

Centre for Media Monitoring's response to Editors' Code of Practice Committee consultation on revisions to the Editors' Code of Practice (27.03.2020).

1. Introduction

1.1. The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) is a project of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and was set up in 2018 with the aim to:

- Create an evidence base on how Islam and Muslims are reported in national print and broadcast media.
- Develop insights on potential areas of improvement through evidence-based analyses, reports and guidelines.
- Advocate change through constructive engagement with key stakeholders.
- Empower Muslim communities to proactively engage with the media and help change the narrative.

1.2. CfMM's monitoring methodology was developed and approved by leading academics and experts in the field of corpus linguistics. We monitor and analyse thousands of articles and broadcast clips daily and CfMM is recognised as an authority on how the media reports on Muslims and Islam by all our stakeholders.

1.3. CfMM has positive and close working relations with editorial policy makers, managing editors, editors and journalists from the national print and broadcast media as well as with regulators, parliamentarians and community organisations. We hold roundtables, publish reports, sit on advisory boards, make submissions to inquiries (Home Affairs Committee on Hate Crime, Lords Select Committee Future of Journalism, APPG Religion in the Media), feed into consultations (OFCOM, BBC) and make recommendations on how to improve the reporting of Muslims & Islam in the media. CfMM was instrumental in developing IPSO's guidance on the reporting of Muslims and Islam and is facilitating meetings with community organisations and IPSO to get feedback on the guidelines.

1.4. The media plays an integral role in our democracy, not only informing the public and reporting news, but also speaking truth to power and holding institutions and government accountable. We agree and uphold the principle that freedom of the press is an important cornerstone of our democracy.

1.5. Almost all the national mainstream press have agreed that they should abide by the highest professional standards and journalism ethics balancing freedom of expression – such as the right to inform, to be partisan, to challenge, shock, be satirical and to entertain – with the rights of the public, not only to the letter but also in spirit.¹

1.6. However, in December 2019, the outgoing chair of IPSO, Sir Alan Moses, admitted that: "The portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the British press has been "the most difficult issue" facing the press watchdog in the past five years. He said: "I speak for myself, but I have a suspicion that [Muslims] are from time to time written about in a way that [newspapers] would simply not write about Jews or Roman Catholics."²

1.7. Centre for Media Monitoring's first quarterly report for the period Oct-Dec 2018, showed that over a third of all articles misrepresented or generalised about Muslims &/or Islam, 59% associated Muslims with negative behaviour and terrorism was the most recurring theme in the media relating to Muslims & Islam. Right leaning publications and religious publications were the most biased, with 37% of all articles analysed, rated as "Very Biased" under our methodology.³

¹ <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

² <https://www.ft.com/content/60d5bea6-1ff9-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b>

³ <https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-quarterly-report-launched/>

1.8. CfMM's Executive Director, Miqdaad Versi, has made a large number of complaints to IPSO specifically relating to the reporting of Islam and Muslims in national newspapers and has had his complaints upheld more than ten times. Along with Mr Versi, CfMM's monitoring team have also submitted 100's of complaints directly to the press when articles have misrepresented, generalised or inaccurately reported about Muslims and Islam. Over 250 corrections have been secured to date.

1.9. This submission to the Editor's Code Review reflects insights drawn from significant experience in monitoring the media, engaging with the Editor's Code and with editorial policy makers, managing editors, editors and journalists on the reporting of Islam and Muslims. However, many of the insights are applicable for the reporting of other minority communities. CfMM's response is split into 2 main sections:

- Section 2: Importance of responsible reporting
- Section 3: Specific recommendations for changes to the Editors' Code

This will be followed by an Appendix with 2 parts:

- Examples of poor reporting about Islam and Muslims
- List of recommendations for ease of reference

2. Importance of responsible reporting

2.1. The purpose of this section is to briefly articulate the consequences of irresponsible reporting on Muslim communities. This issue is increasingly important given that Home Office figures show that almost half of religiously-motivated hate attacks in 2017-18 were directed at Muslims. The majority of Britons polled believe "the media" is to blame for the prejudice Muslims face in daily life in Britain.⁴ The MCB's polling of British Muslims also found 74% of respondents identified the media portrayal of Muslims as the most important issue in terms of Islamophobia. In the week after the current Prime Minister's controversial Telegraph column in August 2018 which compared veiled Muslim women to "letterboxes" and "bank robbers",⁵ hate crime incidents rose by 375 per cent".⁶ In the following weeks, 42% of street attacks referenced Boris Johnson or his words.

2.2. Claiming that the media has played no role in the growth in Islamophobia and increased hatred towards Muslims is no longer a tenable position given the wealth of academic evidence on the issue, and the lack of any evidence to the contrary:

- Research by the University of Cambridge concluded that mainstream media reporting about Muslims is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility toward Muslims in Britain.⁷
- Research by the University of Leicester suggested that "Politicians and media fuel hate crime in Britain."⁸
- Findings of an Islamophobia Roundtable in Stockholm showing that the regular association of Islam and Muslims with crime and terror in the media and on the internet is vital to the spread of Islamophobic rhetoric.⁹

⁴ <https://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MEND-Islamophobia-Poll-October-2018-1.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/>

⁶ <https://www.tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Tell%20MAMA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20-%20Normalising%20Hate.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/media-fuelling-rising-hostility-towards-muslims-in-britain>

⁸ <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2016/june/politicians-and-media-fuel-hate-crime-in-britain-2019-say-university-of-leicester-experts>

⁹ https://issuu.com/drchrisallen/docs/summary_roundtable_10_june_2014

3. Recommendations for changes to the Editors' Code

3.1. The Appendix lists a number of examples of poor reporting, demonstrating that the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) has failed to deter inaccurate and distorted reporting on Muslims and Islam in the media. It is not the case that all the examples are code breaches (though many are) yet taken together, they indicate a worrying trend in the way that Muslims are being reported. Potential reasons, other than the inadequacy of the Code (for which see below) include the lack of appropriate deterrents due to weak sanctions, the unwillingness and failure of IPSO to investigate standards breaches and the lack of independence of IPSO.

