

Briefing for IPSO: Reporting on Islam and Muslims in UK press

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Muslim Council of Britain seeks to facilitate consensus and articulate the common interest of Muslims in Britain. It is pledged to work for the common good of society as a whole. It is a cross-sectarian, democratic organisation where members elect a new leadership every two years. It is the largest umbrella body in the UK with over 500 mosques, associations and charities affiliated to it. Furthermore, a majority of Muslims believe that the MCB does a good job in representing their views.¹
- 1.2. Founded in 1997, the Muslim Council of Britain has sought a fair representation of British Muslims in our media. It is a first-port-of-call for the media on issues related to Muslims and Islam in the UK. The MCB has deployed its deep connection to grassroots Muslim communities with a robust evidence base from experts. For example, it has produced the most definitive data analysis on British Muslims in its “British Muslims in Numbers” report based on the 2011 census. This landmark academic study has been used by media organisations, academics and policymakers as a base for understanding Muslim communities.
- 1.3. Since 2016, the Muslim Council of Britain, led by its Assistant Secretary General Miqdaad Versi, has been monitoring the media for inaccuracies, misrepresentations and discrimination in the way Muslims and Islam is reported. He has consistently lodged complaints that have led to over 40 corrections. He has also been successful in securing more corrections about Muslims and Islam at the IPSO Complaints Committee than anyone else. His work has led to reports in the media accusing national newspapers of publishing a “consistent stream” of inaccurate stories about Islam and Muslims.
- 1.4. Furthermore, during a session of the Home Affairs Select Committee where media reporting about Muslims was discussed, Mr Versi and his work were cited over 10 times by politicians, editors and by Sir Alan Moses.
- 1.5. The MCB has engaged very closely with newspaper managing editors, editors and the press regulator Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) on the reporting of Islam and Muslims.
- 1.6. While supporting the principles of a free and independent press, the Muslim Council also believes that the media must uphold the highest standards and must not engage in discrimination. As such, it established a media monitoring team with a vision of working towards facilitating media outlets being responsible in their coverage of Islam and Muslims and ultimately a force for good. We hope this will align with IPSO’s goal of media outlets holding the “highest professional standards”.
- 1.7. With an understanding of Muslim communities and media reporting, the MCB is uniquely placed to provide insight and have an input into IPSO’s guidance to the press on reporting on Islam and Muslims.

¹ [Muslim Poll, Table 10](#), BBC/Comres, 2015; [Survey of Muslims, Table 26](#), C4/ICM, 2015

2. Impact of irresponsible journalism

- 2.1. Mainstream media reporting about Muslim communities is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain, according to a University of Cambridge/ESRC Roundtable held at the House of Lords.² Similar studies from other academics, the European Union and the United Nations have come to a similar conclusion.³
- 2.2. Polls suggest that 31% of young children between the ages of 10 and 14 believe Muslims are taking over England,⁴ a majority of Britons think that Islam (not fundamentalist groups) poses a threat to Western liberal democracy⁵ and 45% of Christians in the UK say Islam is fundamentally incompatible with British values and culture.⁶
- 2.3. The average Briton believes Muslims constitute 15% of the population, when the reality is less than 5%.⁷ We believe this is, in large part, due to the disproportionately high number of stories about Muslims and the scaremongering that has distorted the reality.
- 2.4. Furthermore, while hate crime against Muslims is on the rise, we also see a resurgence of the far-right. As we demonstrate in this briefing, they feed on inaccurate anti-Muslim stories sourced from national mainstream media to justify their hate and Islamophobic narrative. Corrections after the fact do little to mitigate the damage caused by the inaccuracy.
- 2.5. There is therefore a strong imperative that reporting in this area is taken seriously and does not unintentionally lead to increase hatred and even hate crimes against Muslims.

3. Research and statistics about Muslims

- 3.1. The MCB's "British Muslims in Numbers" report (based on the 2011 census) is a wide-ranging data analysis on British Muslims. The report has an infographic which summarises the key data points.⁸ A video and specific briefings⁹ with further detail on certain topics is also available.¹⁰ We hope this proves to be a useful basis for factual statistics about Muslims and Muslim communities.
- 3.2. There are a number of courses on "Muslims in Britain" including an online course at Cardiff University School of Journalism.¹¹

4. Relevant clauses of the Editors' Code

- 4.1. Whilst all the clauses of the Editors' Code are relevant, the particular clauses being discussed in this submission are Clause 1 (Accuracy) and Clause 12 (Discrimination).
- 4.2. A series of examples are provided in this submission to illustrate how the principles that may be considered obvious, have actually been breached. All examples are from mainstream newspapers under IPSO regulation, with the vast majority from the last 2 years.

