

The Leveson Inquiry

Witness Statement for Part 1, Module 1

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER JEFFERIES

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I, Christopher Jefferies, c/o Collyer Bristow LLP, 4 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4DF will say as follows:

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1. I make this statement in connection with my role as a Core Participant in the Leveson Inquiry.
2. For the purposes of this statement, I refer to a small paginated bundle of documents marked "CJ1". Where I refer to page numbers in this statement, I am referring to pages in "CJ1".

**Background**

3. I am 66. I live in Bristol. I am a retired schoolmaster. My professional career spanned some 34 years, including teaching English literature at Clifton College in Bristol between 1967 and 2001.
4. I own 3 flats within one building in Bristol. I live in one flat and rent the remaining 2 flats to tenants.
5. Prior to December 2010 I had not had any dealings at all with the media. However, I was suddenly thrust into the media spotlight because I was the landlord to Joanna Yeates, the girl who disappeared from her flat on the weekend of 17 December 2010 and whose body was subsequently discovered on the outskirts of Bristol on Christmas Day 2010. In particular, I became the subject of intense media interest when I was arrested on 30 December 2010 by Avon and Somerset Police on

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suspicion of her murder. Although I was entirely innocent of any wrongdoing, as has since been proved, the treatment I received at the hands of the press has significantly affected my life.

**Joanna Yeates' murder and my arrest**

6. As I have said, Ms Yeates went missing on Friday 17 December 2010. She was reported to the Police as missing on Sunday 19 December 2010. Her body was found on Christmas Day at the edge of a quarry three miles from where I live. She had been strangled.
7. Following this, I voluntarily agreed to assist the Police by providing them with two statements.
8. However, on Thursday 30 December 2010 I was arrested by Avon and Somerset Police on suspicion of murder. The circumstances of the arrest remain vividly in my mind.
9. I was woken by the Police just after 7am; I heard a knock at the door of my flat and a voice saying, 'It's the Police, Mr Jefferies. We need your help'. Of course, I let the Police in, but rather than this just being some enquiry, I was immediately arrested.
10. My arrest came as a bolt from the blue. When I first heard the knock, my first thought was that it was a neighbour who was unwell and having some kind of emergency. I had no idea whatsoever that I might even be considered a suspect, since there wasn't a shred of evidence to that effect.
11. I do not own a TV and do not regularly read the newspapers and so I had not been following the progress of the investigation into Ms Yeates' murder. I think this added to the fact that it was such a shock when the Police knocked on my door.
12. I was taken into custody and questioned by the Police for three days, during which time I was entirely cut off from the world to all intents and purposes. Finally, on 1 January, I was released on bail pending further investigations. Following my release, I went to stay with friends as I could not return to my home. In that time, I

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had simply no idea whatsoever about the media furore which had occurred and the way in which, as it has been described, I was so vilified in the tabloid press. I will explain in these paragraphs what I understand happened although, as is clear, I was unaware of it at the time.

**Press coverage**

13. The problem started the day before I was arrested. As I was leaving the house to go shopping, I was suddenly accosted by a number of reporters with television cameras and photographic cameras who sought to question me about specific aspects of the voluntary statements I had provided to the Police. I remember being extremely irritated at the time and shocked that they seemed to know what I had told the Police. I still do not know how the press found out what I had said in my statements to the Police.
14. The worst of the reporting of me started on Friday 31 December 2010, the day after my arrest, and continued throughout the time I was in Police custody. As I will refer to below, the reporting was so hostile that it led to my criminal solicitor, Bambos Tsiattalou of Stokoe Partnership, writing letters to several editors warning them to stop publishing defamatory material about me. This did not seem to work.
15. At the same time, the Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, was also forced to issue a public statement warning newspaper editors to comply with the Contempt of Court Act 1981. Again, despite this, the newspapers continued their campaign.
16. As I have said, I was blissfully unaware of this at the time. The reason is that, whilst I was in custody, my solicitor spared me the ordeal of telling me about the papers and so I had no idea what the press was publishing about me.
17. In fact, I remained oblivious of the extraordinary media behaviour until the day after I was released. Even then, I was told by friends and associates that it would be distressing for me to read the coverage and so I made

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the conscious decision not to read any of the articles.

