Dear Sir Alan,

I note that IPSO have published a “rebuttal” of our report on coverage of transgender people and rights in the press. Although the document is described as a rebuttal, I could not detect any specific point of inaccuracy which the document found.

In any case, you made several assertions in the rebuttal which, themselves, appear to be wholly inaccurate and without foundation. Although Hacked Off have well-evidenced criticisms of how IPSO handles accuracy (and other) complaints about member publishers\(^1\), I was surprised to see your organisation indulge in what appears to be serious inaccuracy itself.

Our full response to your rebuttal is set out here [link]. There are many points on which we disagree, but we recognise are contestable. But several in particular appear to me to be beyond any reasonable doubt.

I would be grateful if you could explain the position in respect of the following points.

**Claim that IPSO is “completely independent” from politicians**

The document states that:

“IPSO is the independent regulator of the majority of the UK’s newspapers magazines and their websites”.

This is an objectionable assertion in itself, but you go on to add, with greater specificity:

“We are completely independent of government, politicians, our member publishers, or any one wealthy individual.”

We would contest that IPSO is vulnerable to government interference, as well as wealthy individuals, but do not make those cases out here. They are at least contestable.

But I do not believe you can possibly substantiate the claim that you are “completely independent” of politicians or member publishers.

According to the documents publicly available on your website, the powers of the Regulatory Funding Company include the following:

1. Owns the standards code which IPSO is required to enforce;
2. Has the power to veto any proposed amendments to IPSO’s own regulations;
3. Has the power to veto the operation of IPSO’s Arbitration Service;
4. Must be consulted on industry appointments to the Board of IPSO;
5. Must be consulted on industry appoints to the Complaints Committee of IPSO;
6. Controls the rules around voting for Members Publishers of IPSO;
7. Must be consulted on financial sanctions guidance.

One member of the RFC is the Lord Black of Brentwood, a Member of the House of Lords. As far as I am aware, he continues to sit in the House of Lords, and indeed plays an active role. He takes a party whip. He votes on legislation before the House. He sits on a Parliamentary Committee. He is, on any reasonable interpretation, a serving and active politician.

I would be grateful if you could explain whether you dispute any of these details, and if not, if you would appropriately amend the rebuttal you have published.

**Claim that IPSO is “completely independent” from “member publishers”**

Member publishers are well-represented on the RFC. These include representatives of Archant, DMG Media, Telegraph Media, Reach and News UK. For the reasons cited above in relation to Lord Black, IPSO is not “completely independent” of member publishers.

Furthermore, as you know, member publishers are also well-represented on the RFC’s sub-committee, the Editors’ Code Committee. This Committee writes the very standards which IPSO is tasked with enforcing. To claim IPSO is “completely independent” of them is absurd.

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2 Para 7.3, IPSO Scheme Membership Agreement
3 Para 7.1, IPSO Scheme Membership Agreement
4 Para 5.4, IPSO Scheme Membership Agreement
5 Para 22.5, IPSO Articles of Association
6 Para 27.4, IPSO Articles of Association
7 Para 6, IPSO Scheme Membership Agreement
8 Para 68, IPSO Rules and Regulations
9 [http://www.regulatoryfunding.co.uk/](http://www.regulatoryfunding.co.uk/)
10 [https://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/lord-black-of-brentwood/4171](https://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/lord-black-of-brentwood/4171)
Claim that “The RFC have no involvement in any of our work”

For the reasons cited above, we believe this claim cannot be substantiated.

Unless in defining the “work” of your organisation, you exclude the standards code, your own regulations, arbitration scheme, appointments to your own board, appointments to your own complaints committee and financial sanctions. Which would leave little else.

Summary

You are welcome to seek to defend IPSO as a system of self-regulation whose rules and standards are at the mercy of a serving politician and member publishers.

But, on the basis of the rules and regulations published on your own website, to claim IPSO is independent in the way you have done is patently untrue. It’s irresponsible to mislead the public and, even under your own body, would surely represent an accuracy code breach.

We call on you to explain your position or abide by the same standards you claim to enforce, and publish a correction with due prominence.

Yours sincerely

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