

The Leveson Inquiry

Witness statement of Peter Wright

Career history

1. I am the Editor of The Mail on Sunday. I began my career as a reporter on the Hemel Hempstead Evening Post-Echo in 1975. I became a reporter on the Daily Mail in 1979, and was subsequently Assistant News Editor, Foreign Editor, Assistant Features Editor, Femail Editor, Assistant Editor (Features), Associate Editor and Deputy Editor. I became Editor of The Mail on Sunday in September 1998. I have been a director of Associated Newspapers since 1998. In 2008 I was appointed as a Commissioner of the PCC.

The need for ethical standards and behaviour in the print media

2. The Code of Practice administered by the Press Complaints Commission ("PCC") is the Editors' Code of Practice, drawn up by editors for editors. All our journalists adhere to the letter and spirit of the Editors' Code. It is against our policy to publish stories that are inaccurate, that involve any breach of the law, that intrude into grief or personal privacy, or that cause offence to our readers. At the same time it is our duty to inform the public, frequently against concerted opposition from those in positions of power. It is my job as editor to balance these demands when they are in conflict.

How ANL seeks to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct and the role of the Editor

3. As Editor I am responsible for all the content of The Mail on Sunday and for the behaviour of all of our journalists while working for the paper. In practical terms I am assisted by the paper's Managing Editor, John Wellington. It is my job to produce a sparkling newspaper within the legal and other constraints I have mentioned. While national newspaper editors, including myself, are competitive individuals and feel under pressure to produce big exclusive stories, the emphasis in our company is actually less on exclusives and more on the need to maintain a spread and balance throughout the newspaper that will appeal to the readers with whom we are seeking to engage.
4. All our journalists are required to abide by the Editors' Code, which is written into their employment contracts, along with observance of the provisions of the Data Protection Act ("DPA") and the Bribery Act. I have read the witness statement of

the Editor-in-Chief and adopt what he has said in relation to the hierarchical structure of our newspapers, the policies and procedures in place, and how editorial discipline is enforced, subject to the general point that The Mail on Sunday is more thoroughly policed than the Daily Mail by reason of the fact that there is usually more time available to investigate stories, most of our stories are self-generated and exclusive and therefore more likely to be challenged, and each piece of copy is filtered through the hands of more people before publication.

5. We have made a number of changes to our policies and procedures over the years, in response partly to legislation, partly to the proliferation of information databases and the problems they can present, and partly to revelations about the activities of journalists at the News of the World. Those changes are described in the two schedules attached to the witness statement of the Editor-in-Chief. The schedules have been prepared by our lawyers based on information and documents provided by Mr Wellington, the Assistant and Managing Editors of the Daily Mail and Liz Hartley, the head of Editorial Legal Services. The first schedule describes the actions we have taken since the publication of the Information Commissioner's report "What Price Privacy?" in order to ensure that our journalists comply with the DPA. The second schedule describes the actions we have taken to ensure compliance with the new Bribery Act.
6. The Editors' Code and the Company's policies are adhered to in practice, though there are areas of the Editors' Code that are open to interpretation and where judgments have to be made by myself and my colleagues – for instance on privacy. We strive for complete accuracy in every article, but it is inevitable when working against deadlines that mistakes are sometimes made. Equally, editorial judgments have to be made quickly and often on partial information. Sometimes in matters of judgment, as with matters of accuracy, we do not get it absolutely right. From time to time we are challenged on our compliance with the Code and the PCC is asked to adjudicate. Where we get it wrong, department heads are held to account and we review our practice to ensure that lessons are learned and mistakes are not repeated. The letters to editorial staff dated 26 March 2008 and 29 April 2011 are examples where, following a complaint to the PCC, Mr Wellington sought to remind staff of the provisions of the Editors' Code and the importance of compliance and to set out the correct procedure to be followed. In those cases the journalists concerned also received words of advice from Mr Wellington.

The impact of financial pressures and incentives on editorial decisions

7. We operate a strict demarcation between the editorial and commercial functions of The Mail on Sunday. I was appointed by the Chairman of the Daily Mail and General Trust Plc ("DMGT") and report to him and the Editor-in-Chief of Associated Newspapers. I do not report to the commercial management.
8. I have felt no commercial pressure whatsoever from the DMGT board or chairman or anyone else in making decisions as the editor of my newspaper. I have never received a bonus, nor has one ever been offered. I receive share options, but these are awarded annually and are tied to the financial performance of DMGT as a whole, not to editorial performance.

