

## Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences](#) – 24 April 2018, HC 683

Tuesday 24 April 2018

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Stephen Doughty; Kirstene Hair; Sarah Jones; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Douglas Ross; Naz Shah; John Woodcock.

Questions 580–823

### Witnesses

[I](#): Paul Clarkson, Managing Editor, The Sun, Lloyd Embley, Group Editor-in-Chief, Trinity Mirror, Gary Jones, Editor-in-Chief, Daily and Sunday Express, and Peter Wright, Editor Emeritus, Associated Newspapers.

[II](#): Ian Brunskill, Assistant Editor, The Times, Ian MacGregor, Editor Emeritus, Telegraph Media Group, and President, Society of Editors, and Ted Young, Editor, Metro.

[III](#): Neil Benson, Chair, Editors Code Committee, and Ian Murray, Executive Director, Society of Editors.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Paul Clarkson, Managing Editor, *The Sun*, Lloyd Embley, Group Editor-in-Chief, *Trinity Mirror*, Gary Jones, Editor-in-Chief, *Daily and Sunday Express*, and Peter Wright, Editor Emeritus, *Associated Newspapers*.

Q580 **Chair:** I welcome the first panel to give evidence to us today. We are very grateful for your time. This is our inquiry into hate crime and, as part of it, we are undertaking a particular inquiry into Islamophobia, just as our predecessor Committee before the election did an inquiry into anti-Semitism. As you may be aware, we have taken evidence in three sessions from social media organisations on hate crime, so today we will be looking at issues in the print media as well.

I will begin the sitting by putting on record an apology: unusually, we have three panels that are all male, which we do not normally do. We asked each individual organisation to choose whom to send, but, on the day that Millicent Fawcett's statue is unveiled in Parliament Square, that is perhaps unfortunate. However, we look forward very much to the evidence that you will give us today.

May I ask each of you to introduce yourselves, along with the organisation that you represent and your role within it? Also, do you think that Islamophobia is a significant problem in Britain today?

**Paul Clarkson:** I am Paul Clarkson, managing editor of *The Sun* since April 2016. Before that, I was editor of *The Irish Sun*. As to the question, "Do you believe that there is a problem of Islamophobia in the UK?", is that in the press and the media?

**Chair:** Generally, as well as in the press and the media.

**Paul Clarkson:** I think there will always be a problem with all kinds of issues against minorities. It is just how pervasive that is. Certainly in the mainstream media, I don't believe that it is an issue.

**Lloyd Embley:** I am Lloyd Embley. I am group editor-in-chief of *Trinity Mirror*. To answer your question, with the wider societal issue, there are issues that we need to talk about. I am sure that is one of the reasons why we are here today.

**Gary Jones:** My name is Gary Jones. I am editor-in-chief of the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*. I have been in situ since March, and before that I worked at the *Mirror*. Yes, I do think that there are issues with Islamophobia. How deep-rooted they are, I am not sure, but the media have certainly had issues in the past.

**Peter Wright:** I am Peter Wright. I am editor emeritus at *Associated Newspapers*, where I deal with legislative and regulatory matters. Yes, we live in a multicultural society, and I'm afraid there are times when things



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are said by one group about another group which shouldn't be said, but if I thought Islamophobia was being practised in any way by newspaper journalists, I'd be deeply concerned.

**Q581 Chair:** What do you see as your responsibility on this? If you think that there is a problem in society, what do you see as being your responsibility, looking at either the cumulative impact of the headlines in your organisation's newspapers or individual articles? Do you think that you have any responsibility in terms of dealing with the Islamophobia that you've identified as existing? And by the way, feel free to come in. We will put some of our questions to particular individuals or groups; some will just be for everybody to respond to. Mr Jones?

**Gary Jones:** Yes, definitely. I think that each and every editor has a responsibility for every single word that's published in their newspaper. And yes, cumulatively, some of the headlines that have appeared in the past have created an Islamophobic sentiment, which I find uncomfortable.

It is my responsibility to ensure that content is accurate and that newspapers don't look at stereotypical views that may or may not be around in the general public. So, I should be held to account and be answerable.

**Q582 Chair:** So are you making changes at the *Express*?

**Gary Jones:** Yes. I have gone through a lot of former *Express* front pages and I felt very uncomfortable looking at them. Individually, they may not present specific issues. There have been accuracy issues on some of them and some of them are just downright offensive, and I wouldn't want to be party to any newspaper that would publish such material.

I have to accept, as a newspaper editor, that people have different views to my own and that the newspaper is there to represent the broader section of views, but I think there are limits to how far you should go in an honest and fair-minded society.

**Lloyd Embley:** Personally, though, I think there are some issues raised by the word "offence". There are several examples of things that you may or may not talk about today that I personally wouldn't like or find offensive.

I wrote something down in my own words to try and encapsulate how I felt about this: "It's important that I read things with which I fundamentally disagree: things which I don't like; things that offend or repulse me. Doing so provides affirmation of my own beliefs and values." And that is really important here. We've got to be careful, because freedom of speech and freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of our democratic system, and we have to remember that.

I have also written down an unlikely double act of Voltaire and Roy Greenslade. Roy Greenslade is not necessarily the greatest friend of tabloid newspapers, but Voltaire is attributed with the saying, "I wholly disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say



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it.” Greenslade said, when talking about Kelvin McKenzie’s article about Channel 4 newsreader Fatima Manji wearing her hijab, “Why Ipso was correct: freedom of expression means the freedom to offend”. While I don’t like some of this stuff, I really think it’s important that I read it.

**Q583 Chair:** But my question is to you as editors, given your responsibility for the cumulative impact of the stories and the headlines in your papers. Do you think you have a responsibility to look at what its cumulative impact is on people who read it?

**Lloyd Embley:** Unquestionably—I have a responsibility and I have a responsibility to reflect and amplify the views of my readers. My readers, as a general rule, come from a left-of-centre perspective and if I carried some of that stuff, I would lose readers; it would not be very sensible.

From a *Mirror* perspective, yes of course I still— I will give an example. When I became editor of the *Daily Mirror* in 2012—I did the same when I became editor of *The People* in 2007—I thought it was true that we used the word “Muslim” to describe individuals or circumstances when we shouldn’t have. We should have used “Islamist” or “fanatic”. I absolutely said that, from then on, that is how it would be. That is no great thing, but it is a minor example of how I believe we have moved over the last decade, as a generation, in our attitudes towards how we cover the news.

**Paul Clarkson:** I’d like to make the point that, as society has changed, so our readers have changed and so *The Sun*’s coverage has changed. What we find very useful is engaging with some of these minority groups. We don’t only engage with Muslim groups. Because one group obviously cannot speak for an entire community, we speak to multiple Muslim groups. We also speak to transgender groups. By actually talking to these people face to face, we sometimes get a really good understanding of why they believe we are the bogeymen, and we get a great understanding of how they feel about our coverage. That has really brought us on a journey.

**Q584 Chair:** Do you look at whether or not your coverage overall might, for example, incite hatred, increase prejudice or promote Islamophobia? Do you take that step back and look at your coverage to see whether it is or not?

**Paul Clarkson:** Yes, we certainly do. We have quite a stringent pre and post-publication discussion, especially over some of the more contentious stories. We always try to balance the article 10 freedom of expression, which we cherish extremely dearly in *The Sun*, with the greater responsibility and the impact of what we write.

Of course, that doesn’t meant that we should shy away from tackling very difficult issues without fear nor favour. Only by shining a light on very difficult issues can you actually open up a debate and move forward as a society.

**Peter Wright:** Our first duty is to report the news. That can be difficult sometimes. I have probably been around longer than anybody else. We



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have had a decade or so in which there have been terrorist incidents carried out by people who claim to be inspired by Islam and by people who would describe themselves, in some form or another, as white supremacists.

Earlier in my career, we had terror incidents carried out by people on behalf of the IRA, and in Northern Ireland by members of the Protestant community. You have to report these things. You have to discuss the issues that may lie behind them, and you have to do it in a way that doesn't encourage people to go out and seek revenge. Certainly, on our newspapers, we try very hard to do that.

I personally, and certainly *The Mail on Sunday* when I edited it, which I did until 2012, and the *Daily Mail*, would lay an awful lot of the blame for the problems that we have had, which may have led to Islamophobia, on the decision to invade Iraq and the frankly disgraceful policies that were carried out after that—in particular, the extraordinary rendition of people from Iraq and the operation of Guantanamo Bay. We campaigned for the release of British prisoners from Guantanamo Bay.

**Q585 Chair:** Just to follow up your point, Mr Embley, I think you said that your role is to “amplify the views of my readers”. That sounds a bit like one of the things we were challenging the social media companies on. We were challenging them on their algorithms and the way in which, whatever people are looking for, what they get further back and what they get recommended to them is something that becomes more polarised and more extreme. Are you really saying that your role is to amplify or to push further out the views of your readers?

**Lloyd Embley:** I don't think it is necessarily to push them further out. “Reflect” is perhaps a better word than “amplify”. Obviously, that is within the confines of the editors' code, with which every single journalist who works for the *Daily Mirror* has to comply. It is part of their contract and training; every single person gets a video training module.

My point, which maybe I was not making very clearly, was that from the *Mirror* perspective, apart from anything else I would be committing commercial suicide if I carried some of the more offensive, insulting articles that other papers perhaps have carried, but I would still defend their right to carry them.

**Q586 Chair:** Given that all of you have said that these are issues that you take seriously and that you reflect on, do you think it is a concern that Baroness Warsi's research suggests that only 4% of articles that refer to Muslims are positive? Sir Alan Moses said, when we took evidence from IPSO, that, “there is a fundamental problem...which is the way people write about other groups and other religions and particularly...about Muslims.”

The UN High Commission on Refugees, which is looking particularly at refugees rather than at Islamophobia, describes coverage in the UK as being “by far the most polarised”, with some parts of the media being “uniquely aggressive” in their campaigns against migrants and talks



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about “decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion.”

In terms of your sense of your overall responsibility to take these issues seriously, do you think you are getting it right?

**Peter Wright:** I am afraid I simply do not recognise that. I have told you that we campaigned against the war in Iraq and against Guantanamo Bay. We go to great lengths to avoid any articles that could possibly contribute to Islamophobia, but you still have to report difficult issues. There have been claims of Islamophobia surrounding the reporting of sex grooming gangs in Rotherham and elsewhere. You cannot ignore the fact that these crimes appear to have a cultural background to them. You try to report them in a way that is even handed and sensible, but if you lean over backwards too far, you get to the point where you are not telling people about what is going on in our society.

The fear of being accused of Islamophobia can create its own problems. We and other newspapers, in trying to describe the activities of sex grooming gangs, have described those convicted in recent articles as Asian or of Asian background. That is correct up to a point, but we are now getting complaints from the Hindu and Sikh communities that that is tainting their communities with crimes with which they appear to have no involvement. These are not easy things to deal with. However you approach them, you will sometimes find that particular groups feel that the approach is unfair to them.

Q587 **Chair:** Does anyone want to add to that?

**Paul Clarkson:** I’d like to add a bit of context to this perception versus reality. I think *The Sun* would have published maybe 82,000 articles of at least 100 words since April 2015. I think there are about five or six articles put before the Committee where *The Sun’s* coverage could be accused of inciting hatred or being Islamophobic. The vast majority are not.

The articles that we produce that are about building community ties and putting a positive light on the Muslim community do not get picked by social media commentators or critics. I can give you examples. They just get ignored and wither on the vine, just within our own readers, so you don’t actually change perceptions of *The Sun’s* coverage in the Muslim community.

Q588 **Chair:** Because you raised that, we would like to turn to some individual articles. Can I ask you about the piece that *The Sun* wrote on 11 December 2016, where you have a cut-out-and-keep guide, “Here’s what terrorists look like”. You have a picture of Osama Bin Laden, Jihadi John and the white widow. Do you have any anxiety about that now?

**Paul Clarkson:** First of all, I would say that the three people who were in that were undoubtedly terrorists. It was a small piece, with a small cut-out. It was a satirical piece: it was about a ridiculous decision about Italian OAPs who were hauled off a flight and mistakenly branded as terrorists. So the accusation is: could we not have used an Anders Breivik or somebody like that? But we were looking for the most high-profile terrorists we could



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think of at the time, and these were three extremely high-profile terrorists at the time.

Q589 **Chair:** Don't you have any concern that that is basically saying to a huge number of people, "Cut this out and keep it; stick it to your fridge, because if you see somebody walking down the street with a hijab, oh, here's what a terrorist looks like"?

**Paul Clarkson:** It's not even about what to wear. I don't think anyone could say that Osama bin Laden is not the world's most famous terrorist.

Q590 **Chair:** Of course, but "Here's What Terrorists"—plural—"Look Like"? Not "Here's what these particular terrorists happen to look like", but "Here's What Terrorists Look Like".

**Paul Clarkson:** We took the criticism in; we engaged with the people who criticised, but at the time we believed it was a perfectly legitimate, and satirical, piece to put in. You could clearly see the faces of all three terrorists, and they were very widely known to the world, so nobody could mistake them for any normal member of the Muslim community.

Q591 **Chair:** Actually, in the picture of Jihadi John, you can't see his face at all, because he has coverings all over his face.

**Paul Clarkson:** It's the pose with the knife that everyone knows.

Q592 **Chair:** Indeed. Look, this is just after National Action was banned for being a terrorist organisation, so you had at that time far-right organisations that do not dress like this being banned for being terrorists, yet you put something in that says, "Here's What Terrorists Look Like". I recognise what you are saying about how there are an awful lot of other articles that do different things. I am just trying to push you on this question: do you now regret this article, this piece?

**Paul Clarkson:** I can tell you that next time we do a piece like that, we will certainly have taken the criticism on board. We are ever evolving and we do learn from the engagement we have with groups, so we regret that it caused offence to people and we would certainly look at this in a different way in the future.

Q593 **Tim Loughton:** Can I come to another specific example? It particularly affects the *Mail*, Mr Wright. Do you agree that we have a shortage of foster carers and prospective adoptive parents in this country?

**Peter Wright:** Yes, I do.

Q594 **Tim Loughton:** Do you recall that some years ago, the *Mail* and other newspapers—

**Peter Wright:** Actually, could I amend that? We have done a lot of stories over the years about white couples who have been unable to adopt, because the adoption authorities won't allow children to be adopted into a different cultural background from the one that they were born into.

Q595 **Tim Loughton:** Which is what I want to come back to. You agree we



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have a shortage of foster carers and adoptive parents.

**Peter Wright:** No, I don't completely agree. There are people who would like to adopt or foster, but can't.

Q596 **Tim Loughton:** Okay. I don't think we are talking at cross-purposes. We need more people to come forward as fosterers and adopters who are then accepted as fosterers and adopters, because there are not enough fosterers and adopters to deal with the number of children we have in care who need foster places or adoptive placement.

**Peter Wright:** I'm not sure that's correct.

Q597 **Tim Loughton:** Well, let's come back to that. Do you remember that a few years ago the *Mail* and other newspapers ran a story about a couple in Yorkshire who were taken off the fosterers register because they were active members of UKIP?

**Peter Wright:** I remember it vaguely.

Q598 **Tim Loughton:** Nigel Farage jumped up and down, and for once he was right to do so. The newspapers condemned it as political correctness. And you clearly remember that some years before that—in fact, it was the time when I was the Children's Minister and promoting adoption—you ran a number of stories that prospective adopters who happened to be white, middle-class couples were not being allowed to adopt, typically, black boys, of whom there is an over-prevalence in the care system.

**Peter Wright:** That is what I was referring to.

Q599 **Tim Loughton:** And you quite rightly said at the time, "This is nonsense. The key thing must surely be to find a suitable loving home for those children who can't grow up with their own parents." I think we'll agree on that.

In September of last year, there was a story that, to be fair, was initiated by *The Times*, but was then certainly taken up and embellished by the *Mail* under the headline "Christian girl forced into Muslim foster care". The line you had taken previously was that there was political correctness just because they didn't share the heritage, culture or religion of the prospective foster carers and that was crazy. But here, you took the assumption that because this was supposedly a Christian girl—a five-year-old girl, referred to as AB, in Tower Hamlets—and the couple who were fostering her were Muslim, that was not appropriate. Why that inconsistency?

**Peter Wright:** I'm not sure it is an inconsistency. The reason it was a story is that the prevailing view of adoption agencies and fostering authorities is that children should not be put into a family with a different cultural background and, on this occasion, on the basis of the facts that were available to us at the time the story was written, a child was being put into a different cultural background.

Q600 **Tim Loughton:** But you have just raised cases—you raised them before I was able to raise them with you—in which your newspaper objected when



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it was white middle-class parents who, through political correctness, were not allowed to foster or adopt children who happened to be black or from a different religion or cultural background. You objected to that as a bad thing. I wholly agree, and we had to change the law to make that less likely to happen. Why was this, therefore, deemed to be a bad thing and appropriate for such a headline?

**Peter Wright:** It was deemed to be a surprising thing.

Q601 **Tim Loughton:** The word “forced” suggests that that was not the best thing for the child. Do you not agree with the use of the word “forced”?

**Peter Wright:** That was the claim being made on behalf of the child’s mother.

Q602 **Tim Loughton:** The child’s mother, who was an alcohol and cocaine addict.

**Peter Wright:** You still have rights even if you are an alcoholic cocaine addict, I’m afraid.

Q603 **Tim Loughton:** Indeed, you have rights, but the primary right is the entitlement of that child to be looked after properly. Under the Children Act 1989, the welfare of that child is predominant. When it subsequently turned out that you had doctored a photograph with which you took that *Times* story to give the supposed foster carer a head veil to make her look as Muslim as possible—

**Peter Wright:** No, hang on. It was to match the facts of the story as presented in *The Times*.

Q604 **Tim Loughton:** But you did not have a photograph of the foster mother wearing a head veil. You invented it.

**Peter Wright:** No, we didn’t have any photograph. The photograph that was published was a stock photograph. Stock photographs are supplied by picture agencies to illustrate stories where there is not a picture.

Q605 **Tim Loughton:** And at what point in that article did you indicate that that was not the actual parents but a stock photograph of people who just happened to be holding the hands of a girl who happened to look about five—who happened to be the age and the sex of the child in the story?

**Peter Wright:** The caption said, “Picture posed by models.”

Q606 **Tim Loughton:** I can’t see that in the article.

**Peter Wright:** I don’t know which version you are looking at.

Q607 **Tim Loughton:** Do many people actually look for that small print suggesting that this in fact is a staged photograph? That photograph was there to create an image that a white Christian child had been “forced”, in the word that you used. To add to that, you had an article by Katie Hopkins, who—surprise, surprise—referred to it as “abuse” of this little girl. You created a story with a headline that suggests that a Christian girl being fostered by British citizens who happen to be Muslims—who



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actually happen to be pretty good foster carers—is not appropriate and not in that child’s interests, entirely at odds with previous stories that you had run when the roles were reversed. That’s the bottom line, isn’t it?

**Peter Wright:** No, I’m sorry, I simply don’t accept that.

Q608 **Tim Loughton:** I didn’t think you would, but why not?

**Peter Wright:** This is a surprising story where a local authority appears to have adopted a completely different policy from what is currently the standard policy, which is that you do not place children into a family with a different cultural background. That was the reason for doing the story. The mother of the child was opposed to this placement. That was the story. This is a news report. The word “forced” is the view—

Q609 **Tim Loughton:** Is inappropriate, because, as the facts later revealed in other news stories, the maternal parents of the mother whose child it was were actually non-practising Muslims. The five-year-old girl—

**Peter Wright:** We have run—

**Tim Loughton:** Let me finish. The five-year-old girl had dual nationality. She was then put into the care of the Muslim grandmother, who intended to take her back to the country of origin—to a completely different background from the one in which that child had been brought up. It turned out that the girl had a warm and appropriate relationship with those foster carers. Therefore, for all intents and purposes, they were ideal foster carers. Entirely because they happened to be Muslim and, on the face of it, she was a white Christian girl—who had never been to church and had more in common with Muslim heritage than Christian anyway—and because of a fabricated story about not allowing her to wear a cross, you deemed that she had been forced and it was not in the interests of that girl, which turned out not to be true, did it not?

**Peter Wright:** We did not deem that she had been forced. We reported the claims made.

Q610 **Tim Loughton:** You used the word “forced”.

**Peter Wright:** Yes. It is a news story.

Q611 **Tim Loughton:** That is your title.

