

Code Committee Chairman's Report: 2002

The work of the editors' Code Committee is absolutely vital to the effective operation of our system of self regulation. Many pieces of legislation in recent years – on youth justice, data protection, human rights and financial journalism – have underlined the importance of that work, not just to the industry, but to the Courts (especially following the recent and welcome judgements in the cases of Gary Flitcroft and Naomi Campbell) and to Parliament as well. □□ That is why our job is to keep the Code up to date and, above all, practical. And it is our job, too, to demonstrate that we can work in partnership with those who have genuine concerns and views about the ethical standards of newspapers and magazines.

In that context, the issue which dominated the Code Committee's agenda in 2002 – and still does – is that of witness payments. The background to this issue is set out on page 8 of this Annual Review. It has been our task to take the legitimate concerns of the Lord Chancellor and others on this important subject, and turn them into practical action.

The issue is still very much under discussion at the time of the publication of this Review, but the Code Committee has been concerned in its deliberations to ensure that: □□ • payments to witnesses conditional on the outcome of a trial are banned (building on the PCC's adjudication in the complaints arising from the Gary Glitter trial); and □□ • payments in current criminal proceedings, after a charge against an individual has been made, can only be made if an exceptionally stiff definition of public interest can be proven by an editor. □

□ The Code Committee has also remained closely involved with the discussions over the implementation of the EU Market Abuse Directive – particularly in the light of the concerns that we raised during the passage in the UK of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (see my report in Annual Review 2000, p.12). We are very pleased that substantive progress has been made on this front – as is reported elsewhere in this Review. I do not now envisage any changes to the Code being necessary as a result of this Directive, although there may need to be minor changes to the PCC's Best Practice note on the subject.

We continue to be open to suggestions for possible Code changes, made by organisations and members of the public as part of the PCC's aims to be as open and accessible as possible. In 2002 we considered 18 representations from members of the public on important issues such as discrimination, the reporting of suicide and harassment. There has only been one change to the membership of the Committee since the publication of my last report. Paul Horrocks left us to join the Press Complaints Commission, and he has been replaced by Mike Gilson, editor of The News (Portsmouth). □

□ I continue to be indebted to all my colleagues – and in particular to the indefatigable Ian Beales – for their help and support. As reported elsewhere in this Review, our Secretary Grahame Thomson is retiring this year after nearly thirteen years in the position. Our debt to him for his wisdom and guidance, as well as the smooth operation of our Committee during that time, is enormous. We are incredibly grateful to him.

LES HINTON

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Executive Chairman, News International*