

Dr Tony Wright MP v The Sunday Times

Clauses noted: 1

Dr Tony Wright, Member of Parliament for Cannock Chase, complained to the Press Complaints Commission that The Sunday Times had failed to correct an inaccuracy about him with due prominence in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the editors' Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

An article, published on 24th May 2009 and headlined "Commons officials helped culture secretary beat tax", claimed that Dr Wright had accepted a £10,000 payout from the landlords of his Dolphin Square flat to surrender his tenancy agreement, and had then moved to a flat in the same block with a higher rent. In fact, the complainant had rejected an offer of £17,000 and remained on a lower rent.

The newspaper immediately accepted it had made an error, and the reporter explained that he had confused the complainant with another MP of the same name. The reporter apologised directly to the complainant; the online version of the article was corrected, with a note sent to other newspapers not to make the same mistake; and an apology was published in its next edition on 31 May, on its letters page.

The complainant said this action was inadequate. The original claim appeared on the front page, and the apology on page 20. This was not sufficient prominence as required by the Code.

The newspaper said that its corrections and apologies were regularly published on this page.

Adjudication

As the newspaper had immediately accepted that it had made a serious error, the only matter for the Commission to consider was whether the necessary apology had appeared with sufficient prominence. While the Commission noted the newspaper's claim that it regularly published corrections and apologies on its letters page, this did not mean that it would be appropriate to do so in all cases, given that the significance and original location of inaccuracies will inevitably vary considerably.

In this case, the Commission did not consider that – however widely-read the newspaper's letters page was – the bottom of page 20 was a sufficiently prominent place to correct a serious inaccuracy that had appeared on the front page. The complaint was therefore upheld.

Adjudication issued 23/07/2009