18. It was only when I blithely proposed that I might head into town to buy some clothes and toiletries that my friends told me the full extent of what had been going on and that I should not go out for fear of being recognised.
19. Even my solicitor was so concerned about my proposal to go out in public that he rang me to say that if my friends couldn't persuade me not to go out he would come down from London to dissuade me himself. It was only then that I began to comprehend the scale of what had happened.
20. I can see now that, following my arrest, the national media shamelessly vilified me. The UK press set about what can only be described as a witch-hunt. It was clear that the tabloid press had decided that I was guilty of Ms Yeates' murder and seemed determined to persuade the public of my guilt. They embarked on a frenzied campaign to blacken my character by publishing a series of very serious allegations about me which were completely untrue, allegations which were a mixture of smear, innuendo and complete fiction.
21. I have been told by friends and family that while I was in custody extraordinary efforts were made by the media to contact anyone who may have had any knowledge about me, including friends from schooldays whom I had not seen for some considerable time, and former pupils. The tabloid press undertook what was quite simply gratuitous dirt-digging.
22. In addition to any allegations made in connection with Ms Yeates' murder, over the 3 days after my arrest, the tabloid press essentially portrayed me as a sexually perverted voyeur who used teaching as a means of feeding my perversions and that I had a malign influence over any pupils I came into contact with. Amongst other highly defamatory allegations, the articles also suggested I had been involved in a previous murder and that I was linked to a convicted paedophile. All of this

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was completely false.

23. The tabloids published a series of photographs of me which meant I was instantly recognisable by the public. They also reported on all aspects of my life - from details about my late mother - to the properties I own – to my conduct as a landlord - to details about my professional career. Almost all the information published was false, inaccurate or exaggerated; the articles contained the wildest flights of fantasy.
24. Even if what was written about my private and professional life had been true, there could have been no public interest served by it being published and certainly not in the hugely sensational and damaging way that it was.
25. I attach copies of the eight worst offending articles:
1. 'The Strange Mr Jefferies', The Sun, 31 December 2010;
  2. 'Murder Police Quiz 'Nutty Professor' with a Blue Rinse, Was Jo's Body Hidden Next to Her Flat?', The Daily Mail, 31 December 2010;
  3. 'The Strange Mr Jefferies, Creepy', Daily Record, 31 December 2010;
  4. 'Jo Suspect is Peeping Tom', Daily Mirror, 31 December 2010;
  5. 'Joanna suspect Ex-teacher known as Mr Chips', Daily Express, 31 December 2010
  6. 'Jo Suspect, 'scared kids' – Obsessed by death', The Sun, 1 January 2011;
  7. 'Was Killer Waiting in Jo's flat?', Daily Mirror, 1 January 2011;
  8. 'A Beautiful Woman in Mind, Body and Soul..I will Always Love Her...Boyfriend's Tribute to Jo as Landlord is Bailed', The Sunday Mirror, 2 January 2011.
26. Ultimately, I brought legal proceedings for libel against 8 newspapers in relation to allegations contained in 40 articles. I was successful in obtaining damages, costs

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and apologies from all eight titles.

27. Whilst these eight articles provide an overview of the truly horrendous nature of the coverage of my arrest by the tabloid papers, I sued in respect of only a handful of the worst offending articles and allegations. The general press coverage was appalling.
28. I set out below a selection of extracts from these articles:

The Sun, 31 December 2010:

1. "This is the Joanna Yeates murder suspect Chris Jefferies – sporting the wispy blue-rinse hairdo that saw him branded "strange" by school pupils he taught"
2. "WEIRD, 'strange talk, strange walk', POSH, 'loved culture, poetry', LEWD, 'made sexual remarks', CREEPY, 'loner with blue rinse hair."
3. "Former students claimed yesterday that the blue-rinse, long-haired bachelor, who police arrested yesterday, used to make sleazy comments and invite them to his home. One recalled: "He was very flamboyant. We were convinced he was gay". "You didn't want him to come near you. He was very unkempt and had dirty fingernails. He was weird... He was a stickler for discipline and very traditional. He used to get very angry and throw books and pens across the room. He kept repeating words in an odd way."
4. "A second student said "He was fascinated by making lewd sexual remarks. It was really disturbing".
5. "Another student told how groups of up to ten pupils were invited to Jefferies' home... "My parents didn't

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know I went. The conversation didn't exactly stick to the curriculum. He was eccentric, odd and could be described as a loner. We thought it odd that a man of his age didn't have a wife and had blue-rinse hair."

