

PRESS RECOGNITIONAL PANEL

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board with Academics held on
25 March 2015 at 107-111 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2AB**

Present: Dr David Wolfe QC (Chair of the Panel), Carolyn Regan, Harry Cayton, Harry Rich, Tim Suter

Visitors: Steve Barnett – Westminster University

In attendance: Susie Uppal (Executive Director), Gavin Sturge (Interim Finance Director) Sadie East (Communications & Stakeholder Manager) John Price-Williams (Interim Media Advisor) (Carol-Ann West taking the note)

Welcome and introductions

1. The Chair welcomed Steve Barnett (SB) to the meeting.
2. Following introductions, the Chair set out the planned format for the meeting and outlined the role of the Press Recognition Panel and its planned next steps. The meeting would be confidential but a note of the key points would be agreed for publication.
3. The Chair stated that this was one of a series of meetings with key stakeholders. In terms of timescales, the Panel was starting to develop proposals for how it intended to go about receiving and considering applications for recognition. The Panel expected to consult widely on these proposals during the early summer before publishing them in final form.
4. SB stated that he felt that the fact that this group of people was sitting round the table was an achievement in itself, although he recognised that this was the beginning of a long process. He stressed the importance of journalists as well as editors and publishers being involved in the consultation process. He saw the Panel's role as being to protect the professional integrity of journalism as well as protecting the interests of the public. SB talked about his experience of talking to former journalism students who sometimes find it difficult to work according to the ethical approach they have been taught because of the structures and processes of some organisations. This was in part a result of the ultra-competitive nature of the national UK print media.

Discussions

Interpretation of Charter criteria

5. The Chair talked about the specific role of the Panel and asked SB how he thought it should approach the application of the criteria set out in the Royal Charter. SB said that Leveson emphasised the need for the process to be simple and he agreed that simplicity and flexibility were vital. The core of the problem was independence. It is vital that self-regulators are independent in order for the public and journalists to have confidence in them. If the board is independent, most other things should follow. His preference would be for minimal interpretation of the Charter criteria.
6. TS explained that some of the criteria were quite specific and others less so and the Panel would need to decide how to interpret them. SB considered that the ultimate aim was to change culture and made a comparison with the regulation of the legal profession.
7. The Chair stated that five or six of the criteria were high level and the Panel would need to decide how to interpret these. There was discussion of the Code of Conduct and the complaints procedure which were two examples of these. The Chair said that as there may be multiple regulators, it is important that the Panel does not design an onerous system which would make it difficult for smaller organisations to apply for recognition. SB agreed this is a risk and this was another reason why simplicity is important. The Panel has an auditing role and could use its biennial inspections to identify issues that might not be within the spirit of Charter criteria. Most genuinely independent self-regulators would not want to act outside the spirit of the criteria so they should be allowed to interpret them.
8. HC stated that simplicity was one of the eight principles of light touch regulation. He asked SB for his views on the desirable outcomes of regulation as it may be helpful to work back from there. SB said that there were two key groups: the public and journalists. The public need to be confident that when they complain it will be dealt with fairly and promptly. They need somewhere to go if they continue to be aggrieved and to be able to seek compensation if they wish, without the risk of being bankrupted. This would provide a safety net. Journalists need to be able to work within a structure which supports ethical journalism. They need to have protection if they feel they are being bullied or intimidated into breaking the code and this needs to be anonymous and effective. The BBC editorial guidelines were discussed. TS stated that these were different as they were administered by the BBC's own board. SB

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said that there was also a difference because the aims and objectives of the BBC are transparent.

9. HR raised whistle blowing which is referred to in the criteria. SB said that we should not regard whistle blowing lines as a universal panacea. There were other ways of influencing journalists who spoke out, such as “byline starvation”. Should the role of the Panel be just to confirm that regulators have a hot-line in place or should it review their effectiveness? HC said that there was a danger of confusing minimalism and simplicity. It would be possible to define simple outcome measures to demonstrate whistle blowing was acted on.
10. The Chair said that some applications for recognition may be made before procedures are up and running. HC said that the Panel needs to be able to deal with paper based applications and then come back to review how things were working. The system needs to be flexible enough to allow players of all sizes to engage. SB said that there were lots of problems to be considered, especially as this was a brand new system. It needs to evolve over time but it should be kept flexible and the Panel can come back to check for effectiveness.

Consultation and engagement

11. The Chair stated that he thought the role of the Panel was, in part, one of public education. The Panel was planning to go out and talk to a range of people in June and July which could include groups of academics and journalism students. SB stated that this was a good idea but it would be difficult to engage with these groups in the summer as universities would be on holiday. It may be possible to give guest lectures on media or journalism courses, but probably not before the autumn term, although there might be opportunities to meet with academics in the next few months. It would also be a challenge to engage with members of the public. In addition to the local press, the hyperlocals were important to consider. Will Perrin of Talkaboutlocal would be useful to talk to. SB also recommended academics in Cardiff and Glasgow. The regional and local press is also important. There are three of four powerful conglomerates but about 20% are still independent. SB mentioned a number of names and agreed to consider other useful contacts. SU would send him an email to remind him. SB also offered to forward information on the Panel’s behalf to media academics. HC asked about engaging journalists as well as students and academics. SB agreed that this was also vital and suggested doing this via the NUJ.
12. SB raised a concern about the possibility of consultation holding back the process and the Panel’s work losing momentum. It is important that the Panel

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opens the doors sooner rather than later. The Chair confirmed that it is the Panel's intention to be open for applications before its first anniversary in November. It was not likely that there would be any applications significantly before then. SB stated that the Panel's report to Parliament after one year of being able to receive applications was a significant moment. The timing would be important and both houses of Parliament needed to be sitting. The Chair noted this is something the Panel was considering as part of its planning.

How to measure success of panel

13. SB said that the creation of the Panel was still an achievement even if there were no applications for recognition after 12 months. However, if after two years there were still no applications and Parliament had not responded then there would have to be further action.
14. SB said that he considered that even if IPSO were to narrow the gap with the Charter criteria then the Panel would still have a role. It represented what Parliament wanted from effective regulation in the public interest. It was not just there to tick boxes. There was a discussion about how the Panel could use its report to Parliament as part of this wider role.

Closing comments

The Chair thanked Steve Barnett for attending and for speaking openly and frankly about issues that were of concern to us both.