

Ruling

00254-25 Booth v Daily Mail



Complaint Summary

John Booth complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation that Daily Mail breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors’ Code of Practice in an article headlined “Revealed, how one in 12 living in London is an illegal migrant”, published on 23 January 2025.

Published date

10th July 2025

Outcome

Breach – sanction: action as offered by publication

Code provisions

1 Accuracy

Summary of Complaint

1. John Booth complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation that Daily Mail breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors’ Code of Practice in an article headlined “Revealed, how one in 12 living in London is an illegal migrant”, published on 23 January 2025.

2. The article, which appeared on page 2 of the newspaper, opened by reporting: “As many as one in 12 people in London is an illegal immigrant, a shock report has claimed.” Further to this, it reported:

“The previously confidential study commissioned by Thames Water found that the ‘irregular’ population of the capital could be more than half a million.

The survey aimed to quantify the ‘hidden’ users of the utility firm’s services to better meet demand.

Researchers at Edge Analytics used academic estimates of illegal migrants nationally as well as National Insurance registrations for non-EU foreign nationals over a nine-year period to estimate the numbers in each London borough.

The study produced a range of figures from 390,355 at the lowest to 585,533 at the highest with a median figure of 487,944.”

3. The article went on to report that: “The study – reported by [a different national publication] – comes as it emerged yesterday a record number of small boat migrants arrived in the first three weeks of 2025”.

4. The article also appeared online, under the headline: "One-in-12 people living in London is an illegal immigrant, shock data reveals: Almost 600,000 of the capital's residents have NO right to be in the UK, previously secret report says."

5. The complainant said that the headline breached Clause 1, as it reported that "one in 12" in London was an illegal immigrant. The complainant stated that the article reported that between 390,355 and 585,533 in London could be an illegal immigrant, and that London has a population of 8.8 million. On the basis of these figures, the correct position would be that between one in 15 and one in 22 could be an illegal immigrant – not "one in 12", as reported.

6. Further, the complainant stated that the article only reported, "in a small fashion", that the study was based on national insurance numbers registered in the United Kingdom. He complained that the article made no mention of how "wildly inaccurate that method of study is".

7. On 28 January, IPSO made the publication aware that the complaint raised a possible breach of the Editors' Code. On 31 January, it contacted the complainant.

8. The publication said that the article was based on an article first published by another national newspaper which, at this point, it did not believe had been amended or corrected. Notwithstanding this however, on 31 January, it published standalone corrections in its Corrections and Clarifications column both in print and online. It also removed the online article. The corrections were identical, and read as follows:

"AN ARTICLE on January 23 and feature the next day reported that a study found one in 12 Londoners is an illegal immigrant. This was incorrect as the study included people who are not illegal immigrants, and did not cover the entirety of London; moreover, the one in 12 figure was the maximum, not central estimate."

9. IPSO subsequently opened an investigation into the complaint. During IPSO's investigation, the publication said it did not accept a breach of the Editors' Code.

10. The publication did not consider that it had failed to take due care over the publication of the "one in 12" claim. Firstly, it supplied the original article, written by a different newspaper, which it had based its article on. This was a front-page print article, published on 23 January, under the headline: "One in 12 in London is [an] illegal migrant". It had also appeared online.

11. The original article, as supplied by the publication, made clear that the report had been commissioned by Thames Water. It included the following extracts:

"London is home to as many as 585,000 illegal migrants, equivalent to one in 12 of the city's population, according to a previously confidential report."

[...]

"For the whole of London, [the Thames Water report] produced a range of 390,355 illegal migrants at its lowest to 585,533 at its highest, with a median figure of 487,944. With an estimated population of 7,044,667, that would mean up to one in 12 of the capital's population is an illegal migrant."

12. The publication under complaint said, given the prominence of the original article, it was reasonable for it to assume the central premise was accurate. It set out that, following the online article it had decided to "follow it up" with its own story. Given the time of publication, it was "too late" for independent request for comment –

nevertheless, it said it was careful to attribute its story to the original publication. It said it had also accurately reported that the original publication had based their claim on a study, which it named, and reported the specific figures included in the study.

13. The publication did accept, however, that it appeared its article was inaccurate. It said that it had received a complaint from a separate party on 28 January regarding its article – in light of this, and mindful that it did not have access to the original research the other publication had utilised, it did not consider itself in a position to defend its article. For this reason, it removed the article and published the corrections.

14. During IPSO's investigation, the publication noted that the original newspaper had since corrected its article – it said that this had occurred after it had removed and corrected the article under complaint. Also published on 31 January, the original newspaper's corrections were substantially similar variations of the following wording:

"CORRECTION: The figure of 7,044,667 is the estimated population of the Thames Water London Water Resource Zone, excluding irregular migrants, not geographical London which is about 9 million. 'Up to 1 in 12 illegal migrants' in a previous version was incorrect and ought to have been 'up to 1 in 13', based on the study's upper figure for irregular migrants, which includes children born in the UK with irregular status and, it is understood, those with indefinite leave to remain. We are happy to correct the record."

15. Finally, the publication stated that it had fulfilled its obligations under Clause 1 (ii). It had corrected its article promptly, and with due prominence, on the basis of the information available to it at the time it became aware of the complaint. It said that the central issue with the one in 12 figure was that it was calculated using a denominator which was too small – namely, the incorrect population of London – and a numerator which was too high – the number of illegal immigrants. It was also based on the upper, rather than central, estimate. It said its correction explained this to the reader.

16. In response, the complainant said that the publication's position "tried to blame" the publication who had run the first article. He said the original article did not absolve the publication of its duty to report accurate information, particularly given – in his view – that the article under complaint "contained the numbers" that demonstrated the headline was inaccurate, given they did not "add up to" one in 12.