**Peter Wright:** It is a news headline.

Q612 **Tim Loughton:** It is your news headline.

**Peter Wright:** I’m not sure you understand how newspapers work, with all due respect.

Q613 **Tim Loughton:** You said just now that, along with your colleagues, you are responsible for all the words written in your newspaper. That word was written in your newspaper. It was used in the headline of your newspaper. It has clear implications that—

**Peter Wright:** If I can just make it clear, I don't actually edit the *Daily Mail*.

Q614 **Tim Loughton:** I know you don't edit it, but you are responsible for what goes in it—or are you saying that you are not responsible?

**Peter Wright:** I don't make the decisions on the headlines, but I am very happy to defend them.

Q615 **Tim Loughton:** Which you are presumably trying to do at the moment.

**Peter Wright:** Yes.

Q616 **Tim Loughton:** When those additional facts later came out—

**Peter Wright:** We reported them.

**Tim Loughton:** You did not make an apology.

**Peter Wright:** Well, the original story was correct on the basis of the facts known at the time.

Q617 **Tim Loughton:** But it wasn't, was it? On the basis of the facts known at the time—before your journalists actually found out what the facts were.

**Peter Wright:** All news stories are written on that basis. When a news story is breaking, you often only have a partial account of what happened. You have to report accurately what information is available to you at the time. You cannot wait until the history books are written—that is not journalism.

Q618 **Tim Loughton:** I think the day after, when the facts become clear, is recent history. It does not really constitute history.

**Peter Wright:** We did a big story the next day.

**Tim Loughton:** You did not—

**Peter Wright:** The facts did not all become clear—and they are still not all clear, I have to tell you.

Q619 **Tim Loughton:** At no point have you run a follow-up story that makes it clear that that child was not forced into a foster relationship that was inappropriate or that that child actually had a lot of Muslim heritage—not that that needs to be a factor on the basis of what you said earlier or what I said we were trying to do in Government to change the law anyway. It is not the law that you cannot place a child with foster or adoptive parents from a different heritage. That is not the law.

**Peter Wright:** I don't think anybody said it was.

Q620 **Tim Loughton:** You suggested—you used the word "surprised", I think, Mr Wright—

**Peter Wright:** Yes. I am talking about the normal practice.

Q621 **Tim Loughton:** The normal practice is to find a placement for a child that



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is appropriate and sympathetic and offers a loving environment. It is not obligatory that they have to be absolutely matched on culture, religion or heritage. That is not a surprise, in fact.

Finally, when that story was clearly misleading on the basis of the limited facts that you used, and with that clearly biased headline that used the word “forced”, and when it clearly used a photograph that was nothing to do with the story, why did you not say, “We got it a bit wrong and we would like to apologise, because Muslim foster carers can be really good foster carers, but this story gave rise to the suggestion that if you are Muslim, don’t bother to come forward to adopt a child”?

**Peter Wright:** I am terribly sorry but I do not accept that at all. It was an accurate account of the facts available to us at the time. The picture was clearly labelled as a picture posed by models. What does that mean except that the people in the picture are not the people being referred to in the story? It is newspaper practice. Every day of the year, you will find a newspaper using stock pictures to illustrate stories. Stock pictures are supplied with the licence that they can be used and adapted as necessary. We have had no complaint from Tower Hamlets, except about one issue concerning another picture that has been withdrawn. There are no complaints about the accuracy or the story from Tower Hamlets.

Q622 **Naz Shah:** My first question is to Paul Clarkson. I will show the size of the newspapers. Do you agree with the widely accepted view that the brazenly adopted headline and shameful front page were intended to stir up anti-Muslim hatred—yes or no?

**Paul Clarkson:** No, and I’ll explain why—

Q623 **Naz Shah:** Thank you. I am moving on. Sorry, Mr Clarkson, I only wanted a yes or no. How can you possibly justify singling out and targeting a specific group of people—in this case, Muslims—knowing full well, first, that that headline was completely inaccurate and, secondly, the polling was actually reflective of the non-Muslim British population? That to me is beyond sensationalism; that is intent. You choose to present an outright lie as a fact because it supports your editorial narrative, which undeniably stirs up hatred against Muslims. Not only do you report on the poll—I would have preferred it if you had decided not to, because it is not news—but you jump at the chance of a horrendous headline.

That front page generated an unprecedented 3,000-plus complaints to IPSO. That brings me to my next question. I have here the ruling that appeared inside, a few months later, in March, so in comparison it is not of equal prominence. Do you agree—yes or no?

**Paul Clarkson:** No.

**Naz Shah:** Thank you.

Q624 **Chair:** Sorry, did you say that you didn’t agree that it did not have equal prominence?

**Paul Clarkson:** I believe there was due prominence.

Q625 **Chair:** You think it was due prominence but you do not, presumably, think it was equal prominence.

**Paul Clarkson:** No, of course. One was on the front page and one was inside.

Q626 **Naz Shah:** Four months after this disgraceful headline, your paper published the ruling by IPSO, out of context, on page 2, in a small column, with no apology. Do you agree with me that this page 2 column is nowhere near the front page in equal prominence?

**Paul Clarkson:** I believe it is due prominence. If you want to limit me to yes or no answers, I cannot give any context. That gives a skewed answer. I can tell you why I think it is due prominence, if you want.

Q627 **Naz Shah:** Surely, you must recognise the offence that this type of headline causes, given that it was used by right-wing groups at the time and, no doubt, is still being used to stir up anti-Muslim hatred. As a Muslim woman who represents Muslims among her constituents, I am asking you directly: will you now apologise—yes or no?

**Paul Clarkson:** I apologise for the errors in the piece and I can explain the context of the story, if you want, and how we got to do the story and why it ended up the way it was.

Q628 **Chair:** So, you do apologise for the front page story?

**Paul Clarkson:** I do apologise for the errors in the story. The two errors that IPSO found were that in the polling we conflated two things: one, that everyone going to fight in Syria was fighting for ISIS—they could have been going to fight for other groups—and we conflated “sympathy for” with “support for” ISIS.

Q629 **Naz Shah:** So, Mr Clarkson, why have you not printed an apology to the Muslim community that you have offended?

**Paul Clarkson:** We printed the correction and we apologised for the errors in it. Whenever we correct a piece, we go back to the context of the piece. It was a very important issue and the reason we commissioned the poll was that there were fears of people going over to fight in Syria and coming back being radicalised when they came back.

What is very fair, and what we should say about this piece, is that we did not do it in isolation just for shock tactics and trying to use poll figures to incite hatred or anything like that. What we did was reach out to at least four different Muslim voices in that piece. In fact, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said in reaction to the poll that “it is clear Britain needs to take its head out of the sand and tackle extremism.”

Q630 **Naz Shah:** Mr Clarkson, the truth is that you published a ruling by IPSO. I have yet to see an apology from *The Sun* for that disgraceful headline, which stirred up anti-Muslim hatred. Will you now apologise for that?



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**Paul Clarkson:** I'll tell you right now that I apologise for any errors in the article. There were honourable intentions in the article. If we offended anyone, we are sorry we offended anyone.

Q631 **Naz Shah:** You are sorry for your offence.

**Paul Clarkson:** Yes.

Q632 **Naz Shah:** And you have not published that. This is the first time that I have heard an apology from *The Sun*.

**Paul Clarkson:** We did what IPSO asked us to do. There were two errors that needed to be corrected and we did so.

Q633 **Naz Shah:** Mr Clarkson, there is the letter of the law and the essence of the law. The essence of editorial practice tells me that you should be leading by best example. It is clear that in this case you have not printed your apology. Thank you very much, Mr Clarkson.

I now come to Mr Wright in relation to the *Daily Mail* story we were talking about. I am not going to go into the details, Mr Wright, but this is the original picture that Mr Loughton just referred to, and this is the doctored picture—with the veil—that you published. I put it to you again, like I have with *The Sun*, that this editorial decision was made by yourselves, because you are the editor, to actually incite—

**Peter Wright:** I'm not the editor. Can I please correct you? I am not the editor.

Q634 **Naz Shah:** You are representing the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mail* took an editorial decision to doctor an image to incite anti-Muslim hatred, because it peddles your narrative.

**Peter Wright:** I totally deny that.

Q635 **Chair:** Why did you put a facial veil on?

**Peter Wright:** This was a follow-up to a story in *The Times*, and the facts in that story said that she wore a full veil. In the stock picture that we had, which was taken of a Muslim woman in the middle east, the woman wasn't wearing a full veil. It was simply that the veil was altered to match the facts of the story.

Q636 **Naz Shah:** Do you accept, Mr Wright, that you as newspapers have an ability to shape public opinion and the public consciousness through headlines, and indeed, at times, to influence changes in the law?

**Peter Wright:** Yes.

Q637 **Naz Shah:** So can we do a compare and contrast? The verdict and sentencing of the terrorist murderer of my colleague, Jo Cox MP, made it on to every major national newspaper's front page in Britain on 24 November 2016—except yours. In the *Daily Mail*, it was on page 30.

Alek Minassian, the suspected terror attacker in Toronto who killed six people, was called a "socially awkward tech expert". Darren Osborne—the chap who did the terrorist attack in Finsbury Park—was called a "Far-right



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'loner'". Alexandre Bissonnette, who killed six people in a Quebec mosque, was initially called a "White university student", although he was called a "mass-murderer" later.

Do you know what all of those things have in common? All of them were white attackers and none of them were called a terrorist. Do you think that was right?

**Peter Wright:** Well, if I can—

**Naz Shah:** It's a yes or no answer.

**Peter Wright:** No, I am not going to give a yes or no answer. You have come here to seek my views, and I would appreciate it if you would listen to them. First of all, the original Jo Cox murder was reported on the front page of the *Daily Mail*, exactly the same as every other newspaper. The trial had been running for some days, and it was reported inside across two pages—the same amount of space that other newspapers gave to it.

Q638 **Naz Shah:** But it didn't make the front page did it, Mr Wright?

**Peter Wright:** Other newspapers did what is called a write-off on their front pages; they didn't lead their front pages with it. The reason for that was that the trial happened to end on the day of the Chancellor's autumn statement, which is a very big story in every newspaper.

Q639 **Naz Shah:** That also applied to the rest.

**Peter Wright:** The editor of the *Daily Mail* has the right to decide which stories are the most important on the day. His decision was that the autumn statement deserved the whole of the front page, which is what it got. There is no other agenda in that decision.

Q640 **Naz Shah:** Mr Wright, I put it to you that these issues at the *Daily Mail* and these corrections—indeed, those in response to Miqdaad Versi alone—are shameful. These are not isolated incidents. These are one of hundreds of generalisations and stereotypes, no different from when papers peddled myths about gay people, black people or people with disabilities. Now it is Muslims.

Earlier, you said that you try very hard to make sure that the content is right and that you report accurately. The fact is, as you have accepted, that despite what you had before you, the Muslim foster story was in fact inaccurate.

**Peter Wright:** No, I haven't accepted that.

Q641 **Naz Shah:** Okay. I put it to you that it was, in fact, inaccurate. To that end, I also put it to you that you failed in your trying.

**Peter Wright:** Sorry, what was inaccurate?

**Naz Shah:** The reporting of the Muslim foster parents was inaccurate.



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**Peter Wright:** I am sorry, but I've just told your colleague that I don't accept that. If it was inaccurate, someone would have complained about it.

Q642 **Naz Shah:** Mr Wright, I put it to you that that story had inaccuracies. Your paper doctored an image that perpetuated an anti-Muslim narrative. It was incorrect. It wasn't correct in its entirety, so therefore your trying failed. For that failure, will you now apologise?

**Peter Wright:** No, because I don't accept what you are saying. You are not listening to my replies. That story was accurate on the basis of the facts that were known at the time. Since then, other facts have come out and they have been reported. The picture, as I have repeatedly told you—

Q643 **Naz Shah:** It is a shame you haven't given them due prominence or equal prominence, Mr Wright. Thank you.

**Peter Wright:** I am sorry, due prominence for what?

Q644 **Stephen Doughty:** I want to come on to some other issues. It is pretty well accepted that *The Sun*, the *Mail* and the *Express* have a history of what I would consider to be homophobic headlines and commentary over many years, going back decades. Things have improved, but I would say that there are still some glaring examples of homophobia. I have just a couple of things to put in front of you. In 2016 and 2017, the *Daily Mail* was putting things like "husband" and "marry" in inverted commas when referring to Stephen Fry and Tom Daley. I was on the Committee that considered the equal marriage Bill—it is now law in this country, and heard the commentary around the PrEP decision and the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and Aids. I understand there is a very legitimate debate to be had around the clinical effectiveness of any product, but when you start talking about things like a promiscuity pill—the *Daily Mail* front page described the decision as demonstrating "a skewed sense of values."

**Peter Wright:** Are you going to allow—

Q645 **Stephen Doughty:** I am just giving a couple of examples just to open this up. The same sex traffic lights in Trafalgar Square. The one particularly egregious example—I still cannot understand how this had any relevance whatsoever to do with the story—was the decisions about the judges on the Brexit court case, where quite fairly the paper described one of the judges as having founded a European law group and the other one having charged taxpayers for advice, but you described the third as "an openly gay ex-Olympic fencer". Can you explain to me what on earth any of those things and the sexuality of those individuals involved have to do with any of those stories?

**Peter Wright:** Right, would you like me to start at the beginning? Which was the first one?

Q646 **Stephen Doughty:** Start with the last one. What does somebody's sexuality have to do with their judgments in a major court?



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**Peter Wright:** I'll explain that one very easily. As you recall this was a major story. These were three judges making an incredibly important decision. What newspapers do, when people who are not well-known to the public are, for some reason, filling a very important place in the news, is they run brief profiles of them.

Q647 **Stephen Doughty:** Does somebody's sexuality have anything to do with their competence as a judge to make or not make a decision, particularly if it is not related to anything to do with sexuality or equal rights?

**Peter Wright:** If you Google the particular judge involved, Sir Terence Etherton—he had become Master of the Rolls I think about six months previously—the first story that comes up is *The Guardian* report on his appointment, the headline is "Britain's first openly gay judge becomes master of the rolls".

Q648 **Stephen Doughty:** There is a very different context here, Mr Wright. I think you are being slightly misleading here. The appointment of somebody, an explanation, particularly of the first gay person to hold that role, is one thing. Relating it to the first part of your headline here, which is "The judges who blocked Brexit", you are relating two—in the first case, the first two—facts which are materially relevant to their position on this, but in the third all you are talking about is their sexuality.

**Peter Wright:** If you're going to profile the three judges, you have to profile the three judges.

Q649 **Stephen Doughty:** Why didn't you say the other two were straight?

**Peter Wright:** Because Sir Terence Etherton happens to have made history by being the first judge—

**Stephen Doughty:** But that's not what the story is about.

**Peter Wright:** Listen to me. The headline on that little piece was "Fencing champ". Now, being a fencing champ does not have anything to do with the judgment he just made. This is a profile. I bet you that you have a website, which includes facts about yourself and they won't all be political facts. There will be facts about your hobbies, your interests or your love of opera, whatever it is—I don't know—and if we were to do a profile of you, we would go to your website.

Q650 **Stephen Doughty:** I'm pretty sure you would probably mention that I was gay, but you wouldn't mention that about a straight person. Can you explain to me why you are still, in May 2017, putting the phrase "marry" in quotation marks when referring to Tom Daley or Steven Fry?

**Peter Wright:** I think in the case of Tom Daley, you may be mistaken. I've seen an article in *Pink News* which attributes that to the *Express*.

Q651 **Stephen Doughty:** I've got a copy here of the piece about Stephen Fry's husband: "Stephen Fry, 58, is to move to LA with his 'husband', aspiring comedian, Elliot Spencer". Can you explain why you did that?



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**Peter Wright:** That's from the Ephraim Hardcastle column, which is a mildly satirical column.

Q652 **Stephen Doughty:** So, someone's marital status is for satire now, not factual reporting?

**Peter Wright:** Well, satire can involve almost anything. It is a very old England tradition, you know: it goes back to Jonathan Swift.

Q653 **Stephen Doughty:** I think blatant homophobia masquerading as satire is pretty clear to most people, Mr Wright.

Can we move on to a serious concern I have about transphobia, certainly with regards to *The Sunday Express* and the *Mail*, and indeed, *The Times* and the *Telegraph*, who we'll have in shortly?

You seem to think this is all very funny, Mr Wright, but there is a serious edge to this. Stonewall said last year that nearly half of all transgender schoolchildren have attempted suicide. On what we are talking about here, hate crime, the current figure is that 41% of all transgender people have suffered hate crime just in the last year. I can tell you this factually from having spoken to a number of my own constituents who are transgender, and from hearing their horrific experiences. There appears to me to be a concerted effort by certain publications at the moment to promote some extremely unpleasant transgender hate material.

I will give some examples. There's Rod Liddle talking in *The Sun* in 2014 about a Labour candidate, Emily Brothers, who happened to be blind as well as transgender, saying, "Thing is though, being blind, how did she know she was the wrong sex?" This was, of course, subject to a complaint to IPSO which upheld the complaint. That's the only one that has been upheld.

We obviously have the case of Richard Littlejohn in the *Daily Mail* in 2013 who was accused by the coroner of character assassination of Lucy Meadows, describing, "He is not only in the wrong body, he's in the wrong job". Lucy Meadows was subsequently found dead.

There's the *Daily Mail* 2017 headline, "Church: let little boys wear tiaras", and *The Sun* in November with: "Now kids, it's Alice in Transgenderland"; "The skirt on the drag queen goes swish, swish, swish"; and "Trans classes for kids aged 2" on the front page.

Very recently, in March 2018, there was "Tran and wife". You'll recall the horror of the couple involved. I thought it was absolutely disgusting, quite frankly. How you think you can get away with that sort of stuff in the modern age?

Finally, in the *Express*, there was Leo McKinstry talking about transgender people tightening their "demented grip on our society", "the growing pattern of transgender madness" and "making a mockery of biological science".



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When we see the suicide and hate crime figures, do you accept any responsibility whatsoever for generating the type of atmosphere that transgender people face in this country? I will start with you Mr Clarkson.

**Paul Clarkson:** I would like to come in because I have some very strong opinions on what you have accused us of.

I would actually say that *The Sun* is one of the most prominent media organisations to shed a light on transgender issues. We have an excellent relationship with a number of transgender lobby groups that we have been engaging with over a number of years.

On the headline that you just spoke of, "Tran and wife"—I think the language you used was "absolutely appalling"—I completely refute that. I would like to give you some context. That couple came to *The Sun* to tell their story because they trusted us to tell their story. Every word, headline and image was passed by transgender groups pre-publication. I have a number of texts that said that it was a wonderful piece, gushing with praise.

Q654 **Stephen Doughty:** But the headline you chose, the couple themselves described it as sensationalised and misleading.

**Paul Clarkson:** Do you think it's the headline, "Tran and wife" that they have an issue with?

Q655 **Stephen Doughty:** It's the headline, and then it's, "Jake who used to be a woman weds Hannah who was a man". We all know where you are going with this, whatever was inside.

**Paul Clarkson:** I know what the issue is here. We talked earlier about one group not being able to talk for a whole community. Gender is a broad spectrum: you have everything from those who accuse certain feminists of being TERFs, all the way through to people who want to go live in stealth or be gender fluid, and so on.

With this story, we got their full blessing beforehand. There was no issue with "Tran and wife" because you have three words to tell a story. It is not a front page story just to say, "man marries woman". The issue that some people within the community had was with the strapline along the top that explained that there was man that used to be women, marrying a woman who used to be a man.

Q656 **Stephen Doughty:** Why is it a front-page story anyway? It's two people getting married.

**Paul Clarkson:** Why shouldn't we shed light on this modern, transgender—

Q657 **Stephen Doughty:** Why is a story of two people who love each other getting married on the front page of your newspaper?

**Paul Clarkson:** Because it shows how society has changed in a positive way. If anybody actually read the piece—everyone in the transgender



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lobby groups who we have spoken to were gushing with praise. They thought it was an incredible—

Q658 **Stephen Doughty:** Do you think that Rod Liddle's report about Emily Brothers—not least because it was upheld as a complaint by IPSO—was acceptable?

**Paul Clarkson:** When I go back to 2014—it was before my time, but I won't shirk responsibility for—that was a pretty stupid and ill-judged joke.

