

**NUJ submission to IPSO Editor's Code of Practice public consultation  
March 2023**

1. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 28,000 members working in broadcasting, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography, and digital media.
2. The NUJ is mainly concerned with members' pay and conditions of work and defending press freedom. A substantial part of the NUJ's work concerns professional practice and ethics. The NUJ Ethics Council offers advice to members, produces guidelines and considers complaints. This work is complemented by the NUJ Equalities Councils.
3. The NUJ has always been involved in the professional concerns of members, introducing its code of conduct for journalists into the UK in 1936. This was significantly amended in the early seventies to produce a code that is recognisable in the modern NUJ code and IPSO's own code of practice.

**Clause 12, discrimination**

4. Clause 12 of the code limits discrimination complaints to identified individuals, preventing complaints being brought about discrimination against racial, ethnic or other groups unless there is inaccuracy involved. Despite this IPSO regularly receives about eight percent of its complaints under the discrimination clause, coming third only to complaints about inaccuracy and privacy. Only around 19 percent of these are upheld. Inaccuracy makes up 85 or so percent of complaints each year but it is impossible to tell how many of these concern discrimination nor how many of those were upheld, although only 20 percent of such complaints are upheld on average. 31 of all complaints made to IPSO in 2022 concern discrimination but only 4 have so far been upheld and 5 cases resolved. This is not an indication that our national press is free of racism, sexism or ableism or that this is a true representation of factual presentation of the news.

5. Minoritised groups concerned about discrimination and scapegoating made strong representations to the Leveson Inquiry; essentially discrimination is often at its worst when attacking a group whether over race, age, gender, disability or sexuality. These concerns have not abated with recent coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in particular and other groups at risk of marginalisation. This includes people experiencing poverty. Changes to the industry with more online content and the widespread use of social media means that potentially discriminatory headlines and reporting are amplified quickly and widely.
  
6. IPSO's Corporate Strategy 2023-2028 identifies five strategic principles that will underpin their work, the fifth stating that IPSO will;  
"Be more accessible and accountable to a diverse public."

It is hard to envision how IPSO intends to be more accountable to a diverse public when it consistently refuses to consider the role of the regulator in protecting minoritised groups from discrimination by amending clause 12 to cover groups and individuals.

7. The code should be expanded to cover discrimination of minoritised groups.

### **Providing guidance**

8. IPSO provides guidance on a range of subjects including, suicide, transgender, sexual offences and religion including signposting to external resources.
  
9. There is a strong argument for reporting guidelines to steer editorial approaches to reporting on issues such as disability and domestic abuse where poor reporting can perpetuate and validate stereotypes and discrimination that can have very real detrimental consequences for people's lives. There is an intrinsic relationship between poverty and other minoritised identities and IPSO should consider providing advice on reporting poverty.

10. More thought should be given in the code to issues of harm and offence, giving the opportunity for editors to pause and think about these issues in reference to the public interest. The public is sufficiently concerned about issues of harm and offence for parliament to legislate for them with regards to broadcasting so it seems reasonable for the regulator of responsible publications to consider the issues more thoroughly in its code and accompanying guidance.

### **General**

11. It remains problematic that the code is drawn up and then managed only by employers and does not involve other stakeholders – the public, journalists or their representatives. That this is a publishers' code rather than a journalism code, is inevitable and does not, of itself, prevent the IPSO from operating effectively. Public consultations such as this are welcome.

12. However, to have the whole of regulatory oversight built by employers, funded by employers around a code designed by employers inevitably leads the IPSO to become, like the PCC before it, a very limited complaints-handling body used simply to give the appearance that publishers care about providing their readers good journalism rather than being concerned purely with profits.