

The Editors' Code of Practice Review

SUBMISSION FROM TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL UK

Introduction

Transparency International UK (TI-UK) welcomes the opportunity to take part in this public consultation on proposed changes to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) Editors' Code of Practice.

As an anti-corruption campaign, our interests relate in particular to clauses 13-16 of the Code. We welcome the presence of these clauses in the Code of Practice, and note that these are supplementary to, and not a substitute for compliance with laws such as the UK Bribery Act.

Independent journalism and a free press are cornerstones of anti-corruption work. From the Panama Papers¹ last April – one of the widest investigations that the world has ever seen – to BuzzFeed covering money-laundering allegations around Lycamobile, investigative journalists play a crucial role in uncovering complex corruption cases.²

Media outlets also have the potential to play an important role in increasing public understanding of issues like corporate secrecy, kleptocracy, money laundering and the misuse of political power. In doing so effectively, the public must have faith in the media to report independently - without fear or favour - and where necessary to transparently declare factors which could constrain that independence.

Clause 13: Financial Journalism

It is vital for the integrity of the media that it is made clear where content is independently produced or where it has been influenced by third parties. If content is produced by sponsors then this has the potential to distort public understanding of an issue without the public's knowledge of where the content came from.

An addition should be made therefore, to clause 13 to the effect that publishers must clearly identify content which has been paid for or influenced by a third party such as a sponsor or an advertiser.

Similarly where content is not published due to third-party interests the extent of those conflicts should instead be apparent. Otherwise this has the potential to undermine public trust in the journalism they are supporting.

Issues around this were brought to light in 2015 when Peter Osborne resigned from his role at the Telegraph in protest at its unwillingness to run reports criticising a major advertiser.³ Under the current provisions of the Editor's Code it is impossible to confidently assess how widespread this practice is.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/panama-papers> [Accessed 6 February 2017]

² https://www.buzzfeed.com/heidiblake/this-tory-donor-was-secretly-filmed-dropping-cash-stuffed-ru?utm_term=.fwLkYv8Xe#.vnoQDql47 [Accessed 6 February 2017]

³ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/peter-oborne/why-i-have-resigned-from-telegraph> [Accessed 6 February 2017]

There is established practice in the declaration of interests in other fields, and we recommend the Editor's Code of Practice Committee consults on proposals requiring publishers to make this information publicly available in an easily accessible and intelligible way.

These requirements could include declaring extended commercial contracts for advertising and sponsorship, and declarations of material financial interests of proprietors and editorial staff.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with members of the Committee or your secretariat.

About Transparency International UK

Transparency International (TI) is the world's leading non-governmental anti-corruption organisation. With more than 100 chapters worldwide, TI has extensive global expertise and understanding of corruption.

Transparency International UK (TI-UK) is the UK chapter of TI. We raise awareness about corruption; advocate legal and regulatory reform at national and international levels; design practical tools for institutions, individuals and companies wishing to combat corruption; and act as a leading centre of anti-corruption expertise in the UK.

We work in the UK and overseas, challenging corruption within politics, public institutions, and the private sector, and campaign to prevent the UK acting as a safe haven for Corrupt Capital. On behalf of the global Transparency International movement, we work to reduce corruption in the high risk areas of Defence & Security and Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare.

We are independent, non-political, and base our advocacy on robust research.

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