

From the Director

Susie Uppal
Chief Executive
Press Recognition Panel
Mappin House
4 Winsley Street
London
W1W 8HF

23 September 2016

Dear Ms Uppal,

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the Press Recognition Panel's third call for information about Impress' application for recognition.

As mentioned in our submissions dated 3 March 2016 and 1 July 2016, the vast majority of our members are involved in news organisations that are contracted to the Independent Press Standards Organisation which has wide support from the industry.

While the Society welcomed the decision by the PRP earlier this month to delay making a decision on Impress' application for recognition pending further comment from third parties, we remain concerned that not only does the organisation fail to meet the thrust of the Leveson-criteria set out in the Royal Charter, its lack of a code of practice upon which it intends to regulate raises questions about the PRP's ability to consider such an application.

The Society has seen and supports the more detailed submission by the News Media Association which raises ongoing concerns with regard to the status of the call for information, the draft Impress code, funding and the proposed regulator's future financial viability.

It remains that Leveson said his preferred option for regulation was a self-regulatory scheme that would be satisfactory in the eyes of the public, politicians and newspapers. Leveson also expressed his concern that any regulator should have membership of the majority of the press and certainly significant publishers who were the subject of his inquiry. In contrast to Impress this has clearly been achieved by the creation of IPSO which has already begun to earn confidence more widely. In addition there is no doubt that it has had a significant effect on how its members operate, not least through how its decisions are reported, revisions to the binding contracts members have signed including the independence of its budget and its governance requirements. It has also appointed an independent reviewer of its work.

We remain of the view that those members of the Impress board and appointments panel that are purported to have deep-rooted and wide media experience do not have the detailed and extensive knowledge of working in a senior position in the industry and particularly those newspapers that were the subject of criticism that led to the Leveson inquiry and the creation of the Royal Charter. This does not instil confidence that the organisation has the capability to effectively, and fairly, regulate the press.

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From the Director

However it is dressed up, Impress derives the majority of its funding through one wealthy individual who is vocal in his antipathy towards the industry and there is no evidence that it has the ability to finance itself, now or in the future. In fact, its funding is vulnerable to being withdrawn at any time.

Whereas those contracted to IPSO are regulated against the widely-consulted, and accepted, Editors' Code of Practice, which was not criticised by Leveson, Impress does not currently have a standards code by which to measure press behaviour. Unlike IPSO, it does not have a final say on the Editors' Code and its decision to consult on a new standards code, with no clarity on what the code will contain or the timeframe by which it will be implemented, is wholly inadequate as an acceptable standard for the press as a whole.

Leveson was never about hyperlocal and small independent publishers of the kind that are believed to have signed up to it. Impress is missing the point by emphasising its list of sign-ups, which does not add to a significant proportion of total readership of newspapers and magazines especially if you take out those organisations still 'awaiting verification', whatever that means.

We remain concerned that not only does Impress not meet the criteria set out in the Leveson report or Royal Charter, it does not, nor does it expect, to have the support or membership of the majority or any significant part of the industry. The draft Code of Practice that Impress has suggested is a pale imitation of the Editors' Code which has never been seriously criticised. A code is at the heart of any system of regulation. The Editors' Code provides stronger protection for the public, particularly vulnerable people and children. The Code committee has lay representation and is open to review and approval by IPSO.

I hope that you, once again, will find these observations helpful.

Yours sincerely,



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Executive Director

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