

## GUIDANCE NOTES: JANUARY 2021

### PUBLICATION OF APOLOGIES AND CORRECTIONS

#### Explanatory note

The Press Council has noted that subscriber members have different practices with respect to the publication of apologies and corrections that have not been ordered by the Press Ombudsman.

These guidelines are issued by the Press Council to assist members with deciding on the placement, prominence and content of apologies that they decide to publish after it has been brought to their attention by members of the public that incorrect information has been published or that an aspect of the Press Code has been breached.

The Press Council's Public Advocate will also rely on these guidelines in interactions with publications to resolve and settle complaints on behalf of the public.

These guidelines are issued in support of the following subclauses in the [Press Code](#) of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media, as set out in Chapter 1, clause 1 on **Gathering and reporting of news**:

*The media shall:*

*1.10 make amends for presenting inaccurate information or comment by publishing promptly and with appropriate prominence a retraction, correction, explanation or an apology on every platform where the original content was published, such as the member's website, social media accounts or any other online platform; and ensure that every journalist or freelancer employed by them who shared content on their personal social media accounts also shares any retraction, correction, explanation or apology relating to that content on their personal social media accounts;*

*1.11 prominently indicate when content that was published online has been amended or an apology or retraction published. The original content may continue to remain online but the amendment, retraction or apology must be included in every version of the content which remains available online;*

*1.12 not be obliged to remove any content which is not unlawfully defamatory;*

### **Correction of factual errors**

1. Corrections of minor factual errors (for example wrongly spelled names, incorrect dates or factual errors that do not change the thrust of the report) in print publications may be placed on any inside page of the publication in the form of an editor's note, clearly labelled that it is a correction, detailing the error and correction. See point 3 below for treatment of such corrections in online versions of the same report.
2. Corrections in print publications of significant factual errors that impact on the thrust of the report or important aspects of the report should be placed on the same page that the report initially appeared in the form of an editor's note, clearly labelled that it is a correction and detailing the error and the correction. If the report appeared on the front page, the correction can be placed on the front page or on either pages 2 or 3. See point 3 below for treatment of such corrections in online versions of the same report. [Please note: Many publications follow the well established practice of publishing *all* corrections/clarifications/apologies on a certain page, quite often on page two, where contact details of the publication, the internal ombud and the Press Council are published. They differentiate between minor and major corrections by using smaller or larger headlines. The keywords here are: *with appropriate prominence*.]
3. In the case of an online publication, factual errors, whether minor or otherwise, must be corrected in all the versions of the article available online. An editor's note, clearly labelled that it is a correction and the amendment date, must be appended at the end of the article indicating that the text has been amended and what has been changed. In cases of corrections of significant factual errors that impact on the thrust of the report, a notice of the amendments should be published at the top of the article, with a reference to the editor's note at the end of the article. [Please note: Some online publications have a

- “Corrections/Apologies” column in their menu on the landing page (although often not utilized/updated sufficiently). It is recommended that this should be the standard practice, with a link to the original article, to which the correction/apology is also attached.]
4. If an error in print or online reports was repeated on social media, or if a factual error was made in social media reporting (for instance live tweeting of an event), the error must be corrected on the same accounts and platforms where it was originally published, with a link/reference to the corrected online or print version where applicable. Where a social media post cannot be edited, such as on Twitter, the tweet with the error should be screen-grabbed and then deleted to prevent further circulation. The error must then be corrected by tweeting it with the screen-grabbed error attached.

### **Right of reply**

5. If a print publication fails to afford the subject of critical reportage a right of reply and then agrees to do so in a follow up edition, the right of reply should be published on the same page as the original report. If the report appeared on the front page, the right of reply can be placed on the front page or on either pages 2 or 3. A right of reply should be accompanied by an appropriate headline which links the right of reply to the previous report in a manner which draws the attention of readers who may have seen the previous report. The headline or subhead should also clearly indicate that it is a right of reply.
6. A right of reply concerning an article that was published online should be incorporated into the online version of the article either by editing the article to reflect the right of reply or by placing the text of the right of reply on the same page as the article. An editor’s note reflecting the nature and date of the amendment to the article must be appended at the top or at the end of the article.

7. If the complainant does not want to exercise the right of reply and only wants a retraction or apology for the fact that they were not afforded a right of reply when the article was published, the response must be appended at the top or end of the online version of the article in the form of an editor's note clearly indicating that it is a retraction or apology. In print, it should be published on the same page as the original article or, if the original article was on the front page, on either pages 2 or 3, with a headline or subhead saying it is a retraction or apology. The retraction/apology can include a statement that the person has declined to exercise their right of reply.
8. If the original article was promoted on social media, any additions, retractions or apologies must also be reflected on social media, on the same accounts and platforms, with links/references to the updated print/online versions of the article.

#### **Retractions and apologies for serious matters**

9. In a print publication, a retraction or apology concerning allegations that affected the dignity, privacy or reputation of the complainant should be placed on the same page where the report initially appeared, with appropriate prominence to readily attract attention. If the report appeared on the front page, the retraction/apology should be placed on the front page or on page 3. Depending on the circumstances it may be appropriate to place a teaser on the front page with a continuation on page 3. The retraction/apology should be accompanied by a headline which links it to the previous report in a manner which draws the attention of readers who may have seen the previous report. The headline or subhead should clearly indicate that it is a retraction or apology, and should include the name of the complainant.
10. A retraction or apology for an online article concerning allegations that affected the dignity, privacy or reputation of the complainant must be appended to the original article in a prominent manner that ensures that it will always be visible by any person who reads the article, and clearly labelled that it is a retraction or

apology. In addition, an editor's note appended to the end of the article should reflect the date and details of the amendment. If the original article appeared or was referred to on a landing page, then the retraction/apology should either appear or be referred to on the landing page.

11. If a decision is taken to remove the article from the publication's online platform then the apology/retraction should be published as a stand-alone item with an appropriate headline.

12. If the original article was promoted on social media, the retraction or apology must also be reflected on social media, on the same accounts and platforms, with links/references to the updated print/online versions of the report.

#### **Apologies for any other breach of the Press Code**

13. Apologies for any other breach of the Press Code, for example publishing gratuitous violence or hate speech, can be published on any page in print; in online publications it must be attached to the original content; and on social media it should be published on the accounts and platforms where the original content was published.

14. The general principle that should be applied is that the prominence of an apology should be determined with due regard to the seriousness of the breach.

#### **Publication of information about complaints procedures**

15. It should be made as easy as possible for readers to contact media organisations to enquire or complain about editorial content, via email, telephone or online forms. These contact options should be published prominently on all publication platforms, with information about the publication's internal complaints procedures as well as the **Press Council's logo** and contacts and complaints procedures.