Sources of information

9. Information comes from a vast variety of sources: agencies such as PA and Reuters, local news agencies, freelance writers and photographers, PRs, publishers, politicians, members of the public, anonymous letters and phone calls, dinner party conversations, other conversations with friends and family, school run gossip, Twitter, Facebook and many others. Every journalist has to make judgments on the quality of the information they are dealing with, firstly as to its accuracy, and secondly as to whether it is publishable having regard to issues of privacy and data protection, libel and taste. The normal process for checking sources of information is that individual reporters make the initial judgment. If they have doubts about accuracy or how the information was obtained they have to discuss it with their departmental editor, who in turn must raise any doubts with me. At the same time senior editors frequently initiate their own checks about the source of material to assure themselves that it is suitable to be published. I also make my own enquiries if I have any reason to believe that the sourcing of a story may involve a breach of the law, the Editors' Code or proper journalistic practice. At the end of the process sub-editors check copy for inconsistencies and raise queries as to possible inaccuracies. All copy on The Mail on Sunday is read by a lawyer, principally for any potential complaint for libel, misuse of private or confidential information, contempt and breach of the Editors' Code. On contentious stories the editorial legal department is involved at an early stage.

10. I normally ask for the source of any story which is likely to be challenged, whether legally or through the PCC. The rule on The Mail on Sunday is that journalists must reveal their sources to the Editor if asked. If they are unable to do so I am very reluctant to run the story unless it is clearly in the public interest and can be verified entirely independently.
11. Newspapers serve their readers and as Editor I have to make a judgment about what my readers are going to be interested in, but I do not send reporters out to find facts to fit a pre-determined story that will flatter my prejudices and reassure my readers. I send them out to examine if something is true. We will often start from a hypothesis or a gut feeling about a set of events, of which we only have partial knowledge, but not with an assumption that something is wrong or right. The job of the reporter is to go out and find out what is really going on. As an Editor you not only have to push reporters but you also have to rein them in. I spend as much of my time telling reporters that they are looking at something too narrowly or investing too much in certain facts or inferences, as I do encouraging them to look at an issue more deeply or from another perspective, or to consider other aspects of the matter which I instinctively think is going to make an interesting story for our newspaper.

Protocols or policies in relation to payments to external sources of information

12. All our journalists are required to observe the DPA and the Bribery Act, which are written into their contracts. The use of inquiry agents is banned. We do not make payments to people who are reasonably expected to be witnesses in criminal trials. Freelancers and other third parties working for us are required to follow the same rules. In respect of payments for information, we have a checklist that department heads are required to fill in before authorising a payment.
13. I was unaware of the use of inquiry agents until we heard of the Information Commissioner's investigation. The use of inquiry agents came into our newsroom at a grass-roots level, having spread, I now believe, from the City and the legal profession. For budgetary purposes I have since 2003 monitored payments to journalistic contributors prepared by department editors on a weekly basis. Payments to inquiry agencies for research and information were classed with payments for taxis, flights, accommodation etc and were monitored by our Managing Editor. I rebuked him for failing to alert me to the practice of employing inquiry agents.

14. Early in 2004 we discovered from the Operation Motorman inquiry that we were regularly using the services of the inquiry agent, Steven Whittamore. We issued an instruction to all staff in February that year that inquiry agents were not to be used without clearance from department heads, who had to be satisfied that other means of obtaining information had been exhausted. Following the Information Commissioner's report in May 2006 we examined whether other inquiry agents had been used. We discovered that a number of external agencies were being used by staff for research and information, including genealogical researchers, tracing and inquiry agents, credit reference agencies and database holders. As far as I am aware none of these agencies were used to source stories. They were used to locate people who were in the news or who might be able to help reporters find people in the news in order to check their facts or give someone the opportunity to comment or give their side of the story. As such they mostly involved searches of databases such as Births, Marriages and Deaths, Companies House, the electoral roll and telephone records. At this time (2000 – 2005) the internet was not widely used by journalists as a research tool: Google and Facebook were in their infancy, reporters on the road had laptops that only communicated with the office. Inquiry agents such as Mr Whittamore possessed CD-Roms containing databases of public records and were adept at searching them. Previously an electoral roll search would involve dispatching a reporter to the relevant town hall, which could take all day. Inquiry agents could search every electoral roll in the country in a matter of minutes. Although the agencies assured us they acted within the law, Motorman demonstrated that we could not always rely on such assurances. For that reason the Editor-in-Chief banned all use of external search agencies in April 2007 with immediate effect. Since 2007 we have approved the use of two subscription tracing services (Trace Smart and e-Trace) and The Mail on Sunday also uses a researcher to support The Mail on Sunday's two staff reporters based in the US. As far as I am aware the rules we imposed have always been observed on The Mail on Sunday.
15. To the best of my knowledge we have never paid a police officer. We have paid public officials on occasion in the past, but these are usually people who have retired or left public service because they are unhappy about some matter. In making any payment I or my deputy or, in some cases, the department head needs to be satisfied that the payment is lawful and complies with the Editors' Code. The amounts paid to public officials will naturally vary according to the significance of their story.