² [Media fuelling rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain](#), Cambridge University, 2016

³ [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: Report on the United Kingdom](#), ECRI, October 2016; [UN Human Rights Chief urges U.K. to tackle tabloid hate speech, after migrants called "cockroaches"](#), Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, United Nations, April 2015

⁴ [Racist and anti-immigration views held by children revealed in schools study](#), The Guardian, May 2015

⁵ [7/7 Bombings Anniversary Poll Shows More Than Half Of Britons See Muslims As A Threat](#), Huffington Post, July 2015

⁶ [Being Christian in Western Europe](#), Pew Research Center, May 2018

⁷ [Europeans greatly overestimate Muslim population, poll shows](#), Guardian, December 2016

⁸ [British Muslims in Numbers infographic](#), Muslim Council of Britain, 2015

⁹ [British Muslims in Numbers Briefings](#), Muslim Council of Britain, 2015

¹⁰ [Muslim Statistics](#), Muslim Council of Britain

¹¹ [Muslims in Britain: Changes and Challenges-Online course](#), Cardiff University

5. Accuracy (Clause 1)

- 5.1. Accuracy is the bedrock of mainstream journalistic practice and the reputation of the media depends on it. Accurate, reliable, verifiable reporting is essential if the public is to trust its journalists and the organisations they represent.
- 5.2. Accuracy within a headline is particularly important given apparently 80% only read the headline¹² and research shows that 59% share articles without even reading them.¹³
- 5.3. **Breaking news:** In the fast-paced digital world where competition is stiff and deadlines are constant and ongoing, there is a danger that accuracy is sacrificed for the sake of speed and being the first one to break a news story. Consider the following examples:
- In November 2017, panic about a “terror attack” spread in Oxford Circus following incorrect reports online, including a tweet by Olly Murs about hearing “gunshots”.¹⁴ The Mail Online also misreported that a witness had seen a lorry mounting the pavement when this was not the case.¹⁵
 - In February 2017, the Express published a false article claiming that 900 migrants carried out sex attacks in Germany’. This was not the case.¹⁶
 - In January 2017, newspapers around the world repeated a report in a Spanish newspaper claiming that a Spanish gunman in a supermarket had shouted “Allahu Akbar”, including the Sun, the Mail and the Express.¹⁷ That was not the case.¹⁸
 - In December 2016, Andrew Gilligan in The Sunday Times, referring to a review by Dame Louise Casey on integration, falsely reported and began rumours that “Enclaves of Islam see UK as 75% Muslim”. The survey in question, was not about a general concern but about pupils in one largely Asian school who thought “50-90% of the British population were Asian” (with no reference to Muslim).¹⁹
- 5.4. **Due diligence:** Is there sufficient due diligence on every story, in particular those where there are stereotypes or generalisations prevalent within certain sections of society?

When the news reinforces stereotypes about any minority group, including Muslims, specific care should be taken to validate stories rather than repeat without sufficient due diligence. This includes breaking news stories where the challenge of informing readers quickly must be balanced with appropriate due diligence.

Consider the following stereotypes that may have been the reason why sufficient due diligence was not undertaken, resulting in an inaccurate or misleading story (all examples are news not opinion pieces, where such inaccurate generalisations are more prevalent):

- **“Muslims involved in public schools have an ulterior agenda”:** Nasim Ashraf and Hafisan Zaman were falsely accused of engaging in a campaign of intimidation in the “Oldham Trojan Horse” story. Retractions and damages were paid by The Telegraph,²⁰ The Sun,²¹ The Mail Online,²² The Daily Express.²³

¹² [Eight out of ten people only read the headline](#), Campaign, December 2015

¹³ [59 Percent Of You Will Share This Article Without Even Reading It](#), Forbes, August 2016

¹⁴ Screenshot of Mail Online report available on [Twitter](#), Matthew Champion, November 2017

¹⁵ Original Mail Online with acknowledgement of error at the bottom of the article: [Mail Online](#), November 2017 (headline changed)

¹⁶ [Correction - 900 migrants carried out Germany NYE sex attacks – 08 March 2017](#), Express, March 2017

¹⁷ Screenshots of the headlines available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, January 2017

¹⁸ E.g. changes made in The Sun available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, January 2017

¹⁹ Screenshot of original Sunday Times article (print) and correction available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, January 2017

²⁰ [Apology](#), Telegraph, February 2018

²¹ [The Sun pays out 'substantial damages' after wrongly claiming couple part of Islamic 'Trojan Horse' plot to take over primary school](#), Press Gazette, February 2018

²² [Associated/MailOnline pay libel damages and apologise in 'Trojan Horse' plot defamation case](#), Doughty Street Chambers, March 2018

