



Police Service of Northern Ireland

Media Policy



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

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4. If someone who is distressed or bereaved asks for police to intervene to prevent members of the media filming or photographing them, we may pass on their request but we have no power to prevent or restrict media activity. If they are trespassing on private property, the person who owns or controls the premises may eject them and may ask for your help in preventing a breach of the peace while they do so. The media have their own rules of conduct and complaints procedures if members of the public object.
5. To help you identify genuine members of the media, they carry identification, which they will produce to you on request.
6. Members of the media do not need a permit to photograph or film in public places.
7. To enter private property while accompanying police, the media must obtain permission, which must be recorded, from the person who owns or is in control of the premises. We cannot give or deny permission to members of the media to enter private premises whether the premises are directly involved in the police operation or not. This is a matter between the person who owns or is in control of the premises and the members of the media.
8. Giving members of the media access to incident scenes is a matter for the Senior Investigating Officer. The gathering of evidence and forensic retrieval make access unlikely in the early stages and this should be explained to members of the media. Requests for access should be passed to the Senior Investigating Officer who should allow access in appropriate cases as soon as practicable.

Advice and assistance in dealing with members of the media is available 24 hours a day via the Press Office at Police Headquarters or Maydown (Monday - Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm).

FOREWARD BY CHIEF CONSTABLE, SIR HUGH ORDE

The Police Service of Northern Ireland works to make Northern Ireland safer on a daily basis. Police officers and staff interact with members of the public all the time and each of those contacts can influence how the Police Service is viewed or perceived. It is important that the principles of reassurance and building public confidence are at the forefront of our minds in every conversation we have and every action we take.

The public's view of the Police Service is also influenced by the way in which we are portrayed in the media. With that in mind the organisation seeks to build and maintain positive relationships with the media generally and adopt an open and transparent approach to their queries and requests. Our priority is to ensure that media coverage of policing and police activity is fair and accurate and this is achieved through engagement on both a reactive and pro-active level.

Of course the media presents us with as many challenges as opportunities and we must always ensure that we balance the objective of being open with our duty and responsibility to protect the rights of individuals and the integrity of our own investigative work. It is therefore important that we have principles and guidelines which govern our interaction with the media.

This media policy is an essential tool for all officers and staff as it sets out those principles and provides valuable guidance as to what is appropriate and necessary in this important area of activity.

The primary organisational resource is the Department of Media and Public Relations and all contact with the media should be co-ordinated through that Department as they can provide expert advice and assistance to officers and staff.

**Sir Hugh Orde
Chief Constable**

THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Department of Media and Public Relations is the primary resource available to officers and staff in dealing with the media. All requests for information, interviews and any queries from media should be directed in the first instance to the Press Office. They will provide advice and assistance, draft any required statement or facilitate any subsequent interviews or press conferences.

The Police Service policy is that all contact with the media must be co-ordinated through the Department of Media and Public Relations and, if contacted by media, every member of staff should decline to comment until they have referred the matter to the Department of Media and Public Relations.

INAPPROPRIATE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Inappropriate disclosure of information to the media can potentially impact on the Human Rights of individual citizens, whether victims, suspects or arrested persons.

Leaking information to the media about individuals, investigations or other police activity also has the potential to impact on criminal investigations or court proceedings. This can damage both the effectiveness and reputation of the organisation.

All police officers and staff should be aware of the harm, which can be caused by mischievous leaking or unguarded/unofficial comments. Behaviour of this nature constitutes a breach of the Code of Ethics.

GUIDELINES FOR POLICE SERVICE STAFF ON DEALING WITH MEDIA REPORTERS, PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS AND TELEVISION CREWS

Members of the media are not only members of the public; they can influence the way the Police Service is portrayed. It is important that we build good relationships with them, even when the circumstances are difficult. They have a duty to report many of those things that we have to deal with - crime, demonstrations, accidents, major events and incidents. This guide is designed to help you take the appropriate action when you have to deal with members of the media.

1. Members of the media have a duty to report from the scene of many of the incidents we have to deal with. We should actively help them carry out their responsibilities provided they do not interfere with ours.
2. Where it is necessary to put cordons in place, it is much better to provide the media with a good vantage point from which they can operate rather than to exclude them, otherwise they may try to get around the cordons and interfere with police operations. Providing an area for members of the media does not exclude them from operating from other areas to which the general public have access.
3. Members of the media have a duty to take photographs and film incidents and we have no legal power or moral responsibility to prevent or restrict what they record. It is a matter for their editors to control what is published or broadcast, not the police. Once images are recorded, we have no power to delete or confiscate them without a court order, even if we think they contain damaging or useful evidence.