3.2. This section will however focus on constructive improvements that can be made to specific clauses in the Editors' Code to help create a more effective self-regulatory regime which can prevent inaccuracies such as those in the Appendix.

3.3. Clause 1 (Accuracy):

3.3.1 Below are some examples of misleading articles that newspapers themselves have corrected or have been forced to correct, given the significance of the inaccuracies involved:

- The Times front page story "Christian child forced into Muslim foster care".¹⁰ IPSO upheld a complaint and ruled the Times "distorted" its coverage of a five-year-old Christian girl who was placed with Muslim foster carers and breached clause 1 of the editors' code of practice.¹¹
- Daily Mail's double page "Powder Keg Paris" article which claimed that 300,000 'illegal migrants' were living in a crime-ridden suburb of Saint-Denis. CfMM's Executive Director asked Marwan Muhammad, a former director of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France, to fact check the article. It was removed online following a lengthy Twitter thread that raised more than a dozen issues with the piece.¹²
- Mail on Sunday's story on "Scandal of the mini cab predators" falsely accused a minicab licencing officer of acting as a "fixer" for paedophile taxi drivers in Rochdale. The newspaper had to pay £180,000 in damages to Wajed Iqbal.
- Daily Telegraph online had to publish an apology and correction after wrongly reporting that the police were investigating Ahammed Hussain, the Leader of the Scout Group at the Lewisham Islamic Centre. The Telegraph claimed he had segregated the Scout group by gender, in breach of the Scouts Association rules, and had promoted Muslim values and extremist views to scout members in ways that contradicted the Scouts commitment to British values and gave rise to safeguarding concerns. The newspaper had to pay him damages and costs.
- The Times had to apologise and pay damages to an imam who questioned the Conservative leadership candidates about Islamophobia during a televised BBC debate in June 2019. The Times falsely accused him of having anti-Semitic and extremist views.¹³
- The Mail Online and The Sun both claimed an Afghan migrant murdered his girlfriend "because she refused to convert to Islam" when in fact Ahmed S had killed her in a fit of jealousy after she had broken up with him and begun a new relationship. The Sun removed the story after a complaint from the CfMM¹⁴ and the Mail Online made a clarification in an updated version of the article and apologised for any confusion.¹⁵

¹⁰ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/christian-child-forced-into-muslim-foster-care-by-tower-hamlets-council-3gcp6l8cs>

¹¹ <https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=20480-17>

¹² <https://twitter.com/MarwanMuhammad/status/1025786653040889856>

¹³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/corrections-and-clarifications-5phnn0xh2>

¹⁴ <https://cfmm.org.uk/corrections/sun-removes-false-reporting-on-murder-in-germany/>

¹⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6673297/Failed-Afghan-asylum-seeker-stabbed-girlfriend-death-jailed-life-Germany.html>

- The Spectator claimed that “there are an estimated 32,000 Muslims eager to commit the next terror atrocity” in September 2017. Following a complaint by Miqdaad Versi, IPSO ruled that The Spectator’s claim was “significantly inaccurate”¹⁶

3.3.2. **Headlines:** Newspapers often attract readers to specific stories through powerful but sometimes sensationalist or misleading headlines, particularly within tabloid newspapers. Such forms of journalism are part and parcel of how newspapers work. In addition, headlines cannot always incorporate the entire story and often have to be abridged – this is a reality for any news publisher. For this reason, the Editors’ Code book makes clear that there is some latitude for headlines in relation to accuracy and that they should not be considered in isolation. Although that is reasonable, it has its shortcomings.

Despite an apparently misleading headline, one way in which the overall piece would not be considered to be misleading would be if sub-headlines (in bullet points, for example) or the opening paragraph made the position clear. In addition, the Code already requires any claim in the headline to be supported by the text of the article.

The reality of the world we live in, however, makes even these methods insufficient to meet the requirements of accuracy and of preventing the reader being misled. Headlines shape a story and often change the way the reader thinks¹⁷ and therefore may mislead the reader when read in isolation. Headlines are often seen in passing in supermarkets, on forecourts etc who will not go and read the whole article, but who will remember the headline. Social media plays an increasingly important role in the consumption of news.¹⁸ Uncontextualized and misleading headlines are often shared without the rest of the article.

