

### **PCC upholds complaints over Sunday Express Dunblane feature**

The Scottish Sunday Express has been criticised by the Press Complaints Commission for intruding into the private lives of teenagers who survived the Dunblane massacre.

On 8 March the newspaper published an article headlined "Anniversary shame of Dunblane survivors", which claimed that the behaviour of some of those who survived the Dunblane shooting in 1996 - and who were now turning 18 - 'shamed' the memory of those who died. This claim was based on pictures and other information which the newspaper had obtained from social networking websites and which, it said, showed the teenagers as "foul-mouthed" youths who "boast about sex, brawls and drink-fuelled antics". The parents of two of those named in the piece said it was intrusive of the newspaper to have identified their children as Dunblane survivors and to have published information about their private lives, including pictures.

The Scottish Sunday Express acknowledged that the tone of the article had been ill-judged and published an apology. It did point out, however, that the identities of the survivors had been published previously and that the information about them had been obtained from publicly-accessible websites.

The Commission did not accept that this argument justified what was a serious intrusion and the apology, while appropriate, was not a sufficient remedy to breaching the Code of Practice. It was clear that the boys involved in this case were not public figures in any meaningful sense and had done nothing to warrant media scrutiny since being caught up in a newsworthy event thirteen years ago.

As a result, even though the images and information were available freely online, "the way they were used – when there was no particular reason for the boys to be in the news – represented a fundamental failure to respect their private lives." The Commission concluded that "publication represented a serious error of judgement".

To see the full ruling, which sets out some of the Commission's thinking on the use by newspapers of material taken from social networking websites, [click here](#).

The ruling was published by the newspaper yesterday, Sunday 5 July.

**ENDS**

For more information please contact Stephen Abell on 020 7831 0022.

6 July 2009