6. "Landlord Chris Jefferies knew Jo Yeates' boyfriend was going away for the weekend – and had a key to the couple's flat, neighbours said yesterday. Jefferies even helped Greg Reardon start his broken-down car so he could drive to stay with his brother in Sheffield on the night Jo Disappeared...Another neighbour said:" He had a key and knew the boyfriend was going to be away in Yorkshire."
7. "Mr Jefferies was also famous for his utter dislike of sports."
8. "Neighbours looked on Jefferies as a nutty professor."
9. "Another neighbour described Jefferies as "a dominant character". He said: "He was unusual in that hair was all over the place. He was very posh, a solitary figure and very cultured. I wouldn't used the word popular to describe him." Family friends of only child Jefferies described him as "effeminate" as a youngster."
10. "Jefferies bought a flat in the block where 25 year old Jo lived from a paedophile who was jailed for enticing a young boy there for sex, it emerged last night. Fellow teacher Stephen Johnston used the ground floor flat to groom the pupil for three years. Jefferies bought it in 1999."

The Daily Mirror, 31 December 2010:

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11. "Jo suspect is a peeping Tom".
12. "We caught him looking in the windows many times...he was strange, always hanging about".
13. "The eccentric landlord arrested yesterday on suspicion of Jo Yeates' murder used to peer intrusively into his flats, two ex tenants said yesterday...The couple also claimed noseys Chris Jefferies, 65, refused to let them put up net curtains to protect their privacy...The husband said: "He made my wife feel very uncomfortable". It emerged yesterday ex-teacher Jefferies bought the Bristol flat Jo rented from an old colleague who is in jail for child abuse. The Police may now re-open the nearby unsolved 1974 killing of Glenis Carruthers".
14. "Chris is a snob really and a bit elitist."

The Daily Record, 31 December 2010:

15. "The Strange Mr Jefferies", "Creepy", "Landlord arrested over Jo murder made lewd sexual remarks, say kids he taught at college...They claimed he constantly made lewd sexual remarks as he clutched the hands of pupils."
16. "Jo landlord was sinister peeping Tom, says tenants...They revealed he would constantly peer through the windows – and even let himself into their flat using his own keys...On several occasions he even entered our flat unannounced. It was always when I was at work and my wife was at home. "She would hear the front door go and he would walk in. He always acted surprised and left when she confronted him".



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The Daily Mail, 31 December 2010:

17. "The teacher they called Mr Strange".
18. "Described as a 'nutty professor', the bachelor used to dye his hair blue and has an obsession with Christiana Rossetti, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet who often wrote about death."
19. "Links to unsolved murder yards away".

The Express, 31 December 2010:

20. "Mr Jefferies, a bachelor who lives alone, is a former teacher at nearby Clifton College, a £9,000-a-term public school...It is believed he owns several properties including one in France".
21. "...He used to touch people's hands and he'd say: 'Oh, you're very sweaty. That means you've been sexually active recently.'"
22. "...He was weird. He would over-emphasise words and repeat them 10 to 15 times over".

The Sun, 1 January 2011:

23. "An ex-pupil of Joanna Yeates' murder suspect Chris Jefferies yesterday claimed he was obsessed with death. The former student said eccentric English teacher Jefferies made them watch films about Nazi death camps – and scared some children with his macabre fascination."
24. "A former acquaintance of Jo Yeates murder suspect Chris Jefferies told last night how she felt she was being followed by the retired schoolmaster. The blonde in her 30s, claimed the wild-haired

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eccentric watcher her as she studied and quizzed her about her personal life."

25. "Yesterday...a couple told how they nicknamed him "Hannibal Lecter" while living in one of his basement flats...The couple lived below Jefferies for eight months...and became convinced he had secretly been into their flat".

The Sunday Mirror, 2 January 2011:

26. "A former student of bailed suspect Christopher Jefferies yesterday told how the retired English teacher's favourite poem tells the story of a man who was hanged for cutting his wife's throat...The oddball teacher bizarrely ordered students to hold hands as they recited the macabre poem."

