July 2017 hackinginquiry.org

FRONT PAGE

HOW IPSO LETS THE PRESS BURY ITS MOST FLAGRANT HOWLERS

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TEN TIMES AS MANY PEOPLE THINK A CORRECTION SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE SAME SIZE AND PLACE AS THE ARTICLE THAT BREACHED THE STANDARDS CODE THAN THINK IT SHOULD BE LEFT UP TO THE EDITOR TO DECIDE

migrants arrives in UK declaring

A 2017 YOUGOV POLL

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When IPSO was set up by the big corporate newspapers we were told it would be the toughest press regulator in the western world. It would impose million-pound fines. It would mount big investigations. It would deliver "upfront" corrections.

More than two years on – and they have been two years in which few could dispute that press conduct has often been outrageous – there has not been a single fine and not a single investigation. Not one. IPSO can't even detect a problem worth looking into.

Take front-page corrections and adjudications. What has IPSO done about those? We examine that here.

If a newspaper gets something badly wrong on its front page it's only right that the correction appears on the front page too. Similarly if a newspaper refuses to admit the error and IPSO rules against it, the published adjudication – exposing the breach - should be of equivalent prominence to the breach.

That way:

- as many of the original readers who were misled can find out the truth
- anyone damaged by the breach gets a fair remedy and
- there is a sufficient consequence for the newspaper that lessons are learned and repeat breaches are deterred.

IPSO claims that it agrees there should be frontpage corrections for serious front-page errors. It even boasts that this shows how tough it is. But IPSO does not deliver. The numbers tell the story.

We have identified 26 front-page stories that even IPSO accepted contained a code breach.¹

- In 10 cases 38 per cent nothing at all appeared on the front page. In other words, although a publication got something wrong on its front page, IPSO allowed it to bury any reference to the mistake on an inside page.
- In 14 cases 54 per cent all that IPSO required on the front page was a small, token reference to what had gone wrong, usually tucked into a corner and often in terms that did not make the paper's failure clear to an ordinary reader.

In just two cases, both of them local papers, did a correction appear on a front-page but in neither case did IPSO require it, it was positively offered by the newspapers.^{2 & 3}

 In other words, 92 per cent of the time (or 100 per cent if you happen to be a big national paper) IPSO fails to deliver genuine front-page corrections – and that is for errors so bad even this sham regulator is prepared to admit they have happened.

IPSO has the power to require a newspaper to publish a front-page correction or adjudication. But it is so in thrall to its industry masters that it chooses not to use it.

Turn the page to see some examples of what papers are getting away with.

Notes 1 - 3 see page 21.

THE SUN RECKLESSLY A SLAP ON THE WRIST



In November 2015, the Sun published the front-page headline: '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis'. This was just 10 days after the Bataclan and other attacks in Paris, a moment of high security alert across Europe when many British Muslims reported feeling the heat of suspicion and even hostility. The danger of provoking hatred and violence against innocent people was very high.

As was very quickly pointed out, the Sun's headline was not supported by the data in the poll. Nobody had been asked whether they had sympathy with jihadis. Instead, they were asked whether they had sympathy with 'young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria'. Fighters in Syria are by no means exclusively jihadis, but the Sun chose to ignore this. Nor did the Sun mention that sympathy for these 'young Muslims' was actually falling.

In a rare step, even the polling organisation distanced itself from the Sun's story, saying: 'Survation do not support or endorse the way in which the poll's findings have been interpreted.'

STOKES HATRED FROM IPSO

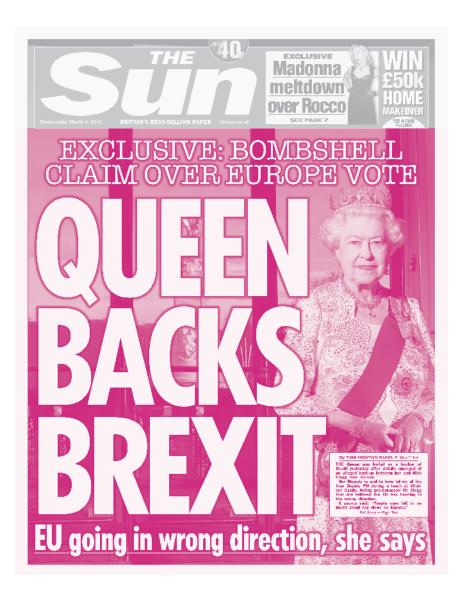
It took a whopping
122 days - 4 months
- to secure even this
woeful outcome