Q659 **Stephen Doughty:** "Stupid and ill-judged"? Okay. Gary, can you just tell us about Leo McKinstry and his comments in the *Express*?

**Gary Jones:** Can you tell me when—?

Q660 **Stephen Doughty:** I haven't got the exact date, but it was in an opinion piece in the *Express*. We can provide it afterwards.

**Gary Jones:** It is a comment piece. I suppose he is entitled to give his opinion within that. I would argue that newspapers have come a long way in the last 10, 20, 30 years on transgender. When I had my time at the *Mirror*, we ran the story with Kellie Maloney, which was a really important story, because it was a very prominent person who wanted her story to be told.

We sat in the office—there were six of us—and we spent two hours going through every single word of that story, until we were entirely happy that the wording of that story was satisfactory and that the communities involved would not object to any single word.

I think that massive ground has been gained here, in communities where newspapers and editors, like myself, are very much aware that you need to get every single word right.

Q661 **Stephen Doughty:** On that, can I just ask one last question, which is just to all three of you? You mentioned that you have liaised with lots of transgender rights groups. Can you tell me which ones?

**Paul Clarkson:** Yes. All About Trans. And there are some transgender individuals who we have actually written about in the past. It was actually ones where we went wrong in the past, but we built a relationship with them.

Q662 **Stephen Doughty:** Would you welcome—this is to all of Gary, Peter and Lloyd as well, I assume—training from organisations like Stonewall and other trans-friendly organisations, in terms of terminology and understanding some of the issues? I ask that because, quite frankly, I don't think that the papers understand the effects and the deep hurt that is caused to members of the trans community by a number of the headlines and a number of the ways that stories are covered. Would you welcome that sort of opportunity for discussion with your reporters and editorial staff? Peter?

**Peter Wright:** I don't have any problem with that at all. We have talked to them in the past and taken advice. I do think that, going back 20 years,



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newspapers—I don't believe the *Daily Mail* ever did, because it's not their sort of language—but stories were done that talked about "gender benders". I don't think you see anything like that now. Society does change.

Q663 **Stephen Doughty:** We've got the *Daily Mail* from 2017, just before Christmas: "Church: Let Little Boys Wear Tiaras", and then a whole set of pejorative copy below, which I think takes you into that "gender bender" territory.

**Peter Wright:** I haven't researched that one, but I do recall the story and I think you'll find it is an accurate report of what was said. However, I do accept that transgender issues were hidden 20 years ago. People didn't know about them; they didn't understand them. And I think we've all been on a journey of discovery and will continue to do so. Actually, as far as I can see—I'm not an expert—it is quite a complex issue.

Q664 **Stephen Doughty:** It is indeed a complex issue, but therefore I welcome the fact that you would all welcome training and support from organisations who actually understand it—

**Lloyd Embley:** Yes, we definitely would.

**Paul Clarkson:** I've had three emails with them this week; we have already set up more training.

Q665 **John Woodcock:** Can I talk in more general terms about the amplification of acts of terror? This is clearly a complex area, but if you understand the definition of "terror" is to be able to project a greater level of fear among a community, whether that is the Westminster attack by an Islamist, or Finsbury Park, where there was a far-right extremist, the act of a single man with a van or a knife being able to command global media attention potentially makes those acts of hatred—acts of terror—more attractive to carry out? Do you accept that that is the case, and do you accept that you, as leading members of the media, have a judgment call to make about the prominence you choose to give to such attacks?

**Lloyd Embley:** They all sound like examples of terror to me, and I think that is how we covered them.

Q666 **John Woodcock:** Indeed they are, but I am asking more generally. It is not an accusatory question at all. It is clearly a question that the political world has to reflect on, when we call for national minutes of silence and world leaders show their solidarity. Do you think it is problematic? Have you ever made judgments in editorial meetings about whether it is problematic to give terror acts the level of attention that they currently get in the media? Is there potentially a role to play for media organisations to set in context, for example, the harm that can be done by someone with a van compared with other ways in which there is a level of risk to human beings in this country?

**Paul Clarkson:** I think we have a responsibility to report on difficult things, but there are measures that every editor will be careful of. For



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instance, every wannabe terrorist can go on to Amazon and order the ingredients they need for a bomb that will maim and injure hundreds of people, but we never give a DIY kit of how to do that. We have to show responsibility on that. But you must uncover and explain the victims' stories and the motives behind terror attacks and why they happen.

**Gary Jones:** The whole idea of terror is to cause fear—that is the intent. All newspaper editors are aware of not wanting to push that, and of just covering the story as fully as they can without going further. Certainly, if there is a terror attack, we will get—or have in the past—members of the community to write a piece saying, "This is not in the name of Islam", or something to that effect. The story itself will play out and, yes, the terminology and the language are things that every editor is aware of. You do not want your readers to be terrorised, which is obviously the whole reason why the attack was carried out in the first place.

**Lloyd Embley:** It also depends a bit on the particular medium you are talking about. If you are online, events can move and change so quickly. We have had examples recently where someone has hit several people in a car and they turned out to be a drunk driver. That probably would not—does not—fall under terror, for sure, but for perhaps 45 minutes, it looked like it did.

Q667 **Sarah Jones:** We have talked a lot about specific cases. I want to talk about the cumulative impact over a long period of time. The Chair has already mentioned that, at the moment, only 4% of content about Muslims is positive, and that for every one moderate Muslim mentioned, there were 21 examples of extremist Muslims. That is from Baroness Warsi's research.

Another example is when you look at the coverage of Brexit and the referendum. A King's College London report said that of the 99 front-page leads about immigration, 88 presented a negative picture and no front-page lead about migration presented a positive picture. Only 5% of the national population are Muslim—it is quite a small number—and yet a YouGov poll found that more than half of Britons surveyed regard Muslims as a threat to the UK. A lot of people who do not know any Muslims regard them as a threat. Do you think the negative coverage, whatever the rights and wrongs of each individual story, has a cumulative impact on people's opinions of Muslims?

**Peter Wright:** Can I come in on that? I have done a bit of research of my own. I went through the *Daily Mail's* front pages so far this year and I found only five front-page stories that in any way impinged on Muslims. One of them was a story about Theresa May promoting women and ethnic minorities to senior Government positions. One of those women, I know, happens to be a Muslim. That was not mentioned in the article. One was about an heroic Afghan interpreter who has been denied entry to the UK and we quoted a general, saying how disgraceful that was. I presume the interpreter is a Muslim; the story did not say so.

Q668 **Sarah Jones:** We don't have time to go through them all. My point is not



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the specifics but the cumulative impact.

**Peter Wright:** The point I am trying to make is that there is no anti-Muslim agenda; it doesn't exist. I can only repeat that my newspaper when I edited it and the *Daily Mail* campaigned against the war in Iraq.

Q669 **Sarah Jones:** The war in Iraq does not mean that you are not publishing racist content or content that is going to incite racial hatred. That has got nothing to do with anything. That is something completely different.

**Peter Wright:** If we were trying to incite racial hatred it would be appearing on our front page. If we want to run a campaign, like we have against the damage plastic does to the environment, or in favour of better treatment for prostate cancer, it will appear on our front page frequently. Stories inciting hatred against Muslims do not appear on our front page.

Q670 **Sarah Jones:** So the content of your papers has had no impact on people's views? That is what you are saying?

**Peter Wright:** I do not know where people have got their views from.

Q671 **Sarah Jones:** Often from newspapers, I would suggest.

**Peter Wright:** Not necessarily. We are told these days that they get them all from social media.

Q672 **Chair:** Hate crime in Britain is on the rise, particularly Islamophobia and hate crime against Muslims, and you think it is all okay—business as usual—and there is no need to do anything?

**Peter Wright:** No. I am afraid I think social media is frankly dreadful.

Q673 **Chair:** So it is all social media's fault and not the print media's?

**Peter Wright:** All I can tell you is that I have worked in newsrooms for 40 years and I have never heard an editor say, "Right. Let's run this story because it attacks Muslims."

Q674 **Sarah Jones:** It might be unconscious bias because you are all, with respect, middle-aged white men—

**Peter Wright:** I am a quite elderly white man, actually. I got my pension letter yesterday.

Q675 **Sarah Jones:** I say that as a middle-aged white woman—I am not making a point about that. What I am making a point about is the proportion of journalists who are Muslim, for example, which is 0.5%, compared with 5% of the population. Sometimes, there is unconscious bias that builds up over time. Just as Lloyd made the point, rightly I imagine, that if I carried some of this stuff, I would lose readers. It might be that editorially you make that decision that if you do not cover these stories you would lose readers, because your readership has a right-wing view.

**Peter Wright:** We have plenty of Muslim readers. I am sure that there are plenty of Muslims with right-wing views.

Q676 **Sarah Jones:** Do you think you should have more Muslim journalists?

**Peter Wright:** I think we would like more journalists from all minority groups.

Q677 **Sarah Jones:** How are you going about it?

**Peter Wright:** We run a big training scheme and we have Stephen Lawrence scholarships, which are specifically for journalists from minority groups.

**Lloyd Embley:** We would all like that, I think. It is a problem for the industry to attract them. My children are a quarter Pakistani, by the way, so I have a certain element of knowledge here. It is difficult to attract particularly Muslim, Hindu and Sikh—

Q678 **Sarah Jones:** That's not surprising when you look at content.

**Lloyd Embley:** I think it is more a cultural thing. Their parents don't see journalism as the kind of career that they want their kids to go into, is the truth. I can't speak for the others but I can certainly speak for the *Mirror*. We would like more, for sure.

**Paul Clarkson:** What we have found is that we have had to give alternative ways for people to get into journalism. With the apprentice scheme, we consciously target different kinds of people, instead of the people who are going through the usual university and education system.

Q679 **Douglas Ross:** First of all I have a question for Paul Clarkson and Peter Wright. In the 2015-16 IPSO annual report, it said 14,455 complaints were received. What proportion or percentage of complaints do you think were from your two newspapers?

**Paul Clarkson:** I would guess, as the two biggest newspapers in the UK, and as newspapers with a certain political slant, that there was a huge proportion.

Q680 **Douglas Ross:** Is it 5%, 10%, 20%, 50%?

**Paul Clarkson:** There is an important distinction about how many complaints—

Q681 **Douglas Ross:** We will come on to that, but my question is about the percentage. What do you think the percentage of complaints received by IPSO was for your two publications?

**Peter Wright:** I'm well aware that our newspapers get the most complaints.

Q682 **Douglas Ross:** You're well aware, so what percentage is it?

**Peter Wright:** I could not tell you off the top of my head.

Q683 **Douglas Ross:** So you're not well aware? Okay, it is 50%. Half the complaints in 2015-16 were for your two papers. Why?

**Peter Wright:** Because they are the biggest papers.

Q684 **Douglas Ross:** So that's it?

**Paul Clarkson:** There are two elements.

Q685 **Douglas Ross:** So are you disagreeing with Peter Wright?

**Paul Clarkson:** I agree with that, but there are two elements. One is that we are the biggest newspaper. There are also the groups that orchestrate complaints, so it is abused by interest groups. You might find, for instance, that thousands of complaints can be orchestrated on social media, all about the same story.

Q686 **Douglas Ross:** Ah, so Mr Wright's argument is that because you are the biggest newspapers and you have the biggest readership, therefore you will have a high percentage, but your argument, Mr Clarkson, is—

**Paul Clarkson:** No, I said there are two elements.

Q687 **Douglas Ross:** So the two elements are totally different? It is because you are the biggest newspapers—

**Peter Wright:** No—

Q688 **Douglas Ross:** Sorry, hold on. If I can ask the question, then you can answer the question. You were getting rather upset at others interrupting you; I get upset when you interrupt me. You cannot possibly say that you have 50% of all the complaints because you have the most readers and are the biggest newspapers, but then say that actually it is not your readers, it is all these outside interest groups that are complaining against you?

**Paul Clarkson:** No, I said it is two elements that combine. They are in isolation, but they are cumulative in effect. First, we are the biggest newspaper, so we are the most prominent and have the most readers. A lot of the complaints will not come from the readers; they will be either politically motivated, or from other kinds of interest groups.

Q689 **Douglas Ross:** Surely by that argument, though, it would not matter if you were the biggest newspaper or the smallest newspaper? If the content is enraging some of these interest groups, you would still receive a high number of complaints.

**Paul Clarkson:** It is not the number of complaints; it is how many are upheld and actually have merit. That is where it is a completely different picture. When you actually think of the percentage of upheld complaints compared with the amount of complaints that come in, it is infinitesimally small. The *Mail* and *The Sun* are probably some of the best at IPSO.

**Peter Wright:** Can I just explain those figures to you slightly? What IPSO counts is the number of complaints filed. Thanks to social media, which in many ways is an excellent thing, if someone tweets, "Look at this front page—complain to IPSO," you will get 3,000 to 5,000 complaints overnight. That number of complaints does not represent the number of stories that have been complained about; it represents the number of complaints that may be simply a matter of someone pressing a button.



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In our annual report, which will be published by IPSO shortly, the four or five Associated titles received complaints, and I am including not just IPSO complaints but complaints that did not come through the IPSO process, that were of enough substance to need investigation on 348 stories last year. Thirty of those involved discrimination, and none of the discrimination complaints were upheld by IPSO—nor, before you leap in, were they, by any manner of means, all about Islamophobia.

**Q690 Douglas Ross:** I have some concerns that you just assume that, because the final figure is small in terms of the number of complaints that are upheld, you should not worry about the thousands of people, readers or interested groups in this country who are offended by something that you have put in. As editors, and as people involved in the newspaper industry—an industry that, as I think you have already alluded to, is losing readership—should you not be worried that thousands of people go to IPSO and complain? That is a question for you all. Or are you only worried about the ones that you get punished for?

**Peter Wright:** No, you are worried about the ones where you think you have got something wrong, but a very large proportion of those complaints—any newspaper managing editor will tell you this—are people who simply disagree with what you publish. They characterise it as a complaint, but the truth is it can be virtually anything. It can be: “Why did you carry another picture of Meghan Markle on your front page?” That is a complaint.

**Q691 Douglas Ross:** It’s still 50% between your two newspapers. I want to come to all four of you to ask whether you think you give enough prominence to corrections and apologies, following on from what Naz Shah was saying earlier on.

**Paul Clarkson:** We certainly do. We have an established position on page 2 of *The Sun* for adjudications, corrections and clarifications.

**Q692 Douglas Ross:** Your opinion is that having that in the same place every time means readers know where to go to find all the mistakes you have made?

**Paul Clarkson:** It is highlighted in blue, so everyone knows now where to go to. Sometimes that would be more prominent than the original article. The original article often is on page 32 or 26 or sometimes it could be for a front page article, but that is the place—it is well established where to go. It is also on the home page and freely searchable usually if it is an online article. We also need to be wary of the fact that these clarifications are not carried in an echo chamber. Any number of social media commentators or media organisations are perfectly happy to report that *The Sun* has had an upheld complaint at IPSO.

**Lloyd Embley:** I agree. Page 2 is the same place for us. It is where we ask people and tell them how to complain. It is almost without doubt further forward in the paper than any complaints that the original story took place, certainly in the case of *The Mirror*, for sure.



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Q693 **Douglas Ross:** Do you mean you have never had a complaint upheld on the front page?

**Lloyd Embley:** I would have to go back.

Q694 **Douglas Ross:** But you did say it was further forward than any other, which would suggest there is evidence.

**Lloyd Embley:** Many other.

Q695 **Douglas Ross:** Okay.

**Lloyd Embley:** I would also say that a number of newspapers have carried front page corrections. From our point of view, that was a big thing.

Q696 **Douglas Ross:** I will come on to that in the next part.

**Gary Jones:** Yes, it is important for newspapers to make corrections quickly if they get it wrong. I checked on stories the *Express* has done in the past and where it has got it wrong, it is amended with a correction on page 2 and also online you can see a correction at the end of the story or the story is removed from online.

**Peter Wright:** Yes, we have a big correction spot on page 2 as well.

Q697 **Douglas Ross:** Finally, what else do you do when you have to make a correction? How does your process go back to the journalist to say: "How did you get this wrong? How did the story get so far down the line that we printed it and we are forced into this embarrassing apology because we are trying to sell a newspaper that gives true facts every time?" You all have a dedicated space, because you have so many corrections to make. You all have a dedicated space where people can see corrections, which means they are there fairly regularly. What do you do to go back to the journalist to say: "This is unacceptable, this isn't good enough, we have had another complaint in"?

**Paul Clarkson:** An awful lot of my time is dealing with complaints at *The Sun*. Basically, as I mentioned before, there is a big pre-publication and post-publication editorial process. We have a readers' ombudsman who we work with. We have a legal department. Every journalist on *The Sun* gets IPSO training once a year, both online and in physical sessions every two years.

The thing is that when you are printing that vast amount of articles—we print hundreds of thousands of articles a year online and in print—you are going to have mistakes. We are not robots.

Q698 **Douglas Ross:** Why are there going to be mistakes? People read the newspaper assuming what they are reading is true. That is why they buy a newspaper—for facts, for comment, but also because it is true. I know we need to move on, but what do you do when a mistake is made—not the training you do every year, but when a journalist and a sub-editor and an editor have all agreed a story that then gets complained about and you have to put out a contraction and a correction? What do you do



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to that journalist, sub-editor and editor? Do you go back every time and ask them why they got something so wrong that you have had to apologise and give a correction?

**Paul Clarkson:** We have an investigation. If we believe that there was a mistake that wasn't an honest mistake or an understandable mistake, there can be discipline, but it is usually an honest mistake, and with the sheer volume of stuff we publish, there are going to be mistakes.

Q699 **Douglas Ross:** I am sure individuals involved that have a correction about your story that may be on page 2 but is of less prominence in their view don't take much comfort from the fact that it is an honest mistake. These mistakes can have massive repercussions for individuals and groups, as we have been discussing here. So is that an agreement?

**Peter Wright:** Our titles publish about 350,000 stories a year between them. The *Daily Mail's* correction box carries about 60 or 70 corrections. It is in the nature of journalism that you are reporting events as they happen and they are often contested. Sometimes, I am afraid, people lie to you. It is inevitable, I am sorry. So there are some corrections that are the result of journalist error, and there are others that are not. There are things that it transpires, when fuller information is available, turn out not to be correct. We still correct them.

Whenever it is a result of journalist error, there is a three-stage process. The journalists are interviewed and made to explain themselves and try to justify whatever statement it is that they have made that turned out not to be accurate. If we then establish that it has been an error and that it is a problem with the way journalists in general are working, all the journalists involved are told that they have got to mend their practices and do it differently. On top of that, I hold seminars every year or 18 months for all our journalists. I do about 35 or 40 seminars—it takes several months to get through—

**Chair:** I am going to have cut you short. We are very conscious of the time. We have a last issue that we need to cover. I apologise to the panellists due to follow that we have let this run on. This panel reflects some of the biggest circulation papers and it is important to make sure we have enough time to cover that, but I do want to apologise.

I want to briefly touch on social media. Kirstene Hair.

Q700 **Kirstene Hair:** There is no doubt that social media companies are going to have to take more responsibility for the content on their platforms. Mark Zuckerberg acknowledged that recently in front of the Senate. Do you think that the current regulations in place for broadcast and print media are sufficient for these new platforms or do you think that we need an entirely different set of rules for social media platforms?

**Chair:** I will ask you for quite short answers, so we can move on.

**Lloyd Embley:** As a company, we sign up to IPSO. There is definitely a grey area when it comes to social media and whether that is covered by IPSO. We would expect our social media journalists to behave within the



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editors' code and the IPSO code. Clearly, you cannot apply that to some of the social media companies who do not fall under IPSO. So there is definitely a problem, but I think the problem lies with the lawmakers of the land to decide how they want to regulate social media.

Q701 **Kirstene Hair:** You suggest there is a bit of a grey area.

**Lloyd Embley:** There is unquestionably a grey area. Someone who has been mentioned quite a lot in here is Katie Hopkins. She is on Twitter right now. In the last 16 hours, she has tweeted some fairly unpleasant stuff; there is a video of her walking around the streets of Toronto saying, "I can't see a single person who looks like they've come from Canada; they all come from Africa." She has 900,000 followers. I don't like that, but that is not a problem we can solve—any of us.

**Paul Clarkson:** We must give people a power to offend and the freedom to offend as long as there are other restraints about accuracy and so on.