27. It is clear that all of these articles were calculated to vilify me and convince the public that I was responsible not only for Ms Yeates' murder but other crimes or misdemeanours as well. The coverage was disgraceful and undermines basic principles of responsible journalism and the right to a fair trial (as was recognised in the contempt of court proceedings which I deal with below).
28. The most telling example of the self-serving nature of the tabloid press is the coverage of Greg Reardon's public statement in early January 2011.
29. On or about 1 January 2011, Greg Reardon, Ms Yeates' partner, issued a statement as a personal tribute to his girlfriend, which contained the following:

*"Jo's life was cut short tragically but the finger-pointing and character assassination by social and news media of as yet innocent men has been shameful. It has made me lose a lot of faith in the morality of the British press and those who spend their time fixed to the internet in*

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*this modern age...I hope in the future they will show a more sensitive and impartial view to those involved in such heartbreaking events and especially in the lead-up to potentially high-profile court cases"*

30. The majority of the newspapers failed to report this section of his tribute and those that did, either omitted the part about my character assassination or cut the statement to such an extent that it read entirely differently (for example, the Sunday Mirror, the Mail on Sunday and the Sunday Express).
31. It is also noteworthy that none of the papers which echoed the defamatory coverage of the eight who have been sued but which themselves were not subject to a libel action have printed anything which might suggest that they regretted their part in the media witch-hunt.

**My experience following my release on bail**

32. When I was released by the Police, I could not return to my home because of the Police investigations and for my own safety. I, therefore, went to stay with friends. No one, other than the Police, my solicitors and friends/relatives knew where I was.
33. I was provided with an escort from the Police station to my friends' house by the Police. The Police had to set up a decoy car to divert reporters' attention away from me and prevent them from following me to my friends' house. My time in custody and the days following my release was like being catapulted into a movie; events seemed to have their own momentum. It was surreal.
34. As I have explained, when I arrived at my friends' house, they spared me the details of the extent of the press coverage of my arrest and my solicitor was required to advise me not to go out in public.
35. From the period when I was released on bail on 1 January 2011 to when Vincent Tabak was arrested on suspicion of murder on 22 January 2011, I was effectively under house arrest. Within a few days of being released, I had to make the decision to change my appearance, including cutting

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short my hair and dying it brown.

36. During this time I only went out after dark to occasionally walk my friends' dog. I could not go out during the day for fear of being recognised.
37. This was all a result of the media frenzy created about my arrest.
38. After staying with friends in Bristol for a while, I moved on to stay with friends elsewhere. The day after I changed addresses, I walked down the road to my friend's neighbour to use their computer (my friend did not have email access) and I recall someone turning around to look at me sharply in the street. The following day I received a telephone call from the friend whom I had just left to say that a number of reporters had turned up in the street. Apparently they stayed for about 2 days although they did not know which house to survey. I assume the person I saw in the street informed the newspapers of my whereabouts.
39. It was not until 4 March 2011 that the Police lifted my bail conditions and formally confirmed that I was no longer a suspect.
40. However, I was not able to return to my home until April 2011, 3 months after my arrest; I had to wait for the Police to release it to me and until the Police had officially confirmed I was not a suspect so that it was safe to return. When I did go back to the house it was not in a state to be lived in. Everything had been turned upside down as part of the Police investigations. All my clothes had been removed and a number of other items had also been taken which meant that I really only had the clothes I had acquired since my release. When I returned to my home I had to sort through and rearrange everything. The period from 1 January 2011 to early April 2011 was the most difficult and harrowing of my life.
41. In fact, I have still to this day not seen most of the press coverage from this period in its original published form. Indeed, it is only as a result of the libel proceedings I

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pursued and an article by Brian Cathcart entitled 'The ordeal of Christopher Jefferies' which featured in the Financial Times on 8 October 2011 that I have read and understood the full extent of the 'monsterring' of me by the tabloid press.

42. I do not read newspapers regularly but, when I do, I take The Guardian, the Financial Times and occasionally The Independent. The interview I gave to Brian Cathcart is the first and only interview I have given for the purposes of a newspaper article. This was a difficult decision for me but I chose to give the interview because I wanted to have my side of the story heard and I was confident that the Financial Times would report it responsibly.

43. As a result of my experience with the national press, I was apprehensive about reading the article in its published form. On the day it was published, I could not bring myself to read the article until the afternoon; I wanted to gather the reaction of my friends and relatives to the article before reading it myself - for fear of it being damaging. Brian Cathcart distilled the coverage from those 3 days and when I saw the article on 8 October 2011 it was the first time I had read all the horrendous allegations in one go and it left me shaken. I would say that reading the article was one of the most distressing experiences I have had in my life. It took me the rest of the day to get over the shock of reading it. I was pleased to have plans that evening with friends as the article left me feeling that I did not wish to be on my own that evening.

