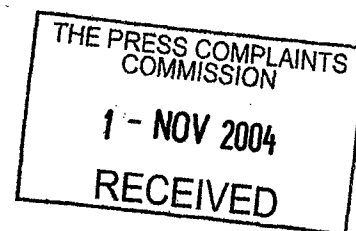


Dr Evan Harris MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Mr Stephen Abell
Assistant Director
Press Complaints Commission
1 Salisbury Square
London EC4Y 8JB

29 October 2004

Please quote in future correspondence: EH/SL.ox.Toulmin

Dear Mr Abell

Thank you for your letter of the 20th May 2004 in response to my letter of the 7th May 2004. I note within the detail of the complaint from the Refugee Council, you attached (in addition to the article about the removal of Afghan asylum seekers "security alerts as first of 26,000 illegal Afghans are flown home"), a further article, listed as coming from the Mail on Sunday of the 27th April 2003 headlined "A solicitor in a leading law firm exposes the greedy cynicism of bogus refugees – and the lawyers who represent them". It is not clear whether this article was subject to a complaint, despite the fact that

- It uses the headline "Bogus Refugees" which is of course a contradiction in terms;
- In the fourth full paragraph in the 3rd column of the first page, it accuses male asylum seekers of being aggressive to women solicitors, uses the expression that the solicitor dare not show that she is offended in case the "refugee complains that she has been rude, and the lucrative case is taken away from her". Again the allegation refers to asylum seekers not to refugees.
- In addition this implies that all male asylum seekers, or at least all young male asylum seekers, are sexually aggressive towards British women.
- The article has a sub-headline "the asylum seekers I meet are so often leering, arrogant liars".
- The article also talks about "millions in taxpayers' money being wasted on the endless swarms of economic migrants with no real claim for asylum".

It is unfortunate that the Mail on Sunday is allowed to write this inflammatory piece anonymously so that they do not take responsibility for the story editorially, nor is there any way that a complainant can check how the allegations in this case have been substantiated. I would be grateful for your opinion on this matter.

The second complaint you sent to me – that from Dr Temple on behalf of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust - concerns an article in the Sunday Express. You say that the "complaint was resolved when the newspaper agreed to publish a letter from the complainant on the matter".

Please send correspondence to:
Oxford West & Abingdon Liberal Democrats
Constituency Office: 27 Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HU
Tel: 01865 245584/Fax: 01865 245589

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The complainant, Dr Temple, states that the newspaper was factually wrong in claiming that non-asylum seekers are having to wait up to 2 years for vital counselling sessions – “NHS clinics are being swamped by asylum seekers who are being fast-tracked for help”. If Dr Temple is correct in his view that there is no such prioritisation then the newspaper was both wrong and unnecessarily inflammatory against asylum seekers.

In addition the second paragraph uses the term “refugees” as a descriptor when in fact one would imagine the figure refers to asylum seekers, and the caption under the picture refers to “refugees often go to the head of the queue”.

In the third story “council tenants sell flat for £94,000 profit in two months” from the Evening Standard from the 24th September 2003 you explain that the complaint was resolved when the newspaper published a letter from the Refugee Council headed “when illegal is legal”. I am rather confused in that in the paragraph marked “resolution” you state that the newspaper “accidentally republished the original headline of the article under ‘complaint’”. This presumably refers to the last paragraph of the letter. I would be grateful if you could explain what the problem with this is.

Thank you for your help with this information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Evan Harris'.

PP Dr Evan Harris MP
Oxford West and Abingdon