

Annual statement to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO)

From: Independent News & Media (INM)

Period covered: January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020

1 Introduction

1.1 Independent News & Media (INM) publishes the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life newspapers in both print and online. It also publishes business-to-business (B2B) titles Ulster Business and Ulster Grocer, both in print and online.

In addition, it also publishes a range of digital-only platforms, including NIJobFinder.co.uk and PropertyNews.com.

1.2 Independent News & Media's responsible person for IPSO is associate editor Martin Hill, who compiled this report.

1.3 Independent News & Media is the largest newspaper publisher in Northern Ireland, with offices at Belfast Telegraph House, 33 Clarendon Road, Clarendon Dock, Belfast BT1 3BG. The company is also a leading commercial printer, printing and distributing newspapers, including UK national titles, across Ireland. It is part of the Dublin-based Independent News & Media, publishers of the Irish Independent and other titles in the Republic of Ireland.

2 Internal manuals, codes, or guidance used by journalists

2.1 Attached is a copy of Independent News & Media's 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

Independent News & Media 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 Independent News & Media journalists. All Independent News & Media 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.

3.1 Complaints about content published by Independent News & Media titles can be accepted in writing, by email, or by telephone, to reporters, senior executives, the Editor-in-Chief's personal assistant, or directly to editors. Reporters must escalate the complaint to an editorial manager as soon as possible. A complaints protocol exists, which provides written

instructions to staff on how to deal with complaints (see attachment 2). Complaints are logged by the Editor-in-Chief's personal assistant.

In the case of the Belfast Telegraph, complaints are directed to the Editor, who delegates the day-to-day investigatory and procedural work to the associate editor. Either the associate editor or the editorial legal counsel will then respond to the complainant.

In the case of Sunday Life, complaints are directed to the Editor, who delegates the day-to-day work to the head of news. Either the head of news 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 associate editor, 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 the Editor-in-Chief's personal assistant.

Both the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life carry details of how to make a complaint prominently on page two of each print edition. 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 Independent News & Media 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 the Editor-in-Chief's personal assistant.

Unlike previous years, in the period covered by this report (January 1, 2020-December 31, 2020) there were no occasions when covert filming was used by any Independent News & Media 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). The associate editor also has a subscription to PA Media's Media Lawyer service, which he uses to share information with senior colleagues.

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.

Independent News & Media's position on financial transparency and conflict of interest is as stated in the Editorial Code of Practice (updated May 2018; see attachment 1):

26 *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.

27 *Conflicts of interest*

There must never be any suggestion that personal, commercial, business, financial or other interests have influenced INM 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 INM 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 Managing Editor. In relation to a particular story, journalists must discuss any possible conflicts of interest with their Editor.

3.2 During the period in question (January 1, 2020-December 31, 2020) no complaints were upheld against Independent News & Media.

The following complaints against Independent News & Media were ruled on by IPSO's Complaints Committee during the period in question:

Patrick Thompson

A Patrick Thompson complained that Sunday Life breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) and Clause 2 (Privacy) in an article headlined "Exclusive honeymoon cash plea for charity fraudster", published on September 1, 2019.

The article stated that a GoFundMe page set up by Mr Thompson "ask[ed] the public to make financial donations to allow them to enjoy a honeymoon in 2020".

Mr Thompson said that the article was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 as they had not "asked the public" for donations. He said that the GoFundMe site was private and the article breached his privacy for the same reasons.

The publication said four Sunday Life employees, who were not invited to the wedding, had been able to access the GoFundMe page.

Despite not accepting a breach of Clause 1, the publication offered a clarification as a gesture of goodwill:

In an article on September 1, we reported that a GoFundMe page had been set up to raise funds for a sunshine honeymoon for convicted charity fraudster Adrienne Peltz and her partner Patrick Thompson and the appeal was open to the public. Mr Thompson, who organised the fundraiser, has asked us to point out that he only intended the appeal to be viewed by the couple's wedding guests. He was not aware that, if the GoFundMe campaign link were shared on social media, it could be accessed by anyone who viewed the link. We are happy to set the record straight.