Confronted by a front page in the Sun that was not only misleading but also reckless and even inflammatory, IPSO decided that there was no need for a front-page correction. Page 2 would do. There was no requirement even for a token reference on the front to the fact that the country's Muslim population had been maligned on the basis of false information. Instead IPSO just asked the Sun to print the IPSO adjudication on an inside page on the grounds that the majority of the original report had been published on pages 4 and 5. In other words, because the front-page story was significant enough to extend to the inside pages, the "remedy" could be downgraded to one buried inside.

All that appeared was a dense legalistic piece of text and a minimal heading. Approved by IPSO, the text disguised what the complaint was about and which paper it was levelled at. Even the heading "IPSO ruling is upheld" was nonsensical, and should at the very least have read "IPSO upholds complaint against the Sun".

QUEEN BACKS BREXITATION THE SUN MOCKS IPSO



The Sun's notorious 'QUEEN BACKS BREXIT' headline was published on 9 March 2016, in the run up to the EU referendum. Buckingham Palace complained on the same day. Ten weeks passed before IPSO published its adjudication, even though it claims on its website to offer speedy resolution.

IPSO concluded – it hardly had a choice given the weight of evidence – that the headline was not supported by the Sun's 'story'. In other words, even in the opinion of a tame 'regulator', the country's biggest-selling paper (owned by a fabulously wealthy company) managed to get a front-page headline wrong on a matter of national importance – a headline undoubtedly seen by millions.

What sanction did IPSO impose? The Sun was instructed to print, not a correction or apology, but the formal IPSO adjudication. And it was told to put this, not on page 1 but on page 2, a location which, as all in the newspaper industry know, would allow it to pass unnoticed by many readers, if not most. On page 1 there only had to be a 'reference', which was duly buried at the bottom.





The paper's response was telling. The editor, Tony Gallagher, who had personally approved the misleading headline, declared publicly that he had no regrets and, whatever the 'regulator' had said, would not hesitate to do the same again.

This case shows everything that is wrong with IPSO. If ever a front-page mistake cried out for a front-page correction of equal prominence, this was surely it. But faced by a powerful national paper the 'toughest regulator in the western world' administered only a slap on the wrist – and then stood by silently as the paper's editor publicly mocked its authority. No meaningful sanction; no lesson learned. If even the Queen can't expect decent treatment from IPSO, what chance is there for the rest of us?

IPSO FAILS ON CHILD I



IPSO ruled that the Lancashire Evening Post had breached a child's privacy. The paper published five pixelated photographs – taken from a parent's Facebook page – to draw attention to the fact that the same photos had been used on a website where they were used for sexual gratification. But the pixilation was insufficient. Some people were able to identify the child. (We have blocked out their faces so they can't be identified at all).

PRIVACY — AGAIN





This isn't a new problem – and it's a scandal that IPSO has not taken serious action. In Hacked Off's 2015 dossier *The Failure of IPSO* we highlighted two cases where poorly pixelated pictures led to vulnerable children being identified – one of them a victim of sexual abuse.

IPSO's remedy in this case was pitiful. The original article was on page 1 with follow-up reporting and comment on pages 8 and 9, but IPSO said the adjudication could be printed on page 9, with only a front-page 'reference'. It also took IPSO 82 days – nearly three months – to reach this decision.

UNCORROBORATED CL BURIED CORRECTIONS



IPSO ruled that the Kentish Gazette had inaccurately claimed that migrant 'men in their 20s are lying about [their] age and going to schools' as the paper had proved unable to substantiate this assertion. Astonishingly, the newspaper defended its use of a stock photo of adult refugees by claiming that otherwise it would have had to breach the Editors' Code by using a photograph of the actual children at school – and IPSO said that was fine.

IPSO's remedy was again pitiful. Whilst the original article was on page 1 with follow-up on pages 8 and 9, IPSO said the adjudication could be printed on page 9, and needed only a front-page 'reference'.

