

IMPRESS Application to the Press Recognition Panel

I am writing in response to the Press Recognition Panel's call for information about the application by IMPRESS for recognition by the Panel. I am writing here in a personal capacity, but it is relevant to the points which I make below that I am a former trustee of MediaWise, a former of Chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (and still a member of its National Council), a member of the advisory board of Index on Censorship, and of the editorial board of the *British Journalism Review*. I was for many years fully employed as a freelance journalist, and since I joined the staff of Brunel University in the 1990s I have remained an active freelance, publishing mainly on websites such as *Open Democracy*, *Inform* and *The Conversation*. I established Journalism as both an undergraduate and postgraduate subject at Brunel in the early 2000s, and I gave both written and oral evidence to the Leveson Inquiry in 2011.

The CPBF, and I personally, greatly welcomed the establishment of the Leveson Inquiry, as we had been vocal critics of both press standards and the Press Complaints Commission for many years. Indeed, we were amongst the first to point out that the PCC was not in fact a regulatory body at all, a line with which we persisted throughout its entire existence, and which was indeed finally confirmed by Lord Justice Leveson.

Of course, any discussion of the Inquiry, its Report and the aftermath of both is made extremely difficult by the fog of propaganda, disinformation, misinformation and general abuse continuously pumped out by most of the daily press – some of which has indeed been aimed at the PRP, as you will be well aware. Nevertheless, one thing is abundantly clear, namely that the Report and the Royal Charter both allow for the creation of more than one regulatory body. Absolutely inevitably, of course, there has been an avalanche of articles in

the national press ridiculing IMPRESS on the grounds that ‘only’ smaller publications have signed up to be regulated by it, but their size, and indeed their number, are entirely beside the point in terms of the arrangements possible in the light of Leveson’s recommendations. This is simply another example of powerful newspapers doing their utmost to discredit any kind of self-regulatory system which doesn’t meet their approval.

Additionally on this point, it should be noted that the much-misrepresented Royal Charter defines a press regulator as a body set up by on behalf of relevant publishers, as defined by the Crimes and Courts Act 2013. The IMPRESS website lists those publishers and publications which it regulates, and it is particularly pleasing to note that these include a number of hyper-locals and a left-of-centre magazine, all of which are a highly welcome antidote to the kind of publishers which dominate the national press in the UK. These are certainly ‘relevant’ in the terms set out in the Act, and it would be accurate to claim that IMPRESS has been established on their behalf (and that of others like them).

The Royal Charter assumes that a regulatory body will take the current Editors’ Code of Practice as its initial standards code. In my view, this was not a particularly good idea, as the Code, like its predecessors, is seriously flawed. (On the other hand, it might be claimed that the problems reside less in the Code itself and more in the ways in which it has been habitually interpreted, first by the PCC and now IPSO). However, Lord Justice Leveson also recommended that a regulator should conduct a public consultation on a future standards code of its own. This is a far better idea, and I understand that IMPRESS intends to undertake just such a consultation, to which I greatly look forward to contributing.

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