

Press Complaints Commission Online Working Group
Minute of a meeting held on 20 October 2010

Present: Anthony Longden, Ian MacGregor, Simon Sapper, Ian Walden.
In attendance: Stephen Abell, Catherine Speller.

The Online Working Group discussed the following three issues at its first meeting:

1. Twitter and Social Networking

The office had undertaken research with the industry, seeking initial views on the circumstances in which complaints about material published on social networks should fall formally within the Commission's remit. Members of the Group agreed in principle with the following proposals as a way forward:

- newspapers and magazines should be encouraged to develop clear policies as to their corporate relationship to the social networking of journalists. If they assume corporate responsibility for journalists' activity, they should say so and make clear how (and perhaps ensure that the accounts are appropriately branded);
- Twitter or Facebook accounts that are branded (in their titles) with the name of a publication, and whose content is editorially controlled, should generally be considered to fall within the remit of the PCC. Examples of this would be: <http://twitter.com/CloserOnline>; or <http://twitter.com/charlesarthur/guardian-tech-twitterers>;
- personal accounts of newspapers, unless branded as such, would continue to fall outside the remit of the PCC, even if the content relates to journalism and the journalist is identified as such in the "bio".

The office will prepare a more detailed paper on these issues which takes account of points arising from the discussion (many of which concern a number of quite complicated grey areas). Given that the PCC's remit would need to be extended formally by PressBof were it to consider these new channels, it is important that members of PressBof are actively engaged with the Group's work. The Commission will also need to be consulted further on this.

It was agreed that the Chairman of PressBof would be invited to the next meeting of the Group for further discussions.

2. PCC Brand Online

The Group was shown examples of newspaper websites which have been branded with the PCC logo and/or wording which makes clear their adherence to the Code. Members agreed that the PCC should encourage more publishers to do the same in order to promote its services. The logo should act as an active link through to the PCC website, but the PCC should not be prescriptive about what (if any) wording is published to accompany the logo: space is at a premium online and it is important to allow publications a degree of flexibility in the way that they interpret this initiative.

The office will liaise with the design company it is using for website redesign, with a view to producing some ideas for a web-only version of the PCC logo, which may be more suited for online use.

3. Online prominence of apologies and adjudications

The office had prepared a short paper on a number of issues around online apologies and adjudications that it had identified as meriting further consideration by the Commission. The central issue is whether the PCC needs to offer more direction to editors in this area, given the absence of any standard PCC requirement, and the increase in the PCC's work with online material.

The Group agreed in principle that the Commission as a whole should consider issuing guidance to enable editors, PCC staff and complainants to have a sense of expectations as to online prominence. The Group needs to do more work on this; an update on developments will be provided in due course.

General Business and Date of next meeting

It is important that the work of the Group is informed by relevant complaints being dealt with by the office. The office will ensure that information is communicated to members on a regular basis, most likely via the weekly update email. News about other developments in the online world that may also be useful will also be shared with members of the Group.

The next meeting will be held in December. A date will be arranged shortly.