**Contempt of court proceedings**

44. Two of the tabloid newspapers who reported my arrest (The Sun and the Daily Mirror) were found to be in Contempt of Court as a result of an action instigated by the Attorney General and fined £50,000 and £18,000 respectively.

45. I attach a copy of the Judgment from the contempt proceedings which condemns the newspapers' conduct. Lord Justice Thomas and Mr Justice Owen described the Daily Mirror articles as 'extreme' and 'substantial risks to

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the course of justice'. Lord Chief Justice Lord Judge described the treatment of me by the national press as 'vilification'.

**Civil action against Avon and Somerset Police**

46. I have issued a civil action against Avon and Somerset Police for false imprisonment, breach of my human rights and trespass. This claim is yet to be determined and so I do not propose to go into any details in this statement about my arrest and my time in Police custody.

**Impact on me, my friends and family**

47. After my arrest my friends and relatives were subjected to an unacceptable degree of press scrutiny amounting to harassment. Indeed, one of my relatives was so concerned about the press hounding her that she contacted the Press Complaints Commission.
48. As stated above, when I was released on bail I was told by friends and family not to read the press coverage because it would be distressing for me. Of course, my friends and family did read everything that was written about me. I was oblivious to what was going on during the 3 days I was in police custody; however, they were not.
49. I had spent Christmas with relatives in Derbyshire and had planned to visit an Aunt in Cheshire for New Year. This obviously did not happen. She was one of the first people I contacted after I was released on bail. She was extremely relieved to hear from me but said that she felt that the experience over those 3 days had aged her a 100 years. She later informed me that one of my Cousins was reluctant to go out for several days after I was arrested because he was worried people would recognise him or people would link us because we have the same surname.
50. Not only was the 'monstering' of me by the press shameful but the coverage was a massive intrusion into my private life. As stated above, I had not had any dealings with the press prior to December 2010 but

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following my arrest the press published an array of information about matters personal to me - albeit exaggerated or inaccurate. I was thrust into the limelight in the most appalling way possible.

51. What strikes me most is the extent of the inaccuracies. To show just one example of how absurd the inaccuracies were: the press suggested I was a close friend of a convicted paedophile and that I bought one of my flats from him (hinting that I was somehow linked to his activities). In fact, this individual worked at a different school (the preparatory school to Clifton) and I had only come across him on rare occasion at our Property Management Company meetings. There had been 2 previous owners of his flat prior to my purchasing it.
52. In many ways the breadth of the character assassination is the worst part of the coverage. The libel actions have been reasonably effective in vindicating my reputation in respect of the allegations that I murdered Ms Yeates in that most, if not all, sensible people now accept that I had nothing to do with her murder. However, the libel actions have by no means addressed all the damage done to my personal and professional reputation, which I spent over 30 years building, given the type of stories which were published about me personally and professionally. I doubt the damage done can ever be repaired. Had I not been retired, I think the effect on my career would have been catastrophic.
53. As stated above, after being released on bail I spent almost 3 months confined to my friends' houses. Even after I returned home and tried to return to some form of normality, I remember being very apprehensive about going into cafes or shops because I did not know how people would react to me.

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54. Through no fault of my own, I had my life turned completely upside-down. I have essentially done nothing else this year other than deal with the aftermath of my arrest. I am now at a point where I have come to terms with what has happened to me and try to be philosophical and detached from it. However, it is only through sheer determination that I have been able to get to this point and it does not detract from the experience.
55. Whilst I have been through a horrendous ordeal this year, I have taken some comfort from the fact that I received a great deal of support from my friends, family, former pupils and members of the public.
56. I should mention that, whilst the libel actions have gone some way to vindicate my reputation, this was not an easy exercise at all. Fortunately, my solicitors acted for me on a Conditional Fee Agreement. Had they not done so it would have been impossible for me to bring proceedings against the newspapers because of the cost.
57. I will never fully recover from the events of last year. The incalculable effect of what was written about me by these highly influential tabloid newspapers is something from which it will be difficult ever to escape. The purpose of my agreeing to give this statement is that I hope it may prevent the same fate befalling someone else.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

DATED the <sup>d</sup>4 day of November 2011

[Signature box]

**Christopher Jefferies**

[Witness box]