

UK PCC upholds complaint against Woman following custody battle story

The UK Press Complaints Commission has upheld a complaint against Woman under Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice after a first-person story it published about a custody battle was disputed by the former husband of the woman who had told her story.

The article was an account of the couple's custody dispute of their son, focusing particularly on the mother's decision to take the child from Cyprus to the UK without the complainant's consent. He contested a number of claims she had made, most notably that the child was taken to the UK because he needed medical care that was not available in Cyprus. He had not been contacted by the magazine before publication. The magazine said this was because he had not been accused of any wrong doing; however, in order to check the veracity of the piece, it had checked the text with the complainant's former mother-in-law to before going to print. Following the complaint, the magazine offered to publish a letter from the complainant, or an article from his point from view, as a means of addressing his concerns.

In its adjudication, the Commission firstly made clear that it was "not in a position to resolve the factual dispute at the heart of this story". Its role here was to assess whether or not the magazine had taken care not to publish inaccurate or misleading information. It ruled that although there is no specific requirement in the Code to contact those who feature in stories before publication, in reality, they will often need to do so in order that the veracity of significant claims and allegations can be established. The Commission judged that "such care was necessary in this case", where the magazine had relied primarily on the account of one party (who had not supplied documentary evidence to support her position), and had published "highly contentious" material.

Stephen Abell, Director of the PCC, said:

"This case raises the important principle of prior notification. While journalists are not explicitly required to contact an individual at the centre of a story before publication, a failure to verify information and obtain the comments of that individual can raise a breach of the Editors' Code. In this case, the magazine should have gone to the complainant, especially given the contentious nature of the article, and informed readers of his response to the claims."

(Courtesy UK PCC)

Two changes to the UK PCC Editors' Code

Britain's newspaper and magazines have agreed to new rules to promote compliance with the Editors' Code of Practice, to which the British press subscribes voluntarily and which is enforced by the Press Complaints Commission.

The changes, announced by the Editors' Code Committee, mean that from 1 January, 2012:

- The Code's preamble will require editors who breach the Code to publish the PCC's critical adjudication in full and with due prominence agreed with the PCC's Director.
- The Public Interest rules will require editors who claim a breach of the Code was in the public interest to show not only that they had good reason to believe the public interest would be served, but how and with whom that was established at the time. The changes have been agreed by the Code Committee following consultation within the industry and the PCC.

Code Committee Chairman Paul Dacre, Editor of the Daily Mail and Editor in Chief of Associated Newspapers, said: "These changes are designed to ensure that the normal good practice followed in most newspaper offices in most cases becomes enshrined in the Code itself, and in doing so explodes some popular fallacies about press self-regulation.

"Last year we introduced a rule requiring editors running corrections to agree prominence with the PCC in advance. This has helped to kill the myth that they are routinely buried in the paper. Now we have brought the publication of critical adjudications more into line with that. It should dispose of another misconception.

"The public interest amendment underwrites the need for editors and senior executives to give proper consideration before they consciously decide to breach the Code - something that should never be done lightly. They should be ready to demonstrate they have observed this process. Most do it already. This measure should be a safeguard, not a burden."

(Courtesy UK PCC)

The Sun rises on Sunday

For media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, February 26, 2012 was a red letter date when he launched his latest tabloid newspaper the Sun on Sunday. It must have brought him a degree of relief, since it fills the gap created by the closure of the disgraced News of the World.

The Sun on Sunday newspaper sold three million copies, far more than the two million anticipated mark.

The 80-year-old Australian media tycoon personally supervised the final stages of production by arriving at the printers in Hertfordshire, on Saturday, February 26 night to witness the new Sunday tabloid roll off the press for the first time.

Stephen Abell steps down as Director of UK PCC

Stephen Abell, the Director of the Press Complaints Commission since the beginning of 2010, has announced that he will be leaving the PCC at the end of February. He is leaving to become a partner at Pagefield communications consultancy, where he will take responsibility for media relations and crisis communication.

Lord Hunt, Chair of the PCC, said:

"When I joined the PCC last year, Stephen and I agreed that we would work together until we were in a position to propose a new structure for self-regulation of the press. I have valued his assistance in this, and his professionalism in leading the PCC's staff as they continued their important work during a difficult period. It is testament to him that the service to complainants, both those in the public eye and those without claim to celebrity, has improved and expanded over the last few years. I wish him success in all his future endeavours".

The PCC has appointed Michael McManus, who has wide experience in the worlds of journalism and politics, as Director of Transition. He will continue the work on ongoing proposals for reformed, independent self-regulation of the press. He will be part of a new senior team at the PCC, including Director of Communications Jonathan Collett and Charlotte Dewar, who has been promoted to Head of Complaints and Pre-Publication Services. The PCC is also acting to strengthen its Complaints and Pre-Publication Services further by recruiting another senior member of staff to ensure the smooth and full continuous provision of a top-class service during the period of transition and beyond.

Stephen Abell said:

"It has been a great privilege to work over the years with the committed, wonderful staff and board members of the PCC. I have been involved with the PCC for more than a decade, and I decided last year that it was time for a new challenge. First, I wanted to work with David Hunt in the development of positive proposals for a new structure of self-regulation. I believe we have now done that. I also wanted to give a full account of the work of the PCC to Lord Justice Leveson.

I remain a firm supporter of enhanced self-regulation for the press, maintaining all that is good about the work of the PCC, and am confident that this will be achieved as a result of the Leveson Inquiry.

My greatest professional satisfaction at the PCC has been in our establishment of a bespoke, 24-hour service to help complainants obtain redress, stop harassment and prevent the publication of inaccurate or intrusive material. Whatever changes are made to the regulatory landscape, this free, public service should continue to the benefit of those in need of it.

I leave a great team of people, who have much to offer in the changing world ahead."

Michael McManus said:

"I am delighted to be joining the PCC at this crucial juncture in its existence. All my work in journalism and politics has convinced me that self-regulation of the press can and must be made to work. I relish the challenge of playing such a senior role in the urgent and crucially important task of creating a new, independent press regulator with real teeth."

PCCSL Board of Directors

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PCCSL Secretariat

The PCCSL Secretariat consists of three: Sukumar Rockwood, Actg CEO, Mr. Kamal Liyanaarachchi, Complaints Officer - Sinhala Print Media and Mr. Ameen Hussain, Complaints Officer - Tamil Print Media.