Consider a small selection of highly misleading headlines CfMM has in its database:

- “Janbaz Tarin appears in court charged with killing Sharia Law wife and her mum while they ‘screamed like animals’” (The Sun).¹⁹ The fact that the couple had a religious wedding ceremony and highlighting it in the headline gave it more importance than its actual relevance to the story. The Sun removed references to Sharia Law in its headline following a complaint by CfMM.
- “The BRITISH hotels propped-up by Islamic torture – Celebs call for mass boycott” (Express)²⁰ The newspaper changed the headline and removed “Islamic torture” once CfMM pointed out that there is no such thing as “Islamic torture” and that what they were referring to were new penal codes introduced by the Kingdom of Brunei aimed at ‘persevering traditional values and family lineage.’
- “‘Duchess’ mosque’ linked with 19 terrorists” (Mail online).²¹ The headline inaccurately refers to terror suspects awaiting trial as “terrorists”.
- “Swapping the Queen’s birthday for Ramadan” (Daily Mail Australia).²² This headline wrongly attributed a change in Pepsi’s employee leave policy as exclusively for Muslims. After CfMM’s complaint they removed references to the Queen’s Birthday being swapped for Ramadan and removed references to Muslims and Islam.
- “NAILED DOWN: Islamist Indian cleric threatens to target Muslim women who wear nail polish” (The Sun).²³ This article is misleading and inaccurate. Nowhere in the article is there a mention of him threatening women. He merely gives a legal opinion about women not being able to wear nail polish when praying.
- “Muslim-only swimming pools and university ‘safe spaces’ all BANNED:” (Daily Mail Australia).²⁴ In a story about a local MP’s policy manifesto to overhaul anti-discriminatory laws, Daily Mail Australia

¹⁶ <https://www.mend.org.uk/spectators-claim-32000-muslims-eager-commit-next-terror-atrocity-deemed-significantly-inaccurate-ips/>

¹⁷ <https://www.newyorker.com/science/aria-konnikova/headlines-change-way-think>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36528256>

¹⁹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7140509/solihull-murder-janbaz-tarin-sharia-law-killing-wife-mum/>

²⁰ <https://cfmm.org.uk/corrections/express-co-uk-headline-amended-to-remove-islamic-torture/>

²¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6425829/Duchess-mosque-linked-19-terrorists.html>

²² <https://cfmm.org.uk/corrections/daily-mail-australia-changes-pepsi-holiday-headline/>

²³ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7664734/islamist-indian-cleric-threatens-to-target-muslim-women-who-wear-nail-polish-and-trim-their-fingernails-in-fatwa-against-un-islamic-grooming/>

²⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6416753/One-Nation-candidate-Mark-Latham-wants-ban-Segregated-swimming-pools-university-safe-spaces.html>

published an incorrect headline and misleading image. Nowhere in the article is evidence provided of “Muslim only” pools. Even though the council says that the privacy curtain was installed “following significant ‘community’ demand, and not just from Muslim women”, the article claims that it was installed “to shield Muslim women”. Following a complaint by CfMM, the headline and article were amended but the accompanying image was not removed.

- “Brit Imam says Muslims should ‘aspire to be like’ Qassem Soleimani at London memorial” (Daily Mirror)²⁵, and “British Imam says Muslims should ‘aspire to be like’ Qassem Soleimani in tribute to ‘martyred’ general at London Islamic Centre” (Mail Online). Both publications erroneously referred to the speaker as the Imam in their headlines. In fact, he is the chair of an unrelated charity, and is not officially connected to the mosque. However, CfMM staff pointed out the mistake and the Mail Online changed its headline.²⁶

Recommendation 1: Wherever the Press chooses to publish a headline, care should be taken to ensure that such all headlines are not inaccurate or misleading.

This could be done through the use of appropriate caveats, identifying the source or making clear that it is conjecture and not fact. If not, it should not appear in the publication.

3.3.2. **Breaking news:** As the Editors’ Codebook notes, “when you are writing the ‘first draft of history’ it can be difficult to see clearly through the fog of breaking news. But that is no excuse for reckless or sloppy journalism”²⁷.

Unfortunately, when it comes to reporting breaking news stories, there are often a number of unverifiable claims that are reported by mainstream media organisations as each aims to be the first to “break” a specific story, sometimes without the appropriate due diligence. Such inaccurate stories, when breaking, are often shared most widely, in particular when they fit a pre-set narrative on the subject. This is particularly the case with changing headlines and headlines shared on social media.

In a number of cases, this has led to inaccurate stories that have later been corrected. For example:

- “SUPERMARKET TERROR: Gunman "screaming Allahu Akbar" opens fire in Spanish supermarket while "carrying bag filled with petrol and gunpowder" (The Sun).²⁸ This was later retracted after Spanish police and a spokesman for the supermarket denied that the gunman had shouted “Allahu-Akbar”, with a police officer stating that the suspect had spoken something in the Basque language of “Euraska.” What is noticeable is how when the alleged shouting of Allahu Akbar was dropped the attack was downgraded by The Sun from “TERROR” to “HORROR”.²⁹ Similar false stories appeared in The Mail and Express.
- “‘I FEEL BAD’ What ‘student’ gunman who stormed Quebec mosque screaming ‘Allahu Akbar’ told cops as he gave himself up after killing six” (The Sun).³⁰ UK tabloids were quick to jump to conclusions when this attack was designated a “terrorist” incident. They relied on uncorroborated witness testimonies in a live story, inaccurately stating in their headlines that the attacker shouted “Allahu Akbar” and that this was an “Islamist phrase” according to The Sun. After CfMM complained The Sun apologised and removed both false references to the story. The express.co.uk³¹ and Mail Online³² did subsequently remove references to “Allahu Akbar” but offered no acknowledgement of the initial error. The left leaning Daily Mirror also followed the lead of its right leaning counterparts in publishing the wrong details but has not removed or corrected the article to date.