Moreover, it took a staggering 141 days – almost five months – after the complaint was made, for an adjudication to be published.

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SCHOOLS

Special investigation: Classrooms where English is starting to die out

MORE than 300 different languages are now spoken in Britain's schools, a Daily Express special investigation reveals. A decades-long open door By Glies Sheldrick
led to English-speaking
pupils becoming a minority
in hundreds of classrooms.
Our inputy reveals there are

where English is hardly heard at all. In some, no pupil has English as a first language. In one school 542 of the 300 pupils say Panjabi is there first language while just six are TURN TO PAGE 7.



IPSO ruled that the Daily Express had wrongly claimed that English is 'starting to die out' in schools and that English was 'hardly heard at all' in some schools. In its ruling even IPSO recognised that the claim was 'both dramatic and significant' and 'was substantially undermined by the inaccuracies'. However it still only saw fit to require the adjudication to be published on page 7, with just a small front-page reference.

The article had been billed as a 'special investigation' and concluded that English-speaking pupils are 'becoming a minority in hundreds of classrooms'. However the Express only used the data for pupils for whom English wasn't their first language and also failed to include data relating to those in this group who spoke English as a second or third language. The Express claimed in its defence that the omission of the key words 'as a first language' had not been a deception but was 'a style of writing'.

FICANT" RREMEDY





WRONGLY LINKED TO ...AND A BOTCHED COI



The Edinburgh Evening News published a front-page 'teaser': a picture of a house with the caption 'Who lives in a house like this?' but wrongly referred readers to pages 4 and 5 for the full story. These pages featured an entirely unrelated article about a man convicted of sexual offences – while the story about the complainant's house appeared on pages 6 and 7.

When the householder complained that the paper had inaccurately suggested that a sex offender lived in his home, IPSO tried to resolve the complaint through mediation - a process that helps newspapers avoid clear-cut verdicts and which is described by some complainants as 'designed to wear them down'. This particular complainant, however, refused to just accept a £50 donation or a letter of apology.



ASEX OFFENDER... RECTION



IPSO, now obliged to take action, required a correction to be published, but not on the front page. It appeared at the bottom of page 2. Worse still, the correction identified the complainant by name – even though he had not been named in the original publication. In other words the correction made things worse instead of better.

In the face of this, IPSO simply took the side of the paper, stating that it was 'unfortunate that the complainant had been on holiday at the time at which the correction was published, and so had not been able to approve it'. Rather than admonish the paper, IPSO simply 'welcomed the newspaper's willingness' to remove the offending correction from the website and with it the complainant's name.

THE EXPRESS AND ITS

'The press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information'

So says the Editors' Code of Practice - the code that IPSO claims to uphold.

No newspaper that believed IPSO actually did its job would have published the story '98 per cent say NO to EU deal: Forget talks with Brussels and quit NOW, urges new poll'. But the Daily Express did, and on the front page.

The article gave the impression that this was a serious, representative poll carried out by a third-party professional organisation, but it wasn't. It was a survey printed in the previous day's edition where readers were invited to call a premium rate phone line and pay to register their response to the question. The Express presented this as a significant political event.

It wasn't the first time that the Express had published 'polls' of its own readers and dressed them up as something else – witness such headlines as '92% want to quit the EU' and '70% say we must ban new migrants'.

So what did IPSO do to uphold the code in the face of this blatantly misleading journalism? How did it act to protect newspaper readers from misleading information and to ensure the Express learned its lesson and stopped presenting half-baked surveys as proper polls?

Well, even IPSO had to rule that the Express had failed to provide any evidence to support the headline assertion and had published seriously inaccurate information. IPSO only required the Express to print its adjudication on page 2, with just a token 'reference' on page 1. Hardly anyone who was misled would be any the wiser. And it most certainly would not have been a deterrent to publishing further similar claims.



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DODGY EU CLAIMS

As it was bound to do, IPSO found that the Express had seriously misled its readers with unsubstantiated claims that the vote to leave the EU had 'boosted' house prices. In fact, the Hometrack figures used related to the period running up to the EU referendum – not after. The figures showed instead that the Brexit vote had no effect on house prices.

