



# Statement of General Principles

## Introduction

This Statement of General Principles forms part of the Council's Standards of Practice which are binding on all print and online publishers who are members of the Council. The Standards are applied by it when considering and adjudicating on complaints about particular instances of their practice.

The **Standards of Practice** comprise:

- the **Statement of General Principles**;
- the **Statement of Privacy Principles**;
- a series of **Specific Standards of Practice**, which apply the two Statements of Principles to particular aspects of media practice.

The Council's Advisory Guidelines may also be taken into account but are not binding Standards.

The Standards of Practice apply to text, headlines, photographs, graphics, captions, audio, video and all other forms of published material, but not to advertising.

Publishers and editors are responsible for taking reasonable steps to comply with the Standards in their print and online publications. This applies to actions by their employees and external contributors, including those who are not journalists.

Publisher members are also obliged under the Council's Constitution to cooperate with its handling of complaints. This includes publishing all Council adjudications relating to their particular publications.

## Preamble to the General Principles

In a democratic society, all people have the right to freedom of expression and to be informed. These rights cannot be secured unless the press is free to publish facts and opinions without fear or favour.

Freedom of the press, however, carries responsibilities to the public. Liberty does not mean licence, and due regard must be given to other important freedoms, rights and values which are in the public interest.

Accordingly, the Press Council has laid down the following General Principles to which all publisher members are committed by the Council's Constitution.

## The General Principles

Publications are free to publish as they wish by reporting facts and expressing opinions, provided they take reasonable steps to comply with the following Principles and the Council's other Standards of Practice.

### Accuracy and clarity

1. Ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.
2. Provide a correction or other adequate remedial action if published material is significantly inaccurate or misleading.

### Fairness and balance

3. Ensure that factual material is presented with reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers' expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts.
4. Ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle 3.

### Privacy and avoidance of harm

5. Avoid intruding on a person's reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

### Integrity and transparency

7. Avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
8. Ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided or adequately disclosed, and that they do not influence published material.

### Explanatory Notes

**"Person"** includes a group or category of people (provided it is reasonably specific and limited in number) and a corporation or other legal entity.

**"Sufficiently in the public interest"**: The necessary level of justification in the public interest is proportionate to the gravity of the potential breach of the Principles. Relevant factors to consider may include, for example, the importance in the public interest of:

- (a) ensuring everyone has genuine freedom of expression and access to reliable information;
- (b) protecting and enhancing independent and vigorous media; public safety and health; due administration of justice and government, personal privacy, and national security;
- (c) exposing or preventing crime, dishonesty and serious misconduct or incompetence (especially by public figures).