

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

From the Chairman

Nick Davies Esq
c/o Chatto & Windus
Random House
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1 2SA

22 February 2008

Dear Mr Davies

You will be aware that during an appearance on 30th January before the House of Lords Communications Committee, I questioned the statistics you used to make false allegations against the PCC in your book, "Flat Earth News". Let me explain in detail why you got it so wrong.

It is false that the PCC "refused to consider ruling on 25,457 complaints" over the last ten years. Among other things, you failed to take into account the numerous rulings of the PCC which are not published. We issue over a thousand rulings every year, many of which do not appear on our website or become otherwise public. This is because some people ask for no publicity, and some cases raise no issues of policy or precedent that require public ventilation. We use our published rulings to set standards for the industry; they would be less meaningful if they were accompanied by a host of other cases that do not raise such issues.

Had you bothered to check this with us first – and we would have been very happy to co-operate – you might have avoided this schoolboy howler.

The mistake you seem to have made is to count the total number of complaints and subtract the published rulings. This inevitably produces a wildly inaccurate figure. The reality is quite different. Take 2007. We received 4,320 complaints. We issued 1227 rulings. Around half of the latter were not published. So, we ruled on approximately 25% of

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complaints received, and 56% of those that the complainant pursued formally.

We disallowed last year only the following categories of complaint:

115 because they were about taste and decency, i.e. outside the remit of the Code of Practice. 619 because they fell under another regulator e.g. complaints about advertising or the BBC (but we wrote to the relevant organisations on the complainants' behalf). 199 because they were from unconnected third parties (but these were first considered fully by the Commission to see whether it could reach a decision without the involvement of the first party. On some occasions it will contact the first party to solicit a complaint).

Let me be very clear. Any complaint made under the PCC's Code of Practice is fully considered by the Commission. The only possible exceptions are where the complainant decides not to proceed further; or where the complaint is made more than two months after publication. Even then, if there are good reasons for delay, the Commission will investigate the complaint. In 2007 only 17 complaints were disallowed for reasons of delay.

How ironical that your failure to check the facts and respect one of the elementary rules of good reporting should give you a place of honour, if that is the right word, at the Flat Earth School of Journalism.

Yours sincerely



**Dictated by Sir Christopher Meyer
and signed in his absence**