The Committee considered that the publication had taken reasonable steps to avoid inaccuracy and did not consider that Mr Thompson had a reasonable expectation of privacy.

The complaint was not upheld, but the Committee said the publication should publish the proposed correction.

A Man

A Man complained that Sunday Life breached Clause 1 (Accuracy), Clause 9 (Reporting of crime) and Clause 11 (Victims of sexual assault) in an article headlined “Out of control”, published on March 1, 2020.

The article stated that a man, described as the son of a high-profile murderer, had been jailed for various offences. The article gave details of the man’s offences, including that the “crime spree began” when he entered a house and “stole [items] from a 13-year-old boy who was in his bedroom”. The article reported that the court heard in mitigation that he had an extensive criminal record, as well as issues with “sexual trauma”.

The complainant said the article breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) as it stated that the “crime spree began” when he had entered a house and “stole [items] from a 13-year-old boy who was in his bedroom”. The complainant said this was misleading, as he was only convicted of handling stolen goods in relation to this specific incident.

The complainant also said the article breached Clause 9 (Reporting of crime) as it mentioned his father’s convictions, which were not relevant. He said the article breached Clause 11 (Victims of sexual assault) as it mentioned he had suffered from “sexual trauma”.

The publication accepted that the article was inaccurate but did not accept it had breached Clause 11. Details of “sexual trauma” were mentioned in court, it said, as part of the complainant’s plea in mitigation and there were no reporting restrictions in place.

The publication did not accept it had breached Clause 9 (Reporting of crime). His father’s convictions and his identity as a relative had been widely reported on before and were also mentioned in the previous legal proceedings involving the complainant.

During IPSO’s investigation, the publication offered to publish the following correction:

An article published in Sunday Life on March 1, 2020, stated, incorrectly, that [the man] was convicted at Newry Crown Court of stealing an iPad and Amazon Dot, valued at £310, from a 13-year-old boy who was in his bedroom at a house in Ballymartin, Co Down. [The man] denied the charge, which was not proceeded with. We are happy to set the record straight.

The complainant said that this would resolve the matter to his satisfaction. As the complaint was successfully mediated, the Complaints Committee did not make a determination as to whether there had been any breach of the Code.

Simon Charles Dorante-Day

Simon Charles Dorante-Day complained that www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) and Clause 12 (Discrimination) in an article headlined “He may have the hair to be an heir, but Prince Simon’s claim just doesn’t add up”, published on January 31, 2020.

The article was a comment piece in which the columnist discussed the complainant's legal action, which centred on his claims that he was in fact the child of the Duchess of Cornwall and the Prince of Wales and therefore "potentially, second-in-line to the throne".

The author expressed her view that the man's claims did not "add up", as the man had brown eyes, and both the Duchess of Cornwall and the Prince of Wales had blue and that "when both parents have blue eyes the child apparently can't have brown eyes".

Mr Dorante-Day, the subject of the article, said that the article was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1. He cited several of the statements within the article and said they did not truly reflect his court case. He also said it was inaccurate to report that parents with blue eyes cannot have a brown-eyed child. He also said that the article had discriminated against him in breach of Clause 12 by referring to him as an "oddball".

The publication did not accept a breach of Clause 1. It said that the article was not solely reporting on the complainant's court case and the evidence he was submitting to court, but also the wider context of the claims he was had made, including on his own social media and in other publications.

The publication said that the article was the writer expressing her opinion of the complainant's claims, in which she was entitled to report her belief that his claims "did not add up" and it was not inaccurate for her to do so

The Committee found the article had been an opinion piece about the "claims" of the complainant; it did not purport to be an in-depth analysis of his legal case. The article had stated that the complainant was relying on photographic evidence but had not stated that this was an exhaustive list of all the evidence that the complainant was relying on.

Where the publication had been able to provide examples of the complainant sharing comparative photographs as evidence that he was the child of the Duchess of Cornwall and the Prince of Wales there was no failure to take care of the accuracy of this point in breach of Clause 1(i). There was no significant inaccuracy and therefore no breach of Clause 1(ii).