CORE PRINCIPLES IN KEY AREAS

CRIMINAL RECORDS

Criminal records are confidential and under no circumstances should there be any discussion with the media as to whether or not a person has previous convictions.

INTELLIGENCE/INFORMANTS

General

The Police Service issues the following statement in response to queries about our use of informants and surveillance equipment:

“The Police Service has always made it clear that in combating serious crime in all its many forms, the police rely heavily on intelligence gathering by all lawful means, including the use of informants. Intelligence is absolutely crucial to the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, as is the case elsewhere.

Over the years, intelligence has proved to be the most significant factor in saving life and preventing crime. The Police Service will therefore seek by every lawful means to enhance its intelligence gathering capability because it is the duty of a Police Service to protect the community to the utmost of its professional ability.”

Informants

The response to queries about whether an individual is an informant is:

“Police do not confirm or deny that any individual is or ever has been an informant.”

This policy must be strictly observed.

Information Messages

If asked about information messages to members of the public, our response is:

“We do not comment on the security of any individual, however where we believe someone needs to review their personal security we would always seek to inform them. We would never ignore anything that would put a person at risk.”

NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS

The Police Service has developed a policy regarding the naming of victims involved in crime, road collisions and other accidents, which aims to balance the needs of victims and the needs of the media. This policy reflects guidance from the ACPO Media Advisory Group which takes into account the most recent data protection and Human Rights legislation.

The main points are:

- Every effort must be made to establish the wishes of victims or their families, regarding the release of their information to the media.
- Police Service staff should always ask a balanced question when trying to ascertain the wishes of the victims or their families. It would not be appropriate to ask ‘You don’t want your name in the press do you?’ Responses should be recorded by the officers on the relevant forms.
- If a victim or their family does not want their personal details given to the media this request must be honoured unless the investigating officer decides there is an operational reason why this information should be released. However, details of an actual incident can still be released as long as this would not allow a journalist to ‘piece together’ the victim’s identity, eg saying an attack took place outside the victim’s home in..... Road when this is the only property in a named road in a small village.

REWARDS

Details of rewards offered in connection with crimes should only be released to the media with the authority of the senior investigating officer. The Press Office must be told about any reward on offer.

ROBBERIES

Press statements asking for witnesses to a robbery, describing offenders and any vehicles they may have used can be issued extremely quickly by the Press Office. The identity of any victim or staff who are threatened should not be released to the media. Most companies, banks and building societies have a policy regarding the release of photographs/stills taken by surveillance cameras. Checks should always be made with the companies before releasing CCTV/surveillance material.

SIEGES

The Press Office should be informed as soon as possible about a siege, and if appropriate, a press officer will be sent to the scene to set up a media reception point. If possible, and in consultation with the senior officer at the scene, the press officer will organise a vantage point where the media can watch from a safe distance. This should discourage reporters attempting to break through police cordons and interfering with the operation. Media statements will only be released with the authorisation of the officer in charge of the incident.

Terrorist Incidents

The Press Office should be informed immediately about any suspected terrorist incidents, and all media enquiries should be referred to the Press Office. Any press statement must be cleared by the officer in charge of the incident.

PRE EVENT BRIEFINGS

There are occasions where it is beneficial to brief media in advance of a police operation in order to provide the background and context of police action. This would not be appropriate in the case of a criminal investigation, arrests or searches. However, it can be helpful in the context of preparation for a major public event, eg a parade, football match, concert or demonstration. Any such briefing must be arranged through a Senior Press Officer or the Media Centre Manager.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences are an effective way of dealing with significant media interest in a serious crime or major incident. By holding a press conference many media enquiries can be dealt with in a relatively short period of time, which is preferable to an SIO receiving a relentless stream of calls and requests from journalists over several days.

Press conferences should always be arranged through the Press Office, who will notify all the relevant media. Corporate display boards and audio/video recording equipment can be organised and a press officer will usually attend to co-ordinate the conference and brief the senior investigating officer on questions the media are likely to ask.

RESCUES/ATTEMPTED RESCUES

The media is interested in acts of bravery involving police officers and members of the public. However, the names of victims in cases involving attempted suicide should never be released and care should be taken in describing such incidents. Details of victims involved in other incidents can be released only with their permission.

