

Editor's Code submission:

Clause 6 needs to be strengthened to ensure that children are properly protected, even if they are in a public place. It is not right for The Sun to make a photograph of a tearful Kai Rooney the main element of its front page with an insult to his father. It should be a requirement that specific permission should be sought for the use of photographs of minors and it should be open to others, not simply the parents, to complain if that rule is broken. In an instance such as the one above, Wayne and Colleen Rooney might well feel that it would cause more trouble to complain. Newspapers are powerful and can be bullying. That is why others should be able to speak up and be heard on the child's behalf.



Clause 12 needs to be amended to encompass discrimination against groups rather than simply individuals. Again, it should be open for people not personally involved to complain.

Public discourse in this country has become very ugly, particularly in the wake of the EU referendum campaign, and it is being exacerbated by some newspapers in the name of a “free Press” or “freedom of speech”.

Those of us who care about the free Press need Ipsos to work, but it does itself no favours by failing to rid itself of the legacy of its predecessor.

To reject the complaints about the “cockroaches” column by Katie Hopkins and Kelvin MacKenzie’s hijab attack on Fatima Manji diminishes public trust. If such articles are acceptable according to the code, then the code needs to be changed. It’s difficult. Yes, we need free speech; no, people do not have a right not to be offended, but a way needs to be found for the profession to say this is not all

right. A longtime friend and colleague who was for many years a very senior executive at the Sun described the Hopkins column as “the single most irresponsible article I have seen in 40 years of journalism”. You had record complaints about it. Yet it did not breach the code.

I wrote a blog urging people to send submissions to this consultation, saying that if they want change, they need to speak up. The response was overwhelmingly exactly what I feared the response to this exercise would be: “What’s the point? They should sort it out themselves. They’re just the PCC in another guise.” People don’t have faith in you and this should be a worry.

It is unfortunate that there is no link to this consultation on the home page of the Ipso website or on the pages relating to the code. Instead, if you click on “consultation” you encounter a page of Trumpesque bluster by Paul Dacre about how great the code is at the moment and his “contempt for so-called liberals who want to manacle the press”. Is this really the approach that is going to win over the sceptics?

Newspapers are in decline. As they constantly tell us, they are regulated whereas social media is not. Why shouldn’t papers be able to print the sort of things that people write on Twitter or below the line on websites? Because they present themselves as the authoritative voice. Because they keep saying that they are the guardians of democracy, the organs that “hold the powerful to account”. They see themselves as above the rabble of the internet and should earn that position by ensuring that their contributions to the national conversation does not sink to the level of the unregulated mob.

Rather than tinker with the code - which, apart from the two specific clauses mentioned above, is reasonable – Ipso and the code committee would do better to look at what is going wrong with the Press, why people do not have faith in it, and how it could restore the industry’s reputation.

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