In addition, as a comment piece, the publication was entitled to report the opinion of the writer that the complainant's claim did not "add up" and there was no breach of Clause 1 on this point.

In the context of this article, which made no reference to the complainant's mental health, the Committee did not consider that the use of the term "oddball" a pejorative or prejudicial reference to the complainant's mental health.

The complaint was not upheld.

John and Gail Lanigan

John and Gail Lanigan complained that Sunday Life breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) in an article headlined “Rangers jersey fakers busted” published on March 8, 2020.

The article reported that a couple “were facing sentencing after they were convicted of selling dodgy football shirts, allegedly for the west Belfast UDA”.

The complainants said that the article inaccurately affiliated them with the West Belfast UDA and they denied any involvement with any illegal organisation.

The publication denied any breach of the Code and did not accept that it was inaccurate in any way to link the charges the complainants faced to the criminal activities of the West Belfast UDA. The publication noted that at the time of the complainants’ arrest the Police Service of Northern Ireland issued a Press release linking the charges to “the criminal activities of the West Belfast UDA, including the sale of counterfeit goods.”

The Committee said the article reported that the complainants had “allegedly” sold counterfeit goods; it did not report categorically that the complainants sold goods for the UDA, that they were members of the UDA, or that this was a finding of the court.

The complaint was not upheld.

Gerard Taylor

Gerard Taylor complained that Sunday Life breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) in an article headlined “loyalists deny ‘coke baron’ link”, published on May 17, 2020.

The article reported on a “suspected coke baron” who the article alleged had been linked to the UVF by the police. It reported that the defendant was “charged with being concerned in the supply of cocaine and possessing the cutting agent benzocaine”. It said that the defendant’s home had been vandalised and “the property appeared abandoned”.

The complainant said it was inaccurate to report that he was linked to the UVF, or “loyalists”. He also said that the damage to the front door had been caused by police on April 7 and was not the result of an attack on the complainant’s property.

The complainant said it was inaccurate to describe the property as “appearing abandoned,” as at the time of the article he was still residing there. The complainant also said that it was inaccurate to describe him as a “coke baron”.

The publication did not accept a breach of the Code. It said that the PSNI had issued a statement, which reported that the “Paramilitary Crime Task Force last night arrested a 48-year-old man in east Belfast” after a “search operation targeted East Belfast UVF’s drug supply network”.

It said that this statement, by the PSNI, supported the article's claim that the complainant had been "linked by police to UVF drug-dealing". It said that the article also made clear that the link had been denied by the UVF in the headline.

The publication said that a photographer had attended the complainant's house on May 7 and had not seen damage to the glass panel or handle of the door. However, it accepted the complainant's position that he still lived there at the time of publication.

The newspaper noted that the term "coke baron" was in inverted comments in the headline and also that the article referred to the complainant as a "suspected coke baron" in the text of the article.

As a gesture of goodwill the publication offered to publish a clarification in direct correspondence with the complainant prior to IPSO's investigation:

Gerard Taylor

An article stated, incorrectly, that a Belfast man's home was smashed up by loyalist paramilitaries after he appeared in court on drugs charges (Sunday Life, May 17). Gerard Taylor has asked us to point out that the damage was caused during a PSNI raid on the house, at Chobham Street in the east of the city. The article further stated, again incorrectly, that the property appeared abandoned, when in fact Mr Taylor was still living there.

The committee said the publication was entitled to characterise the complainant as having been "linked by police to UVF drug-dealing" and had taken care to attribute this as a claim by the police.

There was a disagreement between the complainant and the publication as to who had committed the damage to the property. It had received information from a source that the UVF was responsible, presented this as speculation and attempted to reach the complainant for comment prior to publication. It had not failed to take care not to publish inaccurate information.

During IPSO's investigation the publication offered specific wording, which was prompt and, as it was offered to be published on the same page as the original article, was prominent and accurately reflected the complainant's position.

The complaint was not upheld, but the committee ordered the correction to be published.

