

Mr Darrell Desbrow v The Scotsman

Clauses noted: 1

Mr Darrell Desbrow of Kirkcudbrightshire complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article headlined "Most visitors feel ripped-off" published in The Scotsman on 10 September 2003 was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code.

The complaint was upheld.

The article was a feature on tourism in Scotland which focused on the perception that the country did not offer value for money. The complainant contended that the comparative table of holiday prices which accompanied the text of the article had confused the exchange rates of Sterling to Euros and Sterling to Dollars. The complainant wrote to the newspaper directly three times but did not receive acknowledgement of his correspondence.

Having failed to respond to three letters from the Commission itself, the newspaper finally proposed that it write to the complainant apologising for not responding to him. It also offered to publish a correction in its Corrections and Clarifications column and to change its system for responding to readers who made complaints. The complainant argued that these offers were rendered inadequate by the delay of four months in responding substantively to the complaint.

Adjudication

The Commission considered that the newspaper's offer to publish a correction with regard to the inaccuracy and apologise directly to the complainant would generally have represented an appropriate form of remedial action. It also welcomed the newspaper's proposal to change its system for responding to readers' concerns.

However, the Commission regretted the length of time taken for the newspaper to respond substantively to the complaint. The Code of Practice explicitly states that 'it is the responsibility of editors to co-operate with the PCC as swiftly as possible in the resolution of complaints'. In taking four months to reply to a straightforward complaint, the newspaper had not fulfilled its responsibility – and the result was a breach of the Code. The Commission urged the newspaper to change its procedures for dealing with complaints as soon as possible so that a similar situation does not arise in future.

Relevant ruling

De Silva/Wijeyesinghe v The Sunday Times, 2001

Adjudication issued 2004