



**Re: Complaint by Mark Logie (ref: 24/09/2021)**

**Date of complaint: 24 August 2021**

**Article complained of: (1) “How false claims about 5G health risks spread into the mainstream”; (2) “Facebook acts to halt far-right groups linking Covid – 19 to 5G” (online only)**

**Date of publication: (1) 7 April 2020; (2) 12 April 2020**

## **Decision**

### **Introduction**

1. Throughout this decision, Mr Logie will be referred to as “the complainant” and the above-mentioned articles as “Article 1” and “Article 2” respectively. Guardian News & Media will be referred to as “GNM”, the former Press Complaints Commission Code as “the Code”, the readers’ editor as RE and review panel as “the panel”.

### **The Articles**

#### **Article 1**

2. The article appeared in the online edition of the newspaper in April 2020. It is a report about the various theories that 5G technology was directly linked to Covid-19 and the concerns that such theories had now spread into mainstream discourse via social media. Article 1 includes a quote from The International Commission of Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, which sets guidelines on the output of mobile masts and which has concluded that there are “*no scientifically substantiated adverse health effect that can be attributed to a normal 5G installation*” and notes that while there are concerns about safety held by parts of the community “*The guidelines have been developed after a thorough review of all relevant scientific literature, scientific workshops and an extensive public consultation process.*” The focus of the Article 1 – which was written early on during the first lock-down - is the potential for mistrust and the spread of misinformation about 5G and how government and social media platforms can address the issue.



### Article 2

3. Article 2 was published online shortly after Article 1 on 12 April 2020. Its subject matter is very similar to the first, but reports the findings of the campaign group Hope Not Hate that groups on Facebook “promoting the conspiracy theory” that 5G was linked to Covid-19 were “often linking it to explicitly anti-Semitic messages” and that there was evidence of a “toxic cocktail of influence from far-right activists and others”.

### Complaint to the RE

4. The complainant is a member of one of the Facebook groups referred to in the Articles. He sent a number of emails to the RE complaining about the Articles on the grounds that they were inaccurate and had caused him to receive abuse on Twitter as a result of the claim that such groups were “far right”. The RE did not initially respond to these emails, as she deemed them not to raise any prima facie breach of the Code. Following further contact from the Complainant, the RE replied on 10 June 2021, rejecting his complaints. The RE pointed out that:
  - (1) Article 1 was highlighting that the claims about 5G and its direct link to Covid-19 were being stated as fact, which was in direct contradiction to a significant body of scientific evidence, including evidence from the WHO;
  - (2) The RE did not look into Article 2, which the RE concluded accurately reported the findings of Hope Not Hate that there were far-right influences within anti 5G groups on Facebook, including the posting of anti-Semitic comments.
5. The Complainant was dissatisfied with this response, and in a further email to the RE drew attention to what he said was evidence of a possibility that “5G could worsen and bacterial, viral or fungal infection (including, but not limited to, Covid)”. The RE responded pointing out that Article 1 was published on a matter of significant public interest in the context of vandalism and attacks on 5G sites. The RE again emphasised that the overwhelming body of scientific opinion, including the World Health Organisation roundly rejected any causal link between adverse health conditions and exposure to wireless technology, including 5G. As to Article 2, the RE reiterated her original conclusions that GNM was merely reporting the findings of Hope Not Hate –an advocacy group which campaigns against racism and fascism, with a particular focus on far-right activities - and provided a link to the evidence it had relied upon in its report. She drew attention to the possibility of readers writing a letter to the editor in the event that they held a different opinion to that reported upon.



### **The Complaint to the panel**

6. The complainant complained to the Panel on 24 October 2021. The Complaint is in broadly the same terms as to the RE, namely that:
  - (a) Both articles are inaccurate;
  - (b) The inaccurate reporting in the articles had been at least partly responsible for the abuse suffered by the Complainant on Twitter.
7. The complainant seeks an apology, correction and for it to be “made clear that the Guardian has had money from Bill Gates who has invested in 5G ‘infrastructure equipment’, since that could clearly affect the content of these and future articles”.

### **Relevant aspects of the Code**

8. The Panel considers the following aspect of the Code to be of most relevance to the complaint:

#### *“Accuracy*

- i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.*
- ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology published. In cases involving the Commission, prominence should be agreed with the PCC in advance.”*
- iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when reasonably called for”*



## Discussion

9. The Panel does not find either of the articles to breach the Accuracy provision in the Code. The crux of the complainant's complaint in relation to Article 1 is the omission of what he says is evidence that 5G technology *may* have an adverse effect on health, including in relation to Covid-19. The Panel is mindful that there is a responsibility on the part of the media to ensure the accuracy and provenance of its sources when reporting on any matter, but particularly in relation to issues relating to public health. In this regard, the Panel considers it entirely reasonable to rely upon the findings of experts and institutions such as the WHO, the European Commission, the UK Government, and independent fact-checkers such as Full-Fact. All of these bodies have stated that there is no evidence that there is any link between 5G technology and Covid-19 or any other health condition. As the RE noted in her initial response to the complainant, the WHO has concluded that:

*“To date and after much research performed, no adverse health effect has been causally linked with exposure to wireless technologies. Health-related conclusions are drawn from studies performed across the entire radio spectrum but, so far, only a few studies have been carried out at the frequencies to be used by 5G...Provided that the overall exposure remains below international guidelines, no consequences for public health are anticipated.”*

10. The complainant says there is “considerable evidence” to the contrary and that there is at least a “possibility if not a probability” that 5G can have an adverse impact on infections, including Covid-19. This is not a view shared by the majority of the scientific community. Article 1 reflects and reports the findings of a reasonable body of scientific opinion. The Panel also notes that Facebook itself decided to remove “false claims that 5G technology causes the symptoms of or contraction of Covid-19” The fact that there are views to the contrary does not render Article 1 inaccurate, nor was there any obligation upon GNM to include those views. The Panel therefore finds no breach of the Code in respect of Article 1.
11. To the extent the accuracy complaints in relation to Article 2 concern the link between 5G and Covid-19, the Panel repeats its findings above in relation to Article 1. As to the alleged inaccuracies over the reporting of “far-right” influences within anti-5G Facebook groups, the Panel has read and considered the evidence relied upon by Hope not Hate. It considers Article 2 accurately and fairly reports the analysis and research carried out by Hope Not Hate, which are supported by evidence. Indeed, as Article 2 notes, Facebook itself decided to remove the Stop 5G group “following violations of its “promoting or



publicising” crime policies before it received the report from Hate not Hate and has since removed a Destroy 5G Save Our Children group” and a number of other posts flagged by Hope not Hate.

12. The complainant suggests that as he is a member of one of the groups named in Article 2, the publication of that article has caused him to suffer abuse online. The Panel does not consider that this allegation gives rise to any proper complaint under the Code. In the circumstances, GNM cannot be held responsible for the actions of third parties online. The Panel reiterates its finding that Article 2 was not inaccurate or misleading and that it considers it to be a fair and accurate report on a matter of public interest.

13. The Panel therefore finds no violation of the Code in relation to Article 2.

14. For completeness, the Panel rejects any suggestion that GNM should “make clear” that it has “had money from Bill Gates”. This is a bare assertion but in any event gives rise to no arguable complaint under the Code.

### **Conclusion**

15. The Panel rejects the complaint in its entirety.

Dated: 09/12/21

Signed:

John Willis, Chair review panel.

Signed:

Elinor Goodman, panel member.



Signed:

Richard Danbury, panel member