3.3 In July and August 2020, all Independent News and Media editorial staff participated in intensive legal training (including the operation of the Editors' Code of Practice). This training was delivered remotely because of the restrictions surrounding the Covid-19 virus. The trainer was Fergal McGoldrick, associate solicitor (commercial litigation/media) at Carson McDowell LLP, Independent News and Media's Belfast-based solicitors.

INM Editorial Code of Practice

Independent Newspapers and the Sunday World are pledged to be professional, courageous and relentless in their pursuit of truth and of news. They are also committed to independence, fairness and balance in informing people of events and issues about which they have a right to know.

An important goal of this code is to protect and foster the bond of trust between Independent News and Media (INM) in print and online and our audience.

The reputation of our brands is based on the editorial independence, integrity and high standards of our journalism. Full editorial control lies with the Editors.

The Editors and the editorial executives of the titles within the group are committed to defining, upholding and protecting those standards in every aspect of journalistic work. Central to those principles is the public's right to be informed on issues of public interest. This right is balanced by compliance with relevant legal codes, in particular the laws of defamation and data protection, and adherence to the principles of taste, balance, and accuracy.

Independent Newspapers and the Sunday World adhere to the Press Ombudsman/Press Council of Ireland Editors' Code of Practice (See Appendix 1).

Every staff member must read this document carefully and reflect on how it might apply to his or her duties.

The provisions presented here can offer only broad principles and some examples. No written document could anticipate every possibility. We expect staff members to consult the Group Managing Editor, Editors or other senior staff if they have any doubts about any particular situation covered by this document.

INM believes that its staff share the values this code is intended to protect. It will be the policy of the company to try to resolve any differences of opinion or concerns over the application of these values through discussion. Nevertheless, INM will view any deliberate violation of this code as serious and this may be the subject of a formal investigation.

1. General

Journalists have a duty to observe and comply with the full letter and spirit of this Code of Conduct in the performance of duties for and in the name of Independent News and Media. Journalists are expected to exhibit a high standard of propriety, integrity, efficiency and competence in all dealings.

2. Accuracy, distinguish fact from comment

Journalists must strive to be accurate and establish the facts of circumstances. Stories must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in language which distinguishes clearly between comment, conjecture and fact. Unfounded speculation should be avoided.

3. Fact checking

Journalists must check and verify information, facts and documents. Vigilance and factchecking should be applied to information sources, particularly those researched on the internet. This may include confirming with an individual or organisation that they posted

online material and satisfying yourself that it is accurate. Online sources, while useful, should not be the sole source of information and should be treated with appropriate caution. The important thing to remember is that when you are dealing with facts, you either have the full facts or you don't. If you have a doubt, always check it out. You can never, ever assume.

4. Hear the other side

It is a basic tenet of good and responsible journalism to put any critical or damaging claim or allegation to the subject before publication. This requirement will also assist in defending any defamation action.

Where allegations are being made, the individual or organisation concerned should always be given a fair opportunity to respond to the allegations before publication.

Journalists should always describe the allegations in sufficient detail to enable an informed response. They should also give sufficient time for a response. The response should be reflected fairly and accurately. You may not get one. You may even get an emphatic denial which may give you pause for thought. Records should be kept of attempts to get a reply if one is not forthcoming.

There may be circumstances where getting a response is not feasible, practical or realistic. There must be strong reasons for believing that the subject matter is sufficiently newsworthy and in the public interest to justify publication in the absence of a response. In such cases, the Editor or Managing Editor must always be consulted.

5. Opinions

Journalists have a right to trenchant opinions on matters of public interest. However, journalists have a duty to ensure that when they comment on a matter of public interest that such comment is based upon facts which are either set out in the article or are otherwise known to the reader.

Writers of comment need to be aware that the rules about getting facts right apply to them as much as other writers. If relying on facts from other publications, always seek verification that they are true or that the circumstances have not changed.

6. Misleading readers

Journalists should never distort known facts, present invented material as fact, or knowingly do anything to mislead our readers or audience.

