

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRESS COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND THE PRESS OMBUDSMAN



35 decisions on complaints in first year

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Conciliation process resolves others

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The first full year of operations for the Office of the Press Ombudsman has seen the Office deal with a substantial volume of complaints relating to a wide range of print media.

The Press Ombudsman made 35 formal decisions in 2008, and each of these can be viewed [here](#). 12 cases were successfully conciliated between the Ombudsman's Office, the publication and the complainant, and can be viewed [here](#). Two cases were referred to the Press Council of Ireland for a decision, and can be viewed [here](#).

We look forward in 2009 to continuing to provide members of the public who have a complaint about the print media with a quick, fair and free method of resolving their complaints.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to others you feel may be interested in its contents, or to send us (info@pressombudsman.ie) the names and email addresses of those you would like to add to our distribution list.

PUBLIC MEETING ON SUICIDE AND THE PRESS



A public meeting held in Portlaoise in December on suicide and the press was preceded by a public consultation, when the Press Council invited individuals and organisations to make submissions on the subject of suicide. The submissions received form the basis of a detailed Press Council discussion document, which is currently being considered by the Code Committee in the context of any changes that may be deemed necessary to the Code of Practice for Newspapers and Periodicals.

The role of newspaper coverage of suicide was discussed at the public meeting, and contributions were made by the Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for mental health, Mr John Molony TD, journalists, experts, health professionals and members of the public. Many members of voluntary organisations and individuals who had been bereaved through suicide contributed to the discussion.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Mary Kotsonouris, a member of the Press Council, and speakers included the Coroner for East Mayo and member of the Press Council, Mr Pat O'Connor, Dr John Connolly, Secretary of the Irish Association of Suicidology, Mr Dave O'Connell, Managing Editor of the Connaught Tribune and the Galway poet, Ms Rita Ann Higgins.

Details of the proceedings are now available on-line as follows:

Press Council Discussion Document on Suicide [here](#)

Report of public meeting [here](#)

Speech by Mr Patrick O'Connor, Coroner for East Mayo [here](#)

Speech by Mr Dave O'Connell, Managing Editor of the
Connaught Tribune [here](#)

Presentation by Dr John Connolly, Secretary, Association of
Suicidology [here](#)

The Press Ombudsman will address the Samaritans' National Conference in Cork on 28 March on the subject of suicide and the press.

CASES RESOLVED

Some recent decisions of the Press Ombudsman are below. Some complaints are resolved without a formal decision having to be made. All decisions and conciliated cases are on our websites www.pressombudsman.ie and www.presscouncil.ie



The Mater Hospital and Sunday Tribune

The Press Ombudsman decided to partially uphold a complaint by the Chief Executive of the Mater Hospital about an article published in the Sunday Tribune about the treatment and care of three patients in the hospital. The Chief Executive asserted in particular that the front page headline "Mater hospital patients had gauze shoved down throats", was not only untrue, but had the effect of undermining public confidence in the hospital. For full decision click [here](#)

McArdles' Test Centre and the Irish Daily Mail

The Press Ombudsman decided that an offer by the newspaper to publish prominently a letter by the company setting out their side of the story was sufficient remedial action on its part to resolve a complaint a complaint about the reporting of a court case relating to the Navan bus crash. For full decision click [here](#)

Doyle and the Sunday Independent

The Press Ombudsman decided not to uphold a complaint by a man about an article about the rise in criminal gangs in Ireland, which made reference to his late son. He complained that the publication of the material relating to his late son, for whom the family were still grieving, caused great offence to his family, may have stirred up hatred against them and may even have put their lives at risk. For full decision click [here](#)

A man and the Kerryman

A man complained that an article in the Kerryman contained a number of inaccuracies. The complaint was resolved satisfactory when the newspaper very swiftly gave an undertaking to publish a further article clarifying the matters under complaint.



PRESS OMBUDSMAN ADDRESSES CURRENT ISSUES IN JOURNALISM

In a comprehensive and wide-ranging speech to students at the University of Limerick on 29 January, the Press Ombudsman outlined what he considered to be a number of major issues of importance to the print media in the 21st century.

The Press Ombudsman talked about the ability of newspapers to survive in today's global economy, citing the case of the New York Times, which earlier this year borrowed \$250 million from a Mexican millionaire to make the repayments on a \$1 billion loan. He talked about shrinking advertisement revenues and reducing circulation figures, and the need to address structural changes such as the explosion in communications technology, and added:

"There is a continual risk, especially in straitened times, that the pressures of time and money will convert journalists into drones, into residual processors of facts and opinions that have been generated elsewhere and which they will not have the time to evaluate or sift properly. The web is a huge research tool and should not be under-estimated. But fingers on the keyboard are not the only tools of the journalist's trade. So are their eyes and ears. And their legs. The world beyond the laptop screen always repays a visit."

Click [here](#) for full text of speech

In an address to the Journalism Society in University College Cork on 19 February, the Press Ombudsman spoke about the difficulties presented to journalists in reporting the past and in particular, their interpretations of it. He cited the famous Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscynski, who said "The past does not exist. There are only infinite renderings of it", and added:

"Selection is the basis of journalism, and selection itself is based on value judgments. That is, in part, what journalism and editing is about – offering a version of the past based on a selection of events, that, in spite of all its limitations, is the best effort of a team of dedicated and skilful people to present something that is both coherent and credible. That does not mean it is perfect."

Click [here](#) for full text of speech



COMING UP SHORTLY

The first Annual General Meeting of the Press Council of Ireland will take place at the end of March in Dublin. All member publications of the Press Council will be invited to attend.

The first Annual Report of the Press Council of Ireland and the Press Ombudsman will be launched early in April. This Report will contain information about the development of the new regulatory structures for the print media, its procedures and membership, and the services it provides to the public. It will also highlight some of the more significant issues and challenges that the first year of operations have presented.

A special research study commissioned by the Press Council and Press Ombudsman on "Accuracy in Newspapers" will be published later in the year. Date to be confirmed.

A public meeting on the issue of privacy will be held outside Dublin in 2009. Date to be confirmed.

If you would like any further information on any of the above, or anything else referred to in this Newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us at [**info@pressombudsman.ie**](mailto:info@pressombudsman.ie)
