

Editorial co-operation - 2005

This note has been drawn together in order to highlight best practice in relation to the manner in which editors should co-operate with the Commission in its mission to resolve complaints swiftly and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

Promoting awareness of the Commission

In the first place, editors should try to make sure that potential complainants are aware of the existence of the PCC. In particular:

- Editors should try to resolve complaints that are made to them directly, but if that is not possible the Commission would expect them to tell complainants about the existence of the PCC, providing the matter falls under the terms of the Code;
- The Commission would encourage editors to carry regular slots advertising the PCC's existence. This could be done either by publishing one of the PCC's adverts – which can be requested from – or by carrying standard boxes referring to the Commission. Many newspapers and magazines already do this on their business pages in each edition in order to take advantage of the journalistic exemption from the Investment Recommendation (Media) Regulations 2005. The Commission has suggested that such a standard box – which might also appear with the publication's contact details or on its letters page, as well as on its website – could say:

“This newspaper/magazine/website adheres to the system of self-regulation overseen by the Press Complaints Commission. The PCC takes complaints about the editorial content of publications under the Editors' Code of Practice, a copy of which can be found at www.pcc.org.uk”.

The Commission has encountered a small number of cases where editors have not replied to complainants until they have registered official complaints with the PCC. Editors should reply swiftly to those who have a potential grievance – something that is in the interests of both the complainant and the editor, who may avoid a formal PCC investigation.

While people have two months from the publication of an article to lodge a formal complaint to the Commission, editors should be aware that the Commission is likely to be flexible with this limit if it appears that a complainant has not been informed of the PCC's existence during a complaint made directly to the publication.

Swift co-operation

The Commission also wishes to draw attention to the requirement in the Code that “editors should co-operate swiftly with the PCC in the resolution of complaints”. The record of editors in this regard in recent years has been impressive. But it is important to underline that the Commission has on occasion censured editors for unnecessarily delaying their replies to its enquiries – and that censure has occurred even when the article under complaint has not, after investigation, turned out to breach the Code. If editors believe that there is likely to be some reason for a delay in responding to the complaint, they should let the Commission know as soon as possible.

Resolution of complaints and tagging of records

Current practice on the majority of publications is for published resolutions such as a correction or apology – or a reference to it – to be tagged to the original archived piece. The Commission endorses this approach. Tagged records – whether private warnings or those referring to published remedies – should also be made as widely available as possible within the industry on any shared systems so that errors or intrusions are not repeated by others.