²⁵ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/brit-imam-says-muslims-should-21223686>

²⁶ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7854419/Muslim-leader-says-aspires-like-Qassem-Soleimani-glowing-tribute.html>

²⁷ <http://www.editorscode.org.uk/downloads/codebook/codebook-clause-1.pdf>

²⁸ <https://twitter.com/miqdaad/status/819821028784349184/photo/1>

²⁹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2591800/gunman-opens-fire-in-spanishsupermarket-while-carrying-bag-filled-with-petrol-and-gunpowder/>

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/miqdaad/status/826483372750946304/photo/1>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/miqdaad/status/826484181874176001/photo/11>

³² <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/uk-newspaper-reports-about-attack-on-mosque-in-quebec-appalling-says-muslim-council-assistant-secretary-general>

- The “Thousand Oaks” attack saw the shooting of twelve people in California in November 2018. The ensuing coverage and subsequent reception by the public demonstrate the cost of publicising inaccuracies in a breaking news situation; both in terms of audience reach as well as the propaganda value this creates for prominent anti-Muslim figures. The Daily Express chose to report that the shooter was a “Middle Eastern man”, even though he was actually a US Marine Corps veteran named Ian Long.³³ This misreporting was shared millions of times on social media and gave ammunition to the anti-Muslim agitators and Islamophobes to use this description of the assailant to incite hate towards Muslims.
^{34, 35, 36}

There are two important requirements in such situations: firstly, inaccuracies must be fully corrected; and secondly, the inaccuracies must be acknowledged with equal prominence rather than merely deleted or with a small note at the very foot of the amended article – otherwise, the reader will have been misled.

The importance of social media should not be understated, for breaking news stories in particular. With thousands of shares of inaccurate news, it is imperative that swift steps are taken to ensure appropriate remedy – the deletion of a tweet, for example, would ensure that the “re-tweets” and “quotes” are no longer visible to the audience. There is also the need for the correction to be tweeted in the same way as the original error.

Currently, neither of these requirements are adhered to within parts of the Press:

- **Correction of inaccuracies:** For example, often in a breaking news story, a tweet may be published containing what later turns out to be false information. Those tweets are often not deleted.
- **Acknowledgement of inaccuracies:** News organisations use different methods in reporting breaking news. Some of them update the story on a rolling basis without acknowledging changes. Others publish the original story more accurately as a fresh page (but retain the false story at the original link by claiming that it was “accurate” at the time of publication) and often do not even acknowledge the initial inaccuracy.

The Code Committee should therefore consider the following additions for breaking news stories, although noting the recommendations are applicable more widely:

Recommendation 2: Any material changes to an online news story should be referenced at the top of an article e.g. We previously reported XXX. This was incorrect. It is actually YYY.

The requirement for such a clarification for inaccuracies on breaking news stories may provide additional incentive for appropriate due diligence prior to sharing uncorroborated claims.

Recommendation 3: Uncorroborated witness statements should be avoided until confirmed.

Recommendation 4: A caveat should be included in witness statements making it clear to the reader or viewer that this is the view of one or several witnesses, in order to distinguish between eyewitness accounts and accounts from what may be more reliable sources or information which is easier to verify.

³³ Jordan, F. (2018), Officers were advised that the suspect was a Middle Eastern man in his early 20s wearing all black clothing and with a beard, 08-Nov-2018 (Before and After), Article is No longer accessible (Accessed 08-Nov-2018)

³⁴ Geller, P. (2018), Twitter. [online] @PamelaGeller, Twitter.com. No Longer Available [Accessed 8 Nov. 2018]

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/prisonplanet/status/1060592893528809473>

³⁶ Loomer, L. (2018). Twitter. [online] @LauraLoomer Twitter.com. 6:26 AM 08 Nov 2018 No Longer Available [Accessed 8 Nov. 2018]

Recommendation 5: All false stories should be removed with an acknowledgement of the removal. This includes stories published on social media.

In relation to the publication of corrections on social media, consider the following false headlines shared by the far right:

- "Gunman screaming 'Allahu Akbar' opens fire in Spanish supermarket" (Daily Mail), shared by Tommy Robinson³⁷
- "Enclaves of Islam in Britain see UK as 75% Muslim" (Sunday Times) shared by the English Defence League³⁸ and Britain First.³⁹

Recommendation 6: Corrections and apologies for false reporting, even if not intentional, should be published on all media on which they were initially reported, including social media i.e. corrections should also be published on Twitter if the original story was published on Twitter.

3.3.3. Significance: Currently under the Code, only a "significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected". The determination as to what constitutes significant is very subjective, and it is unclear why there should be any objection to the request that any inaccuracy should be corrected when pointed out. If it is significant enough to have been complained about then it should be corrected.

