

IMPRESS CODE REVIEW

*Some brief comments from Mike Jempson,
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1. ACCURACY

There has always been a problem about use of the term 'significant'. Who determines significance, the publisher, the reporter or those directly affected by the item? Some clarity on its meaning is required. We have dealt with numerous cases in the past where the attitude of editors has been at great variance from that of the complainant/s.

In terms of both accuracy and fairness the ubiquity of the Internet allows for publication of links to credible sources relied upon by the author/s, allowing readers to follow-up if they so choose.

2. ATTRIBUTION & PLAGIARISM

It may be worth stating from the outset that plagiarism of any form is reprehensible in journalism.

It may also be worth indicating that, where appropriate, third party content providers should be adequately compensated for the use of their material.

4. DISCRIMINATION

Consideration should be given to adding the term 'health' or 'medical condition' to the list in 4.1 and 4.2.

Consideration should be given to adding the term 'civil status' to the list in 4.3 to cover issues relating to asylum-seekers, and the position of foreign nationals and migrant workers in post-Brexit Britain.

5. HARASSMENT

The term 'intimidation' requires clarification. It is one of those terms which is often a matter of perception. For example, reporters may be insufficiently aware of a person's circumstances or state of mind to appreciate that their approaches are intimidating.

5. cont.

'Doorstepping' is a perfectly legitimate journalistic practice, but may be considered intimidatory, for example. at a time of bereavement, in the aftermath a crime or court case or in the midst of unexpected /unwarranted media exposure.

It may be more appropriate to have a single clause here, eg:

'5.1 Except where justified by the public interest publishers must seek to ensure that journalists

- a. Should avoid approaches to people that might cause distress or alarm;' followed by the existing items

6. JUSTICE

Again the problem of interpretation of the term 'significantly' crops up. Is it needed here at all?

For the most part the law is quite clear on what reporters can and cannot do/report. Publishers/editors/reporters are perfectly able to defend themselves if arraigned for an allegation of contempt of court.

7. PRIVACY

It is difficult to know how best to reflect the varying degrees of privacy attached to the nature and location of a person's home. More often than not this is a function of a person's financial or class status. A terraced street with no front gardens and the balconies of walk-up blocks of flats, for example, offer far less guarantee of privacy than that afforded to gated communities, or houses with long drives or obscured front gardens, etc.

Perhaps the best that can be done would be to introduce the notion of equity of privacy expectation in 7.1. A council house tenant should have no less an expectation of privacy than the inhabitants of a mansion.

In 7.2 reference is made to privacy settings on social media accounts. Given that media literacy is not yet as sophisticated or as universal as we might wish it is not entirely reasonable to expect everyone using social media to be aware of the significance of the use of privacy settings (How many of us actually read - and understand the implications of - the various policies and disclaimers attached to websites and apps?)

Cognisance of the use privacy settings is one thing but that should not justify use of material (especially images) assumed to be in the public domain without making reasonable efforts to first check with the account's owner.

7. cont.

It should be further noted here that copyright in images remains with the person who took the original photo or shot the video excerpt, so relevant permissions and attributions should be acknowledged.

9. SUICIDE

We would prefer to see a second clause along the lines of

'When reporting such stories it is best practice to flag relevant sources of help for anyone affected by the issues raised.'

(These might range from the Samaritans or self-harm support groups, or even to other forms of support - from grief counselling to debt or relationship advisors.)

We would also like to see a clause encouraging publishers not to perpetuate the term 'committed suicide' which lays blame on the deceased. Suicide is neither crime nor sin. More accurate terms, such as 'took her own life' or 'killed himself', are preferable alternatives.

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