²³ [Express](#) 8 June 2018

- **“Muslims are radicals”**
 - In July 2017, Shaykh Ebrahim Bham was falsely accused of comparing Jews to fleas. The stories have since been edited.²⁴
 - In March 2016, Mr Mohammed Kozbar was falsely accused by The Telegraph as someone who “blamed the UK for Isil” and supported the use of violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The paper set the record straight in September 2016 stating “Mr Kozbar has never ‘blamed the UK for ISIL’ and abhors and condemns the use of violence under any circumstances”.²⁵
 - In Jan 2016, Mr Haras Ahmed was falsely accused of being an “Islamist activist” in The Sunday Telegraph. The paper apologised in August 2017 and accepted that he “does not support Islamist extremists and is in no way himself an extremist”.²⁶
 - In January 2016, Mrs Ifhat Smith was falsely accused of being a member of or affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood or an Islamic extremist by The Telegraph, which apologised in October 2016 and paid her compensation after acknowledging their error.²⁷
- **“Muslims in East London are corrupt”**: In 2016, Mr Mujibul Islam was falsely accused of being “a willing beneficiary of...corruption” in The Telegraph, which the paper acknowledged to be “untrue”, apologised and paid damages in May 2016.²⁸
- **“Muslims are the only ones who don’t drink alcohol”**: In July 2017, a number of British tabloids, namely, the Daily Mail, The Sun, Daily Express and Daily Mirror published articles claiming Manchester United’s Romelu Lukaku was unable to pick up a Man of the Match award on the basis he was a “devout Muslim” and therefore “unable to pose with alcoholic gifts”. He is in fact, a devout Christian.²⁹
- **“Muslims do not report terrorism”**: In December 2015, The Times reported on their front page: “Muslims ‘silent on terror’”³⁰ despite the story referring to concerns about the controversial Prevent programme rather than terrorism.
- **“Muslims hate Easter or Christmas”**
 - In April 2017, The Sun ran a headline “OUTRAGE as Sainsburys and Asda refuse to stock Christian Easter Egg but they sell Halal ones”. The words “Halal ones” were removed after a complaint from Miqdaad Versi.³¹ The Daily Mail headline was: “Sainsbury’s and Asda won’t stock Christian Easter egg - but they DO put halal ones on their shelves”³²
 - In December 2016, the Express falsely reported that “School children were BANNED from singing Silent Night over fears it will OFFEND other religions” and were forced to correct their article to “Headteacher rubbishes claims that school children stopped from singing Holy Night.”³³
 - In November 2016, the Express’s headline: “‘Just ridiculous’ Nativity scene removed over fears it will offend town’s FOUR Muslims”³⁴ and the Mail Online headline: “Nativity scene is ‘banned’ in case it offends one of the FOUR Muslims living in a Belgian town”³⁵ completely misrepresented the reasons behind the decision by a local council in Belgium and was designated as “unproven” by fact-checker Snopes.³⁶

²⁴ Original headlines available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, July 2017

²⁵ [Mohammed Kozbar](#), Telegraph, September 2016

²⁶ [Haras Ahmed – An Apology](#), Telegraph, August 2017

²⁷ [Ifhat Smith – an apology](#), Telegraph, October 2016

²⁸ [Mujibul Islam – an apology](#), Telegraph, May 2016

²⁹ [Romelu Lukaku: British tabloids wrongly claim black Christian footballer is ‘devout Muslim’](#), Independent, July 2017; for all retractions, see [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, July 2017

³⁰ [Muslims ‘stay silent’ on extremism tip off scheme](#), The Times, December 2015. For original letter and MCB response, see MCB website: [Are Muslims ‘Silent on Terror’? The Muslim Council of Britain Responds to The Times](#)

³¹ [EASTER EGG FURY Outrage as Sainsbury’s and Asda refuse to stock Christian Easter Egg](#), The Sun, April 2017; original headline included “but they sell Halal ones”

³² [Sainsbury’s and Asda won’t stock Christian Easter egg - but they DO put halal ones on their shelves](#), Daily Mail, April 2017

³³ Original headline available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, May 2017

³⁴ [The Express](#) 19 December 2016

³⁵ [Nativity scene is ‘banned’ in case it offends one of the FOUR Muslims living in a Belgian town](#), Mail Online, December 2016

³⁶ [Belgian Town Removes Nativity Scene to Appease Four Muslim Residents](#), Snopes, December 2016

- **“Muslims are anti-semitic”**: In July 2018, The Times stated: “In many cases the alleged perpetrators have been the children of Muslim immigrants, particularly in Berlin, which has the largest Muslim and Jewish communities.” There are no specific figures or any evidence that being Muslim is in any way an indicator or of specific relevance to the case of school bullying. The report later reveals that 95% of crimes reported against Jewish people were from the far right in Germany.³⁷
- **“Ramadan is dangerous for non-Muslims”**: In August 2016, The Sun falsely claimed that a train derailment was due to the driver fasting during Ramadan³⁸ despite the report making clear that there was no evidence to support this assertion.
- **“The Qur’an is inherently evil”**: In August 2015, the Times carried a false headline stating that the “Koran encourages Rape.”³⁹ The author of the syndicated piece, Rukmini Callimachi apparently described it as “a bastardization of my article.”
- **“Muslims want their own legal system”**: The Times ran a front-page story in 2013 headlined: “High Court opens way to Sharia divorces”⁴⁰. As the UK Human Rights Blog noted: “In fact the judgment concerned a Jewish divorce under the auspices of the Beth Din, and had nothing to do with Sharia at all.”⁴¹

5.5. Is religious literacy a problem?

In articles referring to Islam or Muslims, it is important to understand the nuances of the faith and that there are many schools of thought. Journalists should not automatically buy into a pre-existing narrative that Islam is counter to British values and human rights. It is important to do sufficient research to ensure that the story is accurate and counter arguments have been presented. This can be achieved by engaging with Islamic academic experts and scholars or umbrella bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain.

Consider the following non-exhaustive selection of examples where it appears a lack of religious literacy led to inaccurate stories:

- *Deobandi*: On 7 February 2016, The Times ran a story “Most jail imams teach anti-western values” following a review into Imams working in British prisons. Based on statistics that the majority were trained in Deoband, India the review concluded that they “espouse a hardline interpretation of Islam”. The Times quoted a Whitehall official who concluded “the majority of Muslim chaplains in prisons propagate a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic scripture which is contrary to British values and human rights.”⁴² The claim that being a Deobandi, is necessarily contrary to British values, is a wholly unjustifiable understanding of Deobandism, as an extensive 3-year study by Cardiff University demonstrates. This study not only provides a context to why there were so many Imams from Deoband but also reached an evidence-based conclusion to the contrary.⁴³
- *Da’wah*: On 26 March 2017, a comment piece in The Times by Niall Ferguson disingenuously misinterprets *da’wah* (an invitation to faith with clear guidance from the Quran stating “there is no compulsion in religion”) and misrepresents it as a widespread practice used to “poison” minds.⁴⁴