17. Further, the complainant stated that the corrections were "almost invisible" compared to the original article. He also said that the corrections were, themselves, inaccurate, because they "still mention[ed] the inaccurate" one in 12 claim.

Relevant Clause Provisions

Clause 1 (Accuracy)

- i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and – where appropriate – an apology published. In cases involving IPSO, due prominence should be as required by the regulator.
- iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when reasonably called for.
- iv) The Press, while free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between

comment, conjecture and fact.

Findings of the Committee

18. The Committee appreciated that the story had been reported by another national newspaper initially, and that this was made clear in the article. The publication was entitled to report on coverage published by another newspaper. It was still required, however, to take care over the accuracy of its own article, and to correct any significantly inaccurate information it published.

19. The article under complaint said that “one in 12” in London was an illegal immigrant. The article also included the range of estimated illegal immigrants in London – the highest estimate of which was 585,553 illegal immigrants.

20. The Committee noted that the article did not cite an overall population figure that was being relied on to calculate the “one in 12” claim. In its view, it would be assumed, given the reference to “London” in the headline and text of the article, that the article referred to the population of London itself – which was approximately 8.8 million. The Committee recognised that, if this were the case, which the publication had not disputed, the highest estimated illegal immigrant population of London of 585,553 did not equate to “one in 12” of London’s population. The central premise of the article was therefore inaccurate, and the headline, solely on the basis of the text that followed, was not supported.

21. The Committee appreciated that the article replicated claims reported elsewhere, which, at the time of publication, had not yet been corrected. Nevertheless, where it appeared that, within its own editorial process, the newspaper had failed to recognise that the figures being reported in its own article did not equate to one in 12 in London being an illegal immigrant, the Committee considered that this constituted a failure to take due care. There was a breach of Clause 1 (i).

22. The Committee considered the “one in 12” claim to be significant – it related to an important matter of both social and political concern; namely, the levels of illegal migration in London. The claim was also reported in the headline, which increased its prominence and visibility to a reader. The inaccuracy was therefore significant and required correction, under the terms of Clause 1 (ii).

23. On 31 January, the publication had published corrections, both in print and online. Given this had occurred within three days of IPSO making the newspaper aware that the complaint raised a possible breach of the Code, the Committee was satisfied that this represented prompt action on the publication’s part.

24. The online article had been removed, and corrections published in the newspaper’s Corrections and Clarifications columns. The Committee was satisfied that this represented due prominence – while it noted that the complainant objected to the visibility of the corrections, they appeared in the position a reader would expect to find them.

25. The Committee then turned to the wording of the corrections. In its view, they identified the inaccurately reported information – “An article [...] reported that a study found one in 12 Londoners is an illegal immigrant” – and identified why this was inaccurate: “This was incorrect as the study included people who are not illegal immigrants, and did not cover the entirety of London; moreover, the one in 12 figure was the maximum, not central estimate”.

26. The complainant had asserted that the corrections were themselves inaccurate,

given they repeated the “one in 12” claim. The Committee was clear that, for a significant inaccuracy to be duly corrected, a correction will often need to set out the original inaccurate information. Doing so does not raise a further inaccuracy, provided the correction makes clear that the information was inaccurate – as was the case here.

27. For these reasons, the Committee was satisfied that the action taken by the publication had put the correct position on record, and sufficiently addressed the terms of Clause 1 (ii). There was no further breach of Clause 1 (ii).

28. The complainant had also contended that the article, in breach of Clause 1, did not reference how “wildly inaccurate” the method of study utilised in the report was. The Committee was clear that newspapers are entitled to report which information they see fit, provided the Code is not otherwise breached. Where the article made clear the method of study – “academic estimates of illegal migrants nationally as well as National Insurance registrations for non-EU foreign nationals” – omitting the complainant’s assessment of the merits of this method of study did not make the article inaccurate or misleading in and of itself. The Committee noted that readers of the article may make their own assessment of the method in which the study was conducted – as the complainant had been able to do – given the method of study was made clear in the article. There was no breach of Clause 1 on this point.

Conclusion

29. The complaint was partly upheld under Clause 1 (i).

Remedial action required

30. The published correction put the correct position on record and was offered promptly and with due prominence. No further action was required.

Date complaint received: 23/01/2025

Date complaint concluded by IPSO: 24/06/2025

[← Back to all Rulings](#)

[Back to the top ↑](#)

Share this page

 [Tweet](#)

 [Share linkedin](#)

 [Share](#)

 [Share](#)

Contact us

How to contact IPSO

Contact IPSO

Find out the ways that you can contact IPSO

[Read more →](#)

Whistleblowing service

Journalists can call our Whistleblowing service if they feel under pressure to act in a way that is not in line with the Editors' Code of Practice

[Read more →](#)

Press Office

Find out more about how to make media inquiries and inquiries for spokespeople from IPSO

[Read more →](#)

Sign up for updates from IPSO

You can sign up here to be added to our mailing list

[Sign up to our mailing list →](#)

Key documents

[The Editors' Code of Practice](#)

[IPSO Strategy](#)

[Arbitration Scheme Rules 2018](#)

[IPSO Regulations 2024](#)

[Articles of Association–2019](#)

Our services

[Making a complaint](#)

[Harassment service](#)

[Monitoring](#)

[Arbitration overview](#)

[Whistleblowing service](#)

Contact

[Contact IPSO](#)

[Sign up to our mailing list](#)

[Join IPSO](#)

[Press Office](#)

Follow IPSO

 [via X](#)

 [via LinkedIn](#)

 [via Facebook](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Cookies](#)

Copyright 2024 © The Independent Press Standards Organisation C.I.C. is a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with registered number 02538908.

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Website by [Reason Digital](#)