Three examples that can illustrate how subjective the term "significant" is, are:

- The inaccurate headline "'WHIRWIND OF HATE' Jewish students attacked by pro-Muslim Palestine baying mob ON UK SOIL" (Daily Express).⁴⁰ There was no justification for "pro-Muslim" in this headline and there is little doubt as to its inaccuracy. However, IPSO quite outrageously ruled that this inaccuracy did not give a "significantly misleading impression of events". As a result, there was no correction.
- The inaccurate headline "Schoolboy put on anti-terrorist scheme for saying Muslims shouldn't be allowed to wear burka" (Daily Express).⁴¹ One of the inaccuracies about this article was the conflation of burka with niqab (the term actually used by the police) yet outrageously IPSO ruled "the discrepancy between a niqab and a burka was not significant".
- The inaccurate claim about a mosque by Ms Katie Hopkins that "A British Imam was hosted by a mosque in Orlando, just days before the attack, saying that death is the answer to the problem of homosexuality, facilitating the spread of hate" (Daily Mail).⁴² As has been accepted by all parties, this mosque did not host this individual just days before the attack at the gay nightclub, nor did such a statement get made at the mosque. Yet again outrageously IPSO's Committee did not "consider that the inaccuracy in relation to the date of the Imam's visit to Orlando was significant: the timing of the speech at the mosque was not central to any of the arguments made in the article".

In all three of these cases, the inaccuracy was clear, unambiguous, and significant in terms of their effect on the views of Muslims held by some readers. Whether or not it was deemed significant, given that concern has been raised on the issue, a correction does not seem to be hugely burdensome on the publications. This problem can be solved by a simple Code amendment.

³⁷ <https://twitter.com/TRobinsonNewEra/status/819256663198801925>

³⁸ <https://twitter.com/EDLofficialpage/status/805332303065006080>

³⁹ <https://twitter.com/BritainFirst/status/805804353021886464>

⁴⁰ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/726468/UCL-Jewish-students-hide-pro-Palestine-protest-Hen-Mazzig>

⁴¹ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/750347/Schoolboy-anti-terror-burka-Muslim-women-West-Yorkshire-Channel-Prevent>

⁴² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3641118/KATIE-HOPKINS-won-t-Left-admit-inconvenient-truth-Islam-hates-love.html>

Recommendation 7: All inaccuracies which have been the subject of complaint should be corrected. Any value judgement about “significance” can be dealt with under the need for equivalent prominence.

Furthermore, in the third example, the requirement of the inaccuracy to be “central” to the argument being made in the piece seems to be an additional criterion in the determination of “significant”, which was apparently invented by IPSO’s Complaints Committee. Whilst we believe there is no need for a new test of “centrality” in relation to determining significance (and significance is too high a threshold), if this is really a requirement of the Code, it should be made clear in the Code.

Recommendation 8: Greater detail should be provided as to what constitutes “significant” in a complaint about inaccuracy.

Recommendation 9: All inaccuracies in headlines should be considered “significant”. If it was considered important enough to be in a headline, then it is clearly significant and central.

3.3.4. Due prominence: The Code currently requires corrections to be (in clause 1, and adjudications elsewhere in the Code) to be made with “due prominence”. Over and above setting the record straight, the purpose of any correction must be to mitigate the impact of the original inaccuracy by ensuring, as far as is reasonably possible, that those who saw the initial inaccuracy, see the correction.

With that in mind, equal or equivalent prominence seems to reflect that goal more accurately, in particular:

- **Size of the correction:** If there is an inaccuracy on a headline, the headline of the correction should be of equal size.
- **Page of the correction:** If the inaccuracy was on page 2, the correction should be on page 2.
- **Author of the correction:** If there is an inaccuracy within an individual journalist’s column, the correction should be within that column so their readers will see the correction (even if that is “further back” in the paper than where the corrections column is;
- **Medium of the correction:** As outlined above if the inaccuracy was published on social media, the correction should also be on social media; and
- **Equal prominence of online corrections:** Currently the IPSO requirement is that corrections be published only on the “home page” of a newspaper website and they are invariably to be found more than 40 screen scrolls down.⁴³

Recommendation 10: Any correction (or right to reply) should have equal prominence to the original inaccuracy. This should include the same prominence on the home page as the original story, and the equivalent publication on social media, with the placement in the same position as the original story for regular features such as columns.

⁴³ For example, consider how the correction to a piece by Trevor Kavanagh of the Sun was on the home page 66 page downs from the top (see [here](#))

3.4. Clause 12 (Discrimination)

3.4.1. **Discrimination against groups:** Currently, the Press is not allowed to discriminate against an individual but is allowed to do so against a group, organisation or institution, with one exception that will be covered in section 3.4.2 below.

It is of course right and proper that the “Code attempts to balance the freedom of the individual with the right to freedom of expression”⁴⁴ and that any serious restrictions on freedom of expression should be very carefully thought through.

However, it is quite extraordinary that under the Code as it currently stands, an article may breach the Public Order Act against incitement to racial or religious hatred but may still not be in breach of the Editors’ Code.

Lord Leveson’s recommendation⁴⁵ that groups with protected characteristics should be covered by anti-discrimination provisions within the Code, should not be particularly controversial.

Recommendation 11: A new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the incitement to hatred against any group with protected characteristics.

Furthermore, given the purpose of the Code is to encourage the highest standards within the media, safeguards should exist that have lower thresholds than staying within the criminal law.

