

Working with journalists

The Press Complaints Commission has a clear role in maintaining and raising industry standards. Its function as adjudicator in cases that can't be mediated (or that are not appropriate for mediation) is key in this regard. By ruling on what is and is not acceptable, the Commission sets benchmarks for editors and journalists, gradually establishing case law across all areas of journalistic activity.

It is not enough, however, for the PCC to make rulings and then assume that they will somehow be absorbed automatically. This is why the Commission plays an ever-increasing role in the professional development of in-post journalists, from junior reporters to news editors, photographers to chief subs. Most of our work in this area is done by holding update seminars at which real PCC cases are discussed and analysed, with journalists first considering how *they* might have judged the complaint and then examining the Commission's own ruling.

Because of increasing demand for such seminars, the PCC generally seeks to run them in-house at any publication that expresses an interest. During 2009, seminars were held at the Bristol Evening Post and the Birmingham Mail, with further regional events planned for 2010 in Belfast, Newcastle and Southampton. National newspapers too have recognised the value of their journalists being familiar with PCC case law and 2009 saw a record number of seminars at national titles, some newspapers requesting a series of events to ensure that all staff were able to take part. The Commission is committed to responding positively to all requests for training and professional development, and seminars can be tailored to suit particular publications or areas of journalism and the number of attendees – from half a dozen to over a hundred.

In all, PCC staff and representatives ran thirty-three seminars for in-post journalists. These reached hundreds of reporters, photographers and other editorial staff on national titles (broadsheet and tabloid), regional newspapers and magazines.

This work is in addition to our involvement in courses for trainee journalists. Once again, the PCC has a strong commitment to ensuring that those who have been through formal journalistic education are fully aware of how the Commission interprets the Editors' Code of Practice in key areas. Staff of the Commission are greatly assisted in this programme of lectures by Alison Hastings, former editor of the Newcastle Evening Chronicle and an ex-Commissioner, as well as by Professor Bob Pinker, another former member of the Commission and for a time its Acting Chairman. In 2009, PCC representatives spoke to students on well over 30 undergraduate or post-graduate degree courses. We also hosted talks and seminars for dozens of school groups and parties of overseas students. Our teachers' resource pack remains available at www.pcc.org.uk and will be updated with new case histories in 2010.



PCC Director, Stephen Abell (bottom left) and consultant, Alison Hastings (below), talk to journalists at a recent update seminar for staff at the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life. Participants discussed the Commission's interpretation of the Code on key issues by an examination of recent cases.