³⁷ [Task force fights rise in bullying of Jewish pupils in Germany](#), The Times, July 2018

³⁸ [The Sun corrects story which said Muslim train driver crashed because of Ramadan fast](#), Press Gazette, November 2016

³⁹ [ISIS uses Koran to justify rape](#), The Times, August 2015. Original headline available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, December 2015

⁴⁰ [High Court opens way to Sharia divorces](#), The Times, February 2013

⁴¹ [Court opens way to divorces by Sharia? Hold on a minute... – James Wilson](#), UK Human Rights Blog, February 2013. See also MCB [letter](#) published in The Times, February 2013

⁴² [Most jail imams teach anti western values](#), The Times, February 2016

⁴³ See analysis by Yahya Birt: [Playing the sectarian card: Britain’s Ministry of Justice is unfairly targeting Muslim prison chaplains](#), Yahya Birt, February 2016

⁴⁴ [Dawa: the Islamist mind poison that turns lost souls into ‘lone wolves’](#), The Times, March 2017

- *Halal*: In December 2016, the Express published an article with the headline “New £5 notes could be BANNED by religious groups as Bank CAN'T promise they're Halal”, which they later acknowledged “was incorrect given the context of the article.”⁴⁵
- *Other examples of misunderstanding basic Arabic words*:
 - In April 2018, The Sun wrongly claimed Mo Salah’s surname (“Salah”) means “worship” when in fact it means “righteousness”.⁴⁶
 - In December 2017, the Mail Online mistook one Arabic letter for another.⁴⁷

5.6. Is one journalist specifically known to report inaccurate stories?

It is possible that an individual journalist reports inaccurate stories on a regular basis. Newspapers should be aware when this occurs and if they choose to hire such a journalist, specific safeguards should be placed to avoid repetitive falsehoods being published.

For example, consider Andrew Gilligan who is the author of five of the inaccurate articles cited in 5.2 and 5.3 above.

5.7. Is a lack of context misleading to the reader?

It is understandable that newspapers often wish to encourage a certain viewpoint and will cite the evidence that supports the overall message being delivered, in particular on partisan political discussions.

However, when it comes to the treatment of minority communities, without the privilege of a response or a platform to share their viewpoint, care must be taken to avoid misleading the reader into believing something untrue about entire communities. Such stories run the risk of feeding into a far-right narrative that is not based on facts but a series of cherry-picked ideas that do not reflect the whole story.

Consider the following news stories, many of which were shared by far-right activists:

- In February 2018, The Times stated that “A governor at St Stephen’s, Arif Qawi, resigned after pleading for help from Damien Hinds, the education secretary, is resisting ‘bullying’ from ‘various Muslim organisations.’”⁴⁸ The Times chose to make no reference to the fact that Mr Qawi had also said “crucify the unholy bastard” about a local Imam, which was the real reason for the resignation, as admitted by The Mail on Sunday.⁴⁹
- In January 2018, the Mail Online ran an article describing the Halal slaughter method as “cruel” while suggesting other methods like “electric shocks” are less cruel. Furthermore, it stated that “under Islamic law animals are not pre-stunned before they’re killed” when in fact up to 85-88% of animals slaughtered according to Islamic principles are stunned.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ [New £5 could be BANNED by religious groups as Bank CAN'T promise what note is made of](#), Express, December 2016. Original headline available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, January 2017.

⁴⁶ Screenshot of now-deleted wording in The Sun available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, April 2018

⁴⁷ Screenshot of original error (now deleted) available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, December 2017

⁴⁸ [We'll stand up for schools that ban hijabs and fasting, pledges minister](#), The Times, February 2018

⁴⁹ [Police are called in after primary school is 'intimidated' into dropping a ban on Muslim girls wearing hijabs](#), Mail on Sunday, January 2018 (updated February 2018 – see bottom of article)

⁵⁰ [Mail Online](#) 2 January 2018

- In December 2017, the Mail Online falsely claimed that 84% of men convicted of grooming are Asian⁵¹ and The Sunday Times claimed that “Asians make up 80% of child groomers - study”. Both papers were forced to correct their error, with the latter admitting “the report...did not find that 80% of all child groomers were Asian”.⁵² The original inaccurate story was shared by the far-right anti-Muslim activist Tommy Robinson.⁵³
- In August 2017, The Times ran a misleading and inaccurate report with the headline “Christian Child forced into Muslim foster care”⁵⁴ that was deemed “disgracefully dishonest” by Sir Martin Narey, the head of the government inquiry into foster care.⁵⁵ Apart from misreporting sensitive information in a child custody case by citing a highly unreliable source (proven to be incorrect) and not explaining the source leading to the reporting of inaccuracies, it also failed to reflect that more Muslims are adopted by white parents than vice-versa.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it fed into the hate-filled agenda of far-right extremists such as Britain First and the EDL.⁵⁷
- In February 2017, both the Express and Mail Online published a story claiming that more than 50 million Muslims were willing to support terrorists in various guises.⁵⁸ This erroneous extrapolation that was used to create this figure, makes it clear that the headline was totally unjustifiable.

5.8. Is there a reason why a specific story has been sought, and is the impression being provided to readers, reflective of the reality?