A restriction on “levelling abuse at vulnerable people” would be preferable so as to prevent columnists using newspapers as a loudspeaker to abuse any vulnerable group without a public interest justification. To safeguard freedom of speech it should be noted that:

- The term “levelling of abuse” is higher than the terms “prejudicial and pejorative language” already protecting individuals in clause 12.
- The term “levelling abuse” would obviously not cover situations where the abuse was not intentional (if such circumstances exist).
- Mere insult would still be permitted.
- It would not cover occasions where offence is taken by a group without an objective judgement being needed that abuse had been levelled.
- Guidance should be provided to clarify that critique of a faith (in terms of tenets, beliefs or practices) is materially different from abuse of its adherents.

Recommendation 12: A new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the levelling of abuse against any vulnerable group.

3.4.2. **Threshold for representative group complaints on discrimination:** Currently, a representative group appears to be allowed to make a complaint, for example on the inclusion of a protected characteristic when not genuinely relevant to a story in relation to an individual. However even this has not been respected by IPSO as in the case of the article by Rod Liddle about Emily Brothers.⁴⁶ Trans Media Watch were required to obtain the consent of Emily Brothers at every step which meant that

⁴⁴ Editors’ Code of Practice Committee, FAQs, Question 6

⁴⁵ Recommendation 38 from Lord Leveson’s report

⁴⁶ <https://www.ipso.co.uk/news-press-releases/press-releases/ipso-finds-against-the-sun-on-discriminatory-rod-liddle-column/>

they were her agents not a group with standing to make a complaint themselves even when the breach was objectively apparent.

However, there is an additional very high threshold for a representative group making such complaints: “there is a substantial public interest in the Regulator considering the complaint from a representative group affected by the alleged breach”.

It is unclear why such a high threshold of “substantial public interest” is required even when a significant breach of the Code has been established. It was not part of Lord Leveson’s recommendations. Consider the irrelevant use of the term Muslim in the following examples from the Daily Mail:

- “‘Millionaire’ Muslim woman who claimed she was a single mum so she could live in public housing now wants LEGAL AID to appeal her sentence - as she leaves court clutching a Coach designer handbag” (Daily Mail).⁴⁷
- “Muslim taxi driver, 45, accused of sexually assaulting a female passenger ‘several times’ and stopping her from leaving the cab” (Daily Mail).⁴⁸
- “Both Muslim women showed no emotion as they were jailed - the mother for two-and-half years and her friend for four years - by a judge who criticised their ‘deliberate scapegoating’ of the boy.” (Daily Mail).⁴⁹

Any breach of the code is in the public interest to identify and report, and it is unnecessary to prevent complaints being made by creating the additional subjective hurdle of “substantial”. In most cases, such as the above, the individual is in no position to make a complaint themselves and creating a hurdle for complaints to be made on their behalf exploits their vulnerability.

Recommendation 13: A representative group should be allowed to make a complaint on the grounds of discrimination against an individual without requiring to prove there is substantial public interest in the complaint being considered, and without having to secure the explicit consent of the individual.

Recommendation 14: Third party complaints should be accepted not only by “representative groups” but by any member of the public.

Recommendation 15: Institutions and organisations should be included along with individuals under Clause 12 (e.g. schools, charities, places of worship, companies and other legal entities).

Recommendation 16: Financial penalties should be imposed for the worst breaches/repeated breaches

⁴⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4206588/Millionaire-Muslim-woman-wants-legal-aid.html>

⁴⁸ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4115380/Muslim-taxi-driver-fronts-court-allegedly-assaulting-female-passenger-Leichhardt-Sydney.html>

⁴⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3703204/Mother-friend-jailed-SELLOTAPING-five-year-old-son-naked-cupboard-went-seaside-older-sisters.html>

Appendix 1 – Examples of poor reporting about Islam and Muslims

1. Since 2006 academics observed how global media coverage has represented Muslims as underdeveloped, illiterate, homeless and orchestrators of failed states. More recent examples have led one mainstream commentator to declare that reporting on Muslims has gone from dog-whistling to fear-mongering, to complete fabrication without consequences.⁵⁰ Almost one in four published online articles (23%) misrepresent an aspect of Muslim behaviour or belief with right leaning and religious publications being the most antagonistic.⁵¹

It is recognised that not all of these examples can or perhaps even should be regulated against, but together they demonstrate a serious concern given the evidence demonstrated in section 2 above.

2. Examples of **outright misleading articles** that newspapers have corrected or been forced to correct, given the significance of the inaccuracies involved, include:

- “1 in 5 Brit Muslims’ sympathy for jihadis” (The Sun)⁵²
- “Ramadan train driver in crash: Rail accident experts claimed his fast caused the rush-hour derailment that led to three days of disruption” (The Sun)^{*53}
- “Isolated British Muslims are so cut off from the rest of society that they see the UK as 75 per cent Islamic, shock report reveals” (Mail on Sunday)^{*54}
- “Islamist school can segregate boys and girls” (The Sunday Times)^{*55}
- “Welcome to east London: Muslim gang slashes tyres of immigration-raid van before officers showered with eggs from high rise” (Mail on Sunday)^{*56}
- “UK mosques fundraising for terror” (Daily Star Sunday)^{*57}

(Starred items corrected following complaints by Executive Director of Centre for Media monitoring).

