

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRESS COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND THE PRESS OMBUDSMAN

PRESS COUNCIL
OF IRELAND



OFFICE OF
THE PRESS
OMBUDSMAN

Press Council remit could be extended to Internet—Minister

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The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Dermot Ahern TD, paid tribute to the work of the Press Council and the Press Ombudsman when he launched the organization's second Annual Report in the Mansion House, Dublin, on 24 May. He also raised the possibility that the remit of the Press Council and the Press Ombudsman might extend to the internet in future.

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“Perhaps for the education of certain sceptics, it should be remembered that the Code of Practice of members of the Press Council relates both to the traditional "ink stained" print version of our newspapers and magazines and to their on-line versions”, he said. “Defamation law, of course, also operates in a global fashion”

The full text of the Minister's speech can be accessed [here](#).



The Minister for Justice, Mr Dermot Ahern TD, at the launch of the 2009 Annual Report.

CHAIRMAN OUTLINES BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE PRESS COUNCIL



The Chairman of the Press Council, Professor Tom Mitchell (right) with the Minister for Justice (middle) and the Press Ombudsman, Professor John Horgan, at The Annual Report launch.

Speaking at the launch of the second Annual Report the Chairman of the Press Council, Professor Tom Mitchell, outlined the substantial benefits for all publications that are members of the Council.

“The Defamation Act is”, he said, “a most important piece of legislation in that it brings badly needed reform to the libel laws, but it also, in significant ways, ensures a stronger and more effective Press Council. The Press Council now has the sanctions of statute law, and all its decisions and communications related to the handling of complaints have qualified privilege.

“The Act enables publications to offer an apology without risk that this could be taken as an admission of liability. It also enables a court to take into account membership of the Press Council and the record of a newspaper in complying with the Code of Practice when considering a defence of fair and reasonable publication.”

The full text of the Chairman’s speech can be accessed [here](#).



PRESS OMBUDSMAN HIGHLIGHTS FAIR HEARINGS FOR COMPLAINANTS

The Press Ombudsman, Professor John Horgan, told those attending the launch that the success of the Office of the Press Ombudsman in providing a fair hearing for complaints about newspapers and magazines had been highlighted by the fact that virtually half of all the decisions made by him had either upheld complaints or had concluded that the publications concerned had taken or offered to take sufficient remedial action to resolve the complaint.

He also pointed out that while formal decisions made by the Press Ombudsman or by the Press Council were slightly up on 2008, more than a quarter of all complaints formally investigated in 2009 were successfully conciliated between his Office and the editor of the publication concerned. The full text of Press Ombudsman's speech can be accessed [here](#).



The Press Ombudsman, Professor John Horgan, speaking at the launch of the Annual Report.



RESOLVING COMPLAINTS INFORMALLY

An increasing number of complaints are now being resolved informally, following advice from the Office to complainants, who then contact the publication directly. In such cases the submission of a formal complaint is avoided. It is an indication of the commitment of editors to resolve complaints in a speedy and satisfactory manner.

Some of the complaints resolved in this manner include the following:

- A lady objected to the publication of her photograph in a report about a court case in which she was involved, but did not want to submit a formal complaint: she wanted to express her concern to the newspaper. After contacting the newspaper, the complainant was assured that her photograph would not be used in any future reports about her court case.
- A man complained that despite a number of emails to a newspaper complaining about a report that he knew to be inaccurate, the newspaper did not respond. On checking with the newspaper the Office of the Press Ombudsman was advised that it never got the emails. It transpired that they had been incorrectly addressed by the complainant and therefore never received by the newspaper. The newspaper immediately offered to publish a correction to the original article.
- A man complained about the publication by a newspaper of the names and addresses of handgun owners in the context of a report about a court case where the owners had their application for a licence refused. While the newspaper was fully entitled to report on court proceedings, it undertook to be more vigilant in future in relation to the publication of the full names and addresses of people who owned handguns.
- An organization representing the rights of children complained about the publication of a photograph of two young vulnerable children. The editor explained that the photographs were given to the newspaper by the children's grandmother but in the light of the complaint undertook not to republish them.



Other news

Press Council Chairman to retirenew members of Council to be appointed

Three members of the Press Council of Ireland will retire at the end of this month. They include the first ever Chairman of the Press Council, Professor Tom Mitchell and independent members Mary Kotsonouris and Peter O'Mahony.

Recruitment is at an advanced stage for a new Press Council Chairman and two new independent members. Details of the new appointments will be in the next newsletter.

Press Council launches new website

At the beginning of June the Press Council and Office of the Press Ombudsman launched their new website. The layout and style of the new website is much improved, with a new search engine facility making it easier for browsers to quickly find what they are looking for.

The website gives full details of the work of the Offices and how to make a complaint about a newspaper or magazine, together with details of the Code of Practice for Newspapers and Magazines.

All decisions of the Press Ombudsman and Press Council, together with details of complaints that have been successfully conciliated, are accessible on the site.

www.pressombudsman.ie

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