copy of the code can be downloaded from the IPSO website or directly via this link: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/IPSO/cop.html>

Adverse rulings

1) 20214-23

Hugo Lunn complained that The Jewish Chronicle breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice in an article headlined "Student who called Jews 'apex predators in capitalism' gets research role at top university", published on 16 June 2023, and an article headlined "Student who called Jews 'apex predators in capitalism' faces university probe", published on 21 June 2023. The JC stood by its stories, and provided a detailed response to Ipso, but the committee found that it should have made clearer that the allegations made against Mr Lunn had not been proven.

The following correction appeared in print and online: In two articles published

on 15 June 2023 and 21 June 2023, respectively headlined “Anger as student who called Jews ‘apex predators in capitalism’ readmitted to Durham University” and “Durham University is ‘urgently’ examining its decision to re-admit a student who called Jews ‘apex predators in capitalism’”, we reported on allegations made against Hugo Lunn in a misleading manner. Our articles reported, as fact, that Mr Lunn had shared “shocking messages”, some of which were antisemitic in nature. This was misleading; the allegations that Mr Lunn shared antisemitic messages are unproven and there is no official finding that Mr Lunn wrote the posts in question. This correction has been published following an upheld ruling by the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

Action: This has been discussed with the newsdesk, and the need for caution emphasised when dealing with multiple alibis.

2) **11788-22**

Peter Gregson, complained on his own behalf and on behalf of Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss, citing Clause 1, 2 and 4 in respect of an article headlined “Jewish group helped arrange tour for disgraced anti-Israel activist” published on September 16, 2022.

The article named Gregson as the disgraced activist, describing him as an “expelled shop steward” who had “claimed Israel exaggerates the Holocaust ‘for political ends’”. He objected to this but the Committee accepted the JC’s right to publish it. However, the paper went on to report that “Rabbi Weiss led a delegation to a Holocaust denial conference in Tehran in 2006. He later said the number who died in the Holocaust had been exaggerated, Ha’aretz reported.” Mr Gregson argued that it was wrong to describe the conference in this way as it was a “review” event. This, again, was dismissed but the paper accepted, shortly after publication, that it was not correct to report Rabbi Weiss’s comments on Holocaust numbers, something corrected at the time by Haaretz who it had quoted.

The JC admitted the error, but only addressed when it was made aware by the rabbi in a phone call. The reporter apologised to him personally, corrected the article online and offered to include a correction in print.

However, the Committee did not accept that the “limited” action was sufficient as it was not delivered promptly enough and did not include an apology. It therefore upheld that aspect of the complaint and ordered the publication of an adjudication online and in print.

Action: This was slated for review at the next training session. While the paper made a strong case, staff need to be aware of the way Ipso interpret the Code and apply those rules.

3) **12610-22**

Inayat Bunglawala alleged a breach of Clause 1 over a November 2022 World Cup opinion piece, “Why don’t footballers take the knee for Jews?”

The writer commended the Iranian team for refusing to sing their national anthem in solidarity with protestors in Iran but went on to state that Iran was “a vicious state with one of the worst human rights records in the world”. The writer criticised the England team for not taking the knee either for Iran’s “treatment of women and girls” and said she found it “hard to ignore that no football commentator mentioned that the Islamic Republic has repeatedly vowed to wipe Israel and Jews off the face of the Earth.”

Mr Bunglawala said he was aware of statements from Iran's political leaders to the dismantling of Israel, he did not think that there were any relating to repeated vow "to wipe...Jews off the face of the earth".

While the paper was initially prepared to offer a slight amendment in the spirit of openness, when formally challenged, it objected to claims that it was inaccurate and produced evidence in the form of multiple articles, a report stating that Jews abroad were targeted by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a letter from the American Defence League, along with articles about blood libel which it said supported the writer's claim.

However, the complainant said none of this evidence went as far as the paper had suggested. He said that there were around 8,000 Jews living in Iran and believed that, if a vow had been repeatedly made, there would be none left.

The Committee acknowledged that there was evidence of the Islamic Republic's vows to destroy Israel, but not enough to suggest this extends to all Jews. And while accepting the article was a comment piece, this had been stated as fact. It therefore upheld the Clause 1 breach and ordered a correction to be published on the same page as the original article.

Action: Discussed in depth at the next training session in which internal procedures to were examined to ensure late detail is not missed.

4. 14697-23

Chris Friel complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation that thejc.com breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice in an article headlined "Vicar guilty of 'antisemitic activity' banned until 2030", published on 30 January 2023.

The article reported on a tribunal at which an Anglican priest had been found guilty of "antisemitic activity" and subsequently "defrocked until 2030". The article reported that the priest had been "found to have carried out 'conduct unbecoming' of an ordained minister after sharing a platform with a Holocaust denier and promoting antisemitic material online". The complainant disputed the way in which the tribunal had been reported.

The paper offered to publish an apology and a correction on certain aspects of the report but not others. The complainant refused to accept this, arguing that other aspects of the story were wrong. The Committee found the paper to be technically in breach, while rejecting the complainant's further claims. So the paper published the apology and correction already offered to the complainant. "As the correction was offered in the publication's first substantive response to the complainant this was found to be duly prompt. There was no breach of Clause 1(ii)."

Action: In this case the paper took the correct action - offering promptly to correct an inaccuracy, refusing to correct the aspect that was not inaccurate. But in training with reporters the need to get every aspect of every story accurate will be emphasised.

Dealing with other complaints

Several other complaints have been dealt with either by direct discussion with the complainant, or with the help of Ipsos resolution. In one case the resolution was reached by the complainant agreeing to write a letter for publication - something which had been offered earlier in the process. In other cases the paper has taken action when we discovered inaccuracies in our reporting, and have removed names from stories and published apologies.

One pattern that has emerged this year is people responding to 'right of reply' requests with a statement headed 'confidential and not for publication', and then complaining that the paper has breached privacy if they are quoted denying allegations. In discussion with Ipsos we have decided not to quote directly from such responses.

Changes this year

The biggest change this year was the switch to an in house complaints system, headed by the managing editor.

This enables us to act even more quickly when complaints come in - either directly or via Ipsos.

The managing editor sits next to the newsdesk and is able to discuss possible issues as the story is being written.

She has held informal training sessions with reporters, and had many discussions with the editor and deputy editor.

Every complaint received is discussed thoroughly with the writer involved, as is any action taken.

All contentious stories are also read by our legal team.

Plans for more formal training, planned for October were delayed, due to the Hamas war. Formal training sessions run by the editor and managing editor will now take place in April and May.

The complaints page on the website is being reviewed as well.