

To the Press Recognition Panel

I am a supporter of the Royal Charter and have a long-standing interest in ensuring that the Leveson Report is delivered fully and effectively.

I am writing to say that I back Hacked Off's submission to you, which has been prepared with the input of victims of press abuse. I hope you will take note of this

One issue which I feel needs to be strengthened is avoidance of victimisation and belittling of those who make complaints, on which I know Hacked Off has been voluble

The requirements of criterion 9 are all clear and represent a basic position for any body seeking recognition by the Press Recognition Panel but I agree with Hacked Off that the efficacy of any complaints system includes the avoidance of victimisation of those who complain and the deterring of complaints or the coercion to drop complaints that flows from this activity. Applicants for recognition should articulate their codes by which any attempts to dissuade complaints and the belittling of complainants will be dealt with as matters which would place offenders in breach of their contracts of employment. In other words, journalists and others who attempt to browbeat or otherwise prevent complaints, however frivolous they deem them to be, should know that their jobs are on the line

So I agree with Hacked Off that you need to require subscribers to have procedures in place for protecting complainants from victimisation, including all the points made about the importance of transparency throughout the process. The press rightly makes use of Freedom of Information requests and their own affairs should be at least on a par with those requirements

I also support Hacked Off's comments about a need for 'beefing up' the definitions of "adequate" in criterion 10 about "an adequate and speedy complaint handling mechanism". It will never be enough for a regulator simply to "note" complaints. If they have to do something more they will more likely take the complaints more seriously. It follows that I also support Hacked Off's points about the need for a full report of how complaints are dealt with

Your task is an important one. A free press, able to open up the darker recesses of government and corporate activity, is vitally important. It will not be helpful if the excesses of some of those who work for the press can be used to dismiss the important work done by those who take their roles more seriously

Best wishes for your important work

Roddy Stuart