

Notes of the PRP Consultation Event held on 30 June 2015 at Abbey Centre, London

Introduction

Between 8 June and 31 July 2015 the Press Recognition Panel (PRP) held a public consultation on how we would receive and determine applications for recognition from independent press self-regulators. As part of the consultation we held eight public events across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The events were an opportunity for the public to have their say on the proposed recognition process and to find out more about the PRP.

This event in London was hosted by David Wolfe QC, Chair of the PRP.

There were 27 members of the public at the event. The notes below summarise the discussion, anonymised to protect the identity of individual members of the public.

Discussion

The question of the PRP's role in regulating the press was raised by a member of the audience, who asked how the PRP would lobby for change and improvements to the system.

David explained it was not the PRP's job to campaign – it was for others to make political points. The PRP's role is to publicise the framework for regulation and to receive and assess applications for recognition from regulators.

With regard to complaints about a regulator, David explained that regulators must continue to comply with the criteria. If they do not, the PRP would consider an ad-hoc review.

In response to a question about members of the PRP Board, David advised there were no plans to appoint further members to the Panel at the current time.

As the discussion continued David explained that the PRP had been funded by the Treasury for its first three years. The PRP would not charge for applications in the first two year period, but after that point would put a fee structure in place. The PRP will consult on this in 2016.

The discussion moved on to whether or not self-regulation would work, and whether or not the general public would know how to complain about the press.

David replied that the issue of self-regulation was not the PRP's debate – the PRP was established to give effect to the Charter regime. The PRP has obligations under the Charter to report to Parliament on the success (or not) of the recognition process. This report would include details of whether there are significant publishers that remain outside of the system

The PRP would work to publicise the regulatory framework and publicise the complaints process of recognised regulators, who would also have to publicise their existence.

David was asked what information would be published if a regulator failed to gain recognition. David explained that the PRP would give its reasons for not recognising a regulator, i.e. which criteria had not satisfactorily been met.

During a discussion on transparency and communications, some of the attendees said that the PRP should publish a regulator's application as part of the call for evidence. It was also stated that the recommendation to the Board on whether or not a regulator should be recognised should also be made public to give others the opportunity to comment before the PRP Board considers the application.

It was stated that the PRP should make clear the reasons for approving (or rejecting) an application. The PRP should also get feedback about approved regulators and undertake regular reviews to ensure the regulator remains compliant.

It was said that it was important to keep the public up to date on the PRP's work, e.g. monthly emails to subscribers on database, outreach sessions to community groups and trade unions, etc.

There was a discussion on much detail the PRP should provide on indicators and evidence in its guidance, specifically on the criteria relating to the regulators' code, complaints and funding investigations.

The discussion moved on to the issue of how regulators should handle complaints. It was stated that complaints received by regulators and the outcomes should be made public. The importance of being able to raise a complaint as a representative body and/or third party was stated. There should also be adequate support for complainants who might be put off by a highly technical system. It was stated that effective regulators need to proactively 'police' their standards codes and have an effective system of sanctions for journalists who don't adhere.

There was a discussion about the potential implications of the Crime and Courts Act provisions on publishers of different sizes, and whether or not small regulators (maybe with a single subscriber) would emerge in future

The issue of advertiser bias was also raised and David explained that this would be addressed and monitored through compliance with the editorial standards code (for which the regulator is ultimately responsible).