

Annual Statement to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO)

From: Mediahuis UK Ltd

Period Covered: January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023

1) Factual Information about the Regulated Entity

1.1 - Mediahuis UK Ltd publishes the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life newspapers in both print and online. It also publishes business-to-business (B2B) title Ulster Business both in print and online. In addition, it also publishes a range of digital-only platforms, including NIJobFinder.co.uk.

1.2 - The Mediahuis UK Ltd responsible person for IPSO is Editor-in-Chief Eoin Brannigan.

1.3 - Mediahuis UK Ltd is the largest newspaper publisher in Northern Ireland, with offices at Belfast Telegraph House, 33 Clarendon Road, Clarendon Dock, Belfast BT1 3BG. It is part of the Dublin-based Mediahuis Group, publishers of the Irish Independent and other titles in the Republic of Ireland.

2) Internal manuals, codes, or guidance used by journalists

Enclosed is a copy of the Mediahuis UK Ltd Code of Practice (see attachment 1). Every staff member (including editorial staff) is contractually obliged to study the document carefully and reflect on how it might apply to his, or her, duties. Staff members are expected to consult the Editor-in-Chief, title editors, or other senior staff, if they have any doubts about a particular situation covered by the document. Any deliberate violation of the Code is taken extremely seriously and may issue in a formal investigation.

3) Our editorial standards

3.1 - Mediahuis UK Ltd fully subscribes to the principles of UK industry best practice, including IPSO's advice and guidance. Editorially, our guiding documents are the Editors 'Code of Practice, along with the Editors 'Codebook. The latest version of the Editors 'Code and Editors 'Codebook have been circulated to all Mediahuis UK Ltd journalists. All Mediahuis UK Ltd titles are happy to seek both pre- and post-publication guidance from IPSO. To this end,

senior staff have been issued with the relevant daytime and out-of-hours phone numbers.

Complaints about content published by Mediahuis UK Ltd titles can be accepted in writing, by email, or by telephone, to reporters, senior executives, or directly to editors. Reporters must escalate the complaint to an editorial manager as soon as possible.

Complaints are logged by senior editorial staff. In the case of the Belfast Telegraph, complaints are directed to the Editor-in-Chief, who delegates the day-to-day investigatory and procedural work to the head of content or news editor. Either the head of content or news editor or the editorial legal counsel will then respond to the complainant. In the case of Sunday Life, complaints are directed to the Deputy Editor-in-Chief, who delegates the day-to-day work to the news manager. Either the news manager or the editorial legal counsel will then respond to the complainant. In the case of the business-to-business (B2B) magazines, complaints are directed to the individual editors, who will then liaise with the editor in chief, Belfast Telegraph. Wherever possible, resolution is sought by agreement with the complainant. Where this is not possible, for whatever reason, the complainant is advised about IPSO and its work and given its contact details. We still find that many complainants go directly to lawyers, leading to a letter of claim. Complaints to IPSO (and their outcomes) are logged by senior editorial staff.

Both the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life carry details of how to make a complaint prominently on page two of each print edition:

The Belfast Telegraph is a part of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). If you believe you have been unfairly treated you can contact IPSO in writing via its website for guidance on what to do. The service is free. IPSO can then advise on whether it's likely you have grounds for a complaint and what to do about it. The normal procedure is for the complainant to then contact the publication's Editor directly. If no agreement is reached, the complainant can go back to IPSO to look for an adjudication or for it to take over the complaint.

- Full details are available at www.ipso.co.uk. Alternatively email complaints@ipso.co.uk or inquiries@ipso.co.uk or telephone 0300 123 2220 or the out of hours emergency number: 07659 152 656.
- Or write to: IPSO, c/o Halton House, 20-23 Holborn, London EC1N 2JD.

This also sets out contact details for IPSO and explains the IPSO process. The business-to-business (B2B) magazines carry this information on the title/contents page. Online, every webpage also features a 'complaints' button, which directs to a page entitled: 'How to make a complaint — Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life'. There is also a link to IPSO's website. Since November 2018, this information has been accompanied by the IPSO kitemark across all platforms.