3. Parts of the press often **conflate Muslims with violence, danger and criminality.**

- “Cut out and keep guide: Here’s what terrorists look like” (The Sun)⁵⁸
- “Muslim sex grooming” (The Times)⁵⁹
- “Mum-of-four butchered while caring for her young kids as cops probe Islamic honour killing lead” (Mail Online)⁶⁰
- “Imran Khan warns of mass violence if world ignores ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Kashmir” (Express)⁶¹
- “Muslim husband who left his wife, 25, to slowly die over five days after being stabbed and gagged will serve his full sentence after losing his appeal - as mum says her daughter was a victim of an 'Islamic honour killing'.” (Mail Online)⁶²
- “Imam beaten to death in sex grooming town” (The Times)⁶³
- “‘WHO ARE THE BOMBERS?’ Ryanair boss sparks outrage by demanding extra anti-terror checks on Muslim men as ‘that’s where the threat is’” (The Sun)⁶⁴
- “COP CALL OUT Scots Muslim who sparked terror scare in Highlands has house searched by cops again after anonymous tip-off” (The Sun)⁶⁵
- “‘Allah will protect me:’ Chilling moment knifeman mutters to himself while lying in the back of a police wagon after Sydney rampage” (Mail Online – Daily mail Australia)⁶⁶
- FLU FEARS Muslim parents refuse ‘non-halal’ children’s flu vaccine sparking outbreak fears” (The Sun)⁶⁷

⁵⁰ <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/media/2018/09/the-times-muslim-christian-child-foster-care-tower-hamlets-court-ruling-ipsa>

⁵¹ <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CfMM-Quarterly-Report.pdf>

⁵² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/ipsa-sun-british-muslims-story-headline-significantly-misleading-a6953771.html>

⁵³ <https://www.imediaethics.org/no-train-driver-didnt-crash-ramadan-fast-uk-sun-unpublishes/>

⁵⁴ <https://politicalscrapbook.net/2016/12/mail-retracts-claim-brit-muslims-think-75-of-uk-is-islamic-but-times-and-the-sun-still-stand-by-it/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamist-school-can-segregate-boys-and-girls-zk8ztfqd0>

⁵⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/sep/20/mail-on-sunday-apologises-for-muslim-gangs-attack-immigration-van-story>

⁵⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/apr/04/daily-star-sunday-uk-mosques-ipsa>

⁵⁸ See Appendix for an image or [here](#): after discussion, the Sun decided to take no action and refused to even acknowledge the concern.

⁵⁹ <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/muslim-council-britain-writes-times-following-incendiary-headline/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/mail-online-breached-editors-code-with-inaccurate-islamic-honour-killing-headline/>

⁶¹ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1166486/Imran-khan-ethnic-cleansing-India-Modi-Independence-day>

⁶² <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8080791/Muslim-husband-Mohamed-Naddaf-left-wife-25-slowly-die-loses-appeal.html>

⁶³ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/20/times-apologise-rochdale-sex-grooming-town-murder-imam>

⁶⁴ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11016741/ryanair-boss-extra-airport-terror-checks/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/4832188/scottish-muslim-alex-tiffin-police-search/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7354035/Sydney-attacker-police-van-slashed-sex-workers-throat.html>

⁶⁷ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9604716/muslim-halal-children-flu-vaccine-outbreak/>

4. Sensationalism and scaremongering about the apparent threat posed by Muslims is also widespread.

- “New £5 notes could be BANNED by religious groups as Bank CAN'T promise they're Halal” (Daily Express)⁶⁸
- “BBC puts Muslims before you” (Daily Star)⁶⁹
- “Halal secret of Pizza Express” (The Sun)⁷⁰
- “Muslim vote could decide 25 per cent of seats” (Daily Mail).⁷¹
- “The Government is proposing laws which risk making criticism of Islam a hate crime”⁷² IPSO upheld a complaint by CfMM.
- “European courts risk corroding free speech to create special status for Islam” (Telegraph)⁷³
- “We know why the Muslims are ant-Semitic” (Spectator)⁷⁴
- “Younger sister of Jewish schoolboy, 12, who forced to kiss the feet of a Muslim classmate in a Melbourne Park is sent a sickening taunt online” (Mail Online, Daily Mail Australia)⁷⁵
- “Jihad is as contagious as covid-19 in the Maldives” (Economist)⁷⁶
- “The burka is the fifth column...we will wake in the Islamic Republic of Britain” (Times)⁷⁷

5. Underplaying the victimisation of Muslim communities

- “China shuts down three Muslim mosques due to “illegal religious education” during police raid” (Mail Online)⁷⁸
- “Muslim fury grows after protest deaths in Indian neighbourhood” (Mail Online)⁷⁹

6. Other problematic articles mentioning the person’s faith or religious practices:

- “‘I lost my boyfriend to Islam’: Woman reveals the heart-breaking toll of her boxing-champion partners radicalisation behind bars – as he vows to leave her for a Muslim” (Mail Online, Daily Mail Australia)⁸⁰
- “PILGRIMAGE HORROR Ashura festival stampede kills at least 30 and injures 100 during Muslim bloodletting ceremony in Iraq” (The Sun)⁸¹
- Devout Muslims slice open heads with swords during Ashura festival ritual” (Mirror)⁸²
- “Stampede at Muslim festival kills 31 – at least 100 hurt in crush” (Daily Star)⁸³
- “Finsbury park mosque terrorist ‘batters Muslim paedophile in jail attack while shouting ‘f..... Allahu Akbar’” (Mail Online)⁸⁴
- “Two women caught ‘using Muslim garments to steal food in Asda’ – before exposing their underwear” (Mail Online)⁸⁵
- “Don’t come to work: Job on the line for Muslim convert prison psychologist after she failed to tell her new boss that she was struck off after love affairs with two convicted rapists” (Mail Online)⁸⁶
- “Strict Muslim father-of-nine who imposed ‘traditional’ Islamic regime on family after two of his daughters refused arranged marriages faces jail for psychological abuse” (Mail Online)⁸⁷