- If it has not been possible to establish whether a victim wants their details given to the press (eg because they are too severely injured) we should not name the victim unless the investigating officer, in liaison with the victim's family, decides there is an operational reason to do so.
- If an officer knows or suspects a victim may be vulnerable to a repeat crime if their identity is released (eg an elderly person living alone), the officer may advise the victim that releasing their details would be inappropriate.
- Under no circumstances should the media be given the name of someone who has died until their next of kin have been informed and the Investigating Officer has authorised release of the information. The deceased's family should be made aware of potential press interest and the fact that the victim's details will be a matter of public record following an inquest opening. If, despite this, the family are adamant that their relative should not be named by the police and if refusing to release the name will not impact in a negative way on the police investigation (ie by making the media refuse to run witness appeals) then consideration may be given to withholding the name. However, it should be made clear to the media that the name is being withheld at the request of the family and no such decision should be taken without having first consulted the investigating officer.
- Any active or imminently active legal proceedings should be taken into consideration before releasing details of injured people (eg someone who has been injured whilst in a suspected stolen car). If an early arrest is likely the identity of the victim should be withheld until they are charged, even if consent has been given.
- Journalists can discover the names of victims from numerous sources other than the police. They then often ask the Police Service for confirmation of these details. Each of these cases should be judged on an individual basis. Consideration should be given as to whether confirming details would help accurate reporting of the facts and so be of direct benefit to the individual involved or the Police Service (eg because there would be serious consequences if the wrong person was named).

NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF SUSPECTS OR ARRESTED PERSONS

The Police Service does not name or confirm the identity of suspects or arrested persons.

NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF WITNESSES

Nothing will be released to the media which is likely to identify any witnesses to a crime without the consent of the senior investigating officer and the witness themselves.

NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

Nothing should be released to the media which is likely to identify a juvenile offender ie anyone who is aged under 17. If a juvenile is charged, only their age and a general area of residence will be given out to reporters eg a 16-year-old youth from Portadown, rather than a 16-year-old youth from Park Road, Portadown. Do not release details of where a juvenile goes to school.

RAPE/SEXUAL OFFENCES/INDECENCY

Nothing should be released to the media which identifies the victim of a sexual offence - no name should be offered or confirmed. Personal details such as age, gender, marital status and whether a woman has children should only be released with authorisation from the senior investigating officer, and as long as this does not help journalists piece together an identity.

MURDER/SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

Murders always attract a great deal of press interest so it is vital for officers to contact the Press Office about the incident as quickly as possible - a holding statement can then be prepared. The initial press statement will only be released after consultation with the senior investigating officer, and the death will be referred to as 'suspicious' until the cause of death has been established and a murder enquiry is confirmed by the SIO. The victim's identity should never be released until relatives have been informed and there has been formal identification of the body.

The SIO must approve all press releases about a murder. This will generally be done with the advice and assistance of the dedicated Crime Operations Press Officers. Only the SIO or an officially nominated police/press officer should talk to the media about a murder. Unless there are exceptional circumstances why this cannot occur, a press officer will attend any briefings given to the media by the senior investigating officer.

POSITIVE STORIES

Although the media has a natural and understandable interest in serious crime, a great deal of work is non-crime related, working with our communities to improve safety, solve problems and improve quality of life. It is important that we try to balance press coverage by actively promoting all the positive work by Police Service staff. Journalists do want to hear about unusual, imaginative and pioneering projects and we should take every opportunity to let them know what we are doing.

KIDNAPPING

In cases of kidnapping or abduction where a life is genuinely thought to be at risk, the media can be asked to impose a news blackout. This can only be endorsed by the Chief Constable (or his Deputy). The Media and PR Department has contingency plans to co-ordinate a news blackout and should be informed of incidents immediately.

MISSING PEOPLE

Publicity can often play an important role in helping to trace missing people, and officers should view it as a valuable tool in their investigation. This is especially true if the missing person is vulnerable - either very old or very young - or is in danger. The Press Office should be told immediately about a missing child.

A recent photograph of the missing person will increase the chances of media coverage. Identities, descriptions and photographs should only be released if permission has been given by the missing person's next of kin. If the case involves a young person we must have the consent of their parent or guardian before their details are released. If a missing child has been placed in the care of the local authority or is a Ward of Court, special approval must be given by the court or social services before details of the child are released to the press.

Let the Press Office know when a missing person has returned or is found, so the media can be told and thanked for their help.