Information about complaints to IPSO (even where a complaint is not upheld) are cascaded to the journalists involved and, more informally, throughout the newsroom.

Fact-checking of stories follows the standard journalistic model: (1) information is gathered and evaluated; (2) the editorial value is assessed and a legal/ethical/public interest view is taken, as required; (3) a decision is made on whether to proceed with the preparation of the story, and; (4) where possible, the subject of any claim, or allegation, is given adequate opportunity to respond. The editorial legal counsel provides the editors with specific pre and post-publication advice on matters such as defamation, privacy, contempt, copyright and intellectual property rights. A particular emphasis is placed on the importance of Mediahuis UK Ltd journalists conducting their own interviews, as opposed to 'recycling' interviews carried by other media. Journalists are obliged to identify themselves as being members of the media before commencing any interview. Editorial managers operate a 'zero-tolerance' policy as regards the use of deception to secure an interview. Where interviewees are waiving their right to lifelong anonymity (for example, as the victim of a sexual assault), a pro-forma consent form must be signed by the interviewee. The completed forms are retained by senior editorial staff.

In the period covered by this report (January 1, 2023- December 31, 2023) there were no occasions when covert filming was used by any Mediahuis UK Ltd title, or journalist.

IPSO guidance for journalists (including updates to the Editors' Code) are circulated among staff. IPSO's private advisory notices are now sent to senior editors and cascaded to other staff, as appropriate. The same applies to advisory notices from the News Media Association (NMA) and Society of Editors (SoE). As outlined above, complaints to IPSO are regularly shared with the journalist involved, in preparation of the paper's response, and the outcome (even where a complaint is not upheld) is discussed with the journalist. Mediahuis UK Ltd's

position on financial transparency and conflict of interest is as stated in the Editorial Code of Practice (see attachment 1):

21. Reviewing products or services

We should make every effort to ensure there is no element of unqualified plugging when we review products or services. Reviews must be seen to be a service to the reader. Advertorial style material should be indicated. Negative reviews should be rigorously backed up by evidence.

22. Conflicts of interest

There must never be any suggestion that personal, commercial, business, financial or other interests have influenced Mediahuis editorial decisions. Journalists have a duty to pay their own way. They should accept no free trips or gifts from sources other than nominal courtesies such as business lunches or seasonal gifts. Transparency is important and if in doubt run past your Editor.

We should not normally accept expenses paid trips unless they are the only way to cover a significant event or they are for travel articles or to speak at/address bona fide media or related conferences. Any proposal to accept an expenses paid trip must be referred to a senior editorial figure and approved in writing.

Under no circumstances should anyone working for Mediahuis accept personal benefits from suppliers or accept goods or services which could be construed as inducements.

These situations can be covered by explanatory letters and the gifts can be returned or redirected to appropriate charities.

Journalists are required to declare any personal interest or relationships which may affect their work. Interests should be declared on a Declaration of Personal Interest Form and given to the Deputy Publisher. In relation to particular stories, journalists must discuss any possible conflicts of interest with their Editor.

Journalists may not work without permission for any person or body except Mediahuis. Any payment must be approved by the Editor or Deputy Publisher. They must seek the approval of their Editor/Deputy Publisher

for any work done with other departments in Mediahuis outside Editorial. The right to engage in freelance work for publications that compete with Mediahuis is subject to management approval in every case.

3.2 – Mediahuis UK Ltd was subject to 0 (zero) IPSO rulings during the relevant period.

3.3 - Our journalists and editorial staff have access to Mediahuis 'internal legal counsel to raise any queries or seek further information in relation to proposed publications.

All Mediahuis UK Ltd editorial staff are scheduled to attend intensive legal training in May 2024. The trainer will be Fergal McGoldrick, associate solicitor (commercial litigation/media) at Carson McDowell LLP, Mediahuis UK Ltd's Belfast-based solicitors.

4) Steps taken by Mediahuis UK to respond to adverse adjudications

Not applicable. Mediahuis UK did not receive any adverse adjudications during the relevant period.