

Dear Press Recognition Panel,

As a member of the public I want the Leveson Report delivered fully and effectively. I back Hacked Off's submission, prepared with the input of victims of press abuse. I hope you will take note of this.

**Regarding complaints handling**, I would like to see the PRP to apply the Charter criteria in respect of the following:-

### **Internal governance, complaints, sanctions and reports of compliance**

Criterion 9 says: *The Board should require, of those who subscribe,*

- *appropriate internal governance processes (for dealing with complaints and compliance with the standards code),*
- *transparency on what governance processes they have in place, and*
- *notice of any failures in compliance, together with details of steps taken to deal with failures in compliance.*

### **Regarding Victimisation**

In addition to what the PRP has already suggested, it is fundamental to prevent the victimisation of those who complain and the deterring of coercion to drop complaints that flows from this activity. In the guidance for applicants in relation to this criteria (or possibly criteria 10 or 11) the PRP should explain that when the time comes to determine what is "appropriate", they will need to be satisfied that the Regulator requires subscribers to have procedures in place for protecting complainants from victimization.

Full transparency by subscribers about their compliance. *"The Board should require, of those who subscribe...notice of any failures in compliance, together with details of steps taken to deal with failures in compliance".* So both Criteria 9 and the need for "transparency of compliance with the code" require reporting to the regulator from subscribers which is full and clear; and which is transparent about all code breaches regardless of whether these are escalated to the regulator.

### **Regarding Full reports of compliance**

While the Regulator will be able to audit complaints that are escalated to it, it will rely on the subscribers' record-keeping and reporting or inspection for those complaints which do not reach the regulator in order to determine whether **"those who subscribe to have an adequate and**

**speedy complaint handling mechanism**". A significant problem with the PCC was that code breaches which were resolved before they reached the PCC were never recorded or reported. This could potentially allow for repeated code breaches, forming what could have been the basis for an investigation of systemic breaching, but which are never known by the regulator or recorded anywhere.

While it is important to enable and encourage newspapers to resolve complaints before they need to be dealt with by the regulator, it is not acceptable for such newspapers to be breaching regularly without record). For example they may have the practice of buying off complainants with donations to charity.

So the PRP should make clear in the guidance column (also called "indicators") that the Regulator will need to show Written agreements between the Regulator and subscribers regarding the recording of complaints and associated code breaches from complaints which are not "escalated".

### **Regarding Conflicts of interest**

The PRP rightly say that their guidance will include that *"The Regulator ensures that the subscriber's complaints mechanism has regard to conflicts of interests"*

However part of this is that the complaints process of s subscriber/newspaper must be managed by staff who are independent of the interests of the newspaper in its published or reported performance on compliance. If the complaints process is managed by those who are assessed by their employer on how many times a complaint succeeds or to what degree the newspaper complies with the Code etc, then it is neither fair nor adequate.

While one cannot insist that the complaints handlers are independent of the newspaper, one can expect as a minimum that they do not personal or financial interests in the outcome of a complaint or compliance rates. Therefore in respect of examples of possible evidence to satisfy the conflict of interest point,

Complaints-handling and complaints-deciding staff in subscribers should be shown by contract to be insulated from newspaper performance indicators in respect of compliance.

Yours Sincerely,

David & Diane Shevels