Journalists should ensure that any digital editing of photographs does not distort the meaning of events, alter the impact of genuine material, or otherwise materially mislead readers. Headlines and introductions to stories should accurately represent the body of the story.

7. Archived content

When archive material is used, journalists are responsible for ensuring that no legal issue has arisen in respect of that material and that it has not been overtaken by later events. Photos of individuals taken from archive must be checked to confirm identity. Therefore, always double-check captions and verify the people in the photos are actually those named in the caption.

8. Researching online

You should be cautious how you use the internet and social media for both sourcing and verifying material for a story in terms of trustworthiness, identification in the case of a photo/video and also the copyright related to material. Apply the same rigorous standards to verifying information on social media as elsewhere.

When using a picture from social media relating to something controversial, defamatory or involving a tragedy (e.g. someone who has died), it is INM policy that unless identified by three people, including a member of the close family (in relation to a tragic event), that it should not be used.

9. Legal checking

Journalists should not publish anything which is defamatory, in contempt of court, in breach of statute, copyright or privacy or which exposes INM to any other possible legal repercussions. Journalists must always seek advice from our lawyers if in doubt about a story.

Any decision to proceed with a story, where legal concerns have been expressed, must be referred to the most senior editorial level. There may be occasions when a story is legally safe to publish but raises editorial issues, such as taste, prurience, abuse etc In these circumstances, INM seeks to strike a reasonable balance between public interest and ethical issues. While lawyers can therefore offer legal advice, the final decision remains an editorial one. The duty for the facts to be right rests with the journalist.

Always be rigorous in your fact-checking. Do not rush to publish if you have any doubt. Always consult with your editorial manager if you have concerns.

10. Complaints

Journalists should inform their Editor and the Group Managing Editor immediately of any complaint which they receive either verbally or in writing. If you are in direct contact with the complainant, for example, on the phone, be courteous and avoid confrontation. You should also take a written note. Do not offer an apology or anything which could amount to an admission of liability in any subsequent legal action.

11. Accountability/corrections

Journalists should be open to admitting mistakes. Where significant mistakes are highlighted, it is our policy to acknowledge those errors at the earliest opportunity in our Corrections and Clarifications columns. All corrections should be referred to the Group Managing Editor for approval.

12. Privacy

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

Journalists should respect privacy and should not infringe it without legally justified cause or reason. Private behaviour, correspondence and conversation should not be brought into the public domain unless it is of clear public interest. It is essential, in order to exercise a right of freedom of expression and information, that we work within a framework which respects an individual's privacy and treats people fairly while investigating, reporting on, commenting and commentating on matters which are in the public interest to report, comment or reveal.

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/her private life and circumstances may be justifiable where the information revealed relates to the validity of the person's conduct, the credibility of his/her public statements, the value of his/her publicly expressed views or is otherwise in the public interest.

Individuals must not be photographed or filmed in places where they have a 'reasonable expectation of privacy' unless justified by the public interest. Each case must be judged on its merits. The location, while relevant, is not itself the sole test for an expectation of privacy. The context of the story may render a situation one where an expectation of privacy may not apply. Equally, being in a public place can give rise to an expectation of privacy where intrinsically personal matters are involved. Seek advice from company lawyers or the Managing Editor if in doubt.

13. Reporting suffering and distress

We must always balance the public interest in full and accurate reporting against the need to be compassionate and to avoid any unjustified infringement of privacy when we report accidents, disasters, disturbances or war or instances where people are involved in distressing situations. In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion.

We should not report at private funerals if the family has requested privacy. There must be a clear public interest if we decide to proceed against requests for privacy.

14. Children

Journalists must always have regard for the vulnerability of children.

Journalists should seek the consent of parents or legal guardians or persons in similar positions – teachers etc – before interviewing children under 16. Any decision to proceed without parental consent is normally only editorially justified on the basis of a clear public interest, or the freedom of a child or young person to express themselves in noncontentious ways. The onus is on the journalist to establish an accurate age.

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.