16. To the best of my knowledge we have never hacked into voicemail messages or intercepted phones or used computer hackers.

Balancing the private interests of individuals against the public interest in a free Press.

17. A great many stories involve making balances between the private interests of individuals and the public interest. Depending on the circumstances, the matters to be taken into account include: the nature of the information or activity; the circumstances in which and the purposes for which the information came into our hands; the reasonableness of the expectation of privacy; the damage and distress likely to be caused; the extent to which the information is generally accessible; what details need to be published to explain or corroborate any allegations; what details need to be published to interest the reader; and whether there is a specific public interest justification in addition to the public interest in a free press (for example, exposing crime, corruption, injustice, incompetence or anti-social behaviour; protecting people's health and safety, preventing people from being misled or disclosing information that empowers people to better understand or make more informed decisions on matters of importance). This list is not exhaustive and the weight given to these and any other relevant factors varies depending on the story.

18. For example:

- (a) *Lord Browne of Madingley, former CEO of BP:* We were approached, via a freelance agency, by his former lover Jeff Chevalier, who had been left in difficult financial circumstances after the break-up of their relationship. He wanted to tell us the story of their life together, which had been widely known about within BP, but had not been acknowledged by Lord Browne publicly. We were not interested in the intimate details of their liaison, which would in any case have been regarded as private by the PCC and the courts. We were however very interested in the close relationship between Lord Browne, BP and the highest echelons of the then Government. We prepared a story focussing on a corporate issue of very considerable public interest. In order to demonstrate the veracity of the story (which is still the subject of a High Court injunction) we needed to quote Mr Chevalier on the record and explain his relationship to Lord Browne, which we planned to do without any detail that might be regarded as private. We put this to Lord Browne's representatives, upon which Lord Browne went to the High Court and obtained an injunction, on the grounds that, as the information came from someone with whom Lord

Browne had an undeclared sexual relationship, all the information was private. We could not publish our story and, believing the injunction to be entirely wrong, prepared to fight the case through the courts. While doing so, we discovered that Lord Browne had lied in his witness statement about his relationship with Mr Chevalier. Mr Justice Eady eventually lifted the injunction as far as Lord Browne and Mr Chevalier's relationship was concerned, but not concerning the story we had originally wanted to publish. Mr Justice Eady's decision was upheld on appeal.

- (b) *Lord Triesman:* We were approached, via a publicity agent, by Melissa Jacobs, a woman who said she had had a relationship with Lord Triesman. She wanted to talk to us about their alleged relationship and had in her possession a recording she had made on her mobile phone of a conversation in which Lord Triesman had made a series of allegations about bribery in the World Cup. As in the previous case some of what she told us was indisputably private, but the bribery allegations, a few months before the start of the World Cup, were clearly a major news story. Again, as in the case of Lord Browne, we had to make clear the nature of Ms Jacobs' relationship with Lord Triesman in order to establish her credibility as a witness. In this case there was an additional issue in that Lord Triesman was a married man, and some might think it inappropriate for him to be discussing these issues with a young woman who did not work at the Football Association, and with whom he had developed an alleged relationship after she had worked for him when he was a Government minister. The FA attempted, unsuccessfully, to get an injunction to prevent the story being published. After publication Lord Triesman began a legal action which he later abandoned, then complained to the PCC on grounds of accuracy and privacy. After Ms Jacobs gave a radio interview in which she discussed issues which might otherwise have been considered private to her, we played her tape to Lord Triesman's lawyer. The complaint was then resolved when we removed certain information from the online version of the article.
- (c) *Lord Mandelson:* We were approached by a member of the public who had heard that Lord Mandelson had bought an £8million house in an exclusive area of London. We considered it a matter of considerable public interest that he was able to afford such an expensive house within little more than a year of leaving office. He told us, through the PCC, that he considered the house

purchase a private matter because he was no longer a member of the Government. We do not accept that. Ownership of property is necessarily a matter of public record, and open to public scrutiny on the Land Registry. In any case Lord Mandelson is still an active member of the House of Lords, writes regularly on matters of public policy, and is the subject of considerable debate as to whether his evident wealth has been accumulated as a result of contacts made and favours done while he was in public office. We did however, refrain from publishing the location of the property in order to minimise any possible security risk. Lord Mandelson has complained to the PCC and we will fight the case vigorously. It would have been possible for The Mail on Sunday to have published the article without a photograph of the house, but that would ignore the realities of journalism. The photograph was essential to presenting the story in a vivid and engaging way. Without it, the article would have been disembodied and bland and informed debate on a matter of public interest would suffer.

Signed

[Redacted signature box]

Date

25/10/11