Basic details of the attack can be given out to warn others and/or for witness appeals but do not release explicit details of the offence. A victim or a victim's family may suffer added trauma if they read these details. Officers should only refer to incidents as 'a rape', 'an indecent assault' or 'a serious sexual assault'. Sometimes reporters will ask to interview a victim about their experiences, but will give assurances that the victim will not be identified. Any such requests must be referred to the Senior Investigating Officer, and Press Office.

RELEASE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Convicted Offenders

Following the conviction of an offender at court, official police photographs can only be released to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer/senior area detective. In the case of terrorist trials, we do not release photographs. The legal justification is based on Article 2 of the ECHR, which imposes on public bodies the duty to protect life. This duty includes not exposing persons to unnecessary risk. Knowing that groups on both sides would use photos to target the opposition, the police could not justify routine disclosure of photos.

Police photographs of non-terrorist defendants may be issued if they involve either significant public interest, or a serious arrestable offence. Serious arrestable offences include:

- Murder, manslaughter, rape, kidnapping, certain other sexual offences.
- Any other arrestable offence if its commission has led to, or is intended, or likely to lead to certain serious consequences. These are serious harm to the security of the state or public order; serious interference with the administration of justice or the investigation of offences; the death of any person; serious injury to any person; substantial financial gain to any person or serious financial loss to any person.

Photographs are only issued through the Press Office. Any photographs released must be produced without prisoner reference numbers. Legal Services are always contacted before photographs are released to the media.

Suspects

Photographs of suspects are issued only in extreme circumstances and there are very strict guidelines governing their release. The photograph of a suspect can only be given to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer, in consultation with an ACPO rank officer and the Public Prosecution Service, bearing in mind the Contempt of Court Act. Photographs should always be released via the Press Office.

Victims

Victims' photographs should not be released without the permission of the victim or their relatives. Pictures of assault victims are very powerful images and can encourage responses for help, information and witnesses. Where a decision is made to release a picture, the Press Office will distribute the pictures to the media.

Incident Photographs

It is not Police Service Policy for police photographs taken at the scene of incidents/operations to be routinely issued to the media, especially if those photographs are to be used as evidence in court. If a specific request is made, a photograph can only be released with the consent of the investigating officer in the case.

Police Officers and Police Staff

Pictures of police staff will only be released with the permission of the officer/member of staff or their relatives.

FIREARMS

The Press Office should be informed of all firearms incidents. The number of armed officers deployed to an incident should not be given out. Nothing should be released about tactics, methods of entry or specialist equipment and skills.

Ballistics

It is not Service policy to release details of ballistic test results, or histories of any particular weapon or weapons, as legal implications may arise in subsequent court proceedings.

Shots Fired/Warnings Issued

It is not Police Service policy to refer to the absence, presence, nature or timing of any warnings given or otherwise in shooting incidents involving police or military.

Discharge of Firearm by Police Officer

Please see Post Incident Procedure Deployment of Post Incident Managers - Discharge of Firearms for guidelines on how to formulate media strategy.

FOUND PROPERTY

The Press Office can help arrange publicity for found property to try and re-unite it with its owner. The media are particularly interested in high value or unusual property. Always withhold one identifying feature of the property to ensure it is claimed by its rightful owner.

CRIME PREVENTION

Crime Prevention messages should be promoted at every possible opportunity. Reassuring the public by putting the fear of crime into perspective, whilst at the same time giving practical crime prevention advice through the media, is the responsibility of every member of staff.

CRITICAL INCIDENT

See PSNI Managing Critical Incidents policy. If a critical incident is declared, the Director of Media and PR and/or Head of News must be contacted at the earliest opportunity.

ESCAPED PRISONERS

From Police Custody

The Press Office should be informed at the earliest opportunity and all media enquiries referred to them. Information will only be released to the media after consultation with the senior investigating officer. Basic circumstances of the escape, such as where and when it happened, can be confirmed if asked. Details of the person who escaped will not normally be given out unless the escape happened after a court appearance or if the escapee is considered to be dangerous and the public need to be warned.

From Prison

The Press Office should be informed immediately if there has been a prison escape. They will then consult with the SIO, the prison authorities and/or the Northern Ireland Office regarding release of information about the circumstances of the escape, and deal with all media enquiries.

RELEASE OF POLICE HELD VIDEO FOOTAGE/CCTV

Footage should only be released to the media to fulfil a policing purpose. At least one of the following criteria should be satisfied:

- An appeal for witnesses or an attempt to identify suspects.
- Where police believe that the footage is likely to offer road safety and/or general crime prevention advice.
- Where police believe the material is likely to provide reassurance to the public (eg police action taken against criminals, motorists etc).
- When access to the material may dispel rumour or speculation which is threatening public disorder.
- An illustration of good police work which may have resulted in the arrest of suspects and the detection of crime.
- To demonstrate accountability within policing.