There are often stories from all across the globe that are published to further a specific agenda. For example, migrants – like all citizens – commit crimes. By accurately publishing story after story of crimes committed by migrants, an impression is built with the reader that migrants are often criminals, which is an unreasonable characterisation.

The same approach often takes place on stories related to Islam and Muslims as can be understood from many of the examples above. Consider also, for example when The Express runs the story headlined “Fury as German primary school ‘forces’ children to chant ‘Allahu Akbar’ in Muslim prayer”.⁵⁹ It is only because of the Express’ pre-occupation with “Allahu Akbar”⁶⁰ and what many might regard as demonising the prayers of ordinary Muslims, that this was a relevant story to its UK audiences.

⁵¹ [Revealed: 84% of men in gangs convicted of grooming young white girls are Asian and see them as 'easy targets' for sex](#), Mail Online, December 2017. Original headline available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, December 2017. In the Twitter thread, it is made clear that the Mail Online made the error, rather than the Mail on Sunday

⁵² [Asians make up 80% of convicted child-grooming gang members – study](#), The Sunday Times, December 2017. Original headline available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, April 2018. Ipsos ruling available at 20563-17 Versi v The Sunday Times, [IPSO](#), April 2018

⁵³ Whilst Tommy Robinson has been suspended from Twitter, a screenshot of his tweet is available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, December 2017

⁵⁴ [Christian child forced into Muslim foster care](#), The Times, August 2017. Screenshots of the four front pages can be seen on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, October 2017

⁵⁵ [Twitter](#), Martin Narey, September 2017

⁵⁶ See a short analysis of the errors in [The Times should apologise for its reporting of the Muslim foster care story](#), New Statesman, November 2017 and a simple explanation of the errors in [The Times LIED on its divisive front page & misled its readers - here's how](#), Muslim Council of Britain, April 2018

⁵⁷ See collation of screenshots of tweets by far-right extremists on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, August 2017

⁵⁸ [MIGRATION WARNING: Expert warns 50 MILLION Muslims are willing to back violence and terror](#), Express, February 2017 and [More than 50 million Muslims are willing to support those who carry out terror attacks to defend their religion, migration expert warns the EU](#), Mail Online, February 2017

⁵⁹ [Fury as German primary school ‘forces’ children to chant ‘Allahu Akbar’ in Muslim prayer](#), Express, October 2016

⁶⁰ Examples of the Express’ obsession with Allahu Akbar, can be seen in a series of screenshots on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, March 2017

5.9. Is the way that a poll is reported misleading to the reader when it excludes key information?

Whilst conclusions can and indeed should be drawn from polling minority communities, care needs to be taken that the implications of any one particular poll are understood properly and holistically, in a way that accurately reflects what the poll *actually* shows. In particular, the following are important themes to consider:

- Polling minority communities are often skewed to larger Muslim community areas and have specific limitations, which should be acknowledged
- There is often a larger margin of error and therefore, specific implications about a specific percentage are often not reasonable
- Individual polls often are one of many on a specific topic. Whilst the other polls are not necessarily the main story, understanding the implications of the other polls will help give greater context to the individual poll cited. In particular, the wording of one particular poll giving a startling result, may be very different to the wording of another poll giving a less startling result.
- Prior to reaching any conclusion about a specific group, the results of a control group should always be looked at, to give greater depth to the story.

Case Study

Consider, for example, a poll conducted by ICM for a Policy Exchange report on Muslims. One question asked: If you thought that someone who is close to you was getting involved with people who support terrorism in Syria, would you report it to the police? 52% cent said they would.⁶¹

Another poll on British Muslims conducted by ComRes for the BBC asked: “If someone I knew from the Muslim community was planning an act of violence I would report them to the police?” 94% of the polled Muslims confirmed they would report them to the police.⁶²

Whilst it is possible for there to be a difference in results given the sample sizes and the limitations of polling, it is clear that the difference in wording of the question makes a difference to the result. Furthermore, if one were to look at the control group of the first poll, it shows that it consists only of Muslims living in areas where they make up at least 20 per cent of the population and are therefore potentially less likely to be integrated with their non-Muslim neighbours.

It would be misleading to conclude that Muslims (uniquely) do not report terrorism to the police based on the polling data, when the opposite appears to be the case. Given the margin of error and the lack of sufficient data points, it would also be misleading to even conclude that Muslims report to the police less than those of other faiths based on this poll.

Yet this misleading poll was reported widely with headlines including “SECRET I.S. SAFE Half of British Muslims would not go to cops if they knew someone with ISIS links” in The Sun.⁶³

⁶¹ [‘What Muslims Want’ A survey of British Muslims by ICM on behalf of Policy Exchange](#), ICM, December 2016

⁶² [Muslim Poll](#) (for BBC Today Programme), Comres, February 2015

⁶³ [SECRET I.S. SAFE Half of British Muslims would not go to cops if they knew someone with ISIS links](#), The Sun, December 2016

6. Relevance for news stories (Clause 12)

6.1. Would the story be newsworthy if it did not concern an individual of Muslim background?

The question of newsworthiness is inherently subjective and ultimately up to the editors of a newspaper. A number of criteria are often considered including the editorial line, the concerns of readers and the importance of the story.

When determining newsworthiness, however, the faith of an individual should not be considered, in particular when it is considered with the purpose of perpetuating a pre-existing faith-based narrative.

