



How to **Complain**

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Introduction

The Press Complaints Commission is an independent body, which has been set up to examine complaints about the editorial content of UK newspapers and magazines (and their websites). **We are here to help you and our services are free.**

This guide explains what we can deal with – and what we can't. It explains how our complaints procedures work and sets out what you can expect from us.

If anything is not clear please call us on 020 7831 0022 or 0845 600 2757; or go to our website, www.pcc.org.uk, where there is a wealth of additional information (including answers to frequently asked questions).

Please remember that we are happy to offer informal advice prior to you lodging

an official complaint. Call us any time. For emergencies only (usually relating to harassment by journalists) please use our 24-hour helpline: 07659 152656.

Remember too that editors are often happy to deal with complaints directly. You may, therefore, like to try a direct approach before considering a formal complaint to the PCC. Any such approach should be made promptly. If you do not receive a reply within a week – or if you are dissatisfied by the editor's response – please write to us as soon as possible.

Our Remit

The PCC deals with all **editorially-controlled material** in UK newspapers and magazines (and their websites). This can include:

- Articles and pictures
- Words and pictures (including video) on newspaper and magazine websites
- Audio material on newspaper and magazine websites
- Readers' letters
- Edited or moderated reader comments on newspaper and magazine websites.

We also deal with the **physical behaviour of journalists**. This can include:

- Persistent pursuit of individuals
- Refusing requests to stop taking photos or asking questions
- Using hidden cameras to obtain material
- Failing to be sensitive when dealing with cases involving grief and shock
- Failing to obtain the proper consent before speaking to children or people in hospital.





Please remember, however:

Complaints have to be judged against the **Editors' Code of Practice**. Before making your complaint we strongly advise that you consult the Code, which can be found on our website. Alternatively, we can send you a copy.

We normally accept complaints only from those who are **directly affected** by the matters about which they are complaining.

We do not generally accept complaints made **more than two months after the date of publication** (or over two months after the end of direct correspondence between you and the editor, provided that correspondence was entered into straight away). If the article remains available on the publication's website, this rule does not usually apply.

There are some things we **don't deal with**. For example:

- Complaints about TV and radio
- Complaints about advertising
- Concerns about matters of taste and decency
- Legal or contractual matters that are dealt with more appropriately by the courts
- Complaints about books
- Complaints about online material that is not on newspaper or magazine websites.

Our Complaints Procedure

When **making a complaint** please send us a copy of the article in question (if there is one) and a letter or email outlining your concerns. For us to take your complaint forward it will need to engage one or more of the numbered **Clauses of the Editors' Code of Practice**. You can see the Code on our website or we can send you a copy.



In the following steps we take you through the basic stages of our complaints procedure. Please note that each case is treated on its merits and the following guide is not exhaustive.



Dear

1. Assessing your complaint

If your complaint falls within our remit – and is neither delayed nor subject to related to legal proceedings – we will assess whether it raises a possible breach of the Editors’ Code of Practice. If the Commission members think it does not, we will explain why. If we think it does, we will initiate an investigation by writing to the editor of the relevant publication.

2. The investigation

When we write to the editor we will send him or her a copy of your complaint and a copy of the article about which concerns have been raised. We will ask the editor to respond to your complaint and a copy of his or her reply will be sent to you. If it still appears that there may have been a breach of the Code, our primary aim will be to find a satisfactory resolution to your complaint.

3. Resolution by mediation

Depending on the seriousness of the case, there are a variety of ways in which complaints can be resolved. For instance, if a serious error has been published, a correction or apology in the paper may be required. Alternatively, we can seek assurances about future coverage or perhaps look to have online material amended or deleted. We cannot generally obtain financial compensation. If your complaint is resolved, we will publish a summary of the case on our website.



4. Taking stock

If it proves impossible to find a way of settling your complaint the Commission will evaluate the case. It will first decide whether there has, in fact, been a breach of the Editors' Code of Practice. If there has, it will decide whether the newspaper or magazine has taken – or offered – sufficient remedial action.

5. Complaint upheld

When the Commission concludes that the Code has been breached (and the breach has not – or cannot – be remedied) it will uphold your complaint in a public ruling. The newspaper or magazine is obliged to publish the critical ruling in full and with due prominence and with headline preference to the PCC. This is a serious outcome for any editor and puts down a marker for future press behaviour.



Important points to remember

- When we write to the editor we will have to identify you (unless there are exceptional circumstances). However, you may remain anonymous in any public ruling or summary of your case
- The Commission can only consider evidence that has been made available to both sides
- A summary of every resolved complaint will be published on our website as will the full details of all upheld cases
- Even where the Commission does not rule in your favour, a copy of your complaint (and the Commission's decision) will be sent to the editor of the publication in question
- All decisions about whether there has been a breach of the Code or about the adequacy of remedial action will be made by the Commission. PCC staff will, however, advise you about likely outcomes.



Our performance objectives

When you make an enquiry or complaint to the PCC we will seek to deal with your concerns as effectively as possible. The following is a list of the performance objectives we have set ourselves:

- We will ensure the information we provide (online, in printed literature and on our Helpline) is clear, accurate and accessible;
- We will aim to respond to a complaint within three working days, and deal with it as promptly as possible. We will aim to complete complaints, on average, within 20 days, and conclude formal investigations, on average, within 50 days;
- We will aim for complainant satisfaction in the handling of complaints and a high level of service to those who use the PCC;
- We will aim to ensure members of the public – and representatives of the most vulnerable people in society – are aware of the PCC and its services;
- We will aim to be open about our work and accountable for it. We will use our website to publish as much relevant information as we can, including our quarterly performance statistics;
- We will offer our training seminars to all newsrooms (national, regional and magazines), and provide pre-publication advice to journalists and editors.



The Independent Reviewer

If, at the end of the process, you have concerns about the way your complaint has been handled by the Commission and its staff, you should write – within one month of being told the outcome of your complaint – to the Independent Reviewer. Email: independentreviewer@pcc.org.uk

He will investigate your concerns and report any finding and recommendation to the Commission. He cannot investigate complaints about the substance of a decision made by the PCC.

“In addition to dealing with complaints about editorial content the PCC also keeps industry standards high by training journalists and editors, and works pro-actively behind the scenes to prevent harassment and media intrusion. We can also provide pre-publication advice to journalists and the public.”

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London EC1N 2JD

Telephone: 020 7831 0022

Fax: 020 7831 0025

Textphone: 020 7831 0123

(for deaf or hard of hearing people)

Helpline: 0845 600 2757

Scottish Helpline: 0131 220 6652

Welsh Helpline: 029 2039 5570

24 hour Press Office: 07740 896 805

24 hour Advice Line: 07659 152 656

*This is for use in emergencies only, primarily
in cases of harassment by journalists*

Email: complaints@pcc.org.uk

www.pcc.org.uk – Fast, free, fair.