

Student Media Regulations Changes

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Earlier this term, Felix was prevented from running three news stories because of prohibitive Union regulations, namely the Student Staff Protocol (SSP) contained within the College Code of Practice and the Elections And Referenda rules within the Union Constitution.

These regulations are preventing the student media from carrying out their duty and fully informing the student body on the issues that concern them. The regulations need revising.

Imperial College Union notes:

1. That point 12, Annex H in the Staff Student Protocol states: "The maintenance of the integrity of the Union as an employer precludes any staff matters, either related to work or personal matters, from being discussed in any open forum of the Union."
2. The Union needs to protect itself from legal action over HR law and that permanent Union staff need protecting from public criticism and harassment from its employers.
3. That when one elections candidate is mentioned in an article, the student media is obliged to mention their competitors (see point G43, Regulation Four in the Union Constitution).
4. The Union's Policy on Felix states that it "shall be editorially free to operate and report on events as the Editor sees fit, as long as he or she is not acting against the wider student interest..."
5. National media abides by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) Code of Practice.

Imperial College Union believes:

1. The Union's regulations are preventing the student media from informing the student body on all of the matters that concern them.
2. Interpretation of the regulations varies from person-to-person, year-on-year. Debate about the Student Staff Protocol, especially, repeatedly arises each year. The regulations are a 'grey area' and need clarification.
3. The student media is effectively gagged during elections because it cannot report on individual candidates' behaviour without being seen to be giving that candidate undue prominence.
4. That having to mention all election candidates in an article that is predominantly about the actions of one candidate is unnecessary, where those actions are unrelated to the election itself.
5. There is a conflict between the regulations and Felix's intended method of operation as defined by the Union's Policy on Felix.
6. The student media should not be prevented from reporting on stories that are within the public interest.

Imperial College Union resolves:

1. To revise the Student Staff Protocol section of the Code of Practice: (changes underlined):

12. *The maintenance of the integrity of the Union as an employer precludes any staff matters, either related to work or personal matters, from being discussed in any open forum of the Union. This does not include the discussion of departments or the performance of a department as a whole save where a department has only one staff member.*

14. *All matters relating to conditions of service, performance and conduct of individual members of staff employed in the Union shall be dealt with by the ICU President in consultation with the ICU General Manager where appropriate. The ICU President and General Manager may seek the advice and support of the College's Human Resources Division.*

2. To revise the Elections And Referenda regulations within the Union Constitution and to add an Annex detailing the contents of the PCC definition of public interest so that it reads (changes underlined):

43. *All media or newsletter reports or comments pertaining to elections or referenda must mention the names of all candidates standing for a post within the body of the report, in the case of elections, or attempt to produce a balanced debate on both sides of the argument in the case of referenda. In any case reports and comments should be fair and accurate. Publications may not give undue prominence to any candidate, unless in the public interest as defined by the PCC Code of Practice (see Annex for definition).*

(ANNEX Definition)

The Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice can be viewed online at <http://www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html>.

The following definition is given in the Code:

THE PUBLIC INTEREST

*There may be exceptions to the clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.*

1. *The public interest includes, but is not confined to:
 - i) *Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety.*
 - ii) *Protecting public health and safety.*
 - iii) *Preventing the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.**
2. *There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.*
3. *Whenever the public interest is invoked, the PCC will require editors to demonstrate fully how the public interest was served.*
4. *The PCC will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain, or will become so.*
5. *In cases involving children under 16, editors must demonstrate an exceptional public interest to over-ride the normally paramount interest of the child.*