**Lloyd Embley:** Far be it for me to defend *The Sun* or the *Mail*, but Katie Hopkins has worked for both of them and she doesn't have that job any more, so they did something about it.

**Peter Wright:** That was because of her activities on Twitter.

**Gary Jones:** I think everybody is very aware that social media putting information out immediately is going to have issues. Certainly, the *Express* online is treated very much the same way as print. It goes through a legal process and if there is a complaint, it will be at the end of the article or the article no longer exists.

Q702 **Kirstene Hair:** So you believe the regulations that are currently in place are sufficient?

**Gary Jones:** No, I don't. I think we need to look very closely because it always moves very, very quickly and people respond. As Lloyd has just said, Katie Hopkins and that kind of material can suddenly go into the stratosphere immediately.

**Lloyd Embley:** The current regulations deal with our news brands online, because we are signed up to IPSO. It is everything else.

**Peter Wright:** If I could explain—if one of our journalists goes on to Twitter or puts something on Facebook as a *Daily Mail* journalist, then that is regulated by IPSO. If somebody not employed by a newspaper puts stuff on social media, they are not regulated by anybody. I think that is something that the internet and social media industry is going to have to grapple with and I am sure will come under a great deal of pressure from politicians.

Q703 **Kirstene Hair:** Just to clarify, you said there is a difference between a newspaper, which has an editor, and a social media company, which does not. Does that mean, for example, that Mark Zuckerberg sitting in San



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Francisco should be held responsible for a post uploaded by somebody sitting in the UK, which does not come under, for example, one of your newspaper titles?

**Lloyd Embley:** That is the problem we face right now. Are they publishers or not? With the greatest respect, I am not sure it is down to the newspaper industry to solve that particular problem. To a certain extent, we are victims of the problem—in many ways, not least our ad revenues.

Q704 **Kirstene Hair:** If I finally delve into this a little deeper, do you think that having stricter rules on removing hate speech would be a more effective method of regulation than making the specific social media companies responsible for all posts that appear on their platforms? As you say, a newspaper editor has their own regulations but others, as we've suggested, don't.

**Gary Jones:** That is something that media companies like ourselves do. If there is an inappropriate comment or a race hate comment attached to a story, that will be removed as soon as humanly possible. The argument is that perhaps Facebook and other sites should adopt the same policy.

Q705 **Kirstene Hair:** And take on more responsibility.

**Gary Jones:** Yes.

Q706 **Chair:** I will just ask you one very quick question because we are going to come on to this in the other panels, but we just want to quickly hear your views on the record. It is currently illegal to incite racial hatred. Would you accept having the words of the law in your editors' code?

**Paul Clarkson:** I believe that the law is the best form for dealing with incitement to hatred. I think there is certainly an argument—and I know IMPRESS's code and so on have a clause there—but I think we should leave it to the professionals: the CPS and the police.

Q707 **Chair:** You really would rather have the police and the prosecutors deciding what should happen in the newsroom than you yourselves through an editors' panel or through IPSO?

**Paul Clarkson:** I believe that there is the IPSO code and there's the law. We actually operate within both. I would be uncomfortable with IPSO deciding on what is hate speech and what is incitement to hatred. As talented and esteemed as they are, they do not know better than the CPS and the police. Of course, the code is constantly evolving and it will be really interesting to find the Committee's opinions.

Q708 **Chair:** So you would prefer to have the law step into the newsroom than have self-regulation on this?

**Paul Clarkson:** It already does and there has been no journalist, I believe, who has ever been charged or arrested over incitement to hatred.

**Lloyd Embley:** I am certainly minded to look at it, but clearly we need to have agreement. The difficulty is the bar or burden of proof. The law exists. There have been very few prosecutions as far as I am aware. In



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fact, I think that was part of the evidence given to you, wasn't it? Was it six in the last three years or something? Was that right? Maybe, again, push that back a little bit and say that if that isn't doing the job it is supposed to do, then perhaps there is a problem with the law, but it would be incorrect if we weren't, as a group of editors, to consider that. My current position is that I would be minded to look at something that was aligned to the law, but that is my personal view.

**Gary Jones:** The legal bar is very high. Whether it should be that high is a debate we should also have as a society. Where it's at as an industry, it is much lower. There is a much better balance that could be found and I am not sure we have got it at the moment.

**Peter Wright:** I am going to echo the views of others. The editors' code isn't set in stone; it changes, it is regularly reviewed and it is certainly something we could look at. I have two caveats. One is that if the editors' code simply replicated the law, it would be very difficult for IPSO to investigate a case because the editor would be very reluctant to give evidence to IPSO if there were a pending court case. The other is that if the proposal is that there should be a clause of the code that set a lower bar, you would then be demanding of journalists who depend on freedom of expression in order to do their job. You would be allowing them fewer rights to freedom of expression than members of the public, which would be a very difficult circumstance.

Q709 **Chair:** You don't give them fewer rights to freedom of expression if you can decide which of the things they say and which opinions they hold you decide to publish and give a bigger platform to. That does not give them fewer rights to free opinion or expression when they go to the pub.

**Peter Wright:** It depends on how it is phrased. It is something that the Editors Code Committee should be prepared to look at.

Q710 **Chair:** Just to sum up some of the things we covered in terms of where we started this and the wider issues and concerns around Islamophobia: we put relatively few questions to you, Mr Jones, about the content of *The Daily Express* partly because we know that you only recently took up the post, and you said you were planning to make changes to *The Daily Express*. Is that right?

**Gary Jones:** Yes. It is a newspaper. I do not want specifically to look at any race group.

Q711 **Chair:** Mr Wright, you said you were pretty happy with everything and you were not planning to change anything. Is that right?

**Peter Wright:** I think that is an over-simplification.

Q712 **Chair:** Mr Embley, you said that your readers would not stand for it if you covered these stories in a particular way. I am confirming however that even if they would stand for it, you do not think it would be right to have Islamophobic headlines or inappropriate content.

**Lloyd Embley:** It is not something I believe in.



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Q713 **Chair:** And Mr Clarkson, we welcome at least a partial apology from you for one of the stories that we put to you. Would you like to add to those apologies the story that I raised with you about "Here's what terrorists look like"?

**Paul Clarkson:** I actually believe that we did not do anything wrong with that piece. They are three very well-known terrorists.

**Chair:** You have unfortunately rather gone back on the comments you gave earlier in which you said you might reflect on that.

**Paul Clarkson:** I am sorry if people find offence in it, but it was not intentionally offensive. I do not believe that it was offensive.

Q714 **Chair:** This is not about offence. This is about the impact on people reading it, saying "Here's what terrorists look like" and you have chosen three people and said that as you are walking down the street, this is what you think terrorists look like. Do you think that you did nothing wrong with that article?

**Paul Clarkson:** I thought I made it clear that those three were very prominent terrorists, and I did not think there was anything wrong in that. We are engaging with groups and we are constantly listening to their criticisms.

Q715 **Chair:** That is very unfortunate. I thought you were trying to say in a hinting kind of way earlier that you did think there was a problem with that. It is hard to see how there is any justification for a cut-out-and-keep piece like that suggesting that these are the kinds of people that people should be looking for in the street, and this is the way in which they dress and this is the sort of thing they look like. Do you want to offer any apology for the Katie Hopkins article that described migrants as "cockroaches", which I believe you have taken down from your website?

**Paul Clarkson:** Yes, it was before my time. I do not think there is any defence for the language she used. We can cherish freedom of expression, but using language like "cockroaches" is certainly not appropriate and I apologise for that.

**Chair:** Can I just finally say to all of you that you all have huge leadership roles in your profession. We have still not moved on from the evidence that we were given from Baroness Warsi that says that only 4% of the articles referring to Muslims were positive. Only 4%.

**Peter Wright:** I dispute that.

**Chair:** We have heard your evidence and we have it on the record. Only a tiny proportion of your journalists are Muslims.

**Peter Wright:** Can I address that?

Q716 **Chair:** We have heard a lot of evidence from you and we have given you a lot of time to give evidence to us. Sir Alan Moses has said that he would be willing to have a wider inquiry into Islamophobia in the print media,

and into what the print media's responsibility might be to challenge it or prevent it or deal with some of the wider issues in society. Would you be willing to take part in that?

**Peter Wright:** I certainly would.

**Gary Jones:** Yes.

**Lloyd Embley:** Yes.

**Paul Clarkson:** Yes, certainly.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. Thank you for the evidence you have given us. We appreciate your time and your patience. Conscious that this evidence session has overrun, we would like to move to our second panel.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ian Brunskill, Assistant Editor, The Times, Ian MacGregor, Editor Emeritus, Telegraph Media Group, and President, Society of Editors, and Ted Young, Editor, Metro.

Q717 **Chair:** I welcome our second panel giving evidence to us this afternoon. Can I ask you to introduce yourselves, your organisations and your role within them? Can you also tell us whether you think there is a problem with Islamophobia in society?

**Ian Brunskill:** I am the assistant editor of *The Times*. I am responsible, as Peter was at the associated titles, for regulation, complaints handling and that kind of thing. I also edit the paper quite often, so I understand the challenges involved in that.

Islamophobia in society—yes, definitely. I think none of us would dispute that. Whether this is the point at which to say it or whether you want to say it later, I must say I don't recognise the picture of intentional, deliberate Islamophobia in the press that has been presented, a little bit here and also at your previous session. The basis for Baroness Warsi's figure strikes me as a bit peculiar. I'm not quite sure where the 4% comes from. You can do these things anecdotally, but it certainly wouldn't be reflected in our pages at all.

I can give you examples. I have given you written evidence about four or five articles from the last couple of years that you asked about. They were the subject of complaint and we got into difficulties, but there are dozens more articles about which we didn't get into difficulties, often while addressing similarly difficult questions, which is what happens. There are also quite a lot that do precisely the kind of thing people have talked about, in which we are really just reporting Muslim life. We have done pieces on Muslims in gay marriages, mosques being given listed status or not—just treating the stories as stories. I certainly wouldn't recognise the 4% figure.

I also wouldn't recognise the deliberate agenda bit, which we have heard from several people. It seems to me that there are news stories that



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tackle difficult subjects, and there will be problems around them. There are opinion columns that offend, and there have been problems around them. There are certainly misunderstandings, misjudgments and mistakes, but I don't recognise the picture of deliberate dishonest manipulation of information in order to stoke Islamophobia. That is rather a long way of answering that question.

**Ian MacGregor:** Good afternoon. My name is Ian MacGregor. I am editor emeritus at *The Telegraph*. I should probably declare that I also have the honour of being president of the Society of Editors, and I have just joined the board of IPSO.

To answer your particular point, I think your report—which, if I may so, was first class—on online crime and hate speech hit the nail on the head. The scale of Islamophobia in this country is appalling. When you read the figures that you rightly highlighted—1,200 people have been convicted under the Communications Act for hate speech—and combine that with the fact that the Home Office has reported recently that the police in England and Wales recorded over 80,000 hate crimes in 2016-17, and with what we hear from Labour MPs about the appalling things going on in social media and the horrible crimes and threats, it is appalling.

You also hit on several of the key areas we need to address. I assure you that there is no complacency on my part or the part of any of my colleagues. You raised some points regarding advice for the industry. Perhaps you want to go through this later, but there is an excellent piece of advice, which I think we could refresh. Back in 2004-05, with Home Office funding from the Faith and Cohesion Unit, the Society of Editors got together, spoke to journalists up and down the country, and did a very detailed report on reporting diversity, which I think addresses a lot of your issues about how we are responsible and how journalists treat these issues. It also gives guidance on terminology.

There is another excellent report, which could also be updated, and which was also funded in part by the Government—the Department for Communities and Local Government, of which I think Eric Pickles was Secretary of State at the time. It is about four or five years old now, but it was very helpful on moderation and on how we should deal with a lot of these issues online. It highlighted our responsibilities and looked at how different newsrooms work. I think that they can be refreshed and a lot of that we can learn from. You also highlighted recruitment. Baroness Warsi clearly highlighted that as well in her evidence. A lot of the points she made in that respect were correct. We would all like more people from ethnic minorities in journalism. That is only fair; that would be representative and just the right thing to do.

If I may say what *The Telegraph* is doing, because nowhere is perfect at this, in the past year we have started a new recruitment process with apprentices, where we have used blind CVs and specialist recruitment agencies, so that we don't know the gender or ethnicity of the applicants until we see them in person, and we judge them on their merits, of



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course. I am glad to say that of the 24 apprentices that we recruited this year, 44% of those people were from a BAME background.

I believe, to your point about Islamophobia being a real problem—and the scale of it is, without question—that we have a responsibility to deal with it in a responsible, accurate way, which is what our readers and the British public want. We have a very rigorous code, as part of a regulated media, that will ensure that we do things properly and accurately and, if we make mistakes, we hold our hands up to them and correct them. I have probably drifted on a bit too long, but I wanted to make those points.

**Ted Young:** I am Ted Young, editor of *Metro* newspaper. Yes, there is a problem with Islamophobia in the country. I can come slightly differently, in that *Metro* is a free newspaper, but we are in 50 cities, on buses, trams, tubes. That includes 21,000 buses every morning. We have tried to be proactive as a paper to defuse race hate. Mandy, could you show the Committee?

This is one of the first ones that we did. There was an incident at Leytonstone tube station, when a guy denounced another guy who said, "This is for Syria," and stabbed a rail passenger. Our intro by Tariq Tahir says, "Muslim leaders yesterday condemned a suspected terrorist who shouted, 'This is for Syria.'" Then we go on to say that there was a member of the public who said, "You ain't no Muslim, bruv." Our sub-deck says, "Mosque leaders and thousands of Twitter users denounce station knifeman."

Specifically, Mr Doughty, on gay hate, when there was the hideous terrorist attack in Orlando, our showbiz editor got that picture in Old Compton Street, and we changed the masthead to say that Britain was with Orlando.

After the London Bridge attack, we did this front page: "True Brit". That is the baker who chased terrorists. He battered one down with a crate. He is from Romania and everybody wanted him to be given the freedom of London. Interestingly, on the point that Mr Ross was making about whether we are scaring people, our front page after that attack was: "Taken down in eight minutes". Sorry, it was Mr Woodcock. That was a positive message about just how efficient the police were.

I have only got two more. On the London Bridge attack: "Not in our name. Imams march to site of atrocity with pledge to root out extremist criminals." Finally, there was the terrorist attack on Finsbury Park: "Terrorist suspect is saved by hero imam." I got a lot of emails from Muslims saying thanks for doing that front page.

I am not saying that *Metro* does not get it wrong. We constantly get things wrong. I think it was Mr Ross who was making a point about mistakes. Mistakes happen, but as a paper we definitely try to be proactive in promoting racial harmony and a sense of national togetherness, especially in times of crisis.



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**Q718 Chair:** Can I ask each of you, do you have ways within your papers to look at the cumulative impact—the impact over time? I recognise there will also be individual editorial decisions made about how to handle a single story, but do you look at the impact your stories might be having routinely, as opposed to in advance of an evidence session, on a wide range of things? Mr Young?

**Ted Young:** We have something in *Metro* called “Metro Talk”. We don’t actually have a leader column in the paper. We have a double-page spread every day, which gives quite a good take on what people are thinking. On Brexit, we get people saying, “You are a Remain paper,” and people saying, “You are a Leave paper.” We get people saying, “You are a Tory paper,” and people saying, “You are a Labour paper.” We try to go down the middle line. I am very aware, as a commuter—in fact, I recognise Mr Woodcock, because I have seen him on the tube down to Richmond. I think you are just aware in London that, I think, it is something like 40% of Londoners are, like me, not born in Britain. So if we were getting race hate in the “Metro Talk” section, we would know about it. If people were saying, “These Muslims—we should be doing something”—

**Chair:** John Woodcock wants to come in on that. I assume it’s not on the commute.

**Q719 John Woodcock:** It is not on the details of the Richmond tube, no. You make a really interesting point about the diversity of your readership in London. Forgive me for my ignorance, but to what extent does *Metro* editionise? Obviously, you are in the north-east and in other cities. I am interested whether you carried this particular headline and tone throughout.

**Ted Young:** That was national.

**John Woodcock:** Good.

**Ted Young:** We do have, as Mr Ross would know, a Scottish edition, because obviously there is Scottish politics, education, policing and all that. We have a Scottish edition. We editionise for sport.

**Q720 John Woodcock:** It is good to hear that answer, because you could imagine that this headline may suit your readership in a more diverse area, but there may be more of a need for readers in less ethnically diverse areas to see it.

**Ted Young:** Particularly last year, with those horrific attacks, I think it is very important to sit and say to people, like with the page about the imams, that these are not Muslims—these are Islamist nutcases. I think it was important for us as a paper to do that. We have 3.4 million readers every day.

**Q721 Chair:** Mr MacGregor, do you look at the cumulative impact as well as individual stories?

**Ian MacGregor:** Let me say one thing, if I may. It depends on how you define where these stories are coming from, because clearly it is difficult



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to know what judgments you are making. Are we aware of the power of words and words that are chosen carefully? Absolutely. That is why we have a compliance officer and a compliance team, who are looking at any issues or any occasional errors that occur. We do weekly reports to all staff, for them to see issues and trends or particular points about particular stories, every week.

Q722 **Chair:** But as a “for example”, earlier Sarah Jones raised the issue of unconscious bias, or things that you may not realise are happening in terms of the overall coverage. Do you have in place processes to review the overall coverage and the overall impact of it?

**Ian MacGregor:** When it comes to unconscious bias, if I may address that in particular, we are very aware of that. For example, we are setting up workshops for the staff to look at diversity and inclusion and all those kinds of issues. We have a head of diversity joining us at the *Telegraph*, and we are very aware of the difficulties for unconscious bias. In fact, I gave a speech recently to the London Press Club about the gender pay gap, unconscious bias and those challenges that we all face. It is certainly something that our compliance team look at. But, to answer your point in more detail, I will probably have to get back to you on that specific point, if I may.

**Ian Brunskill:** I don’t look at stories and think, “How does this fit with other stories that we have done?” and try and construct a continuous narrative. There is a rolling sense of awareness of what we do and what we think, because we think quite a lot about what we think. There is a leader conference at the paper. *The Times* leaders are quite important things in a way. Readers read them still. The conference that comes after the news conference every day is a quarter of an hour or a 20-minute discussion. Things come up and you work out positions. We have been, for instance, consistently in favour of immigration as a social and economic good, so a position like that remains constant and you are aware of how things that you are reporting will fit in with that or not.

In the referendum we came out for remain in the end, after a lot of consideration. That is partly because of the readership that we have. If you are a *Guardian* reader, you know you’re a *Guardian* reader. If you’re a *Telegraph* reader, you know you’re a *Telegraph* reader, whereas I think if you’re none of the above, as it were, and you cannot afford the *FT*, which is a preposterous price, you are probably looking at us. So what you are not wanting is for us to tell you what to think, but you want us to be conscious of what we are doing and to be setting things out and to be giving you a platform against which you can react, and to inform you in a sensible and considered way. I hope that is what we do. That is the extent to which we are aware of a cumulative thing.

We haven’t got a mechanism that records how many Muslim stories we have done, but we would know at any given point what kind of signals we might have sent out on any of these topics, not least because readers will tell us, and they will tell us quite quickly and quite fiercely. If you go and look at the comments online on some of the stories that I imagine you will



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want to talk about and that have attracted all kinds of criticism, some of the most fierce criticism was from not just readers but paid-up subscribers—you have got to be a paid-up subscriber to post. Go and look at some of those comments. They are still there and they are taking us to task very fiercely. In that sense, we have an overview of where we are.

**Q723 Stephen Doughty:** I want to come on to the issues of homophobia and transphobia, particularly transphobia. I was not surprised to find the sorts of headlines that I found in some of the publications on the previous panel, but I have been very disappointed, particularly with the *Telegraph* and *The Times*, to see both publications jumping on the anti-trans bandwagon. I will give you some examples. *The Times* opinion piece in November 2017 had the headline, “Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby”. You will understand why that is a particular concern, given the previous use of “gay lobby”, “Jewish lobby” and all of those sorts of things. “Children sacrificed”? Come on. In a description of an incident in an NHS facility—I do not want to get into the specifics—the words in the *Sunday Times* January article described a woman as a “burly transgender patient”.

