

MEDIA CONDUCT & CORPORATE REPUTATIONAL DOUBLE STANDARDS

An analytical investigation into corporate containment strategies, selective ethical enforcement, and current professional standings within Reach plc and Scotland's sports journalism landscape.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This intelligence dossier examines the systemic double standards operating within mainstream Scottish print and digital journalism—specifically focusing on **Reach plc** and its key asset, the **Daily Record**. By reviewing historical social media misconduct, this document maps the sharp divergence between public rhetoric and internal corporate preservation.

While the *Daily Record* historically utilizes its editorial platform to spearhead high-profile campaigns calling for the public termination and social suspension of external figures who violate ethical boundaries online, it engineered a comprehensive **"Silent Wall" containment strategy** in September 2021 to protect its own high-traffic sports writers who committed identical infractions. This dossier serves as an active investigative file, detailing the original conduct, current professional standing, and clear operational evidence of these institutional double standards.

2. KEY TARGETS: CONDUCT & CURRENT PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS (2026)

During a massive online backlash in September 2021, a compiled dossier of historic, public posts from football forums and older social media accounts associated with prominent sports desk journalists was disseminated. The posts contained a pattern of explicit ableist, sectarian, and homophobic slurs. Rather than facing public disciplinary action, these individuals were protected and currently hold powerful media roles:

NAME	2021 INFRACTION CONTEXT	CORPORATE MITIGATION	CURRENT STANDING (2026)
Jonny McFarlane	Unearthed posts on dedicated online football boards containing ableist slurs, sectarian terms, and homophobic tropes.	Enforced account scrubbing, deletion of historic public records, and	Head of Digital Sport / Head of Sport at <i>Newsquest Scotland</i> (directing digital operations for <i>The Herald</i> and <i>Glasgow Times</i>).

NAME	2021 INFRACTION CONTEXT	CORPORATE MITIGATION	CURRENT STANDING (2026)
		transition into digital-management roles.	
Scott McDermott	Uncovered authorship of legacy online comments containing offensive language and sectarian tropes.	Immediate and total "digital deletion" of personal social media, backed by internal HR silence.	Chief Football Writer for the <i>Sunday Mail</i> and <i>Scottish Daily Record</i> .
Mark Pirie	Exposed for historic ableist and sectarian posts on public online fan discussion forums.	Brief deactivation and sanitization of active author byline profiles on Daily Record domains.	Digital Sports Reporter / Sports Writer for the <i>Daily Record</i> .
Gavin Berry	Participation in explicit online forum threads involving offensive, sectarian, and homophobic language.	Full digital sanitization; enforced corporate guidelines regarding active, public social posts.	Sports Writer for the <i>Sunday Mail</i> and <i>Scottish Daily Record</i> .

3. COMPARATIVE PRECEDENT: THE FIRED EMPLOYEE VS. SENIOR STAFF

To demonstrate the corporate bias inherent in Reach plc's operational framework, their handling of the 2021 senior staff scandal must be contrasted with their response to an identical incident in 2017 involving a junior, non-permanent staff member:

The Alan Clark Case (January 2017)

Alan Clark was an active digital sports journalist working in a casual capacity for the *Daily Record*. In early 2017, Celtic fan accounts unearthed and published historic tweets written by Clark years prior, which included aggressive anti-Catholic slurs, sectarian remarks, and explicit support for offensive football anthems.

The 2017 Zero-Tolerance Response:

Within 12 hours of the tweets being publicized, Reach plc terminated Clark's employment and published a highly publicized statement to preserve their brand integrity. Publishing Director Jonathan Russell stated publicly: "I can assure you there is no religious or football club bias at the Daily Record, which abhors all forms of discrimination and sectarianism."

By 2021, when multiple full-time, senior sports writers were caught in a nearly identical, multi-faceted scandal involving similar sectarian and homophobic slurs, Reach plc abandoned this zero-tolerance precedent. Realizing that firing four key revenue-generating sports writers simultaneously would cripple their sports coverage and digital ad revenue, they opted for an internal containment shield.