We would argue that at least some of the above case studies may have been chosen to justify a pre-set narrative about Muslims rather than to report a newsworthy story. For the sake of brevity, only one example is repeated here: The Times' story in August 2017 claiming that a "white Christian Child" had been left distressed after being placed with Muslims was not only inaccurate but divisive.⁶⁴ Given that over 1500 Muslim foster children have been placed with non-Muslim households without similar front-page coverage,⁶⁵ it is clear there would have been no story had it not involved a Muslim.⁶⁶

It is important to stress that bias, such as is claimed in the aforementioned examples, is not necessarily conscious. However, given the consequences, care should be taken.

6.2. In the case where a story is genuinely newsworthy, is the faith of the individual relevant and worthy of mention – in particular for negative stories? And if so, what prominence should that be given?

Care must be taken to ensure that aligned to Clause 12 (ii), "Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story." The relevance should be to the specific story in question. Furthermore, care should be taken that its mention is where its inclusion was not only relevant but important for the story.

Consider a situation where the faith of an individual is mentioned incidentally but is not relevant to the core narrative of the story. In such a case, the faith should not be mentioned at all. For example, in May 2018, The Times said that one of the individuals involved in the Sophie Lionnet murder was "coerced into an Islamic marriage." It is difficult to see what the relevance of the term "Islamic" is to the marriage.⁶⁷

Consider another case, where the faith of an individual is mentioned but is only tangentially relevant to the core narrative of the story. For example, where in a judge's ruling, there is a reference to the values of the faith of an individual as part of an appeal to the perpetrator's conscience. In such a situation, the faith may be mentioned but in a way that does not imply the faith of the individual was in anyway a driver for an action where no such evidence exists – in particular, it should not be used as a descriptor for the perpetrator.

⁶⁴ [Christian child forced into Muslim foster care](#), The Times, August 2017

⁶⁵ [The fostering case shows the British press has a problem with reporting fairly on Muslims](#), New Statesman, August 2017

⁶⁶ [The Times should apologise for its reporting of the Muslim foster care story](#), New Statesman, November 2017

⁶⁷ [Sophie Lionnet murder: Kouider was cruel, beguiling fantasist who drew men into deadly spiral](#), The Times, May 2018

For example, in January 2018, the Mail Online ran the following headline: “Muslim husband is found guilty of murdering his convert wife with claw hammer and knife and burning her body after he had banned her from seeing her family”. There is no reason to describe the man as "Muslim" as there is no correlation between his actions and his faith, even if his faith was mentioned in court.⁶⁸

Consider another case, where there is an accusation that the faith of an individual was a driver for a crime but that accusation is from a known biased perspective e.g. a prosecutor or a detractor of the individual in question. In such a situation, care should be taken not to assume the faith to be genuinely relevant and a nuanced reference may be reasonable but not as a descriptor of the individual, and certainly not in a headline.

Even in the cases where the faith is determined to be genuinely relevant and important to the news story with the relevant prominence, a balance must be drawn between whether even this usage is valuable for the reader. The danger that should be considered, is whether its inclusion builds on a pre-existing narrative that the reader is expected to have, which may lead to an unfounded inference with potentially worrying consequences.

7. Terminology (Clauses 1, 12)

7.1. Does the choice of terminology assist the reader in understanding the underlying concept?

Terminology is part and parcel of news reporting yet the choices often have wide-ranging impact. For example, should a terror group’s name be translated or should the original name be used? Can a pejorative term be used for a terror group? How should a specific crime be described if the main perpetrators are from one specific group?

In some cases the terminology choice is part of the style guide of a publication and on other occasions, the less frequent usage of a term means there is less of an editorial drive for a specific choice.

The key principles to consider when determining terminology are:

- **Consistency in approach:** is the same approach used for all similar terms?
- **Accuracy:** is there already a meaning for the term being used, e.g. in academia?
- **Familiarity and ease for the reader:** terms should reflect readers’ understanding and familiarity with terms – this should not prevent publications from taking a lead in using a specific rarely used term but it should form part of the consideration.
- **Proportionality:** for smaller one-off uses, it is understandable if a complete analysis of the term is considered

Examples of terminology used within the press that may not reflect the aforementioned principles include:

- **ISIS / IS / Islamic State:** the names of terror groups are generally not translated (e.g. ETA, Hamas, Taliban, Al-Qaeda) and in print, the choice of using pejorative terminology is not a regulatory question of bias (for example, despite it being pejorative, most publications use “Boko Haram” which is not the self-identified name of the organisation).

⁶⁸ [Muslim husband is found guilty of murdering his convert wife with claw hammer and knife and burning her body after he had banned her from seeing her family](#), Mail Online, January 2018

Furthermore, a common vision shared by many faiths is “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven” – and it is in this sense too an 'Islamic state' has for long been an inspiring vision for many Muslims, and not to be confused with Daesh's aberrant posturing by the lay reader. Given the scale of this term's usage and impact on broader society, the meaning to readers is likely to lead to an association between “Islam” and this terror group.

- **Islamist:** Technically an individual who “believes that Islam should influence political systems”,⁶⁹ its usage has moved to a specifically more derogatory meaning “advocate of militancy or fundamentalism linked to Islam”, blurring the line between the groups ready to engage in cordial debate within the democratic processes, and those seeking to impose their views by intimidation and violence. The perpetrators of the latter are driven by a range of factors. For example, during the Balkan Wars (1991-1995) Serb forces and militia in particular resorted to Christian symbolism, but discerning journalism correctly attributed their acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide of Bosnians to a racist nationalism, rather than the teachings of Christ.
- **Jihad & Jihadist:** The words “jihadi” and “jihadist” are used without much consistency and have become shorthand for “terrorist” when the suspect is Muslim. Words used for acts of terror should specifically describe the actions of the perpetrator: for example bomber, attacker, gunman or kidnapper with care taken where the motivation of the terrorist is explored.

