

## **COMPLAINT ADJUDICATION**

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**Ashley Borges**  
**and**  
**Evolve Politics**

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### **Clause 1. Accuracy**

**1.1. Publishers must take all reasonable steps to ensure accuracy.**

**1.4. Whilst free to be partisan, publishers must not misrepresent or distort the facts.**

**Complaint Dismissed**

**No breach of Code**

**Before IMPRESS Regulatory Committee A**

**David Leigh, Pam Vick, Shelina Janmohamed, Walter Merricks (Chair)**

**10 February 2020**

## 1. Summary of Complaint

- 1.1. The Complainant is Ashley Borges, a third-party seeking to ensure the accuracy of published information. He has confirmed to IMPRESS that he is not an affected party or the representative of an affected party.
- 1.2. The Respondent is Evolve Media Limited, which publishes online as Evolve Politics and is a news website covering current affairs that has been regulated by IMPRESS since 23 November 2017.
- 1.3. The complaint concerns the accuracy of a tweet posted by Evolve Politics on 27 November 2019. The @evolvepolitics Twitter profile page displays the Evolve Politics logo and strapline “truly independent news, media, option”.
- 1.4. The complaint is assessed against the IMPRESS Standards Code, the relevant clauses are:

*Clause 1 (Accuracy)*

*1.1. Publishers must take all reasonable steps to ensure accuracy.*

*1.4. Whilst free to be partisan, publishers must not misrepresent or distort the facts.*

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The tweet read as follows:

*“The Conservative Party have no disciplinary process*

*The Conservative Party refuse to release figures on suspensions and expulsions*

*The Conservative Party consistently readmit racists*

*Labour have the most comprehensive disciplinary process of any political party in the world.”*

- 2.2. The tweet was one of 29 tweets published by Evolve Politics on 27 November 2019 (not including re-tweets). The tweet had received 11 comments, 370 retweets and 698 likes as of 17 January 2020.

### 3. The Complaint

- 3.1. The Complainant contacted Evolve Politics on 3 December 2019 and made a complaint on the grounds of accuracy. Evolve Politics dismissed the complaint and informed the Complainant that they could escalate their complaint to IMPRESS. A full copy of correspondence between the parties was provided to the Regulatory Committee.
- 3.2. The Complainant subsequently made a complaint to IMPRESS, and after seeking clarification of the basis for the complaint, IMPRESS confirmed the substance of the complaint as follows, a full copy of which was provided to the Committee.
- 3.3. The Complainant argues that a breach of Clause 1.1 of the IMPRESS Standards Code has occurred. The Complainant disputes the accuracy of the claim made in the final line of the tweet that *Labour have the most comprehensive disciplinary process of any political party in the world.*"
- 3.4. While the Complainant did not provide any specific evidence to directly dispute the claim, he does not consider that the Publisher took all reasonable steps to ensure accuracy, including researching a sufficient number of disciplinary processes from other political parties around the world. In support of his position, he notes that the Publisher did not research the disciplinary process of all political parties in English speaking countries and did not research the disciplinary process of any political parties in non-English speaking countries.
- 3.5. Regarding Clause 1.4., the Complainant argues that the final line of the tweet was presented as fact and that the Publisher misrepresented the facts to further its world view or partisan view. The Complainant considers that the Publisher did not accurately represent information about the disciplinary process of other political parties from around the world.

### 4. Response of Publication

- 4.1. IMPRESS invited Evolve Politics to provide additional information in response to the Complaint. The Publisher's response is summarised below, a full copy of which was provided to the Committee.
- 4.2. Regarding Clause 1.1., the Publisher says that all reasonable steps to ensure accuracy were taken. The Publisher says that the tweet was based on several years of its research into more than 21 political parties in the UK and

throughout the world, specifically in relation to disciplinary procedures that govern racism, discrimination, and antisemitism.

- 4.3. The Publisher further says that the claim was made (in part) based on its understanding that no international political party has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into their constitutions or rulebooks for use in their disciplinary processes, its understanding that no other political party around the world had a specific rule governing antisemitism and its research into the publicly available documents of three UK political parties. By comparison, the UK Labour Party had included the IHRA definition in its rules and because of this, the Publisher considered that it was accurate to claim that the disciplinary process of the UK Labour Party was the most comprehensive. Copies of political constitutions that the Publishers says it researched were provided to IMPRESS.
- 4.4. The Publisher says that the Complainant has not provided any alternative evidence to counter its claim. In the absence of such evidence, the Publisher stands by its statement as honest opinion.
- 4.5. Regarding Clause 1.4., the Publisher says that its research did not uncover evidence to counter the claim that the UK Labour Party's was the most comprehensive and therefore it did not consider that it had misrepresented the facts. Furthermore, the Publisher says that the tweet was posted in the context of ongoing media interest about how political parties deal with racism and was specially intended as a response to media coverage of antisemitism within the UK Labour Party.

## **5. Compliance with the IMPRESS Regulatory Scheme**

- 5.1. Evolve Media Ltd complied with the requirements of the IMPRESS Regulatory Scheme (Paragraph 3.2), by acknowledging the complaint within seven calendar days, issuing a final decision letter within 21 calendar days, and by informing the Complainant of their right to refer the complaint to IMPRESS.

## **6. The Committee's Findings**

- 6.1. The Committee noted that the IMPRESS Standards Code Guidance on Accuracy at paragraph 1.23 sets out that "a fact is susceptible to proof; an opinion is not" and "A reader must be able to tell from the tone, context and language whether the information represents the journalist's or someone else's

Case Ref: 0257/2019

judgment or whether it is presented as information that is true regardless of anyone's opinion about it". The Committee did not consider that the ordinary reasonable reader would regard the statements made in a standalone tweet as factual. Rather, because the tone and style of the tweet was akin to political rhetoric or sloganeering, it would be understood as an expression of the Publisher's partisan opinion. Therefore, because the claim made in the tweet was not a fact that is susceptible to proof, the Publisher had not breached the Code.