

Press Release

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Primary school teacher awarded £49,000 in libel compensation over false allegations of unacceptable professional conduct

In a judgment handed down on 12 August 2020, the High Court of Justice awarded primary school teacher Martin Gilham compensation in the sum of £49,000 in libel compensation in respect of four articles published by the Sunday Mirror, Mirror Online and Kent Live on 15 to 20 December 2018.

The articles falsely alleged that Mr Gilham had been found guilty of unacceptable professional conduct by the Teaching Regulation Authority and would be the subject of punishment. These allegations were entirely false and seriously defamatory of Mr Gilham. In fact the Teaching Regulation Authority had acquitted Mr Gilham, and confirmed that his ability to teach remained unaffected.

The Defendants made a qualified offer of amends in May 2019, a procedure whereby a newspaper admits its error, publishes an apology and agrees to pay compensation to be determined by a judge if not agreed by the parties. Failing agreement on the wording of the apologies, the Defendants proceeded to publish unilateral apologies in June 2019, which the Court described as “*grudging, unsuitable and insufficient in terms of providing adequate vindication, restoring the claimant’s reputation and reducing the distress and upset caused to him*”.

This award was made after a hearing to assess compensation, which was held on 19 June 2020. The sum of £49,000, which was arrived after applying the discount on compensation awards that is applicable in the context of the offer of amends procedure, reflects the gravity of the allegation, the fact it was false, the high reputation of the Claimant in his local community, and the egregious conduct of the Second Defendant in particular after the publication of the article (as to which the judge remarked that “[f]or reasons that are difficult to understand, the second defendant added further defamatory material... [which] was simply untrue”).

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