15. Children (photos/video)

When photographing children under the age of 16, it is imperative that no room is left for doubt about whether consent has been granted and you should always seek clarity before photographing/filming, if there is any doubt. Always bear in mind the context of the situation, whether it is likely to be in any way controversial. Under-16s must not be photographed or filmed on subjects about their welfare – or the welfare of other children – without the consent of their parent/guardian or someone in loco parentis.

Be particularly vigilant when photographing children at times of grief or at funerals.

16. Harassment

Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit. They must not persist in questioning, phoning, pursuing or photographing people once asked to stop,

unless there is a good reason not to do so. In this case, the decision must lie with the Editor after all the facts of the case have been attained by him/her (the Editor).

17. Court cases

When writing about court cases involving children or any aspect of family law or sexual offences, be aware of the law and any specific restrictions. Sometimes writers who have not been at court will comment on these cases or bring them into related stories. It is always their ongoing responsibility to check on restrictions. Journalists covering court cases should always make the news desks, Head of News and the Managing Editor aware of any specific reporting restrictions issued by a judge.

18. Your use of social media

INM encourages its journalists to engage with social media and blogs as they may assist our titles and websites in gaining exposure and growing our audience. However, it is essential that journalists adhere to the same standards on social media as they would in publishing material in one of our print titles or websites. Despite the apparent informality of such online activities, they are publications in law and are subject to the same laws concerning defamation among other things. Our journalists should not promote political views or make offensive comments as these can undermine our reputation.

Anyone who breaches our social media policy may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

19. Subterfuge

For certain stories where there is a clear public interest and when dealing with allegations of serious criminal, fraudulent, unlawful or anti-social behaviour, it may occasionally be acceptable to use subterfuge. Subterfuge should be the minimum necessary in proportion to the subject matter. Any proposal to use subterfuge must be referred to your Editor and the Managing Editor in advance.

20. Impartiality

Journalists should seek to reflect all opinions by exploring a range of conflicting views. Journalists should be objective and even-handed in their approach.

INM will strive to reflect a wide range of opinion in its publications, and explore a range of conflict of views to allow expression to its wide readership market. INM exercises its editorial freedom to produce content about any subject at any point on the spectrum of debate as long as there are good editorial reasons for so doing. INM's titles and websites will sometimes need to report on or interview people whose views may cause offence to our readers. This would be the subject of a clear decision from the Editor that the public interest outweighs the possible offence which may be caused. It is the policy of the titles to allow a forum for the expression of opposing views either through editorial columns or Letters to the Editor.

21. Copy approval

The general rule is that no one should be given the right to prior copy approval. Doing otherwise, no matter how trivial the subject matter of the article, impinges on the freedom of the press. On occasion, we may allow people to see copy or quotes but we are not required to change the copy. In all cases such as this, consult with the Head of Content or Managing Editor.

22. Legal

The Republic of Ireland has the harshest defamation law regime in Europe. The consequences of losing or settling actions are very expensive and damaging commercially and reputationally. Even where an action may seem to have little grounds, if our facts are wrong, the costs of fighting the case are often prohibitive. All journalists need to be very familiar with defamation law and adhere to the fundamental tenet of journalism: check your facts.

23. Picture selection

NEVER ever take a chance on a picture. Too many defamations and embarrassing mistakes are caused by picture errors. Never select a picture for use where the subject(s) have not been identified and confirmed. ALWAYS recheck pictures of people identified as criminals, relatives or associates of criminals, subject of legal proceedings, leaving or entering court, associated with controversial circumstances such as bankruptcy, corruption etc. Agency pictures need to be carefully checked as well.

Never use a picture of a crime scene or contentious situation without checking that the location identified is absolutely accurate.

24. Mind your language

We should never casually use words likely to offend in our journalism. Use swear words only when necessary – and in consultation with senior editors. The stronger the swear word, the more you should think about it. Avoid using in headlines, pull quotes, Tweets or standfirsts. Asterisks may be used where a particularly offensive word is deemed necessary to the story.

25. Suicide / attempted suicide

When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used. Please note that the term 'commit suicide' is considered offensive by some people. See also and familiarise yourself with the Editors' Code of Practice (Appendix I).

