

Richard Price:

Dear Editors' Code of Practice Committee

Thank you for the chance to offer comments on how the editors' code might be revised to improve the system of self regulation of the press.

In November 2018, PressGazette reported that only "2% of British adults put a "great deal" of trust in journalists to tell the truth, according to research by YouGov and Cambridge University".

While it could be argued that the sample for the survey was small, no one can deny, as confirmed by other surveys, that this lack of trust is shared by a large proportion of the adult UK population.

This should worry the members of your committee. Perhaps it is contributing to the worrying fall in sales for national daily newspaper titles?

Trust must be earned and is easily lost when journalism becomes irresponsible. This is especially true when dangerous fake news is not only widespread but also free. And this at a time when more and more of what one would hope would be responsible and reliable sources of news are behind paywalls.

What could you do to the editors' code to make it more likely earn the respect and trust of a wider public? Here are four things that would undoubtedly help towards restoring trust in British journalism.

1. The treatment of women by some media groups is truly shocking. For example, we should all deeply regret the fact that so many dedicated female MPs, from both sides of the political spectrum, chose to stand down at the last election. Media groups should be doing far more to protect women in public life, and ordinary citizens, from trolling and/or overt sexualisation. The code should be strengthened to enable this to be enforced.

2. There appears to be a big gap in the editors' code. This prohibits groups of people who have been subjected to racist, religious, sexist or otherwise abusive attack from making a complaint to IPSO.

There is an urgent need for reform of the code to plug this gap.

3. When we buy a newspaper or subscribe through a paywall we expect to be told whether information that is presented as news or comment is the work of an independent journalist or the result of a monetary deal with a private company that, for example, might hope to benefit from favourable coverage. Advertising is fine, right and proper as a way of funding the media. But we need to be able to tell the difference between advertising and genuine independent journalism. The code needs to make it clear to editors that they must make it possible for readers to make this distinction.

4. Lastly, the code should be strengthened to insist that apologies and corrections (we all make mistakes) should be prominently displayed in such a way that at least as many readers are likely see them as are likely to have read the offending or incorrect item in the first place. So, if the offending item was on the front page, that is where the correction or apology should be prominently placed. We have all seen too many examples of apologies or corrections for seriously misleading or inaccurate journalism being buried deeply away where few will see them.

Kind regards

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