

Guy Black

From: Guy Black
Sent: 15 October 2003 16:42
To: David Newell (davidn@newspapersoc.org.uk); Philip Graf (philipgraf@hotmail.com); Harry Roche (hjr@marloes2.freemove.co.uk); Jim Raeburn (JRaeburn@spof.org.uk); Ian Locks (ian.locks@ppa.co.uk)
Cc: Christopher Meyer; Tim Toulmin
Subject: Complaints - national / regional statistics

Both Tim Toulmin and I had an interesting discussion with John Robertson at the Society of Editors about the level of PCC complaints, and where the actual burden of complaints fell in terms of investigation.

It seems to me that there is something of a misunderstanding on this point - which is the reason why I thought I would drop colleagues a quick note - because it turns out that the main burden of investigation relates to regional and local newspapers. It might be helpful if I set this out in more detail.

As you know, a good proportion of the complaints made to the PCC are outside of our remit, third party and so on. The true reflection of work therefore lies not in the processing of those (which is very easy) but in those complaints which we actually have to investigate (and resolve) as they raise prima facie breaches of the Code. This is where most of the staff time goes as investigation is often long drawn out.

Following the very helpful conversation with John, I asked colleagues here to undertake a breakdown.

In 2002 - which is a fairly typical year - the burden of investigated complaints was as follows:

- * national newspapers - 38% (of which 16% were tabloids, 21% the rest);
- * regional newspapers, and indigenous Scottish newspapers - 55%;
- * magazines - 7%.

This is - ironically - in inverse proportion to the total complaints levels. The reason for this is that a lot of the complaints against national newspapers tend to be third party complaints, matters of taste and so on, or very clear no breaches.

These proportions are obviously also reflected in the numbers of complaints we receive about privacy (almost all of which have to be investigated). You will recall from our Select Committee submission that the clear majority of privacy complaints - as a proportion rather than absolute numbers (which would not be a useful guide) - are about regional and local newspapers.

I thought these figures interesting. Do let me know if I can let you have further information. Tim will be writing to John separately.

Best regards, Guy