

PCC publishes new guidelines on subterfuge and newsgathering

The Press Complaints Commission today publishes 6 new recommendations to UK newspapers and magazines on compliance with the Code of Practice and law in undercover newsgathering.

The move follows a wide-ranging inquiry into the press's approach to subterfuge after the convictions for phone message tapping of Glenn Mulcaire and Clive Goodman, both of whom worked for the News of the World, in January 2007. The Commission recommended that:

- Contracts between newspapers and magazines and external contributors should contain an explicit requirement to abide by the Code of Practice;
- A similar reference to the Data Protection Act should be included in contracts of employment for staff members and external contributors;
- Although contractual compliance with the Code for staff journalists is widespread, it should without delay become universal across the industry;
- Publications should review internal practice to ensure that they have an effective and fully understood "subterfuge protocol" for staff journalists. This should include who should be consulted for advice about whether the public interest is sufficient to justify subterfuge;
- There should be regular internal training and briefing on developments on privacy cases and compliance with the law;
- There should be rigorous audit controls for cash payments, where these are unavoidable.

The Commission found numerous examples of good practice throughout the industry, both as regards the Code of Practice and the Data Protection Act. So far as the latter is concerned, it recommends that the government assesses the impact of recent initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the Act before proceeding with plans to increase penalties for journalists who breach it.

The Commission's report also sheds light on the background to the News of the World case and sets out how the new editor has improved internal controls, including more robust contracts of employment with staff members and external contributors.

To read the report, [click here](#)

ENDS

Notes

1. The PCC announced on 1 February that it would be asking the editor of the News of the World a number of questions relating to the phone message tapping incidents involving the Royal Editor of the paper and Glenn Mulcaire. It said that it would be broadening its inquiry to find out the extent of controls at other publications aimed at preventing similar abuses.
2. The PCC is an independently-run self-regulatory body that administers a Code of Practice for the newspaper and magazine industry. Clause 10 of the Code says that "the press must not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by using hidden cameras or clandestine listening devices; or by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, messages or e-mails; or by the unauthorised removal of documents or photographs".
3. For more information, contact Tim Toulmin on 07803 597372 or Stephen Abell on 020 7831 0022.

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