**Ian Brunskill:** I am not being evasive, but I cannot speak for the *Sunday Times*. We are a separate tile.

**Q724 Stephen Doughty:** Okay. It said “extremely male-bodied” as well.

**Ian Brunskill:** I take your point.

**Q725 Stephen Doughty:** Fine. There have been an increasing number of stories focusing on the issues around the trans community in *The Times* that seem to have been given particular prominence in recent months. I appreciate there is an ongoing debate around some of the issues, but is there a particular editorial line that has been issued?

**Ian Brunskill:** No, there is a very fierce debate, as you know, as there is within your own party, if I may say so, apart from anywhere else.

**Q726 Stephen Doughty:** But do you think a headline like “Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby” is acceptable?

**Ian Brunskill:** I can’t remember what sort of piece that was on, but I agree, the language there strikes me as slightly emotive. If it was an opinion piece and that was the opinion being expressed, then the headline should quite reasonably express the opinion that the article is expressing. If that was the opinion that was being put in an opinion piece, I don’t think that was a news report. If we ran a news report headline, “Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby”—

**Q727 Stephen Doughty:** It is still appearing with *The Times* logo next to it.

**Ian Brunskill:** But it is appearing on an opinion column. It is a fair reflection of a column that we have carried. We are quite happy to carry the column.

**Q728 Stephen Doughty:** You know full well, Mr Brunskill, that when any of us write an opinion piece or whatever, the headline is given by the



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publication and not by the individual.

**Ian Brunskill:** Yes, but I can't remember who the column was by.

Q729 **Stephen Doughty:** It was by Janice Turner.

**Ian Brunskill:** Exactly, it would have been and that, frankly, would be Janice's view. That is what I was about to say. This is a debate. Janice has been consistently fierce in that debate. She has attracted massive criticism in that debate. She is having the same arguments in the Labour party, of which she is a very active member.

Q730 **Stephen Doughty:** Do you think the use of the phrase "trans lobby" is an appropriate one?

**Ian Brunskill:** I don't have any objection to that. There is a lobby, or rather there are several transgender lobbies.

Q731 **Stephen Doughty:** So trans lobby is okay, but gay lobby, Jewish lobby?

**Ian Brunskill:** If there were one. If you really wanted to—

Q732 **Stephen Doughty:** I think it is very, very dangerous territory. Let us turn to *The Telegraph*, Mr MacGregor. You are carrying pieces by Alison Pearson in October: "Will our spineless politicians' love affair with LGBT ever end?" Norman Tebbit, 17 October: "We need to investigate the causes of this sudden transgender explosion", and a piece, "Trans survey for 10-year-olds". What is going on here? Why are you allowing headlines like that? I accept they are opinion pieces and the individual is expressing them, but do you think that is appropriate?

**Ian MacGregor:** If I may say first of all, we take the coverage of these issues so seriously. That is why, as members of IPSO and abiding by the code of conduct, we are very careful about the wording we use. We treat these issues with great sensitivity. One other piece of guidance that we watch very carefully is from IPSO to all its members on researching and reporting stories involving transgender individuals, which asks, and guides every reporter on a step-by-step approach, about whether mention of their sexuality is relevant, going back to one of your earlier points about the use of pronouns, whether it is suitable to use certain "dead names" and that kind of thing. So we take it very seriously.

Clearly, as my colleagues have said, these are very sensitive issues and very important issues. It is important that our columnists and writers are entitled to their opinion in this world. Sometimes that can be upsetting. I would not be encouraging anyone to upset anyone, but the issues are quite sensitive. I think we reserve the right to upset if we have to, because these issues are important to discuss.

Q733 **Stephen Doughty:** But given what I said very seriously, they are on about the levels of hate crime, of violence experienced by the transgender community and also, of course, the levels of suicide rates particularly among young transgender people. Do you think it is responsible to be carrying content by individuals who are expressing such extreme views and using those types of headlines?



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The reason I ask is because we all know about clickbait. We all know about how you are driving revenue and driving traffic to your site. We didn't get a chance to discuss it with the previous panel. That is the headline that you see; you don't get to see the rest of the article unless you pay—"We need to investigate the causes of this sudden transgender explosion", "Will our spineless politicians' love affair with LGBT ever end?", "Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby". These are the two-second and three-second reads that your people are seeing online.

**Ian Brunskill:** We are editing newspapers. We are not actually doing this on Twitter. I think it is quite important. I know you are right—yes, you see a headline and so on—but you have to look at the bigger picture here. It is extremely unfair not to. Can I just finish? On trans—

Q734 **Stephen Doughty:** You say you are not on Twitter. In terms of how news is fed to people online now—whether that is through Apple News, Google News, whatever it might be, or people sharing content online—the thing missing is the headline. We all know about the phenomenon of clickbait. Do you not accept some responsibility for the headlines that you are using, whether by you or by your columnists?

**Ian Brunskill:** I am not not taking responsibility for that headline. We are perfectly happy to accept responsibility for that headline. I don't share your view that it does what it did and I don't think it breaches a code or anything. If we could just talk a little—

Q735 **Stephen Doughty:** So it is okay?

**Ian Brunskill:** Can we just talk about the substance of this for two seconds? You have singled out a single column. We didn't even get to talk about that properly because we focused on the headline. The point about Janice Turner is that she is the only columnist who is doing this—the newspaper has no line on this. This is where this conversation started. I think it is important to clarify this. The debate within the trans community has shifted quite dramatically and quite violently, in some ways, as you know. It has become about who is a member of it, essentially. It has become about self-definition. This is the toxic issue here. Janice has taken quite a firm view on that, as have many other Labour Party members. This is partly taking place in a Labour Party context.

Q736 **Stephen Doughty:** With respect, Mr Brunskill, we are talking here about your responsibilities as media proprietors and the public information out there. I accept there is a debate, but the headline is what gets seen. May I ask one more thing?

**Ian Brunskill:** Can I put one more thing in that case? We will take that headline as read—you can have that headline, if you like, as being a sign of transphobia in *The Times*. *The Times* has run—[*Interruption.*] Let me finish, please. We are talking about *The Times* as a paper. I have explained Janice's position on trans, and that actually accounts for most of these columns that we are talking about. The other thing that *The Times* has run—a great many pieces over the past two or three years—is pieces about trans people which have been entirely sympathetic, particularly



pieces about children and adolescents. We ran an enormous piece about—I know this because I put it in a “best of” *Times* anthology from last year—the Tavistock Clinic, the people who go there and so on. So there is no sense that we are poking people with sticks on this. There is a bigger picture. We have a columnist who has a particular view on this issue, and the headlines on her column reflected the strength of feeling that there is around this issue in the kind of area that she is operating in. In no sense does that reflect the bigger picture of *The Times’s* take on this.

**Q737 Stephen Doughty:** I just think it is a great shame to see your titles slip into the clickbait territory that we have seen from some of the proprietors on the previous panel.

I have one last question, to Mr MacGregor. On the subject of the infamous front page about the Brexit mutineers, do you still stand by that front page given some of the attacks and threats made to public figures and the hate crime that many politicians have experienced? Do you think that that was a wise headline? Taking away the issue of what was being reported, do you think that it was wise to name them and put all those faces on the front with the word “mutineers”? We have seen other papers use “traitors” and things like that—is that wise language to be using?

**Ian MacGregor:** I will give you a very clear answer and in detail, but I have to go back to the previous point first, if I may—I will come back to you. We are not interested in clickbait; we are interested in quality journalism dealing with stories that are important, sometimes of great sensitivity. We try to ensure that we do everything with great rigour and great sensitivity. Sometimes that is debateable, but we ensure that we do everything that we can to make that happen.

To come back to your point, we stand by that story, 100%. I know people have different views. Brexit is, has been and probably will be a very divisive issue. It is dividing political parties, friendships and families, and no one takes any pleasure in that, but these are big issues and it is our job to investigate them, to discuss them and to highlight them. On your specific point about that story, that particular headline, that was a fair characterisation of how senior Conservatives saw what they perceived as rebels who were not going to support them on the date for Brexit. We were being guides to how they were perceived. To put something on the front page like that is totally justified.

May I just quote the editor-in-chief, who issued a statement at the time? He said, to get the exact wording right: “I’d urge you to distinguish between the legitimate actions and language of a free press and the illegitimate actions and language of those who make threats of violence.” I know it is a sensitive issue but, if I may say, Amber Rudd hit the nail on the head when she said that the “real problem”—her words—is the attackers who are potentially launching their hatred and abuse.

It is a divisive issue. We take great care about getting things right and we make no apology for doing things in an eye-catching way, but it is accurate. Your point about how some people are debating it is very



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important, and I and everyone at the *Telegraph* condemns the behaviour of some mindless thugs on the internet when they are discussing stories like this. It is shocking and, as your particular—

**Stephen Doughty:** On your last point, it is in real life as well—colleagues receiving threats, death threats and that sort of stuff. With the greatest respect, it wasn't a quote about what someone had said or a characterisation of what other Conservatives might have said, it was your paper's headline—it wasn't in quotes.

**Ian MacGregor:** I'm not denying that. We stand by that headline and we stand by the report. All I was going to say was that we have a very clear policy on moderation of anyone talking on our website about our stories. If anything like that kind of thing that you were alluding to emerges, it will be flagged. Our reporters will see it—our moderation team. We have 12 people involved in a moderation team, who are dealing with these kinds of issues, to stop them emerging, and dealing with other reader inquiries. They will delete accounts—they will suspend accounts—if anything like this is seen. If I may just quote you the commenting guidelines for our staff: "We do not tolerate religious abuse, racism, sexism, homophobia, minority abuse or any hate speech." We even go on to say "Any comments containing denial of the Holocaust or denouncing a world tragedy will result in a suspension or permanent restriction from commenting." I have obviously highlighted a few for quick reference, but the details go on. We take this very seriously.

**Stephen Doughty:** But it is fine for petty columnists to talk about a sudden transgender explosion.

Q738 **Sarah Jones:** I just want to press on this unconscious bias issue, because I do think it is significant. Mr Brunskill, in your written evidence you said to us: "It would be regrettable if continuing debate on these complex and important subjects were to be closed down on the basis of assertion and prejudice from vested interest groups who dislike the British press and appear to hold its readers in contempt." It was in the first paragraph of your evidence and it is basically saying: "Somebody else is wrong and not ourselves," and I think the point of unconscious bias is that you don't know it is there.

**Ian Brunskill:** That is not unconscious bias—

**Sarah Jones:** If I could just finish making the point. This isn't about your paper alone, here. When we have terrorist incidents reported—and this issue of whether people are called a jobless lone wolf or whether people are called a terrorist—you can look at each one and think "Well, they are true," but it is the unconscious bias that veers you in one direction more than another, and I think *The Times* in particular in the UK is such an important publication historically, to say that you have no mechanisms for looking at just how are we covering stories about Muslims is quite surprising.

**Ian Brunskill:** No, that wasn't what I was saying at all.

Q739 **Sarah Jones:** You said you haven't got a mechanism for knowing how many Muslim stories you cover.

**Ian Brunskill:** We don't have a mechanism for ticking boxes and going through the paper each morning and counting the number of Muslim stories. We have, as I have tried to say, an editorial setup which involves, one would hope, constant awareness of what we are doing, which draws on what we have done before. The same people are doing this all the time.

Q740 **Sarah Jones:** But they are probably white, Christian journalists.

**Ian Brunskill:** But journalists write all the time about things that they are not, as it were.

Q741 **Sarah Jones:** But that is the point of unconscious bias, isn't it?

**Ian Brunskill:** No, it isn't. What we do is write about things that we don't know about—that we are not. We are not experts. We write about science; we are not scientists. We write about Muslims; we are not Muslims. We write all kinds of things. What you do is you find out the facts and you get them right, and you find out where to go to get the unbiased information.

Being alert to unconscious bias I think is something that is very much built in. It is built in through the editors' code anyway, because the code doesn't just—and there were some things said in the section—my statement, by the way, about those people was not unconscious bias. I am quite actively biased against these people who are actively biased against the press. I think both of those biases are quite conscious.

Things were said last time about IPSO and inaccuracy, and how they don't investigate and it is not really serious. It is, actually. If you look at the way the code is drafted it says that you must take care to avoid publishing inaccurate, misleading or distorted information. That is really quite broadly drafted. Since IPSO took over from the PCC the wording hasn't changed but the interpretation has broadened tenfold, so what you are constantly being made to do is to justify the things that you are reporting and to say that they are accurate. Clause 1 covers almost everything you might need or want to do. Do you see what I mean? It covers being misleading and distorted—that is what I mean, as well—which does, to me, say bias. It is not simply a factual inaccuracy, but that clause will actually apply to make sure that the picture you are giving is clear and not distorted.

Q742 **Sarah Jones:** It wouldn't have stopped those two differences in definition.

**Ian Brunskill:** No it wouldn't and I think that is a good point—I think it is something that we are alert to. There are differences around those things. You do have to look at those people. Some people are acting in a cause and say that they are acting in a cause and have some kind of measure of organisation around them and so on, and it becomes easier to say that that is a terrorist. I don't think this is a purely racial thing at all. There are other people who really are, I think, loners who are just doing it—you don't know what the agenda is. If you can identify, or if they have proclaimed, an agenda, you are more likely to call them a terrorist.



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**Q743 Sarah Jones:** I have just one more question, again to you, Mr Brunskill. Ian MacGregor listed issues, and I don't know whether what he listed is common to both sides, as it were—to Ted and to Ian—in terms of what is being done at the *Telegraph* on apprenticeships, using agencies that can help you get to more BAME employees, running workshops, having a head of diversity and looking at the gender pay gap. Do you want to just tell us what you are doing on that front?

**Ian Brunskill:** It is not totally my realm so I can give you only a bit of overview. I think we are aware of the same problems as everybody else. We are not actively, I think, doing a positive discrimination thing, if you like, but we do run training schemes and we do work with groups and organisations that are intended to fuel people into those training schemes who might not naturally have thought to apply—people who are working with people who might not think of journalism as a potential career. That has had some success, I would say. We have had trainees.

At a broader sort of corporate level, one of the more interesting and impressive things that the whole company—News UK—does is the news academy scheme, which involves working with schools and young people, not just giving them training. The latest initiative that I have had a bit of involvement with is to make them media literate, to understand the kind of questions we are thinking about here to some degree. We go out into schools with these courses and get people thinking with their teachers about what the newspapers do, what kind of decisions are involved in making newspapers and what kind of unconscious bias there might be. If you have people at 14 and 15 thinking about these things and they then start to think that it might be quite an interesting thing to do, I think you have started at the ground floor, as it were, in encouraging people, and that will filter through into newsrooms and so on. But newsrooms are not quite the monolithic middle-aged white male places that I think you think they are. You would be welcome to come in and see ours if you wanted, to talk to some people and see how unconsciously biased you think they might be. Seriously, it is a much more open process than it was. I have been doing this for 30 years—

**Q744 Sarah Jones:** The journalists I have spoken to in the past have told me, not about this issue but about other issues, that they are told editorially that they have to cover things they do not want to cover. I have heard that from plenty of journalists.

**Ian Brunskill:** Yes, but what does that mean?

**Q745 Sarah Jones:** It means they are told what they have to cover.

**Ian Brunskill:** Well, they are, because that's their job. The news editor sends his reporter out on a story, but there is a world of difference between saying, "I want you to go and report on this", and saying, "I want you to write a transphobic or Islamophobic news story, and you'll get sacked if you don't". I honestly cannot say that I have ever, not even anecdotally, come across a case of that anywhere.

**Q746 Chair:** Mr Young, do you want to come in on that point?



**Ted Young:** To go back to your very first comment, right at the beginning: we are all blokes. If I had known, I could have sent in my place my deputy editor, who is a woman, my night editor, who is a woman, or my news editor, who is a woman. I would have gladly done that.

As far as young journalists are concerned, it is a real problem getting kids from minority backgrounds into journalism. We have one young guy from the Stephen Lawrence scheme who is currently on *Metro*, but there is just not enough diversity in our newsrooms at the moment. Funnily enough, many, many moons ago on *The Sun* there was probably more diversity than I have seen recently, and that is something that is worth looking at. The value of this Committee is having a look at ourselves. *The Times* and the *Telegraph* are socially conservative newspapers. These are changing times. We are very different, but that is not to say I am criticising them. In many ways, they are a reflection of our society. Also, *Metro* is just not big enough to have a training scheme. I only have about 50 staff and nobody is leaving at the moment. If we could, I would love to have more from a minority background.

**Ian MacGregor:** Can I just add one thought, which is quite sincere? If you think it would be useful to meet our apprentices—all or some of you—about their experiences and backgrounds, I will check with our HR team. That might be very useful.

Q747 **Stuart C. McDonald:** We started by talking about the issue of recruitment, and the difficulties in trying to attract as diverse a range of candidates as possible. Are there other things that can be done alongside that, such as the employment of specialist advisers or correspondents to deal with, for example, particular religious groups?

**Ian MacGregor:** I can answer that. I am lucky enough to be at a newspaper that believes in having correspondents for certain areas. We certainly have a religious affairs correspondent. It is their duty to ensure they are on top of all these areas and understand all the different religious groups that exist. They are familiar with and in contact with them. The very good guide that I was referring to earlier—it's too complicated to go into now—explains our responsibility for understanding the complexities of the different religious groups in our country. We should be very aware of that.

Q748 **Stuart C. McDonald:** What about training for your journalists more generally? Is there training about diversity issues to make sure that stories are being reported appropriately and that the correct language is used?

**Ian MacGregor:** 100%. Again, you are very welcome to come and talk to the compliance team to see how it works. All our journalists are trained properly before they arrive. If they are apprentices, they are trained when they are there. They are all trained according to the IPSO code, with clear guidance. As I said earlier in a different context, the compliance editor sends to all staff details of trends, issues or things to be aware of every single week.



Q749 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Brunskill, Mr Young, what is the role of specialists?

**Ian Brunskill:** I think I can answer both of those in pretty much the same way. We have correspondents—we have always had a religious affairs correspondent and a social affairs correspondent. Their remits overlap, as it were. They have been responsible for the kind of stories I was talking about—the perfectly positive Muslim stories of various kinds that the paper has run. I am just looking at the random notes I made before coming. There was a profile of the first British-born leader of the Muslim Council, and so on. When somebody like that is appointed, you go out and interview them. We are doing all that.

We are covering the stories, and we take it very seriously as a factor in British life. *The Times* traditionally always has. There was a time long ago when doing that meant taking the Church of England seriously. That was really quite a long time ago. I don't think that has been the case for a good 10, 15 or 20 years. It is a much more diverse approach. On Saturdays, we actually have a faith page, uniquely among papers. I know the *Telegraph* has a little bit of religious content like that, but we have dedicated religious features. We will also have religious leaders of various kinds writing religious content, which is a very unusual thing to find in newspapers—a sort of "Thought for the Day"-type thing, but in print. We have always done that.

On training, it is the same as at the *Telegraph*. There was a lot of talk in your last meeting—you may want to talk about it today—about extending the discrimination clause to groups and so on. We tried to address it in our written submission. The point is that the discrimination clause, as drafted, gives an awful lot of pretty robust protection to individuals. The kind of factors that you need to be alert to in reporting in order not to be discriminatory are all in there. The training we give people in the code covers all that.

Q750 **Stuart C. McDonald:** We may come back to that. Mr Young?

**Ted Young:** When *Metro* has achieved world domination and can have the number of staff and pages as the *Telegraph*—

Q751 **Stuart C. McDonald:** It is a different challenge, but how do you address it?

**Ted Young:** I'm not sure if you are a *Metro* reader, but we tend to do bitesize information for commuters, so that after a 20-minute commute they have got a good idea what is going on in politics, sport and so on. If I did a column, say, for a religious section, you would have to then think of all the various other religions that would rightly need to be covered to balance it. We survive on advertising. If someone from some religious section or whatever sponsored a spread that paid for me to have a religious comment section and they were prepared to have everyone, so you could have a Hindu, a Sikh, a Muslim and a Roman Catholic, I would love to do that, but I am ruled by the economics—the space—of the paper.



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**Q752 Stuart C. McDonald:** In the absence of that possibility, how do you make sure that your journalists more generally write stories sensitively and appropriately?

**Ted Young:** We genuinely try to. We are picked up by commuters before they have even seen the front page. They are running for a tube, a bus or whatever, and they pick up the paper. They want something that may challenge them but is not going to insult them. As I said, we don't always get it right, and I certainly think if we have got it wrong they will let us know about it, but we police ourselves very strictly.

