



Press Release

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Publication of the Annual Report of the Press Council of Ireland and Office of the Press Ombudsman 2023.

The Press Ombudsman has said that publications that are members of the Press Council must continue to rigorously challenge those who are spreading prejudiced ideas about issues including identity, race, gender and sexual orientation in Ireland today. She said misinformation and hate speech emanating from a small number of social media accounts was capable of reaching a massive audience and causing disproportionate harm. “We need to stand in solidarity and demand that the social media platforms submit to regulation,” she said.

“When a publication joins the Press Council of Ireland it makes itself accountable to the public. Members commit to publishing journalism to the highest ethical and professional standards,” said Susan McKay. “If member publications fail to honour that promise, people should complain to my Office using the Press Council’s Code of Practice.”

She said she was increasingly concerned about the need for the media to deal sensitively with people who are marginalised or vulnerable. “Journalists in this country do incredible work to highlight social issues, and most do so with proper respect. However, increasingly people with lived experience of marginalisation are telling us that bad or just careless journalism can cause deep harm to people who are already traumatised. I urge Press Council members to take care to avoid this.”

She said that her Office was receiving an increasing number of complaints under Principle 8 of the Press Council’s Code of Practice, which deals with prejudice. The Principle states that “the press shall not publish material intended or likely to cause grave offence or stir up hatred against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin, membership of the travelling community, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness or age.”

Noting that it can be difficult for individuals to make complaints about prejudice, Susan McKay said her Office was open to representative organisations making complaints on behalf of those whose interests they seek to protect.



Ms McKay was speaking at the launch of the Press Council of Ireland and Office of the Press Ombudsman's Annual Report. Also speaking at the launch, the Chairperson of the Press Council, Rory Montgomery, urged publications which are not already members to join the Press Council. "A vigorous and independent press is fundamental to a decent, open and democratic society. The Press Council supports its member publications in their vital role," he said. He welcomed the fact that membership is required for publications to be eligible for the Local Democracy reporting and Courts reporting funding schemes operated by Coimisiún na Meán.

Mr Montgomery noted that the Press Ombudsman and Press Council of Ireland are recognized under the 2009 Defamation Act and that membership strengthens a publication's entitlement to avail of the defence of reasonable publication in the case of defamation. He noted that under the proposed new Defamation Bill solicitors will be obliged to notify clients considering taking defamation actions that the Press Council offers an alternative route to dispute resolution. "It is very disappointing and frustrating that while the Bill received its second reading last month, it now appears that, given the imminence of a general election, it will not progress further before the next Dáil," he said. "We urge the next Government, whatever its composition, to commit to completing legislative procedures as a matter of urgency."

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