

Jeremy Hunt MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 6813

Facsimile: 020 7219 3197

Email: huntj@parliament.uk

Tim
Excellent. Would
you like to draft
a reply?
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Sir Christopher Meyer
Chairman
Press Complaints Commission
Halton House
20/23 Holborn
London EC1N 2JD

16 October 2007

Dear Christopher,

**FAKERY SCANDALS: THE NEED FOR CLARITY OVER
DIGITAL MANIPULATION OF IMAGES**

I let you know of a suggestion I have made to Ofcom and the BBC Trust which I believe you will be interested in and could potentially assist with. I have asked them to look into clarifying the broadcasting code and if necessary to establish a separate code of practice with respect to the digital manipulation of images.

I believe the model of self-regulation at the Press Complaints Commission could be of use when considering my request as I note that the first line of your code of practice states that "The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures".

The broadcasting code already requires broadcasters to be accurate and avoid misleading viewers. The threshold at which it applies occurs when the misleading nature of the material causes actual or potential harm. It is clear how this applies to quiz and competition phone-in programmes, where Ofcom has already taken decisive action. However, there does not appear to be an understanding either in the industry or amongst the public as to where such actual or potential harm would be deemed to occur in

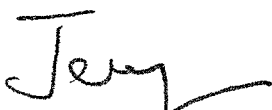
issues relating to digital manipulation of images in a way that could affect viewers trust in the veracity of content. It is for this reason that I have sought clarification of the code and an examination of whether a voluntary code of practice could assist in restoring public trust and confidence in the broadcast industry.

It would be immensely preferable if changes in behaviour by broadcasters could be driven by industry consensus rather than statutory legislation or regulation. For this reason it would seem sensible for the BBC Trust, Ofcom and broadcasters either to agree more transparent guidelines as to the way in which the broadcasting code will be applied with respect to digital manipulation, or alternatively to set up a voluntary code of practice as to the limits of digital manipulation.

There is also an obvious crossover with the way digital images are manipulated in newspapers. Again voluntary self-regulation is likely to be infinitely quicker and more flexible than statutory regulation and it may be that you feel this has already been the case. If Ofcom, the BBC Trust and broadcasters decide to take action as I have suggested then it would obviously be ideal if they did so in a manner consistent with the print industry's regulations. I am sure you will therefore want to play a part in any such discussions on how best to proceed.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Hunt

Member of Parliament

Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

*P.S. Thank you again for an excellent dinner
last week.*