**Q753 Stuart C. McDonald:** A final question from me. The evidence today has contrasted pretty sharply with some of the evidence we have heard in previous sessions, and with one bit of evidence we received in particular. It was from the NUJ, which said that journalists are being pressurised by their editors to find Muslim stories and write them "in a way that is negative and poisonous". I take it that is something you would say is not happening at your own newspapers. If that is the case, have you ever heard stories about that happening at other publications? If a journalist came to you to say that that was what their editor was demanding of them, what would your advice to them be?

**Ian Brunskill:** Where to start? I hope I addressed this slightly before. No, I have not even heard of it anecdotally at other newspapers, and I can certainly say that it does not happen—or I have never been aware of it happening—at *The Times*. I have been there a very long time, and it is quite hard to know how it might happen without my becoming aware of it. If it were to happen, there are pretty robust procedures in place for dealing with it. You would be able to bring a straightforward complaint through HR procedures that you were being victimised and bullied and that the terms of your contract were being breached if you were given an instruction like that with any sort of accompanying threat. We have pretty clear workplace bullying, harassment, employment fairness, diversity—all that is really very rigorously in place and there is a big HR operation that would make sure that you had some redress. That is certainly the advice I would give to anyone who came to me: "We take this to the managing editor and then to the HR department."

**Ian MacGregor:** I would say exactly the same thing. That just does not happen. I have never heard of it happening. I was just digging out copies of the best-selling *Telegraph* front pages of the last year. Most of those are politics. Some of them are atrocities. Some of them are royal stories. We do not go out to get Muslim stories. There is a great difference between what you are implying and—

**Q754 Stuart C. McDonald:** I am just reflecting evidence that we received previously. It is obviously miles apart from what we have heard today, but everyone is now saying that that definitely does not happen.

**Ian MacGregor:** That definitely is not happening. Have there been times we have asked people to look at the behaviour of extremists, who might be of different religions, especially in the wake of some of these atrocities? Absolutely, yes. But if you were to look at some of the very positive



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articles about Muslims that you were referring to, such as some of the work by Shelina Janmohamed, Radhika Sanghani or Afua Hirsch, which you have seen in the *Telegraph* on a regular basis—different people writing at different times, a lot of the time about the difficulties facing Muslim people, or Muslim women, in society—you would see that they make no bones about what those problems are.

Q755 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Sure. And you have not heard any suggestions at all that that sort of practice goes on at another newspaper?

**Ian MacGregor:** No.

Q756 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Young?

**Ted Young:** No, I haven't, and I think they should name names. If there are people doing that, they should be fired.

Q757 **Naz Shah:** First, Mr Young, may I add to the thanks that you have had from many other Muslims for your headline calling a terrorist a terrorist?

Mr Brunskill, coming back to *The Times*, these—I do not have the full pages—are four of your front page headlines for the fostering story: "Christian child forced into Muslim foster care"; "Council under fire for fostering Christian girl with Muslims"; "Judge rules child must leave Muslim foster home"; and "Child in Muslim foster home row may be taken out of Britain". The four front pages on the infamous Christian child in Muslim foster care story propagate what Sir Martin Narey, head of the Government inquiry into foster care provision called "disgracefully dishonest coverage". You have yet to apologise or issue any corrections for this despicable fabrication, which shamed the world of journalism. I have a few simple questions. Do you agree with me and campaigners such as Miqdaad Versi that apologies and corrections should warrant equal prominence in comparison with the offence caused—in this case, on the front page of your newspaper?

**Ian Brunskill:** IPSO has been quite clear about the difference between due prominence and equal prominence. We have an established corrections column, which is on the letters page of the paper, not because it is on page 26 or whatever, which sounds quite far back, but because it is an incredibly prominent and important page of the paper—it is opposite the leading articles. The letters page is a place where an awful lot of people are very keen to be published, so it is a place where they see them. Everybody set out the virtues of a fixed site for corrections. This is a general point I am making; I am not answering the question yet.

Q758 **Naz Shah:** Ethically speaking, it really should be on the front page, shouldn't it, to give it equal prominence?

**Ian Brunskill:** There is no requirement for equal prominence in the code; there is a requirement for due prominence. There have been a lot of arguments about that.

Q759 **Naz Shah:** Are you hiding behind the requirements, as opposed to what you should be doing ethically?



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**Ian Brunskill:** We abide by the spirit of the code as well as its letter. We are not hiding behind anything. I was not quite sure whether you wanted to discuss the story—it turned out you wanted to ask me about something else. I don't know whether your other questions are about the stories—you asked if I would answer "some questions" and your first one was what we would do about a correction. If you had any substantive questions, perhaps I should try to pre-empt them slightly.

This was a story that has caused an enormous amount of trouble for us and for other people. It has caused enormous offence and enormous upset. The suggestion that we might have set out to do that is frankly absurd. What would the benefit for us be in that? By no means are you the only person to express the kind of views that you have expressed about this story. They were expressed almost nowhere more fiercely than my *Times* readers—if you go on to any of those stories, which are still on our website, and go to the reader comments, you will find that *Times* readers are condemning us very fiercely. They are saying, "What the hell did you think you were doing; you should be ashamed of yourselves."

We set out in the written submission, partly because it is quite complicated, what we thought we were doing. It was not quite what everybody accused us of doing. It was not in fact what was brought up here. I can say this now: we were reporting concerns that had been raised by a contact supervisor working for the council, who supervised the family contact sessions and submitted a report to the council. That is the person one imagines is used to seeing distressed small children taken away from parents who they have been briefly reunited with and returned to a foster carer, for whom they may feel no great sympathy. They are used to seeing upset children. Despite that familiarity, this one felt obliged in her report to raise serious concerns about the degree of distress she had perceived in that child on being returned to these foster carers. I am not criticising the foster carers; I am simply telling you what we were reporting.

**Naz Shah:** We have gone through the details in a previous session.

**Ian Brunskill:** But you have not, because all the details that you have gone through have been completely inaccurate. I am just trying to give you the facts, because nobody has had them out there. If you have not got them, you can think that what the *Times* was doing was deliberately and rather weirdly stoking Islamophobia.

Let me I tell you what the judge said in court on 29 August about our initial reporting of these concerns that had been raised by a care supervisor, and which it turned out were shared by the family. She said, "The article itself it seems to me was entirely responsible. It raises a matter of legitimate public interest."

**Naz Shah:** Subsequently, there have been further comments saying quite the opposite.

**Ian Brunskill:** Which we have reported as we have gone along.



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**Q760 Naz Shah:** Do you agree that it is an absolute disgrace that more than seven months later, this has not been resolved and no apology has been made to the British people who your paper deliberately lied to? Will you now apologise?

**Ian Brunskill:** No. The paper didn't deliberately lie to anyone, and the paper is not going to make an absurd apology to an undefined class of people for political grandstanding. It is not going to do that. The answer to your real, substantive question on why it has taken so long is that it IPSO has been investigating a complaint from Tower Hamlets. It has been investigating it quite properly and in a way that shows the rigour of the IPSO process. It has taken a very long time.

My submission to IPSO, responding to the complaint and showing that we weren't simply deliberately lying, ran to something like 10,000 words, in several instalments. It showed that we think about what we are doing, that we are prepared to face challenges to it and that we are prepared to answer, and that the process will hold us to account.

I said in my written submission that we were expecting adjudication imminently. We have now had it this morning. It is confidential until it is published, but I can tell you that they have found against us; they have upheld the complaint. The adjudication will be published in full imminently—in the next day or two. The process has worked.

**Q761 Naz Shah:** Would you be kind enough to take on board the calls from the Muslim Council of Britain's Miqdaad Versi and myself to give that apology—the correction that you will no doubt issue; you just said IPSO has found against you—the equal prominence of a front-page headline in *The Times*? Would you give that consideration?

**Ian Brunskill:** We are not running a correction. We are running a full adjudication, as required by IPSO, and we will run it in the way that IPSO dictates. In the past, we have run full front-page notices of corrections.

**Q762 Chair:** So when do you expect the IPSO judgment to be made public?

**Ian Brunskill:** The next day or two, literally. Until it is published, I cannot tell you what is in it, but I have told you the broad thrust of it. What it simply hasn't done is upheld, in a blanket manner, all these rather wild allegations that have been made against us. It has found us, in the words of the code—I said it was a broad interpretation, which is crucial—to not have taken care to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information. That is the basis on which it has found against us.

You mentioned Miqdaad Versi. Can I just pick up on that? What this shows, which is really useful—it is more useful than getting into a stand-off about apologies and corrections and where they go—is that it is about process. I think this process can work. The process of policing accuracy is potentially much more effective than the process of posturing and arguing about discrimination. That is my sense. That is what I think Miqdaad Versi has very sensibly woken up to doing. It is working. What he does now is to pick people up on small errors about Islam all the time.



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It is a tactic that works. It is something that has been used for years by people effectively covering coverage of Israel. There is a very effective mechanism for doing that. There are a couple of organisations and websites. They don't come in and say, "You have been unfair to Israel" or "Your coverage is anti-Semitic". They come in and say, "But it was 14, not 17". They do that every single time. They effectively say, "You can be as critical as you like of Israel—", or Islam in this case, "but you have to get your facts right."

**Q763 Naz Shah:** Mr Brunskill, bringing it back to anti-Muslim hatred, you just suggested that you are not creating or doing anything that is Islamophobic or in that atmosphere. However, in January 2018, following your article, "St Stephen's in Newham bans hijabs for girls under 8", deputy head Adam Bennett said: "They took a lot of footage, they chopped it up, they used it how they wanted, they had their agenda and they put stuff forward to create this big debate and unfortunately our school was left in the middle of this debate".

**Ian Brunskill:** Sorry, I don't even know what this is about. That wasn't a *Times* story. *The Times* reported on that story, but that wasn't us. That was *The Sunday Times*.

**Naz Shah:** I am happy to provide you with a reference.

**Q764 Chair:** Perhaps we could ask you for some written evidence to follow up on that individual case?

**Ian Brunskill:** I do not think it was us; it was *The Sunday Times*. I mentioned in my written evidence that we followed that story once it had started. It is a story that developed in various ways.

**Q765 Naz Shah:** Finally from me, I would add that, unfortunately, when you have headlines that are grandstanding and are on your front pages, they offend. In comparison, your apologies don't. The offence caused is of a magnitude much higher than in your apology, which is very late coming. I argue that newspapers actually have a responsibility—yourself included—and you have failed in that.

**Ian Brunskill:** We fully accept that.

**Q766 Naz Shah:** You hide behind a code that is clearly not working.

**Ian Brunskill:** I am fully accepting that nobody is hiding behind anything. There is a process, and part of the purpose of this exercise is to establish whether that process is working. I am telling you that this is a very good instance of that process working.

**Q767 Naz Shah:** It is not working.

**Ian Brunskill:** If you do not want to believe it is working then you will not believe it is working, but I think it is.

**Chair:** We look forward to seeing the judgment.

**Q768 Douglas Ross:** You were all here in the audience when the first panel



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were in and I asked *The Sun* and the *Mail* about how their two publications accounted for 50% of the complaints to IPSO. Their argument was that they account for 50% because they are such big, popular publications. Do you agree with that?

**Ian Brunskill:** What, that we do not get them because we are less popular?

Q769 **Douglas Ross:** That was the implication—that because they are so popular, they will attract more complaints. Do you agree with that, or do you think you do something different from those newspapers that means you receive fewer complaints than they do?

**Ian MacGregor:** From my experience, all those papers pay great attention to detail, believe in the code and do their best to be accurate.

Q770 **Douglas Ross:** Are you speaking for the Telegraph Media Group or your role at IPSO?

**Ian MacGregor:** You were asking us to compare and contrast.

Q771 **Douglas Ross:** I am just wondering which role you are—

**Ian MacGregor:** I don't mind, actually; it was a personal view, but I obviously have a *Telegraph* hat, a Society of Editors hat and an IPSO hat.

Q772 **Douglas Ross:** That is what I was interested in.

**Ian MacGregor:** Let's go through the *Telegraph* stuff first of all. As a matter of fact, we published over 106,000 articles last year. We had 89 corrections, which can be all sorts of different things. According to my maths, that is about 1.7 corrections a week and 0.08% of articles merited any kind of correction at all. That is the *Telegraph's* view of the scale of the issue. We pay great attention to detail; accuracy is very important, and we are passionate believers in the importance of the code, correcting mistakes, apologising for them when we get things wrong—thankfully that is very occasionally, but we do apologise for them—and learning from them. Going back to your earlier point, I have given my personal view.

**Ted Young:** Definitely it is a factor that they are the mass- circulation papers, but also, going back to the point I made earlier about their being socially conservative, they will attract complaints from people who disagree. It may not be a factual complaint; it may be a complaint about a point of view. That is not a scientific answer, but I am guessing that is possibly why.

**Ian Brunskill:** There is probably some truth in that about their being essentially targets for differences of opinion, which is what a lot of this might be about. The one thing we do slightly differently is that we run corrections all the time, as a matter of routine, whether we have had IPSO complaints or not. We have our daily corrections column, and like *The Guardian* we put things in it. I would say we ran 500 corrections last year. Most of those did not involve anything to do with IPSO. You could say that means we are making an awful lot of mistakes, but you have to look at what some of those are. We are publishing 1 million words a week, as



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near as matters, and there will be mistakes in the conditions we are working in.

The thing that is important is to be seen to be correcting them, because readers value accuracy above everything else. If they cannot trust you on accuracy, they cannot trust you at all. Those can be quite small things. If you print, as we did last week, a picture of a surfer in the sea and you say he is off Christchurch pier, then everybody in Dorset will tell you that there is no pier at Christchurch. They start to think, "Well, if they don't know that, then how can I trust them on all the things that I don't know about that they do?" That is why it is very important to fix those. Our way of heading off a lot of that trouble is to correct them.

That means we have fewer contested IPSO complaints, because if we have got it wrong—I know not everybody would agree with this—we are ready to correct. We corrected the Islamist/Islamic school one that Miqdaad Versi complained about straightaway. With the story about the one in five Muslims poll, we ran a correction the very next day, which got me into a bit of a row with *The Sun's* then managing editor, frankly, because we acknowledged it was misleading. It is important to do that, because it is what readers are really coming to you for.

**Q773 Douglas Ross:** I want to pick up on the point that Naz Shah started off, about the prominence of where you publish your corrections. I think I am right in saying that *The Times* was the first one that was forced to put it on a front page. Having previously had the standard of page 25 or whatever, on the letters page, you made the correction there, but IPSO said that was not prominent enough given the story. You are saying, "We always put it on the letters page, which is where everything goes and is where people know where our corrections regularly are", but do you accept that in some cases IPSO has said that that is not good enough?

**Ian Brunskill:** You use—it is like us on that front page—the word "forced", but actually what happened—

**Q774 Douglas Ross:** Well, you were asked to.

**Ian Brunskill:** Let me tell you what happened. IPSO, the complainant—whom I know—and *The Times* agreed that we should test this. There had been no sensible test of what "due prominence" might mean. The complainant, Jonathan Portes, who is a very sensible man, felt that because of the nature of the story and where it had been—it was the week before an election—it had essentially distorted a Labour tax policy in a way that could potentially have had electoral effects, which is not a clever thing even to run the risk of doing. I don't think it did, but that was potentially there.

There were a lot of serious questions about that. He said, "Is this always appropriate?" We said, "Let's test it. We've run the correction, because there was an error and we are ready to correct errors." We had done it in our usual way, and he felt it was enough. We did the test case with IPSO. They looked at it and decided what due prominence means—it doesn't mean equal prominence. When do you need it and when do you not? They



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made a ruling, and we abided by it. The ruling then was that we should republish on the front page.

What I did two weeks later, when we did something very similar, was spontaneously run a front-page one, which nobody even noticed because nobody complained. We simply saw that we got it wrong and that it needed fixing. It is not a requirement, but it is a thing that has been tested and will be tested more by IPSO as it goes along. It is best tested in co-operation in the way we do it.

**Q775 Douglas Ross:** Okay. Very quickly, Mr MacGregor and Mr Young, I have one final question. Are you happy with how you print your corrections, or do you believe that sometimes something is such a major issue that you should be forced to make it more prominent?

**Ian MacGregor:** We have our corrections panel on page 2. It is there every day, even if there are no corrections, so people know how to contact us. There is an IPSO kitemark. Of course, IPSO has the power to make people put corrections or references to those corrections on the front page, which its predecessor did not do, and that has happened 17 times already.

**Ted Young:** If IPSO say, "Put it on page 1", we put it on page 1. We have had to correct immediately. We called a member of this panel a Tory, rather than a Labour MP, and we put the correction in immediately.

**Q776 Douglas Ross:** This is my final question. I will come to Mr MacGregor last, because he has various hats and will have a different view. I am sure you will all say you are happy with it, but some people say the regular corrections column and the small print, etc., is not proportionate. They see any instruction to print a correction by IPSO or others as a slap on the wrist. When a complaint goes to IPSO, do you worry about it upholding the complaint and finding against you, or do you know that it is in the trash can tomorrow—you have done your correction? Do you genuinely lose sleep over every complaint that goes into IPSO?

**Ian Brunskill:** Yes.

**Q777 Douglas Ross:** And do you think that is shared throughout the industry?

**Ian Brunskill:** Yes, I think it is actually, but I will tell you why—

**Q778 Douglas Ross:** I'm sorry; we are short of time. Mr Young?

**Ted Young:** The last thing you want to do is an IPSO correction. Quite frankly, if you put your hands up quickly and admit you are wrong, that does far better with your readers' perception of you as a newspaper. If you have made a mistake, get it out there and say, "We've done it wrong."

**Ian MacGregor:** Our readers expect to read trusted, quality news, and they want transparency and clarity. Having a page 2 slot is first class, and the opportunity to have front-page corrections is a big improvement on what happened before.

**Q779 John Woodcock:** Mr MacGregor, you have talked at length about the



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newspapers' ethics and standards, and about combating and not propagating hate. Do you accept that, on reflection, your front page from 8 February—"the man who 'broke the Bank of England', backing secret plot to thwart Brexit"—fell short of those standards by using a classic anti-Semitic trope to describe a Jewish banker?

**Ian MacGregor:** No. We put out a statement at the time, and we stand by it. The *Telegraph* has a proud history of fighting against anti-Semitism.

Q780 **John Woodcock:** That may or may not be—

**Ian MacGregor:** Just to answer your question, we actually said, and we stand by the fact, that we believe that any allegation or suggestion of that type is unfounded, and that the quote used was offensive.

Q781 **John Woodcock:** The plot wasn't secret, was it?

**Ian MacGregor:** I would have to go over the article to go into answering your point.

Q782 **John Woodcock:** But it is a pretty basic point. You have made no secret of his desire to combat Brexit. I am not doubting your sincerity in the newspapers overall, but a secret plot is a classic anti-Semitic trope and you used it with, as you describe, "a reclusive banker, George Soros, who just happens to be Jewish"—except he doesn't just happen to be Jewish, does he?

**Ian MacGregor:** We reject that and we haven't had that complaint.

Q783 **John Woodcock:** Was that view universally held by your staff?

**Ian MacGregor:** I haven't done a tour of the office—I am not being flippant about it—but I have heard no one say that that is the view of anyone.

Q784 **John Woodcock:** Did no one raise objections at the town hall meeting? Your editor realised that it was enough of a problem that you called at the newspaper the day after.

**Ian MacGregor:** That is a different point. I am not aware of any complaints—

Q785 **John Woodcock:** Not formal complaints, but there was a concern wasn't there, among some of your employees, about the way the story was put?

**Ian MacGregor:** I do not know that that is the case.

Q786 **John Woodcock:** No?

**Ian MacGregor:** No, I don't know that that is the case.

Q787 **John Woodcock:** I do.

**Ian MacGregor:** Then you know people there better than I do.

Q788 **John Woodcock:** No I don't. That is why I am questioning you.



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**Ian MacGregor:** I appreciate completely that there was debate on the web and whatever about that story. I have made our position clear. You ask about that particular town hall meeting, which I was at. I do not remember every detail, but I do remember the editor-in-chief, who believes in transparency, accuracy and honesty and in dealing with these things responsibly, saying that he was aware of the discussions on the web and elsewhere. I do not know the exact words, but he rightly made the point that it was not anti-Semitic in any way, and there was no intention for it to be either.

