

Mrs Julie Clark v Closer

Clauses noted: 16

Mrs Julie Clark of Bwlchgwyn complained to the Press Complaints Commission that information contained in an article published in Closer magazine on 31 January 2004 headlined "I want to be a lawyer to help people" had been obtained in breach of Clause 17 (Payment to criminals) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The article was an interview with Louise Woodward – who was convicted in 1998 of the involuntary manslaughter of a child – in which she discussed her impending legal career. The complainant was concerned that Ms Woodward had benefited financially from the article despite the Code's restrictions on paying criminals or their associates.

The magazine maintained that the subject matter – which concerned Ms Woodward's rehabilitation as a trainee lawyer – was in the public interest, although it added that she had not in fact sought, and did not obtain, any payment for the interview. However, it accepted that a fee had been paid to her boyfriend for a photograph that accompanied the piece.

Adjudication

Clause 17 states that payment must not be made to the associates of convicted criminals except where the material concerned ought to be published in the public interest and payment is necessary for this to be done.

The sole issue under the Code was, therefore, the payment of Ms Woodward's partner for the photograph. It was not apparent to the Commission how the public interest was served by publication of the photograph. Nor had the magazine demonstrated why the payment was necessary. In these circumstances, it was clear that there had been a breach of the Code.

Relevant material

'The PCC, payments to criminals and the public interest', Guidance note issued 2003

Adjudication issued 2004