Care should be taken and, if necessary, check with the legal advisor to ensure that any footage released to the media does not jeopardise the existing or future legal proceedings. Video material should only be released on the authority of an officer of ACPO rank or by an officer acting under their delegated authority.

All releases of material should be done by the Police Service Media and Public Relations Department. Licence agreements which cover the use of any material released to the media and detailed terms and conditions of use, rules on copying and archiving clips, etc should be issued for every release. These can be obtained from the Administration Office in the Media and Public Relations Department and a signed copy should be returned there for filing.

There are specific arrangements and guidelines in place for the release of video footage of the policing of parades. Any such release is co-ordinated by the relevant Senior Press Officer in consultation with the Gold or Silver commander and the Human Rights lawyer.

The Police Service operates a 24-hour seven days-a-week Media Monitoring service. All television and radio news bulletins and current affairs/documentary programmes are recorded. However, it must be stressed that the Police Services does not hold copyright for the use of these tapes for evidential purposes. Consent is required from the originator for its evidential use and it needs to be formally proved by the camera user.

POLICING BOARD ISSUES

Staff should not comment on committee papers either prior to the meeting taking place or afterwards, without first discussing the matter with the Press Office. Usually only Policing Board members and officers of ACPO rank comment on Policing Board matters.

POLICY

As a general rule, when an officer/member of staff is talking to the media about an incident, they should confine themselves to the facts - what, when, where, who, why and how. Do not be tempted to give personal opinions. All media enquiries relating to Police Service policy are dealt with by the Press Office.

PRE-TRIAL BRIEFINGS

Pre-trial briefings are not to be held without prior consent of an officer of ACPO rank in consultation with the PPS and the Press Office. The strict rules of disclosure mean that such briefings should be the exception rather than the rule.

BRAVERY

The media are always interested in a story of bravery. If police officers or a member of the public have been involved in an act of bravery, the Press Office should be contacted so a press release can be distributed to the local media, unless of course an individual's circumstances mean this could pose a security risk.

BURGLARIES

Releasing general details about a burglary can help recover stolen property. If the victim asks for their details not to be released to the media, their wishes should be respected, but details of the incident itself can still be released, the general location (but never give out details of house numbers/names) - details of what happened and what was stolen, as long as it does not lead to the identification of the victim. Do not go into details about the precise method of entry.

CONTAMINATION OF FOOD/PRODUCTS

Please inform the Press Office about any threats of/actual incidents of contaminated food or products as there are special procedures regarding release of information about this type of incident.

COUNTERFEIT MONEY

At the request of the Bank of England the only information to be released about counterfeit money should follow the guidelines in recognising a forgery ie quality of paper, colour of ink, watermarks and the silver strip. Details of the amount thought to be in circulation should not be released. Any details to be released to the media must be given to the Press Office.

ARRESTS AND CHARGES

Under the Contempt of Court Act, a case becomes active upon an arrest or the issue of a warrant or summons. There is then a legal responsibility on journalists not to publish or broadcast any details which may prejudice a fair trial. It is therefore extremely important that the media are informed as soon as proceedings are considered to be active if the crime has been publicised. Therefore, the Press Office should be contacted as soon as possible after the arrest has been made. Officers should specify whether a person has been arrested or has attended a police station voluntarily.

When a case is active nothing should be released which would create a substantial risk of serious prejudice to a court case, and nothing should be released which identifies a suspect. However, the sub-judice rule should not be used as an excuse to release nothing. The main facts of the matter can still be given.

For example: *“A 21-year old man from Belfast has been arrested by police officers in connection with and will be interviewed later today.”*

Once a suspect is detained press conferences and media interviews should be refused, other than to confirm a statement similar to the example above or where they are required for operational or investigative purposes.

Also under the Contempt of Court Act, we have a duty to tell the media when a suspect has been charged. When a person has been charged and has appeared at court, their age, gender, occupation, the area where they live and full details of the charged can be released, although this is normally handled by the Northern Ireland Court Service.

ACPO guidelines say these rare cases should:

- Be an example of exceptional police work.
- Demonstrate the use of innovative or unusual detection techniques.
- Be of exceptional public interest.
- Be where media interest is so great, a controlled briefing is the only way to ensure accurate reporting and minimise distress for victims/relatives.