26. 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.

27. Conflicts of interest

There must never be any suggestion that personal, commercial, business, financial or other interests have influenced INM 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 INM 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 Managing Editor. 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 INM. Any payment must be approved by the Editor/Managing Editor/Editor-in-Chief. They must seek the approval of their Editor/Managing Editor for any work done with other departments in INM outside Editorial. The right to engage in freelance work for publications that compete with INM is subject to management approval in every case.

28. Foreign assignments

Editorial staff on trips for INM to dangerous parts of the world or countries where journalists can be at risk must obtain clear written permission from their head of department or editor on the scope of their task, what is expected of them and where they are going before leaving Ireland. Please consult with the Department of Foreign Affairs website which regularly updates travel advice on countries (<https://www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/>). Any change to the work you are being asked to do will be discussed and agreed with you and will also be put in writing so there can be no confusion.

The reason for this approach is because we place the safety of our staff at the heart of all we do. Operational decisions are based on a clear assessment of risk and journalists should be particularly cognisant of the risk in countries where there is armed conflict or a significant terrorist threat. The Managing Editor and/or HR must be made aware of all foreign trips for insurance purposes. Under no circumstances should staff unilaterally decide to venture beyond their brief by straying from one country to another. This could unwittingly place themselves and others in danger.

29. Confidentiality

Journalists must not disclose confidential information about the operations, policies or plans of INM. Disclosing confidential information to competitors will be regarded as a serious breach of the Code and will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

30. Radio and TV

Journalists who are asked to guest on radio and TV programmes should discuss the opportunity with the Editor. In deciding whether to make a radio, television or internet appearance, a journalist should consider its probable tone and content to make sure they are consistent with INM standards. They should not say anything that could not appear under their bylines. Journalists must always keep in mind that their first duty is to their title and its readers or audience. Under no circumstances should they ever scoop their newspaper or website by disclosing information which has not yet been submitted for publication.

31. Speeches, seminars and other appearances

Journalists should only make speeches and undertake other appearances subject to prior approval of their Editor, Head of News or Editor-in-Chief. They should not write for any other publications/websites unless this is approved by their Editor.

32. Business journalists

Business and financial journalists are required to disclose all financial holdings or investments and any other financial interests or dealings by them and their family. Journalists should not write about shares or securities if they know that they, their partners or close family have a significant financial interest unless they have disclosed this information to their Editor or Editor-in-Chief.

Journalists must not use for their own profit any privileged information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass on such information to others. To maintain their integrity, journalists should not speculate by buying and selling shares on a short-term basis if they have written about them recently or know that they will be doing so in the near future.

It is essential that financial journalists do not promote, or give the impression of promoting, any business or financial service. However, where editorially justified, references may be made to particular services, businesses or branded products. In some cases, it will be editorially relevant to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of a financial service or product. Financial journalists must always guard against the impression of promoting or plugging particular products or services.

The onus is on the journalist to let INM know if they have any interests or relationships which could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

33. Confidential sources

Quotes with names attached always carry more weight. Journalists have a moral and professional obligation to protect confidential sources when anonymity is a pre-condition for the story. Care should be taken to ensure that the identities of any confidential sources are protected and do not appear in any notes that might become the subject of a court order or can be seen by third parties. When we agree to protect the identity of the source, that identity will not be made known to anyone outside INM. Before any information is accepted without full attribution, however, reporters must make every reasonable effort to get it verified. This also applies to tip-offs from unknown or criminal sources where a journalist should exercise particular caution. Efforts should be made to get the information elsewhere and, if possible in the context of the article, a reason for protecting the source's identity should be included in the story.

When our journalists undertake to protect sources, they must establish how far the protection is required: Is it understood that the writer could be challenged to identify the source in court? Will the source give evidence if the paper is sued?