The Muslim Council of Britain will be working to support journalists in this area in the upcoming year.

8. Imagery

- 8.1. News sources often use images to illustrate a specific part of the story given the power of an image to immediately elicit strong emotions and draw on well-understood narratives, adding greater strength to a story. Such images may be stock photos, photos owned or commissioned by the publication or, as is becoming increasingly common, sourced from social media.
- 8.2. The standard principles of choosing an image include:
 - **Relevance:** is the picture relevant to the specific story and does it elicit the desired response
 - **Unintended consequences:** are there other emotions or links to broader narratives that are driven by the chosen images
- 8.3. On stories related to Muslims, there are a number of cases where these basic principles appear not to have been considered. A small selection of five examples are outlined below:
 - On 22 June 2018, The Times ran an article “Head hits back at Ofsted chief over extremism claims.” The image showed a set of significant scholarly works in Arabic and associated them with “religious fundamentalists” in the caption. The image has been changed following a complaint from the MCB media monitoring team.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ [Islamist](#), Cambridge Dictionary

⁷⁰ [Head hits back at Ofsted chief over extremism claims](#), The Times, June 2018. The original image can be seen on Twitter, XX

- On 12 April 2018, The Times published an article online, with the headline “Parents ‘abusing’ rights over children’s religious education.” The original image shows a school scene focusing on a student wearing a hijab suggesting a correlation between wearing a hijab and parental abuse of children’s religious education. The image has been changed following a complaint from the MCB monitoring team.⁷¹
- On 28 August 2017, The Daily Mail used a stock picture of a Muslim family to illustrate the story about a Christian child in Muslim foster care. However, they altered the image to cover the woman’s face with a veil.⁷²
- On 11 December 2016, the Sun published a “Cut out and keep guide” on “WHAT TERRORISTS LOOK LIKE” suggesting that anyone wearing a turban or a hijab is a terrorist.⁷³
- In April 2015, the Mail Online reported on a local council in Australia asking non-Muslim women to wear hijab to show solidarity with their Muslim counterparts. However, all the images feature women dressed in niqabs and burqas which are a different garment altogether. Once again, given that so few women actually wear the burqa in Australia, it is misleading for the Mail to represent Australian Muslim Women with these images. These images were subsequently removed a result of a complaint by the MCB’s monitoring team.⁷⁴

9. Opinion writers

- 9.1. In a free society, it is right that individuals have the freedom to express sincerely held views, including for the purposes of discussion or to influence a discourse. It is also well established that publications have chosen to restrict that freedom in certain ways given the platform they are providing their columnists e.g. abide by the IPSO code, editorial line and code of conduct.
- 9.2. Most newspapers agree that they should not be platforms for hate or bigotry against any group. There have been specific lessons learnt from the treatment of gay icons in the 1990s.
- 9.3. Despite this apparent consensus, there is a disturbing view that newspapers wish to retain the right to discriminate and prejudicially target faith groups, currently not included in Clause 12. It is unclear what specific forms of bigotry they wish to publish that they fear will breach Clause 12 if it is amended to include groups.
- 9.4. The list of examples of opinion writers being given the platform to spread dangerous bigotry is long – a small selection of examples are outlined below:
 - **Douglas Murray** in The Sun declares that to have less terrorism, the UK needs “less Islam.” Given the article makes it clear that he is referring to countries where there are fewer Muslims, he is categorically stating that to have less Islam in the UK, the country needs fewer Muslims – an outcome that is deeply dangerous and one that elements of the far right are currently promoting.⁷⁵

⁷¹ [Parents ‘abusing’ rights over children’s religious education](#), The Sunday Times, April 2018. The original image is available on Twitter,

⁷² [The Daily Mail published a doctored photograph of a veiled woman in an inflammatory story about Muslims](#), Business Insider, August 2017

⁷³ A screenshot of the print version of The Sun is available on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, December 2016

⁷⁴ [‘This doesn’t encourage integration, this encourages separateness’: Local council slammed for asking non-Muslim women to wear hijabs to raise awareness and combat Islamophobia](#), Daily Mail Australia. The original image is available on Twitter,

⁷⁵ [Never mind singing John Lennon songs... if we want peace then we need one thing – less Islam](#), The Sun, June 2017

- **Trevor Kavanagh** in The Sun discussed “The Muslim Problem”, using capital letters, making it clear that he is making reference to the Nazi-like terminology “The Jewish Problem”. The articulation of Muslims in this way, implies clearly that it is a problem that must be removed, which is why Muslim and Jewish groups as well as Parliamentarians raised serious concerns about this article.⁷⁶
- **Rod Liddle** in The Sun belittles the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims as “a bit, um, heavy-handed” and suggests the Muslim victims are responsible for their own plight.⁷⁷
- **James Delingpole** in The Spectator glorifies Tommy Robinson,⁷⁸ described by Hope Not Hate, as a far-right Islamophobic extremist.⁷⁹
- **Richard Kemp** in The Times responding to the sentencing Ciaran Maxwell, a Royal Marine who made bombs for Republicans in Ireland, dedicates most of his article to create fear about Muslims infiltrating the police and armed forces.⁸⁰
- **Trevor Phillips** in The Sun said placing a Christian girl into Muslim foster care was like “child abuse” and that the Council had chosen to “value their pro-Muslim reputation above the welfare of the child”⁸¹ even though the child actually had a “warm relationship” with Muslim foster carers, and the facts of the case were completely different.⁸²