Q789 **John Woodcock:** I can imagine the intent. You are clearly standing by it. So you would do it again, you would publish—

**Ian MacGregor:** We stand by that story. Every story is different. It depends on the detail. It depends on the case and the timing. We have nothing else to say beyond what we have said already. I am not being evasive on that, I am just telling you the truth.

Q790 **Chair:** Unfortunately, we may have a vote in a second and I do not really want to have this panel waiting. We will move on to the other panel if we can. We may not be able to get to the questions on social media because I want briefly to put to you questions about the editor's code and about whether it should be changed. We have put this to previous panels. My question is whether the code should include what is in the law about incitement to racial hatred. Can I ask whether you would be happy with that? Quickly, first, just yes or no, in case we run out of time.

**Ian Brunskill:** No, if you want a quick answer, but there is more of an answer than that.

**Ian MacGregor:** It is important to recognise that there is a major problem with Islamophobia. We are open, in my view, to looking at all new ideas to improve things. However, it is important that we do not inhibit free speech and, secondly, that anything we might consider is workable and can be useful in practice. What you do not want, as I think Peter Wright was referring to earlier, is a situation whereby there is well-meaning and good intent but where any editor, if they were allegedly involved in that kind of thing, would be advised by lawyers not to say anything in case they would be incriminating themselves for any legal procedures after that. It has to be realistic. The important thing is to be open-minded but also to protect freedom of expression.

**Ted Young:** The Committee should certainly look at an incitement to racial hatred code—they should look at it as a clause. Whether it should exactly mirror the law, honestly, I think that needs a lot of focus and discussion.

Q791 **Chair:** My further question to you on it, if we have the time to hear answers, is this: as a former journalist and NUJ member, I strongly believe in freedom of expression and the freedom and role of the press. The Public Order Act both supports and protects the freedom to offend and freedom of expression but also has this challenge in terms of preventing incitement to racial hatred. The Director of Public Prosecutions



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said that that is a balance that they have to consider when they look at individual cases in the law. I would much rather that, as a routine issue when it is about the newsroom, those issues are considered first and foremost by journalists or by a self-regulatory process than that the first point of call to make the adjudication on that balance is the law or the CPS, which frankly do not have to look at those issues in the way that you do every single day. That is my question to you—why you would not welcome that being in the code.

**Ian Brunskill:** Maybe you need to look at doing something different with the code, so it can do what you are talking about. Incitement to hatred is a serious criminal offence. Although the code replicates the law here and there, it does not actually contain anything that directly replicates a serious criminal offence in that way. If you are going to be charged with it, it will be as a result of a proper police investigation. It will be a decision by the CPS and you will have a trial and a jury. The IPSO process—in a way, this answers the earlier question about why you do not want complaints—does not start with the presumption of innocence. You get an IPSO complaint and you act on it. The complaint does not have to be investigated by anybody, but you have to answer it. The assumption is that you have probably got it wrong. To be doing that on incitement to racial hatred strikes me as potentially problematic. *[Interruption.]*

Q792 **Chair:** Do either of you have a one or two sentence addition before we rush out the door?

**Ian MacGregor:** I am not against it. I am saying that we should look at all the ideas, but it needs to be workable. That is my concern.

**Ted Young:** Ditto. Let's look at it.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for your evidence. We appreciate your time and patience, particularly given the late start. I will adjourn the Committee briefly until we have a quorum back to get started again after the Division. Apologies to our third panel who have to wait for the occupational hazard that is us voting.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Neil Benson, Chair, Editors Code Committee, and Ian Murray, Executive Director, Society of Editors.

Q793 **Chair:** We are resuming our inquiry into hate crime, and specifically into Islamophobia. I welcome our third panel. I thank you for your patience, given how long you have had to wait through the previous panels. Can I ask you to introduce yourselves and your role, and say whether you think there is a problem with Islamophobia?

**Ian Murray:** My name is Ian Murray. I am the executive director of the Society of Editors. I took over the role just about a year ago, after almost 40 years as a journalist in regional newspapers—about 30 of them spent editing weekly and daily regional newspapers. The Society of Editors



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campaigns for a free press, freedom of expression, the training of journalists and the public's right to know.

Yes, I believe that there is a problem with Islamophobia in this country. It would be crass of me to say that the media as a whole does not play its part in that. Do I believe that that is a result of unconscious bias errors? I would say that that is what I believe, because I do not believe that there is a conscious effort anywhere in the media that I can see, including the national printed press, to set out with an anti-Muslim agenda. I have not come across that, and I have not come across it at a local level either.

**Neil Benson:** I am Neil Benson. Until the end of last year, I was the regionals editorial director for Trinity Mirror—a post I held for 16 years. I left Trinity Mirror in December and I am now a consultant. One of my first jobs was to be offered a post as interim editorial director at Express Newspapers, which is what I am doing at the moment. It is probably more relevant for this hearing that I am currently chair of the Editors Code Committee. I think I have been on the committee for around 11 years. I was elected as chair towards the end of last summer, so I am fairly new to the post but not to the committee.

I agree wholeheartedly with what Ian and others have said about Islamophobia. There is clearly an issue in the country. The press has to be aware that it may play a role in that. In my 40-plus years in the industry, as Ian and others have said, I have never been aware of an attempt to set out to have an agenda to be anti any particular group, including Muslims.

Q794 **Chair:** Can we pursue this issue about the editors' code and incitement to hatred? This is obviously something we raised with the previous panels and also with IPSO. To be honest, as I said when we took the evidence, I found IPSO's evidence pretty contradictory with itself on why on earth you wouldn't have in the editors' code a specific reference to not having incitement to racial hatred. What are your views on that?

**Neil Benson:** As others have said, there is a law on incitement to hatred. The bar is set quite high. The editors' code, while it sometimes occupies similar territory to the law, specifically tries not to just copy what the law says. Where it has some overlaps, the code tries to then supplement the law and to add to it, to give journalists clear guidance on how to do their job and to maintain standards.

As has already been said, if the bar for incitement to hatred within the code was set lower than it is within the law, there is a danger of double jeopardy. The legal advice to editors, if they were facing a complaint under the IPSO code, would be to say nothing and not co-operate, because the odds are that there would be some sort of follow-up by the police. That is a situation that I don't think any of us want to get into.

Q795 **Chair:** Why is that not the case for some of the other bits of the code that also involve the law—for example, not publishing "material likely to lead to the identification of a victim of sexual assault" or some of the issues around child welfare? Why are those not equally issues on which you



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might have potential cases in court as well?

The Director of Public Prosecutions was very clear with us that there are plenty of areas where there is both a regulatory role and also a potential criminal role. They have arrangements that they operate in those circumstances.

**Neil Benson:** The difference, in the case of incitement to hatred, is that there is then a legal jeopardy. The editor is then potentially at risk of legal action being taken against him or her. On the other areas of the code that you referred to where there are strong overlaps, the additional elements that the code adds tend to be about stiffening what the law already says. It is a case of self-regulation, really; the code implies a higher standard than the law.

**Q796 Chair:** But even in areas where you have a higher standard, there are still issues that are also potentially criminal as well. Again, there are standard procedures that the CPS operates with other regulatory bodies. If a criminal investigation is under way, the regulatory body steps back or waits until the criminal investigation is completed and so on. I just don't understand why that seems to be possible for other organisations, and for other bits of the code, but somehow is impossible on this issue.

**Neil Benson:** I am in danger of repeating myself, but I think the difference is the danger of double jeopardy facing the editor. In the other areas of the code where the law is referred to and then built on, it tends to be— For example, in the recent review of the code, a change was made around clause 11 that talks about victims of sexual assault. The wording of the code in that case was brought closer to the law, because it was felt— IPSO agreed when the point was made to it—that we should avoid a chilling effect on lawful reporting. That is around the technical side of doing the job.

The point about incitement to hatred is a very clear and very serious charge, as has been said previously. As you say, if a police investigation took place, then the code is in fact rendered unimportant at that point, because—

**Q797 Chair:** In that particular case, yes, but there may be other cases where the police say they are not going to investigate—the nature of the offence or the scale of it relative to all of the other things they happen to have on mean that it is not a justifiable use of their time. However, it might be your bread and butter. So, while there may be some cases, just as there are with other areas of regulatory overlap, there will be others that are not. That is what I just don't understand.

Look at clause 15, for example: "No payment or offer of payment to a witness...should be made in any case once proceedings are active as defined by the Contempt of Court Act 1981." That is clearly about something where there is a legal issue involved and where the issue is all about offering payment "to any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness". Surely if this was such an insurmountable hurdle, it would apply to something like that as well. No editor could



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possibly get involved in a code determination on something like that for fear of police investigation because they would be providing more evidence, but that does not stop you having that in the code, so I do not understand why it stops you having incitement to racial hatred in the code.

**Neil Benson:** Clause 15 is an interesting one, because it was added to the code in, I think, 2003. That was after some infamous cases around Rose West and Gary Glitter. The Code Committee was in conversation with the Lord Chancellor's Office and came up with that form of words, so it saved the Government of the day the need to legislate. That was a case of the Code Committee and the Government working hand in hand to come up with something that was felt would be the right approach to take. You can probably see that it is quite a detailed, long clause. That is because that was its genesis.

To come back to your point about incitement to hatred, the code is constantly under review. We do a three-yearly formal review and ask for submissions, but the code is reviewed on an ongoing basis anyway. If you are asking whether the Code Committee would be prepared to look again at incitement to hatred and whether it should be in the code—yes, we would. I think we would look forward to seeing the recommendations that this Committee makes. I should say, though, that this is a difficult area and there aren't any easy answers. The one caveat I would put on it is that we would have to look carefully. I couldn't make a commitment today that we will definitely do this, but we will commit that we will certainly look, if that is what you are asking us to do. We would welcome any input in terms of a wording that is workable. That is the key thing. It has got to be something that is understandable by journalists and helps them to do their job.

**Ian Murray:** I echo all of that. From the society's point of view, our concern is over protecting freedom of expression and protecting the free press. As a past member of the Code Committee, I know that these issues are considered extremely seriously and gone over, and past issues have come back and the code has evolved. That is what we have seen with the British media and the print press over the last couple of decades; it has evolved. We have seen that what were common terms that would be used, whether that was referring to mental health or the gay community and so on, have just become unacceptable to society. That was said earlier today. The code has evolved, hopefully, to keep up with what is acceptable. We can look back and say, "Well, it shouldn't have been acceptable in the past."

We would certainly agree that this is an issue that should go back to the Code Committee to be looked at. We would welcome a sensible and serious debate and a final decision that makes those protections and ensures that we still have a free press and that freedom of expression is still there. These are easy terms to bandy around, but we have a balancing act in this country and any other liberal society between freedom of expression and ensuring that hate crime does not exist and



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does not go too far. We have the laws of the land and then we have the voluntary codes that are there.

It is a very narrow path to walk down, and the society's role is, I suppose, to play devil's advocate. I can perhaps draw an analogy with the potential rush to bring in security laws when we have had terror incidents and so on, clamping down on things in order to protect people, versus: "We're taking away the very liberties and freedoms that the terrorists are trying to take away from us."

I understand that when we have some of the headlines that have been shown today, or others that have gone on, there is a knee-jerk reaction to say, "We need to tighten the rules, and clamp down." That is completely understandable, and in some cases it turns out that that is the case. All we would say is, "Can we please have the reasoned debate and discussion about this before we set things into law and into the code about journalists?"

I would pick up on one point about the code. There has been a lot of, "This is the code, and we try to stick to the code." The code does actually say—Neil, you will point out if I am wrong about this—that it is not just about sticking to the code; it is the spirit of the code that matters. That is something that we at the society try to impress on editors and members. It is about the spirit of the code; don't try to just to stick to that point, and say, "Well, that's what it says just here, so I can end at that full stop."

**Q798 Chair:** Obviously, you operate within the law, and the legal framework currently has in it both protection for freedom of expression and the protection, effectively, for freedom to offend around religion. It also has protection against incitement to racial hatred, and both of those are in the Public Order Act. Do you think that the law has the right balance on protecting both, and recognising that there will always be judgments about how you handle individual cases?

**Ian Murray:** I am not an expert, of course, on making the law, but I think that the law has the right balance, in the sense that we are now trying to square the circle. We are trying to say that, on the one hand, we have a liberal society that allows freedom of expression, but on the other hand, we need to protect groups and individuals from that freedom of expression going too far. You can see nations where they get it wrong, I would say, and they clamp down far too heavily, and you get nations that get it wrong on the other side, where it is basically a free-for-all, and you can say just about anything. That does a great deal of harm.

I think in this country—I am not going to say that others have not got it right as well—we strive all the time to try to square that circle, and get it right in the centre. It comes down to, as you were saying, where that judgment lies. That judgment is left to the practitioners, code-setters and regulators. It is right that we go back constantly and look at that, and say, in our free society, allowing us to have the judgment, "Are we getting the judgment right?"



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As I say, in the past, we have had homophobic terminology used and, more recently, terminology referring to people that live with mental health issues, and to the way that they are. We have seen a shift away from what used to be quite common terminology.

**Q799 Chair:** Judgments are being made all the time about how you balance those things, and at the moment the only frameworks for making those judgments are within an individual paper or publisher, and then within the police and the prosecution. Given that, would you accept my contention that it might actually be better—if you believe in freedom of the press and the principle of self-regulation—if, when an individual judgment is challenged within a newspaper, that is first and foremost assessed within a self-regulatory framework, and within a framework of people who are doing that kind of balancing judgment in the interests of the free press on a daily basis? That might be better than if the only recourse is to go all the way to the police and the prosecutors, who frankly do not have to deal with this on a daily basis, and will find it much harder work and much more resource-intensive if they find you are bringing the law into the newsroom.

**Ian Murray:** I think that is absolutely right, and one of the platforms that, as a society, we campaign on is to have a free press—self-regulatory in the print press, anyway. I therefore agree absolutely. It is far better that those judgments are being made, to the acceptance of society as a whole, within the newspaper, within the newsroom, within the organisation itself, or within a self-regulatory body, before you resort to laws in that sense.

As I say, it is part of an evolving thing. I am quite certain that following Lord Justice Leveson's inquiry a lot of people who had influence in the media sat up and took notice and thought, "Right." There were areas where that was not welcome, but a lot of areas where it was welcome. The spotlight had been turned on, and they said, "You know something? We need to do something about this."

During today's discussions, I thought, "Is there any process for sitting back and seeing a broader view of your publication over a period of time with regard to the way that you report the Muslim community, for instance?" I think the answer was—I do not want to say this definitively, but I think I have got it right—"Well actually, no, we don't have that." I would be very surprised if any of those who were here today did not go back and have serious conversations in their newsrooms and say, "That is something we ought to consider bringing in in some way." I hope I am not putting words into their mouths. I just know that, given the way the industry has changed and the conversations that have taken place over the past decade or so, that will be taken on board.

I do not know whether that 4% figure included the regional press; I think it was just the national press. I imagine that in the regional press—I know that is not quite the issue we are dealing with—there are far more examples of diverse local communities and of positive news stories going on there. The Society of Editors runs both the National Press Awards and the Regional Press Awards. In the Regional Press Awards, which is coming



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up, we have been able to introduce a new category for reporting communities. That is basically to reward and recognise where local newspapers—the local media—are playing their role in stitching communities together and reporting all communities in a positive way. I would like to see a similar category introduced in the National Press Awards, in part as a reminder that this should be going on, but also so that the national press can show that they are considering this and that there are positive elements there. It would concentrate the mind.

**Neil Benson:** I agree that editors are employed to know their audience and to make decisions about content on a daily basis, and I think they are the right people to do it. It would be quite heavy-handed and make the job quite difficult to have interventions happening on an ongoing basis ahead of publication. Having said that, one of the big changes in recent years—since IPSO replaced the PCC—is that there is far greater interaction between publishers, newsrooms and editors, and IPSO, to get their advice pre-publication. In the way that national newspapers previously put all their stories through their legal departments, they now also take IPSO into account. They will talk to the experts at IPSO, who can give guidance. That is a major step forward from where we were under the PCC, and it shows a shift and a more serious approach to dealing with sensitive and contentious issues.

On complaints generally, I would estimate—I do not have any research on this, but I have worked in newsrooms for a very long time—that upwards of 90% of complaints that newspapers receive never see IPSO. They are dealt with at local level by the local management. There are processes in place to deal with them. Pre-Leveson, that would have been done ad hoc. These days—since the Leveson report came out—there is much more structure around complaints policies. Titles will set out the maximum time they will take from receiving a complaint to acknowledging it to going back with a definitive answer.

As was said earlier, editors absolutely hate having an adjudication against them. I had one PCC adjudication against me as an editor 20-plus years ago, and it still rankles with me. I think they were wrong, and I made that point to them, but when they said, “Well actually, how about you don’t publish the adjudication?” I said, “No, if we’re signed up to self-regulation and that’s how you find, we will carry it.” I said it through gritted teeth, of course. That more general point about complaints processes is really important. That has been a step forward for the press, and that applies regionally and nationally.

**Ian Murray:** I had one ruling against me as well, from the PCC. After all those years as an editor, it still haunts me. I argued it through, but there we go. An example that came out this afternoon about how newspapers are taking things differently was the transgender community. The whole of issue of that subject has suddenly arisen over the last few months or perhaps a year or so. It has suddenly come on to the horizon.

You heard about newsrooms—I think every single person was representing the newsrooms. We are actually saying that we take advice, even to the



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point of putting the story in front of representatives of those communities and basically saying, "Is this right or is this wrong?" Obviously, they are not getting it completely right because they are still getting complaints. They might argue, "Actually, we believe we can go as far as we have gone."

It is not a cavalier attitude that I believe is going on in newsrooms. The lessons have been learned. In the same way as the language that was being used to describe the disabled, shall we say—"wheelchair-bound" and things like that—lessons were learned that, through unconscious bias, you are using language that is insulting people. The lesson is learned of whether we can take advice.

We have come right forward now and immediately you can see this is a contentious issue and we will try to get it right—they are not going to get it right every time and no one is an angel.

**Q800 Sarah Jones:** I want to press a bit on the benefits of self-regulation as opposed to anything else. The gentleman from the *Express* who was here said that he was unhappy with some of the things that he had seen in the paper in the past, and that he was going to try to change them. I can't remember his language, but he accepted that some of them were not right.

We have a list of all the *Daily Express* headlines in the run-up to the EU referendum. There were 34 front-pages splashes in that short period about immigration. They said things like, "We can't stop new migrant surge", "Britain 'has too many' migrants", "EU migrant numbers soar yet again", "Migrant crisis in the Channel", "2m EU migrants grab our jobs", "Migrant mothers cost NHS £1.3bn" and "Migrants keep on pouring into EU". It is endless.

He recognised that perhaps there needs to be a shift, but there was nothing in the code or anything else to say at any point that they may well not be against the law or break the editors' code—that is really focused on the individuals that are being written about and their rights and accuracy—but that the accumulative effect must undeniably to influence people's views of migrants. It must be, because there are no positives. In a self-regulating environment, how do we stop that drift over time of things that may not break your code, but might have a damaging effect on people's views of different races or different people?

**Neil Benson:** It is important to say that all newspapers are entitled to their view. That may be offensive or it may be biased at times, but in the end, it is quite difficult to envisage a scenario where there are ratios for what is right to publish and what is not. That is a very dangerous territory. I accept that an unrelenting diet like that is bound to reinforce, at least, certain prejudices.

**Q801 Sarah Jones:** What can we do about that? I agree that it is difficult. They took a view to be pro-Brexit, which is completely legitimate, of course. Their views are perfectly reasonable, but that quantity of anti-migrant stuff must have an impact. As editors—as the leaders—how do you stop



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that from happening and make sure that is embedded in your organisations?

**Neil Benson:** This is tricky ground. Why should I, as a former editor, have a view about what another editor is producing if it is within the law and the general bounds of decency? I may well disagree with it. I cannot give you a definitive answer about what I think should happen.

I accept that sometimes titles take a very specific view and bang on about a particular issue, which people may find offensive. That is their right, though. Again, if there are any thoughts—we need more minds getting involved and taking a view on this, but we need to tread carefully so we do not just inhibit freedom of expression.

**Ian Murray:** I think the best defence against one voice, one opinion or one set of opinions holding sway is to have a robust, vibrant and free media across the board. I think it was the former director general of the BBC who said that, looking back, the BBC had been too timid in discussing immigration into the United Kingdom for fear of appearing racist—I hope I am not misquoting him. The point being, as I took it, that that had stifled the discussion and that, if the discussion had been more open, it would perhaps have had a different outcome—I think he was referring to Brexit.

