

Working internationally

The media is increasingly globalised and something that appears on a website hosted in Australia is just as accessible here as information on a UK website. This doesn't mean that a newspaper in Britain can automatically publish something because it has already appeared on an obscure website elsewhere in the world.



But what it does mean is that individuals caught up in a story can become the subject of global scrutiny like never before. As a result, it is vital that the PCC is able to assist people who are experiencing problems abroad.

If the problems relate to UK journalists working in foreign countries, the PCC can deal with them easily – the behaviour of British reporters and photographers is a matter that falls within the Commission's jurisdiction wherever the journalists may be. But what about material that has appeared in a newspaper or magazine that is published outside the UK's borders? Or what if an individual is being harassed by foreign journalists?

It's here that our relationship with other Press and Media Councils can be of great practical benefit to complainants. Within minutes we can – and have – put complainants in touch with PCC-equivalent bodies in Belgium or Australia, Canada or Germany. Not every Press Council can offer exactly the same range of services as the PCC – especially in connection to pre-publication concerns – but they are best placed to offer help and advice to people who don't know exactly what their rights are.

As well as providing immediate, practical benefit to complainants, our links with counterpart organisations help us to develop press self-regulation in a positive direction: learning lessons from other countries, avoiding pitfalls they might have experienced, while borrowing ideas that have proved successful elsewhere. Changes to the presentation of our own statistical information in 2009 followed a close examination of practices abroad.

Much of this information and advice exchange happens through meetings of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE). Members of the Alliance are also much more readily in contact with one another by email than in times gone by, which undoubtedly reflects the need to be as up to date as possible with developments in the field. At the 2009 meeting of AIPCE, topics under discussion included the various mechanisms for mediating complaints and models for sustainable funding of Press Councils. The Alliance welcomed as members the newly-established Press Councils of Serbia and Moldova.

The last year also saw the PCC participate in a major Council of Europe project to 'Speak out against Discrimination' in the media. The project examined the role that self-regulation can play in rooting out prejudice, noting that there is not necessarily a single solution to suit all geographical areas. The project remains ongoing but it has already been helpful in providing an additional framework for comparing the ways in which different Press Councils go about their work. For instance, it is clear from the work already done that, like the PCC, most Press Councils do not offer specific protection to groups (as opposed to identifiable individuals) against discrimination. Yet on another point of comparison – the make-up of its board – the PCC is in the clear minority: it has a greater ratio of public to industry members than any other comparable body in Europe.



For more information about the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe please visit:

www.aipce.net

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