9.5. Whilst IPSO rules do not proscribe the propagation of hateful bigotry, even if it is a hate crime or contributes to far-right propaganda against Muslims, we believe that there would be value in IPSO:

- Explicitly discouraging columnists (via the newspapers) from propagating hatred;
- Encouraging newspapers to provide column space (rather than solely letters) to respond to such bigotry; and
- Calling out hateful bigotry as part of an encouragement of best practice.

10. Social media

10.1. News articles are often accessed via social media, making standards within social media platforms increasingly important.

10.2. The social media platforms of the publications themselves should be subject to the equivalent regulation of the print and online publications. Whilst on Twitter, the limited characters may make it more difficult to provide the full context, it is important that when it comes to headlines that may be used by far-right instigators, extra care is taken to provide the relevant context.

10.3. Whilst the social media platforms of individual journalists are understandably not within the scope of IPSO regulation, media outlets should not allow journalists to undermine corrections made by the media outlet or enforced by IPSO. For example, Andrew Gilligan tried to undermine a Sunday Telegraph correction⁸³ and a Sunday Times correction⁸⁴ of stories that he falsely reported.

⁷⁶ [Now Philip Hammond is finally Out he must shut the door behind him and take control over our laws, our trade and especially immigration](#), The Sun, August 2017. To see the original capitalised wording, see [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, August 2017. See also [More than 100 cross-party politicians demand action over ‘Muslim Problem’ article in Sun newspaper](#), Independent, August 2017

⁷⁷ [When Theresa May needs to save herself and scrap cap on public sector pay — there really is a magic money tree](#), The Sun, September 2017. See letter by Miqdaad Versi to The Sun articulating these concerns on [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, September 2017

⁷⁸ [Britain’s most hated man isn’t all that hateful The EDL founder has been jailed for fraud and assault. So, why do I like him?](#), Spectator, April 2017

⁷⁹ [TOMMY ROBINSON IS A FAR-RIGHT, ISLAMOPHOBIC EXTREMIST. HERE’S WHY.](#), Hope Not Hate

⁸⁰ [Islamists may have already infiltrated our armed forces](#), The Times, August 2017

⁸¹ [The decision to put a five-year-old Christian girl into Muslim foster care is like child abuse and the council must pay](#), The Sun, August 2017

⁸² [Girl had ‘warm relationship’ with Muslim foster carers, court told](#), The Guardian, October 2017

⁸³ [Twitter](#), Andrew Gilligan, May 2018

⁸⁴ [Twitter](#), Andrew Gilligan, December 2016

11. Corrections

- 11.1. The principle underpinning corrections is that those who were misled by an inaccurate story, should be informed about the error. This is the rationale of why many support the idea of equal prominence for a correction, rather than solely within a corrections column. This would mean an error in an article that was later in the paper would have a correction later in the paper – but if the error was in the headline, the correction would be large.
- 11.2. IPSO guidelines on corrections require “due prominence” (note: not “equal prominence”), recognising that minor errors may not merit large corrections. However, it is clear that publications sometimes take advantage of the loose wording on resolution statements. For example, The Sun was required to have a correction on its home page, yet it buried the correction 66 screens down from the top of the page.⁸⁵ Despite being raised with IPSO, this was deemed sufficient.
- 11.3. Where there are serious errors about Islam or Muslims, a mere acknowledgement of the error is insufficient. An apology to those affected is also necessary given the impact such errors have on broader Muslim communities.
- 11.4. Many articles are corrected online with clarifications or acknowledgements of errors at the bottom of news articles online and no note on the home page. The idea of equal prominence would require a note of the correction on the home page for as long as the original article was on the home page – and with the same prominence. Furthermore, the error should be acknowledged at the top of the article to avoid those misinformed from missing it.
- 11.5. Some articles are corrected by the author themselves in a later story. Care must be taken that such a correction is not sarcastic, as James Delingpole appeared to be in The Spectator when he stated: “My main resolution in 2018 is to avoid again upsetting Miqdaad Versi, ever-vigilant assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain”.⁸⁶
- 11.6. On social media, corrections are even more important given how a single tweet has the potential to go viral within far-right circles and build a dangerous narrative. Some media outlets have deleted false tweets, for example, without any acknowledgement of the error, in part due to the inability to edit tweets. Given the driving principle of informing those who have been misinformed, the following appears to be a reasonable standard to follow on Twitter (similar standards applicable to other social media):
- A misleading tweet should be deleted
 - An acknowledgement of any corrections or errors should be tweeted at a reasonable time
- 11.7. In the longer term, work should be done with social media platforms to ensure all those who saw the original tweet or Facebook post, also see corrections made (for example, using “impressions”). Were IPSO to encourage Twitter or Facebook to identify those media platforms who subject themselves to this rule, this will help in the broader battle against fake news.

⁸⁵ [Twitter](#), Miqdaad Versi, February 2017

⁸⁶ [Nine reasons to be cheerful this year](#), Spectator, January 2018