4. THE ANATOMY OF CORPORATE CONTAINMENT

Reach plc successfully insulated their sports desk from commercial fallout by deploying three distinct, highly calculated strategic measures:

- **The "Silent Wall" Strategy:** Citing strict privacy and employment laws, the company refused to publish their internal investigation findings, issue statements, or confirm whether disciplinary action was taken. By refusing to engage, they prevented the story from gaining national news traction.
- **Digital Deletion & Sanitization:** All targeted journalists were forced to immediately delete, deactivate, or sanitize their historic social media and forum accounts. Author bio pages on the *Daily Record* website were temporarily hidden or scrubbed to prevent automated brand-safety algorithms from flagging active advertisers.
- **Commercial Demographics & Traffic Preservation:** Tabloid sports writers drive the highest volume of repeatable digital traffic for Scottish news domains. Programmatic ad buyers purchase views based on scale rather than individual bylines. By keeping the writers active but quiet, the publisher protected its primary commercial revenue stream.

5. DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE OF EDITORIAL DOUBLE STANDARDS

The core of this investigation highlights that while the *Daily Record* shielded its own sports desk from the public consequences of their actions, the paper has consistently and aggressively published investigative campaigns demanding the immediate suspension or firing of external public figures for the exact same behavior.

EXHIBIT A: THE STANDARD FOR LOCAL POLITICIANS (SECTARIANISM)

Target: Stirling Conservative Councillors Alastair Majury and Robert Davies.

The Daily Record Headline: *"Twitter row councillors suspended"* (May 2017)

The Double Standard: The paper aggressively spearheaded coverage of their historic tweets, which contained the sectarian term *"Tarriers"*. The paper gave massive print space to rival politicians and anti-sectarian campaigns calling for their immediate resignation, declaring: *"this form of bigotry and hatred simply cannot be tolerated... they must be sacked."* Yet, in 2021, when their own sports desk was exposed using identical sectarian slurs on public forums, no such demands for public accountability were published.

EXHIBIT B: THE STANDARD FOR POLITICAL COMMENTATORS (HOMOPHOBIA)

Target: Stuart Campbell (Wings Over Scotland blogger).

The Daily Record Headline: *"Twitter tirade highlights divisions"* (March 2017)

The Double Standard: The *Daily Record* published a prominent, highly publicized column condemning Campbell's legacy online comments as *"homophobic tweets"* and *"spouting hatred and homophobia"*, declaring that such behavior is *"utterly unacceptable"*. The paper went to court to defend its right to publicly label external online comments as homophobic. However, when its own senior sports writers were caught using explicit homophobic tropes in 2021, the publication completely abandoned its public crusade.

EXHIBIT C: THE STANDARD FOR FOOTBALL AFFILIATES (HISTORIC TWEETS)

Target: Rangers FC Media Partner / Podcaster (Heart & Hand).

The Daily Record Headline: *"Rangers' new media partner in police probe over hate-filled sectarian tweets"* (Sept 2021)

The Double Standard: Published in the *exact same month* that the *Daily Record's* own senior journalists were exposed. The paper ran sensationalized front-page angles calling out a club affiliate for historical online sectarian slurs, while concurrently utilizing its corporate HR structure to hide, sanitize, and preserve the identical behavior of its own full-time employees.

6. LEGAL & INSTITUTIONAL IMMUNITY

Our investigation confirms that these journalists face zero threat of personal, criminal prosecution for these historic posts due to legal design and statutory limitations:

- **Communications Act 2003 (Section 127):** Under Scottish law, summary prosecutions for sending grossly offensive digital messages must commence within **3 years** of commission and within **6 months** of prosecutor awareness. Both absolute statutory timelines have long expired.

- **Hate Crime & Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021:** While containing strict provisions on stirring up hatred, this act did not go into effect until April 1, 2024. Legally, criminal statutes cannot be applied retroactively to historic forum posts.
- **SFA Jurisdictional Void:** The Scottish Football Association possesses no regulatory or disciplinary power over private media entities. Their disciplinary framework applies strictly to players, club staff, and referees, meaning the SFA had no legal basis to intervene.

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