If you are approached by a reporter to provide background information on a case before it is heard at court, contact the Press Office.

SEX OFFENDERS

The NIO Sex Offender Strategic Management Committee (NISOSMC) oversees Multi-Agency procedures for the assessment and management of sex offenders at a strategic level. It is chaired by ACC Criminal Justice. Any police issues concerning sex offenders should be brought to the attention of ACC Criminal Justice and Policy Co-ordinator of NISOSMC. Any public statements made on behalf of NISOSMC should have agreement of all partner agencies, or if this is not practical by cleared by the Co-ordinator of NISOSMC.

There is a great deal of public interest in the issue of sex offenders and it is important that any public statements on the matter emphasise that the role of the police is to maximise public protection and minimise the risk of sexual offences occurring.

STATEMENTS MADE AFTER A COURT CASE

Journalists often approach officers immediately following a court case asking for a police comment. This is particularly the case following a trial which has ended in acquittal. Officers should avoid saying that no one else is being sought in connection with the case or that the case is not being re-opened. Both of these statements could be regarded as defamatory as they imply the acquitted person remains the only suspect. If approached by a journalist outside the court, officers should make a short holding statement. A suggested example is: 'We will be reviewing the case following the court's decision.' The officer should then contact the Press Office and prepare an agreed statement. Never make a comment which implies disagreement with a court's verdict.

WHEN TO CONTACT THE PRESS OFFICE

The policy is that all contact with the media must be co-ordinated through the Department of Media and Public Relations and, if contacted by media, every member of staff should decline to comment until they have referred the matter to the Department of Media and Public Relations.

On a daily basis, police officers and staff are involved in investigative activity, planning for major events or dealing with emerging incidents where it is important to pro-actively contact the Press Office, even before media enquiries are made.

Below is a non-exhaustive alphabetical list of circumstances where the Press Office should be contact, briefed or their advice sought at the earliest opportunity.

ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Individuals and groups will often contact the media themselves to try and gain publicity about their actions. If this happens an incident can be confirmed to the media if appropriate. However, as a general rule, we do not pro-actively publicise the activities of animal rights activists. If the incident involves public safety, for example, contamination of foods or products, the Press Office should be informed immediately.

(See also **CONTAMINATION OF FOODS/PRODUCTS**)

APPEALS FOR RELATIVES

Appeals for relatives are made through the Press Office. Radio SOS appeals to trace relatives will only be used by the BBC if someone is dangerously ill. No broadcast will be made for relatives of someone who has died.

JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING OFFICERS ON SEARCHES/ OPERATIONS/PATROLS

Media representatives will only be allowed to accompany officers if there are specific reasons why the Police Service would benefit from their attendance. A signed indemnity should always be obtained from the company concerned, together with an editorial rights approval by the Police Service's legal adviser. Media representatives will not be briefed about major crime operations prior to their implementation unless there are sound operational reasons for doing so.

This policy is not aimed at preventing media representatives from attending police operations or filming officers, but at ensuring the Police Service complies with the law and protects officers and the rights of victims, witnesses, suspects and innocent members of the public.

All Media requests to accompany patrols will be dealt with by the Press Office.

APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Police Service staff should never use any language which could be considered sectarian, racist, sexist, homophobic or in any other way discriminatory. When describing a person (eg a missing person, crime victim or suspect) no reference should be made to a person's religion, colour, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation unless it is strictly relevant.

Please see PSNI Guide to Appropriate Language in the workplace and Wider Community.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

MAJOR INCIDENTS

Reporters are often only minutes behind police officers arriving at the scene of a major incident, and need to be managed. Officers at the scene should request a press officer at the earliest opportunity by contacting the Press Office so that a 'media liaison point' can be established where information can be relayed and the media can see what is happening from a safe distance. The Press Office will endeavour to ensure a press officer is always available to attend major incidents to support the senior investigating officer in dealing with the media.

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS

Press photographers and TV camera crews will always want to get as close as possible to the scene of an incident. In many cases it is sensible to create 'a media liaison point' which allows photographers and TV crews a view of the action without interfering with the work of the emergency services, rather than refusing them access and leaving them to take matters into their own hands.

Once the incident is under control a senior officer can consider giving the press greater access to the scene. Police officers cannot be held responsible for the taste and decency of pictures taken by photographers and film crews - that is a matter for editors.

(See also Appendix 'A' - ACPO Guidelines which are endorsed by National Union of Journalists).