

Ms Angela Foran v Sunday World

Clauses noted: 1

Ms Angela Foran complained to the Press Complaints Commission that two articles headlined "Sinn Fein MLA dumps wife for Brit army general's daughter" and "Love rat McHugh dumped by Brit lover", published in the Sunday World on 27 January 2008 and 10 August 2008 respectively, contained inaccuracies in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The articles claimed that the complainant – said to be the daughter of a British army general who had links to the intelligence services – had conducted an affair with Sinn Fein MLA Gerry McHugh. The affair, it was suggested, led to the breakdown of his marriage and resignation from the party.

The complainant said that Mr McHugh had not left his wife to "shack up" with her. She denied causing the breakdown of the marriage, as the relationship had occurred long after Mr McHugh and his wife had separated. In addition – while her father had carried out national service in the army – he had not attained the rank of general or worked in the security services.

The newspaper stood by the accuracy of the central allegation of the affair. The information in regard to the complainant's father had stemmed from the complainant herself as part of an earlier story, together with its own security sources. The complainant said that she had never mentioned her father when speaking previously to the newspaper.

Adjudication

Although the complainant had not denied having a relationship with Mr McHugh, she had denied two significant aspects of the coverage: the claim that Mr McHugh had left his wife for her, and the assertion that her father had been a general in the British army who worked in the intelligence services. Neither of these points had been satisfactorily corroborated, and the paper had not offered to publish a correction. There was therefore a breach of Clause 1 of the Code, and this part of the complaint was upheld.

The complainant had also raised concerns that photographs of her – for which she had voluntarily posed for a previous article – had been edited misleadingly. However, the Commission did not conclude that cropping the images in this way would have misled readers in breach of Clause 1 of the Code.

The complainant also complained that the articles had intruded into her private life in breach of Clause 3 (Privacy). In the context of a story which connected her relationship to the resignation of Mr McHugh, the Commission did not consider that referring to the existence of the relationship – which appeared to have been made public by the pair attending a number of events together – raised a breach of the Code, particularly when there were no private details about anything that happened within the relationship.

Adjudication issued 12/03/2009