IPSO agreed to the placement, wording and headline of the published adjudication – but this tiny front-page reference to page 8 is all it could muster.







PUBLIC MISLED — BU STAMPS MAIL'S WRE



Just ten days before the EU referendum, the Daily Mail ran a front-page splash: 'We're From Europe. Let us in!' illustrated by a photo of refugees in a van in East London.

The problem with this was that the remarks by the refugees were recorded, and in the recording they could very clearly be heard to say they were from Iraq and Kuwait. They did not say what the Mail's front-page headline claimed. They weren't from Europe. Their case had no possible relevance to the EU referendum, as the Mail had insisted it did.

The Mail corrected the story next day on page 2, in just 54 words, blaming 'a reputable news agency' (the same excuse that was used by the Sun for its Hillsborough outrage in 1989 – huge, powerful news organisations hiding behind small, often hard-up local outfits).

Four months later IPSO managed to agree that the story was wrong and the Mail had breached the Editors' Code. Was it unhappy that a spectacular front page headline error, and one of obvious political significance, had been corrected only on page 2? Did it stick up for the principle of front-page corrections for front-page errors? It did not. It concluded that the small, grudging correction, blaming somebody else and claiming the excuse that others had made the same mistake, was 'appropriately remedied' and that a requirement to republish the correction on the front page would be 'disproportionate'.

IPSO RUBBER-TCHED CORRECTION



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Four months later IPSO said that a requirement to republish the correction on the front page would be disproportionate.

MISLEADING GENERA

Just weeks before the 2015 General Election, The Times claimed on its front page that Labour's tax policies would directly affect all working families. IPSO found that the headline and opening paragraph were 'clearly inconsistent' with the rest of the article. The Times published a correction prior to the imminent General Election but it was buried on page 24 in the bottom left-hand corner, and appeared a full nine days after the initial complaint.

The complainant requested a correction of equal prominence — claiming that the only way of correcting a prominent front-page headline is with a front-page correction. Only after the General Election did IPSO agree that the Times should publish something more 'duly prominent' — but could not bring itself to request anything more than a small front-page reference. Therefore, a further eight days later, the Times reluctantly printed the small front-page reference, and reprinted the inside correction... But a further four pages back... on page 28.





AL ELECTION CLAIMS

Around the same time, the Daily Telegraph misled the public but without any real censure at all. IPSO ruled that the Telegraph had published inaccurate information in its front page story "Sturgeon's secret backing for Cameron", without including her denial. But by way of correction, IPSO only required the paper to publish a tiny footnote on its front-page directing readers to the adjudication published on page 2, more than three months after the article was published and long after the election.







CONCLUSION

IPSO Chairman Sir Alan Moses has claimed:

"Never before have there been any front page corrections dictated by a regulator...ever.

For the first time newspapers are required under their imprint, under their banner in their daily or Sunday edition, what we the regulator require them to print...the correction is not their story - it is ours."

No one reading these pages could believe that IPSO is sincerely committed to the principle of front-page corrections for serious front-page errors. IPSO's record on this – especially with national papers – is simply abject.

In the power relationship between the big press companies and IPSO, IPSO is servant, not master. It dare not mount investigations. It dare not impose fines. And it dare not tell the Sun or the Mail or any other big paper to put an honest correction or apology on its front page when it has made a mistake.

The regulator has been well and truly captured by the industry. Any idea that, as for any other industry regulator, IPSO should act in the interests of individual citizens and society at large, as identified and set out by Parliament, is still-born. Seven decades of failure have taught us that only truly independent press regulation can be effective. As these pages show, IPSO is not independent of the big papers and is not effective.

NOTES

- 1. www.hackinginquiry.org/other-news/26-front-page-stories/
- 2. www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=02182-16
- $\textbf{3.} \ \ www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=02184-14$
- 4. www.ipso.co.uk/media/1133/reality_regulation.pdf



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With thanks to the brave victims of press abuse, persistent IPSO complainants, the general public and our supporters who continue to generously support our campaign.

FRONT PAGE FAILURES How IPSO lets the press bury its most flagrant howlers - July 2017

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Report by. HackedOff

Design by. Mr Gresty (Studio)



HOW IPSO LETS THE PRESS BURY ITS MOST FLAGRANT HOWLERS