

In your email to Rose Wild, you ask three questions. I have answered them below.

*I note that The Times has accepted that the headline was misleading. Do you consider that there has been a breach of Clause 1?*

We do not. If every published correction or clarification is taken as acknowledgement of a breach, it is hard to see what incentive there might be for attempting to resolve complaints promptly rather than simply waiting for IPSO to adjudicate. The key word in clause 1 in respect of this complaint is “significant”.

Newspapers reporting this story have been the target of a coordinated campaign of complaints questioning the methodology of the Survation opinion poll, the validity of its results and the advisability of reporting it at all.

*The Times*, as it was entitled to, reported the poll in an accurate and balanced fashion, giving full weight to reservations which had been expressed both about the survey itself and about the wisdom of reporting its findings; critical voices of one kind or another occupied approximately half the published article, which also pointed out that similar recent polls had reached quite different conclusions.

This meant that those wishing to complain about the *Times* report could focus only on the headline. They were able to raise two objections to it: that the survey had not distinguished between those who go to fight for Islamic State and those who join other factions in Syria; and that respondents had not been asked about attitudes towards Isis itself.

These arguments are not persuasive. If the complainant has statistics, or even reliable estimates, for the number of British Muslims fighting in Syria for anyone other than Isis, we would be interested to see (and indeed report) them. In the absence of such figures, the consensus would seem to be that the numbers involved – whether fighting for the Assad regime or opposing it with non-Isis groups – are so small as to be insignificant. Media reports over recent years have certainly given that impression, with only a handful of cases being reported at all. In contrast, the presence of British Muslims in the ranks of Isis has been very widely covered, with estimates of the numbers involved ranging from about 700 to as many as 2000.

In short, given the relative numbers involved and the relative media attention they have received, it seems reasonable to argue, as the Sun did when first reporting the poll, that “No one agreeing to the statement ‘I have a lot of sympathy with young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria’ was in any doubt which fighters we meant.” Moreover, in the three questions in the survey immediately preceding the question about sympathy for fighters in Syria, respondents were asked whether they agreed that British Muslims had a duty to condemn terrorism carried out in the name of Islam; whether British Muslim leaders were doing enough to condemn Isis; and whether Isis leaders were exploiting vulnerable young people. The references

to Isis were explicit. The context of the subsequent sympathy question, in other words, was perfectly clear.

Nevertheless, we were happy to clarify precisely what question the poll had asked, and to accept that, in so far as – and *only* in so far as – it had not made this clear, our headline was misleading. How significantly misleading it was, and whether anyone at all was actually likely to have been misled, is something that readers of the clarification could decide for themselves. (The online headline, free of the space constraints of print, was amended anyway to read “One in five British Muslims has sympathy for young Muslims who join fighters in Syria”.)

*Can you explain any steps taken prior to publication to ensure the accuracy of the headline?*

Newspaper headlines, dozens of them every night, are written by sub-editors who read the stories and attempt to convey their essential facts in the limited space available, ideally in a manner that will make readers want to read. The results are revised by a revise editor, and ultimately approved, or revised again, by the chief night editor. This headline was no different.

*Can you confirm the page number on which the correction appeared?*

It appeared in the daily Corrections & Clarifications column on the Letters page, which is the established place for such things to appear in *The Times*. On the day in question that was page 36, as the paper was unusually large because of the autumn statement and spending review. The paragraphs below, from the published IPSO adjudication in *Portes v The Times*, set out the case for the established column.

*The newspaper said that it had established its Corrections & Clarifications column in 2013 on one of the most important and most-read pages of the newspaper, the Letters page. It listed a number of benefits of the column: it demonstrates the newspaper’s firm commitment to correcting errors; makes corrections easy to find in a place which readers will go to; allows readers to see what has been corrected from day to day; makes it easy for staff to check daily for published corrections and so avoid repeating errors; helps to ensure that corrections, once agreed, will appear in the newspaper in the approved form; and is accompanied daily by the newspaper’s complaints policy and procedures. For these reasons, this position gave corrections more prominence than they might otherwise have on a page further forward in the newspaper, the exact position of which could be variable depending on each day’s layout.*

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*The newspaper rejected any assertion that the column's positioning suggested that it was "hiding away" its corrections. It said that the Letters page has long been one of the best-read in the newspaper and that page, along with the Comment section, is the heart of the newspaper and sets it apart from its rivals. Historically, a letter to the editor was the primary way of complaining to a newspaper, and the newspaper observed that many requests for corrections and clarifications still arrive in this format today; there is an intrinsic link between corrections and letters. This link is recognised by a number of publications that choose to publish their corrections in this location.*

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*The Committee recognised the value of publishing the correction in the newspaper's established column; choosing to place some corrections in another part of the newspaper could undermine the advantages of having a consistent position for corrections.*