

**THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE
CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF CARLA BUZASI

(1) Who you are and a brief summary of your career history.

1. I am Editor-in-Chief of The Huffington Post UK, provided by AOL (UK) Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of AOL Inc.). I have been with AOL since August 2010, and I supervise a team of journalists and editors based in London publishing content aimed at a UK readership. Before my current position I worked as the Associate Editor/Online Editor at Marie Claire, and before that in a number of roles within Conde Nast's digital team. Unless otherwise stated, the comments I make in this statement relate only to The Huffington Post UK service.
2. I make this statement in response to a notice served on The Huffington Post UK dated 23 January 2012 pursuant to Section 21(2) Inquiries Act 2005.
3. For ease of reference I have reproduced the questions asked in the notice before each response. I have answered these questions to best of my knowledge and belief. Where any matters are outside my own knowledge I have stated the source of my information.
4. Nothing in this statement should be taken to be a waiver of privilege in any legal advice.
5. I refer to in this statement to our Terms of Service, Privacy Policy and Comments Policy available at The Huffington Post UK site at <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/p/huffingtonpostcouk-terms-of-service.html>, <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/p/huffingtonpostcouk-privacy-policy.html> and <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/p/huffingtonpostcouk-comment-policy.html>.

(2) What material [does] the website "[The] Huffington Post" publish to UK readers and why?

6. The Huffington Post publishes content that spans news, politics, entertainment, lifestyle, celebrity, technology and international affairs. We publish our own original

material, licensed content, curated content links, and blogs, and we host and display user comments.

7. Our original content is created by an in-house team of journalists and editors who write stories for the website. This consists of both general articles on news stories in the public domain and our own original reporting. Our licensed content is provided by third parties including press agencies (such as the Press Association) and picture agencies. Curated content consists of links to selected news stories available elsewhere on the net, often at the express request of the original author/publisher. We operate a blog platform that allows people to express their opinions and views on topics they are passionate about, to our audience of readers. We also allow readers of the website to post their own comments.
 8. We believe this mix of content provides our readers with an appealing online destination for news and opinion that ensures they are better informed about the big issues of the day, but also entertained and encouraged to weigh in with their own opinions.
- (3) **Where are your servers located? Do you consider the UK courts to have jurisdiction over the way in which your website is operated in the UK, and how far does this jurisdiction extend?**
9. Our servers are located in the US. As The Huffington Post UK is published by AOL (UK) Limited and targeted at a UK audience, we do consider that the English courts have jurisdiction over the operation of the UK service. For example, our Terms of Service are with AOL (UK) Limited, are governed by English law and are subject to the jurisdiction of the English courts.
- (4) **How do you source stories and where do you consider the responsibility for checking sources of information to lie, with you, or with the person who has provided you with the information? and**
- (5) **The extent to which you are aware of the sources of the information which makes up the central stories featured on your blog.**
10. As stated above, The Huffington Post publishes a range of content. Each kind of content is sourced differently, and the responsibility for checking the sources of content varies accordingly.

Original journalism

11. A significant proportion of our content is generated by our in-house team of editors and journalists, many of whom have many years of experience in journalism and are familiar with the principles and practices of responsible sourcing, fact checking, and

ethical practices. They receive regular training on our own editorial guidelines, legal issues such as defamation, privacy and copyright and on the PCC Code. The training is provided by our in-house legal team, and also by outside counsel.

12. The responsibility for checking sources for our own stories lies initially with the journalist. As a general principle we always look to double-source articles where the information is not otherwise verifiable. Editors will come to me if they have any concerns about a particular story and this is done on a common-sense, case-by-case basis bearing in mind the legal and regulatory considerations and our own editorial guidelines. Where stories contain serious allegations we take steps to verify the information and give the subject of a story a reasonable amount of time to reply to any charges levelled against them before publishing. If there are any particular concerns (for example if the journalist is relatively junior and is writing on a sensitive issue, or if the story is particularly controversial) I, or the relevant section editor, or our in-house legal team will review and may ask for further checks to be carried out. I spend a significant amount of time checking stories before and after publication. If I am not available, the Executive Editor will deal with any concerns. Both of us are always on call in case an issue arises. For investigative stories, the relevant editor will be involved to make sure that all reasonable checks have been taken by the journalist to ensure that their sources are reliable. Our journalists and editors follow responsible journalism practices, including those set forth in the PCC Code and our internal guidelines. We also seek advice from our in-house legal team when necessary.

Licensed content

13. Our licensed news content is provided by third party newswires and picture wires. We have contracts in place with these agencies and rely on standard representations, warranties and indemnities in relation to the accuracy and correct sourcing of that content.

Curated content

14. As explained above, curated content on The Huffington Post consists of links to content on other websites. As we are merely linking out to other sites across the Internet we are not responsible for checking the sources of these third party stories.

Blog content

15. An important feature of The Huffington Post is that it provides a platform for a large number of bloggers to express an opinion to a wide audience. We want this to be a lively, diverse and interesting space where voices can be heard on issues of their choosing without editorial interference. These are opinion pieces, and inherent in that is that the bloggers have the ability to air their views.