Given the small selection of examples shared in this document, it is little wonder that according to reports, the British population believe that the current British Muslim population is 15%, over three times the reality⁸⁸ and that more than half of Britons now regard Muslims as a threat to the UK.⁸⁹

⁶⁸ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/express-corrects-story-suggesting-muslims-wanted-to-ban-new-fivers-but-ipso-rules-no-breach-of-code/>

⁶⁹ <http://www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk/bbc-put-muslims-before-you/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/799401/halal-secret-of-pizza-express/>

⁷¹ <http://www.perspecsnews.com/read/politics/rising-islamophobia-in-uk/HyloRkamXb/HJl3ZXKU7Z>

⁷² <https://cfmm.org.uk/corrections/the-sun-kavanagh-complaint-upheld/>

⁷³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/27/european-courts-risk-corroding-free-speech-create-special-status/>

⁷⁴ <https://twitter.com/migdaad/status/990995495815450625>

⁷⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7863173/Sister-Jewish-schoolboy-forced-kiss-fee-Muslim-classmate-Melbourne-bullied-online.html>

⁷⁶ <https://twitter.com/migdaad/status/1242363218728833025>

⁷⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/taj-hargey-interview-the-burka-is-a-fifth-column-we-will-wake-in-the-islamic-republic-of-britain-5wqhk0q8m>

⁷⁸ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6546953/China-shuts-three-Muslim-mosques-illegal-religious-education-police-raid.html>

⁷⁹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-7828455/Muslim-fury-grows-protest-deaths-Indian-neighborhood.html>

⁸⁰ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6611127/Womans-life-torn-apart-partner-turns-radical-Islam-jailplanning-marry-muslim.html>

⁸¹ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9901514/ashura-festival-stampede-kills-at-least-30-and-injures-100-during-muslim-blood-letting-ceremony-in-iraq/>

⁸² <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/devout-muslims-slice-open-heads-20002692>

⁸³ <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/world-news/breaking-stampede-muslim-festival-kills-19973024>

⁸⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7397141/Finsbury-Park-mosque-terrorist-batters-Muslim-paedophile-jail-attack.html>

⁸⁵ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7331497/Womans-life-torn-apart-partner-turns-radical-Islam-jailplanning-marry-muslim.html>

⁸⁶ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7227289/Joanne-Senior-Skaf-gang-psychologists-Malek-Fahd-Islamic-School-job-investigation.html>

⁸⁷ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7156375/Muslim-father-imposed-traditional-Islamic-regime-family-faces-jail-psychological-abuse.html>

⁸⁸ Europeans greatly overestimate Muslim population, poll shows, Guardian, December 2016

⁸⁹ 7/7 Bombings Anniversary Poll Shows More Than Half Of Britons See Muslims As A Threat, Huffington Post, July 2015

Appendix 2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Wherever the Press chooses to publish a headline, care should be taken to ensure that such all headlines are not inaccurate or misleading.

Recommendation 2: Any material changes to an online news story should be referenced at the top of an article e.g. We previously reported XXX. This was incorrect. It is actually YYY.

Recommendation 3: Uncorroborated witness statements should be avoided until verified.

Recommendation 4: A caveat should be included in witness statements making it clear to the reader or viewer that this is the view of one or several witnesses, in order to distinguish between eyewitness accounts and accounts from what may be more reliable sources or information which is easier to verify.

Recommendation 5: All false stories should be removed with an acknowledgement of the removal. This includes stories published on social media.

Recommendation 6: Corrections and apologies for false reporting, even if not intentional, should be published on all media on which they were initially reported, including social media i.e. corrections should also be published on Twitter if the original story was published on Twitter.

Recommendation 7: All inaccuracies which have been the subject of complaint should be corrected. Any value judgement about “significance” can be dealt with under the need for equivalent prominence.

Recommendation 8: Greater detail should be provided as to what constitutes “significant” in a complaint about inaccuracy.

Recommendation 9: All inaccuracies in headlines should be considered “significant”. If it was considered important enough to be in a headline, then it is clearly significant and central.

Recommendation 10: Any correction (or right to reply) should have equal prominence to the original inaccuracy. This should include the same prominence on the home page as the original story, and the equivalent publication on social media, with the placement in the same position as the original story for regular features such as columns.

Recommendation 11: A new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the incitement to hatred against any group with protected characteristics.

Recommendation 12: A new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the levelling of abuse against any vulnerable group.

Recommendation 13: A representative group should be allowed to make a complaint on the grounds of discrimination against an individual without requiring to prove there is substantial public interest in the complaint being considered, and without having to secure the explicit consent of the individual.

Recommendation 14: Third party complaints should be accepted not only by "representative groups" but by any member of the public.

Recommendation 15: Institutions and organisations should be included along with individuals under Clause 12 (e.g. schools, charities, places of worship, companies and other legal entities).

Recommendation 16: Financial penalties should be imposed for the worst breaches/repeated breaches.