34. Note-taking/recording

Journalists must either record or take accurate, reliable and contemporaneous notes of all significant conversations and other relevant information. Any such notes or recordings which provide the basis for a story must be kept for a minimum of two years. When anonymity is essential and has been offered, great care should be taken that no document, computer file or other record could identify a source. Journalists may use personal recording

devices to record telephone conversations with individuals in the interests of accuracy. There is no legal obligation to inform the other side that they are being taped if the journalist is the other party to the conversation – however, if specifically asked, the journalist should confirm that the conversation is being recorded. Recordings used in this way should be retained for a minimum of two years. Any request for notes to be handed over in legal proceedings needs to be approved by the Editor and Managing Editor.

35. Publication of the decision of the Press Ombudsman

When requested or required by the Press Ombudsman and/or the Press Council to do so, INM shall publish the Ombudsman's decision in relation to a complaint with due prominence in accordance with the publication guidelines specified by the Press Ombudsman.

36. Attribution

Journalists should never use material from other publications without permission and credit. Where stories are 'rewrites' using material in other media, there should be proper accreditation and there should be no breach of copyright. Pictures should also be properly accredited in captions.

37. Payments

In general, INM does not pay for stories, except from bona fide freelance sources. Written approval must be obtained from the Group Editor-in-Chief or Group Managing Editor in any rare exceptions.

Please note that:

- Payment or offers of payment for stories, pictures or information, which seek to exploit a particular crime or to glorify or glamorise crime in general, must not be made directly or via agents to convicted or confessed criminals or to their associates – who may include family, friends and colleagues. The only exception to this is if it is approved by the Managing Editor and this would only be done if clearly in the public interest and unobtainable without such a payment.
- No payments should be made to serving public officials.

38. Data protection

INM, as a media organisation, and journalists who work on its behalf are data controllers because they decide how they will use the personal data that they hold about individuals. The Data Protection Commission is responsible for upholding the privacy rights of individuals in relation to the processing of their personal data. The equivalent body in the UK is the Information Commissioner's Office.

Journalists have a right to gather information and process it for journalistic purposes and have an exemption under data protection law to do so (Article 85 of the General Data Protection Regulation). This right should not be abused – the information gathered should not be used unless for the public interest and must be processed securely through the media organisation systems, processes and procedures. It should not be given to third parties unless for journalistic reasons.

Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure any personal data is processed securely and to prevent it being lost, stolen or misused. Steps should also be taken to delete personal data that is no longer needed.

Sometimes data protection is mistakenly used as a reason to deny journalists information. Remember that the law covers personal data, not all the data, and even personal data can be lawfully released in some circumstances. Any data protection issues should be referred to our legal advisers. If you lose any work device, notify data.protection@inmplc.com.

39. The right to erasure

Also known as, the 'right to be forgotten', provides individuals with the right to have personal data erased or amended if inaccurate. Newspaper websites are under no obligation to delete a story if it is still accurate – and often requests refer to internet search engines which have processed this data separately by deciding the order in which the information appears in search queries. However, discretion may be exercised in cases where deemed appropriate. All requests should be referred to the Group Managing Editor or designated deputy. The identity of the individual who made the request must be confirmed before proceeding to deletion.

40. The public interest

The press has a right to freedom of expression and to impart and convey information freely. In many circumstances, the press will invoke the public interest as a reason for reporting.

The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

- Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety
- Exposing significantly anti-social behaviour
- Exposing corruption or injustice
- Exposing significant incompetence or negligence
- Protecting public health and safety
- Preventing the public from being misled
- Disclosing information that assists people to better understand or make decisions on matters of public importance

There is also a public interest in freedom of expression in itself. Also, it should be noted that exceptional public interest will need to be shown in cases involving children.



As part of our Ipso obligations it is vital that we record all the complaints we receive, along with details of how the complaint was handled.

Please complete this form and return to Margaret Thompson no later than 3pm each Friday.

Thank you

Name of complainant: _____

Date/time received: _____

Format received in (*eg phone, email*): _____

Complainant's phone number and email: _____

Nature of complaint (*inc edition date, page number, headline, URL*):

Line manager notified (*y/n*): _____

Action taken: _____

Complainant informed: _____