

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

Claim No: QB-2019-004059

B E T W E E N:

DR ELEANOR LOUISE HANSON

Claimant

-and-

ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS LTD

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

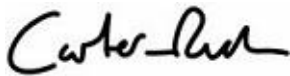
Solicitor for the Claimant:

1. My Lord, I appear for the Claimant, Dr Elly Hanson.
2. Dr Hanson is an independent clinical psychologist and therapist who acts as a consultant to UK law enforcement agencies, including the National Crime Agency. She is an active researcher, writer and speaker. Her principal research interests include the causes, dynamics and impact of, and recovery from, trauma such as domestic violence or sexual abuse. She holds a first class undergraduate degree from Oxford University in Experimental Psychology, as well as a doctorate in Clinical Psychology.
3. The background to these proceedings for libel is Dr Hanson's involvement in Operations Midland and Conifer. These police operations investigated allegations of historic child sexual abuse which were made by Carl Beech against a number of public figures (in Operation Midland) and by him and others against the late Sir Edward Heath (in Operation Conifer). The allegations made by Beech were later found to be false, and on 22 July 2019, he was convicted of twelve counts of perverting the course of justice and one count of fraud at Newcastle Crown Court. On 26 July 2019 he was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

4. On 28 July 2019, the Mail on Sunday published an opinion article under the byline of criminologist Dr Richard Hoskins entitled “*Expert who told police Carl Beech’s evidence was ‘ludicrous’ blames psychotherapists for the foul abuse ‘memories’ they helped create*” (“the Article”). The Article was illustrated, amongst other images and graphics, by a large photograph of Dr Hanson which bore the caption “*Carl Beech’s claims were given credibility by psychotherapist... Dr Elly Hanson.*” The Article appeared in near identical form on MailOnline; indeed it continued to appear there until it was taken down at the end of January 2021. Dr Hanson was not approached prior to publication of the Article.
5. The Article made various allegations about Dr Hanson, which were false. In the light of their prominent publication to the Mail on Sunday and MailOnline’s very substantial readership, under such a sensational headline, Dr Hanson immediately made a legal complaint through her solicitors, within days of publication, requiring that the Article be removed from MailOnline and seeking the publication of a correction and apology. Following the publisher’s refusal to comply with those requests, Dr Hanson issued proceedings for libel.
6. In the light of a number of factual claims which were set out in the Article, the Defendant sought to defend the defamatory imputation that Dr Hanson “*had demonstrated a lack of professional judgment*” and herself given “*credibility and legitimacy*” to Beech’s abuse allegations, thereby “*shar[ing] some of the responsibility for ruining the reputations*” of those accused by Beech and “*wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money on police investigations*”. This was on the basis that these allegations were an honest opinion, and that they were true. In fact, the factual claims which formed the basis of the defamatory allegations were false:
 - a. Dr Hanson had not “*supported*” Vicki Paterson, one of Beech’s counsellors, who was treating him at the time he started making public allegations of historical abuse. The extent of Dr Hanson’s involvement with Ms Paterson was limited to providing a note for the police on whether Ms Paterson could make an accurate judgment on Beech’s credibility as his therapist, and holding (at Ms Paterson’s request) a single session with her to provide some reflective listening, designed to help her deal with the emotions caused by the shocking disclosures Beech had made.
 - b. Dr Hanson did not subscribe to the idea that Beech must be believed simply because he alleged abuse. In stark contrast to a position of blind belief, Dr Hanson has always believed in the principle of taking allegations seriously at the outset and in the merits of thorough investigation.

- c. Dr Hanson had not befriended Beech, nor had she organised the Wall of Silence childhood sexual abuse survivors event with him, or “*shared a platform*” with him at that event. Dr Hanson’s involvement with Beech was limited to two instances. The first was in the context of Operation Midland, when she advised upon and implemented a strategy of making first contact with ‘Fred’, a potential second witness (who later turned out to be an alias operated by Beech), via email. This email was drafted and sent by Dr Hanson, having been approved by the police. The second instance of contact with Beech was when Dr Hanson attended the Wall of Silence event. Contrary to what the Article alleged, Dr Hanson had not organised the event, did not know Beech would be attending when she accepted an invitation to speak, and, Dr Hanson believes, learned that fact either shortly before or on the day. She met Beech at the event, speaking briefly with him in person for the first (and only) time that day for a couple of minutes. Dr Hanson had no further contact with Beech, that day or at any time thereafter. After meeting him briefly, Dr Hanson gave a talk about how to break the silence surrounding child sexual abuse issues, and the exhibition formally opened for viewing. Mr Beech did not share a platform with Dr Hanson but spoke later that day, at the end of the event, from behind a screen and using a pseudonym so that he could not be identified.
 - d. Given the false nature of these claims, there was in fact no basis for stating that Dr Hanson had demonstrated a lack of professional judgment. Nor did she give unjustified credibility and legitimacy to Beech’s claims, and she shared no responsibility whatsoever for ruining the reputations of blameless public figures who were investigated in the context of Operation Midland or for “*wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money on police investigations*”, as stated in the Article.
7. Finally, Dr Hanson did not in fact express a prejudicial view about Sir Edward Heath prior to joining the Operation Conifer Scrutiny Panel, as the Article also alleged. As such, Dr Hanson did not prejudge his guilt, nor did she demonstrate a lack of impartiality and professional judgment.
8. The publication of these extremely serious, false and defamatory allegations over such a prolonged period of time caused enormous distress to Dr Hanson, as well as very considerable professional embarrassment. This included, for example, in one distressing instance Dr Hanson having to defend herself to a group of people who had experienced child abuse, and who understood from the Article that she had acted unprofessionally and befriended Mr Beech, someone who had damaged perceptions of child abuse complainants.

9. Soon before trial, the Defendant made a settlement offer which Dr Hanson accepted. In recognition of the falsity of the allegations made against Dr Hanson, the Defendant published a full and prominent apology in the Mail on Sunday and on MailOnline on 31 January 2021. It also agreed to pay Dr Hanson £65,000 by way of damages for libel, as well as her legal costs and it removed the online version of the Article.
10. My Lord, it only remains for me to ask for leave that the record be withdrawn.



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Carter-Ruck

Solicitors for Dr Elly Hanson

Dated: 3 March 2021