16. By posting content to our platform, bloggers agree to our online blogger terms that govern their blogger account. Under those terms, responsibility for the content (which would include ensuring the reliability of any sources) lies with the blogger. Whilst we won't exercise editorial control, we will not publish in the rare cases where we think the blog does not comply with the law or meet our blogger terms.

Comments

17. The comments posted by readers of our website are user-generated content and our Terms of Service and Comments Policy require users to not post any illegal or unauthorized content and say that we will not tolerate personal attacks, defamatory statements etc. We encourage in-depth intelligent discussion in a receptive, transparent and civil atmosphere. As comments are posted to The Huffington Post directly by the users, we are not responsible for sourcing those comments.
- (6) **The extent to which you consider that ethics can and should play a role in the blogosphere, and what you consider 'ethics' to mean in this context.**
18. We consider that ethics can and should play a role in the blogosphere and that the Internet community - in the UK and globally - has benefitted greatly from innovations that support freedom of expression and online interaction.
- (7) **Do you have any policy which relates to complaints about articles or web pages which are libellous, defamatory or considered to be an invasion of privacy? If not, do you have any relevant practices? Do you ever remove availability to such pages on that basis?**
19. Our approach to complaints will vary according to the type of content, and in particular whether it is our own content, blog content or user comments. We operate a robust notice and takedown process for all content on The Huffington Post and will react quickly if we receive complaints about content from users
20. Complaints about articles and blogs published on The Huffington Post UK site are referred to our in-house legal team who will liaise with outside counsel as and when necessary. If it was deemed that an article should be removed for any reason, our practice is to remove the offending copy and post a notice on the page explaining why the content has been removed. In addition, we have a published notice and take down policy, which provides an email address for users to quickly and easily report content.
21. With our own content we accept primary responsibility and will therefore consider the substance of the complaint and act accordingly. We may respond in a number of ways, ranging from removing the content to offering a rebuttal to the person who has complained, or not accepting the complaint if we believe it is unfounded. We employ a robust notice and takedown process for blog content and user comments. With blog

content, we may first provide the blogger the courtesy of an opportunity to rectify the concern in the complaint, if appropriate.

- (8) **Do you consider yourself to be regulated and if so, how and/or by whom?**
22. We are subject to the laws of the UK, and we are members of, and subject to, the PCC's regulatory regime.
23. As online publishers operating out of the UK we are subject to numerous laws, regulations and codes of conduct with which we endeavour to comply such as, for example, laws relating to copyright, defamation, privacy, harassment, the Data Protection Act, RIPA, the PEC Regulations, the e-Commerce Regulations.
- (9) **Your views on the extent to which the content of websites, and the manner in which you operate, can be regulated by a domestic system of regulation.**
24. I believe the British press should operate independently and be free to publish stories in the public interest. I believe news websites should be judged and held to account in the same manner as print publications. This is why we voluntarily joined the PCC and accept that the UK service should comply with English law.
25. The content of websites and the manner in which we operate is already regulated and subject to the law. That said, I do think that it is important to make the distinction between original journalism which is created by professional journalists and editors and over which we have editorial control, and blog content and user-generated content which is created by users and which we do not exercise editorial control over, and in respect of which there are separate discussions (including, importantly, on the Draft Defamation Bill and the proposals surrounding responsibility for online publication). In my view, there is a difference between, on the one hand, our own editorial content and, on the other, content that is created by our own users in blogs or through user comments, and there should be a different regulatory regime for each.
26. In many ways online publishing offers an improved news forum as it allows for amendments, should they be necessary, to be made more quickly and for rebuttals to be offered in context. Being able to comment and report on stories in real time is another difference as is providing the reader with the option to comment and enter dialogue with the author and other readers.
- (10) **What are your views as to the future regulation of bloggers (or types of blogger) including whether or not they should be regulated at all?**
27. I believe it would be a travesty if the free-natured, entrepreneurial manner of digital publishing was hampered, however, in the same way that newspapers and magazines should be transparent with their readers, so too should bloggers and online writers. In

relation specifically to the regulation of bloggers, I believe it would seriously hamper the growth of the blogosphere if a mandated system of regulation was put in force. Even in the case of the PCC, there is a cost involved to join, something that would instantly disqualify many at-home bloggers, and bloggers whose full time occupation is not in the journalism field. Many individuals only ever blog once, especially on sites such as The Huffington Post. Blogs by their very nature are often entrepreneurial, not-for-profit enterprises run by individuals who are passionate about a particular topic, and a regulation process would be impractical if they are to flourish. On The Huffington Post, many of our bloggers are policy makers and experts in their respective fields who are expressing their views, which in turn adds to and enhances public discourse on issues and events.

28. We feel that online content websites such as The Huffington Post should not be held responsible for blog content in the same way that we are responsible for our own original content. With respect to bloggers, we are providing a public forum for people to express their views and opinions. We do not interfere with content because we think it important to provide a dynamic, independent and yet civilised and responsible forum. We provide them with a platform to reach an audience of engaged and interested readers who then post comments on the subject of public interest. On the other hand, our staff journalists and editors are professionals in the field of journalism and engaged in reporting the news and it is therefore important to ensure that they get their facts right. As such, any regulation of online content should be different for those two categories of content.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

29. I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed



CARLA BUZASI

Dated

3/2/12