That is one newspaper that you are talking about. I completely agree with Neil that it has a right, provided it stays within the law, to say, “This is our opinion and we are driving with this.” The counterargument: it always comes down to allowing people to come forward with the debate and the argument and say, “That is simply not true. I disagree with this. Here are the facts and the figures.” If it is about accuracy, it should be picked up on. It is about having the discussion, rather than closing it down and saying, “We don’t allow you. You have had this many stories about immigration so far this month, so we are not allowing you to have any more.” That is ridiculous—I know that is not what you are saying, but when you begin to go down the line of thinking how we stop this one point of view, you get very close to saying, “Well, we have to stop a free press. We have to stop freedom of expression.”

Meanwhile, in the Twittersphere, everything is being discussed. We have the absurdity that the media—the ones who are trained, who take this incredibly seriously, who are regulated, who are seriously looking for ways in which they can ensure that we have a fair debate on issues—are basically being restrained. Meanwhile, out there on social media, they are chatting away merrily on all these issues.

I am not saying it cannot be done. I am not saying it is not difficult—it obviously is. It is worth pursuing and looking at. As I said beforehand about taking that cumulative effect back to newsrooms, I am sure there will now be discussions about that as well.

Q802 **John Woodcock:** In the Society of Editors, do you have figures for the level of ethnic and religious diversity among editors?

**Ian Murray:** No, we don’t.



**John Woodcock:** Do you not think you should?

**Ian Murray:** Perhaps we should—yes, we should have that. The society is going through a number of changes. It happened to fall that I had taken over, in the same way, the new editor of the *Express* is looking at it. What went before was absolutely brilliant, but we are basically progressing forward. I will be setting up a number of new working parties and committees, one of which is a diversity working group that will basically—we have always supported things such as the Journalism Diversity Fund. We have worked with *Muslim News* and we held a conference with them a couple of years ago. We are about to start working with the Aziz Foundation centrally and in the regions about how more positive news about the Muslim community and other communities can get through and how to employ more journalists from diverse backgrounds in newsrooms.

Q803 **John Woodcock:** A number of panellists mentioned those initiatives, but they are starting at the grassroots level. Presumably you would accept that, although there is not enough diversity in newsrooms as a whole, it gets worse the higher up the tree you go, and that is a problem.

**Neil Benson:** I think we have got very little ethnic diversity in newsrooms—0.5% was mentioned earlier, against 5% of the population at large who are Muslim. There is an issue there. It was mentioned earlier that it could be unconscious bias. I found it very interesting what Ian MacGregor had to say about the way the *Telegraph* have approached blind CV testing. That is a really interesting thought that will get some traction. There are other issues, which I know from my time working in Bradford many years ago. We tried to get some representatives from the Muslim population in Bradford to join the *Telegraph* and *Argus*. We eventually appointed a young Indian woman, who was our first non-white person on the team. Her parents did their utmost to talk her out of it and then to get her to stop doing the job. That is one instance. It was the reality of the situation, and that pertains today as well.

The press has more than one kind of diversity issue—not just around ethnicity but socioeconomic background. I think most of the people that you have taken evidence from today will have started their careers without a degree and will have come into it—usually, in my generation—with A-levels. In journalism now, the entry level is a degree for 94%. That will automatically exclude people of certain social grades, or will certainly skew it towards more white, middle-class entrants.

The whole issue of diversity has many different parts to it. During my time as president of the Society of Editors in 2003-04, we did a piece of work to try to break out of this cycle. It is incredibly difficult to do.

Q804 **John Woodcock:** Briefly, I very much endorse what you said about the importance of a vibrant, robust free press. Presumably you would accept that it will not be as vibrant and robust as it should be while it is so overwhelmingly unrepresentative of the country?

**Ian Murray:** I completely agree with you. I was just about to say that there are two pressures. The idea is that newsrooms aren't taking this



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seriously or that news organisations don't recognise this as a challenge, but the need to diversify all the way up to the top is basically twofold.

One is the pressure from organisations—I shouldn't call you an organisation; from bodies—such as yourselves, which ask why we are not doing it. Of course, unless you are reflective of your communities, how can you reflect your communities? The other need is commercial. With the growing and diverse communities that are out there, you must talk to all of them if you are going to survive commercially. There are therefore huge incentives there.

What the industry is finding, and what I found when I edited local newspapers down on the south coast, is that it is incredibly difficult, even at the bottom level, to actually attract people from different backgrounds. That is why I am delighted that the Society is involved with a number of initiatives to get the message across that it is a good career for people, that their voice will be heard and that their voice is important.

**Q805 Douglas Ross:** I have one question. You have listened to all the evidence today. Do you think that those who have raised concerns with the Committee, and people in general who are concerned about some of the comments and headlines and what they read in the papers and how that could promote hate crime and so on, will be satisfied with what they have heard from the two panels we have had today?

**Neil Benson:** I'm reluctant to try to read your mind. That is something—

**Q806 Douglas Ross:** It's not my mind. I'm just saying that you are both very experienced in the newspaper industry, so I understand that you will listen to and be able to judge how people will view the comments made. Do you think, based on the evidence the Committee has heard today, that people who have concerns about this issue will be satisfied that newspapers are taking this seriously?

**Neil Benson:** I really can't say how you are going to react to it. All I can say is that you have heard today from a number of people who take this subject very seriously. I have seen it myself in newsrooms. This isn't something that is taken at all lightly. I think it is higher on the agenda now than it has ever been. Would I have made the same choices about some of those stories that were published? No, I wouldn't, but that is the subjectivity of editing. You have heard a number of people from across the spectrum talking honestly about the reality of life in their newsroom.

**Ian Murray:** I'm trying to be honest about this. It would be absolutely crass of me to say, "You came here with your minds made up." I don't believe that at all. Equally, you are faced with people who have been sitting here who are passionate about their right, as editors or representing their newspapers, to have their approach to stories. They believe they have made a statement regarding where there has been controversy and stories that have been proved to be inaccurate. That is the issue. As a man of words, I am finding it difficult to actually say it.



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On the debate over whether a front page mistake should warrant a front page apology, my personal opinion is that I made a front page apology just once, when I felt we had got something wrong on the paper I was editing in Southampton, because I felt that had to be done. IPSO can instruct that that apology needs to be there, and perhaps this Committee will feed back saying that you feel it is an important point that it should be there. Going to the barricades over those kinds of thing is not necessary.

Am I waffling about your things? I can't get into your minds, I'm afraid. I hope, genuinely, that you have seen here, from the evidence that has been given, that newsrooms are no longer cavalier. They cannot afford to be cavalier, and they do think these things through. Do they get it right every time? No, but it is not a cavalier, "Print and be damned." It is not that attitude at all.

**Q807 Naz Shah:** Can I pick up on the point you have just made about newspapers being able to print a front page apology? You were here during the evidence session, and the editors before us, particularly *The Times* and others, referred back time and time again to the editors' code. The code just requires them to publish a correction on page 2. I am trying to understand this.

**Ian Murray:** You know the requirements of the code better.

**Neil Benson:** I think that is an IPSO requirement. IPSO has the powers to dictate the placement of a correction or an apology.

**Q808 Naz Shah:** So let me get this right. The editors' code says page 2, but IPSO can ask—

**Ian Murray:** No one says page 2.

**Neil Benson:** That has become a convention post-Leveson. Prior to that, any title would decide to run their corrections and apologies wherever they saw fit. Post-Leveson, the industry got together to try to address the issue and give more prominence to corrections and apologies, and it has become the convention that that appears on page 2. As you heard earlier, there is a standard panel in there that explains who you can complain to and what IPSO is, but also any corrections and apologies would appear there unless IPSO decided differently. That is for IPSO to choose.

**Q809 Naz Shah:** Would you agree that that headline, which was one of the most offensive I have seen, would warrant a front page apology of equal prominence after the damage it has done and the amount of right-wing usage of that particular headline?

**Neil Benson:** You're really asking the wrong person here, because that is for IPSO to determine. The process is for IPSO to field the complaints, to investigate, to make an adjudication and then, if they feel there has been an error, to specify where that apology or correction should go.

**Q810 Naz Shah:** But you've just said that it has become convention. How does it un-become convention when it refers back to the editors' code, which is your bag, not IPSO's?

**Neil Benson:** It does not refer back to the editors' code. That is my point. IPSO decides where corrections are placed.

Q811 **Naz Shah:** I hear that, but earlier on in the evidence session, it was not IPSO that was referred to. It kept coming back to the editors' code, saying that the editors' code does not require it, which is why IPSO do not then require it. You have just said it has become convention. So what do we do? Or do you have any responsibility to make sure that convention is undone and we are giving equal prominence to mistakes?

**Neil Benson:** No. First of all, in my view, promoting corrections and apologies further forward in the paper was a positive move. I think Baroness Warsi talked about a correction going in on page 66. That now does not happen, because the industry has decided that we should be more transparent about corrections and apologies, so it gets a more prominent position in the paper. I think that is a positive move. Then it is for IPSO to decide whether something even more visible has to take place. They have done that 17 times so far. They have required newspapers to put apologies, or a reference pointing readers to an apology, on the front page, and point them further inside the paper.

Q812 **Naz Shah:** While we're on that point, you said that you agree—you have expressed your thoughts—with the progression that IPSO has made in relation to that. Would you agree that the complaints and corrections need equal prominence?

**Neil Benson:** No, I wouldn't.

Q813 **Naz Shah:** Why?

**Neil Benson:** My view is that the appropriate way to do that is to have due prominence, which is what IPSO works to, because there can be several reasons for that. A page 1 story might have a small error in it. What is the proportionality there if you say it has to be equal prominence? A small correction gets made on the front page. Equally, there could be a story that's on page 66 and has a serious error in it. That will get dealt with earlier in the paper.

Q814 **Naz Shah:** But this is a prime example of one of those that has caused massive damage to the community. It is horrific in terms of peddling an anti-Muslim narrative. In this instance, you wouldn't agree either? I am just asking for your opinion.

**Neil Benson:** What I have already said is that it is for IPSO to adjudicate and make a decision about where the appropriate place for a correction or an apology to appear is. In some cases, that is page 1.

Q815 **Naz Shah:** I am going to move on, but before I do, Neil, I must say I am really struggling to understand the fact that you are happy to give an opinion on other matters but not on this one. You are referring back to IPSO.

**Neil Benson:** That's because it is not an issue for the Editors Code Committee. It is an IPSO issue.



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Q816 **Naz Shah:** I would really have valued your opinion on this. You are referring back to IPSO for it, but you are happy to give your opinion on other matters. I struggle with that.

**Neil Benson:** I can't comment on specific cases, because I have got less knowledge than IPSO on them.

Q817 **Naz Shah:** Ian, I understand you were at the 10th annual Muslim awards last night.

**Ian Murray:** I was. It was a good night.

Q818 **Naz Shah:** I was also there. It is in its 10th year. Much was being celebrated across the Muslim community, from arts, medicine and everything else. Yet, despite it being in its 10th year—again, this is according to Baroness Warsi's evidence—a study of 200,000 newspaper articles making reference to Muslims identified heroes 39 times, brave Muslims on 20 occasions and honest Muslims in six out of 20,000. Kind Muslims were not found anywhere in the investigation. 99.965% of the time, the references were negative. Do you not think the research supports my assertion that there is a culture of Islamophobic headlines and stories pursued by newspapers?

**Ian Murray:** I don't think it is a conscious one. I seriously don't think there is a conscious culture there. We have heard evidence, and that is my experience of working in newsrooms—admittedly mostly in the regional press. I have been in contact with the national newspapers, national reporters and national broadcasters, and there is no conscious Islamophobia there. They would recoil from that. If any newsroom gave those kind of instructions, the whistleblowers would be running for the phones immediately. I can't argue with the statistics you have got there. I don't know how they have been created, but even if there is a reasonable margin of error, it is a very worrying statistic.

That is in the national press, I believe. If it was looking at the regional press, I think it would be nowhere near that. I think it would be a much more positive view. If I disagree with the need for something to be done to redress the balance, there is no reason why the Society is not about to start working with the Aziz Foundation on the very matter of how we can get the media to engage with far more positive stories from the Muslim community to balance what would be legitimate debate. Look, this is unconscious in the way that it is being done. It is by us and we can eradicate that, but there are going to be areas where it is a legitimate debate that takes place. But you always need to balance that with, "But where is all the positive news coming from any community, any area of life? Are you ensuring that that balance is there?" Obviously, the statistics you are giving show that there isn't. Rather than clamp down on the one side and say, "We must not discuss this," how can we get the positive there to be getting the headlines as well?

Q819 **Naz Shah:** The truth is, Ian, you were part of a celebration yesterday—alongside many of us, including myself—which celebrated the vast majority of contributions from Muslims to this country. I declare my



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interest in the all-party parliamentary group, which launched the report on "A very merry Muslim Christmas", on the role that Muslim charities play. Indeed, we are expecting to raise £100 million for charity and lots of that will be used here in the UK, but none of that is actually documented. Finally, while you say that this might be an unconscious bias, in April the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights urged UK authorities, media and regulatory bodies to take steps to curb incitement to hatred by British newspapers. He said that some publications displayed "decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion", and likened the language used by Katie Hopkins in advocating the use of gun boats to stop migration to that used in Rwandan newspapers in the build-up to the 1994 genocide. I would argue that there is a culture in British media. Do you think you have any role to play to challenge that?

**Ian Murray:** Yes, absolutely. That is one of the roles of the Society of Editors and that is why we are engaging in all of these initiatives. That is why we set up our diversity working group, to actually say "This isn't a talking shop, how are we physically going to do this?" We have engaged with the *Muslim News*, we are working with them again and we are engaged with the Aziz Foundation to actually take this forward. We are not a body that regulates. We cannot tell editors what to do, but we can help to facilitate bringing together topics, ideas and discussions. One thing I thought you might have put to me, but which I will say, is that the thing that struck me last night was, "This is fabulous, look at all this going on. I wonder how much of this is going to be reported in the mainstream media." I haven't been able to check very much today, but there was so much there that should have been. That is one of the things I am taking back from last night to talk to contacts about, to say, "This is something you shouldn't be not ignoring, but basically allowing to pass you by."

Q820 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Returning to debates that have been going on about possible changes to the editors' code, clause 12 of the code asks for editors to "avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference" to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex and gender identity. Is there a debate to be had about why that does not extend to discrimination against groups?

**Neil Benson:** In my time on the Code Committee, this has been the single most difficult and contentious issue. It is certainly the thing that we have been lobbied about during the review phases more than anything else. It is a very tricky area. The concern that the Code Committee would have is that if you open up complaints to groups, there is a very active set of interest groups around the UK on various topics. That was evidenced when we asked for submissions to the code review most recently and there was a co-ordinated campaign by certain bodies to send cut-and-paste letters or emails to the Code Committee. Because we know that is the case, the concern is that if we allow complaints on behalf of groups, we open the floodgates to any complaint which is not really based on the content of the code but is based on every single story that any particular group doesn't like. That would, from a practical point of view, swamp editors with complaints, some of which would be genuine, but a lot of which could be vexatious or not really worth the huge amount of time they



would take to deal with. The corollary of that is that we believe it would certainly have a chilling effect on freedom of expression, because in that sort of climate editors would be bound to think, "Well, I'm not going to publish this story—I'm just not going to go there—because I know what the reaction is going to be." It is a really difficult area. If we could come up with acceptable wording, we would look at that, but finding the right wording that balances what groups would want to say and to be investigated against freedom of expression is the really difficult thing.

**Q821 Stuart C. McDonald:** You raised two possible objections there, one being the practical one. There must be an extent to which you already face that challenge. If there is an article that is going to be complained about, it will be complained about by hundreds, if not thousands, of people but, ultimately, it becomes one complaint that is investigated. Secondly, a more general point of principle that everyone would say is absolutely valid is how it affects freedom of expression. As I understand it, at least six or seven other countries across Europe have a group provision in their code, and that includes countries like Ireland and Germany, so surely we should look to them to see how it works there. I don't think anyone would say that Ireland has some sort of repressive press regime.

**Neil Benson:** The difference between here and Ireland is that here there is a kind of ecosystem of pressure groups and single-interest groups that does not exist to the same extent in Ireland. This has been looked at by the committee, and it is a fundamental difference. The one group I am aware of that the Irish equivalent dealt with was the Travelling community. There is a far greater spread of pressure groups and interest groups in the UK, so I think we would get far more complaints. All right, if it was on the same story it would be more consolidated into a single complaint, but there would be more complaints about more stories, and I think that practical issue would lead to a chilling effect on freedom of expression. I have probably covered that.

**Q822 Chair:** Scale doesn't sound hugely convincing though. You know, you get a whole load of comments on an article. In a social media age, we are all used to being bombarded by far more things than we were before. I cannot imagine that the newspapers that we have in this country are going to be scared by the fact that they just happen to get twice as many emails as they did before.

**Neil Benson:** Two points on that. One is that we believe that the scale would be far greater than that. Dealing with all those, many of which would be vexatious, at a time when the media have far less resource than they used to have, could have a really damaging effect on the ability of staff to do their job, to go out and to get news.

**Ian Murray:** From the Society's point of view, we welcome these issues being looked at again by the Code Committee. We think that it is a fair request that it is actually done. We have the same concerns with regard to group complaints—first of all IPSO, but then the newsrooms, editors, managing editors or whoever would actually deal with it being utterly swamped. I think it would be very simplistic to say that if an article has



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been written about immigration, for instance, and, as I think was mentioned beforehand, it goes out to supporters of a particular group saying, "Complain about this, complain about this, complain this", literally, you could get thousands of complaints coming in. They will all be on the same issue, as was said, so you can just funnel them down to one complaint, "Can you please look at this?"

As a formerly practising editor, when we would have a complaint about a story that had been written, it could have come in from two or three people. There are slight variations, and there is a lot of to-ing and fro-ing backwards between the editor—in my case, it was myself—and IPSO on the minutiae, because obviously, and quite rightly, each person who has made the complaint has the right to come back and say, "I disagree with this, on these grounds, so what have you got to say?" But if you have several thousand people coming back on one complaint and basically saying, "We disagree with this", you can see how this could tie everything up. That doesn't mean that we can't look at the issue to see if there are safeguards that can be put in around it.

If it is working in other countries, how is it working? As Neil was saying, is it that they just don't have the pressure groups on the same level that we have in this country? If they do, and it doesn't work, we can look at it. From the Society's point of view, we would welcome it being looked at, provided that it doesn't lead to a freezing of press freedom here and editors just saying, "We will just avoid that issue altogether because it is just too time-consuming for us." That is no way to have freedom of expression.

**Q823 Stuart C. McDonald:** We will look into the practicalities of how that could be made to operate, but we still have this debate over the principle of whether or not it is appropriate to have such a clause.

Moving on, Mr Murray, you gave evidence that was quite similar to what Mr Brunskill said in his evidence. You suggested that making a complaint about accuracy could sometimes be as effective an alternative to making complaints about concerns regarding pejorative or discriminatory articles and so on. How far does that go? Going back to immigration, for example, you could understand that pejorative language such as "swamping, swarming, stampeding migrants" would justify a complaint, if there was such a group provision as we have just been speaking about. Would that in any way, shape or form engage accuracy rules, if a newspaper is saying, migrants are "swarming" to the United Kingdom? Or is that just poetic licence, as it were, to describe how they are turning up?

**Ian Murray:** I think Neil is better placed on whether that would be considered as accurate; what is the "Oxford English Dictionary" definition of "swarming" or "swamping" or those kinds of things? If there is an accuracy issue, it should be looked at as an accuracy issue.

What that does highlight is training on the use of language. I am not saying it should never be used, but if you say "swarming" and



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"swamping", you step back and look at that, and consider whether that can be seen as insulting, as basically provocative. I think it can be addressed like that. We have heard today about newsrooms being open to feedback and awaiting the recommendations from your Committee, and recognising this as an issue. Language would be something there. Is it just simplistic language to say, "We are being swamped"? Where is the accuracy on that?

**Chair:** Thank you. It has been a very long evidence session this afternoon, so thanks to colleagues on the Committee, as well as to the panellists for your patience. We would very much welcome you looking further at some of these issues, alongside the Committee's work looking at them. Thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon.