

PRESS COUNCIL  
OF IRELAND



OFFICE OF  
THE PRESS  
OMBUDSMAN

**Code of Practice  
for Newspapers  
and Magazines**

# Code of Practice for Newspapers and Magazines

## Preamble

The freedom to publish is vital to the right of the people to be informed. This freedom includes the right of a newspaper to publish what it considers to be news, without fear or favour, and the right to comment upon it.

Freedom of the press carries responsibilities. Members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.

This Code sets the benchmark for those standards. It is the duty of the Ombudsman and Press Council to ensure that it is honoured in the spirit as well as in the letter, and the duty of

publications to assist them in that task. In dealing with complaints, the Ombudsman and Press Council will give consideration to what they perceive to be the public interest. It is for them to define the public interest in each case, but the general principle is that the public interest is invoked in relation to a matter capable of affecting the people at large so that they may legitimately be interested in receiving and the press legitimately interested in providing information about it.

## **Principle 1 – Truth and Accuracy**

**1.1** In reporting news and information, newspapers and magazines shall strive at all times for truth and accuracy.

**1.2** When a significant inaccuracy,

misleading statement or distorted report or picture has been published, it shall be corrected promptly and with due prominence.

**1.3** When appropriate, a retraction, apology, clarification, explanation or response shall be published promptly and with due prominence.

## **Principle 2 – Distinguishing Fact and Comment**

**2.1** Newspapers and magazines are entitled to advocate strongly their own views on topics.

**2.2** Comment, conjecture, rumour and unconfirmed reports shall not be reported as if they were fact.

**2.3** Readers are entitled to expect that the content of a publication

reflects the best judgement of editors and writers and has not been inappropriately influenced by undisclosed interests. Wherever relevant, any significant financial interest of an organisation should be disclosed. Writers should disclose significant potential conflicts of interest to their editors.

## **Principle 3 – Fairness and Honesty**

**3.1** Newspapers and magazines shall strive at all times for fairness and honesty in the procuring and publishing of news and information.

**3.2** Publications shall not obtain information, photographs or other material through misrepresentation or subterfuge, unless justified by the public interest.

**3.3** Journalists and photographers must not obtain, or seek to obtain, information and photographs through harassment, unless their actions are justified in the public interest.

## **Principle 4 – Respect for Rights**

Everyone has constitutional protection for his or her good name. Newspapers and magazines shall not knowingly publish matter based on malicious misrepresentation or unfounded accusations, and must take reasonable care in checking facts before publication.

## **Principle 5 - Privacy**

**5.1** Privacy is a human right, protected as a personal right in the Irish Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights, which is

incorporated into Irish law. The private and family life, home and correspondence of everyone must be respected.

**5.2** Readers are entitled to have news and comment presented with respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals. However, the right to privacy should not prevent publication of matters of public record or in the public interest.

**5.3** Sympathy and discretion must be shown at all times in seeking information in situations of personal grief or shock. In publishing such information, the feelings of grieving families should be taken into account. This should not be interpreted as restricting the right to report judicial proceedings.

**5.4** Public persons are entitled to privacy. However, where a person holds public office, deals with public affairs, follows a public career, or has sought or obtained publicity for his activities, publication of relevant details of his private life and circumstances may be justifiable where the information revealed relates to the validity of the person's conduct, the credibility of his public statements, the value of his publicly expressed views or is otherwise in the public interest.

**5.5** Taking photographs of individuals in private places without their consent is not acceptable, unless justified by the public interest.

## **Principle 6 – Protection of Sources**

Journalists shall protect confidential sources of information.

## **Principle 7 – Court Reporting**

Newspapers and magazines shall strive to ensure that court reports (including the use of photographs) are fair and accurate, are not prejudicial to the right to a fair trial and that the presumption of innocence is respected.

## **Principle 8 – Prejudice**

Newspapers and magazines shall not publish material intended or likely to cause grave offence or stir up hatred against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, nationality,

colour, ethnic origin, membership of the travelling community, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age.

## **Principle 9 – Children**

**9.1** Newspapers and magazines shall take particular care in seeking and presenting information or comment about a child under the age of 16.

**9.2** Journalists and editors should have regard for the vulnerability of children and in all dealings with children, should bear in mind the age of the child, whether parental or other adult consent has been obtained for such dealings, the sensitivity of the subject-matter, and what circumstances if any make the story one of public interest. Young people

should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion. The fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian must not be used as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

## **Principle 10 – Publication of the Decision of the Press Ombudsman / Press Council**

**10.1** When requested or required by the Press Ombudsman and/or the Press Council to do so, newspapers and magazines shall publish the decision in relation to a complaint with due prominence.

**10.2** The content of this Code will be reviewed at regular intervals.



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