

Centre for Journalism
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25th August 2016

Dear Sir,

I welcome the delay in recognition of Impress by the Press Recognition Panel. I hope fervently that it presages a final and emphatic rejection of Impress' application for recognition under the Royal Charter. I believe recognition of Impress would be a grave error that would harm the interests of news publishers both small and large, and of news consumers throughout the UK. It would protect the selfish interests of corporations and institutions whose activities must be scrutinised in the public interest.

Recognition would lead to the introduction of legal measures inimical to the liberal tradition of press freedom. Among the most oppressive of these is section 42 (3) of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. This sets out that an organisation which does not join a recognised regulator but falls under its remit (through being considered a "relevant publisher") may become subject to exemplary damages in court, and could be forced to pay its opponent's costs.

It is plain that such a system would jeopardise press freedom. Those who believe passionately that it would be wrong in principle to submit to such oppression would, immediately, fear the imposition of exemplary damages. Newspapers battered by the consequences of multimedia convergence and fighting to identify new online business models can ill afford such burdens. They will shun controversial topics and abandon investigative reporting. Too many will fill their websites and pages with anodyne, uncontroversial stories in order to minimise risk. Their readers and the communities they serve will be impoverished. The impact on struggling local titles will be particularly regrettable. I fear the consequences for the diversity and plurality of news that has informed our parliamentary democracy since the abolition of newspaper stamp duty.

The system of press regulation that would emerge were Impress to be recognised would, I suggest, shame this country in the eyes of our allies and set a precedent that might be followed by regimes determined to restrict freedom of expression and to protect from scrutiny their own abuses of power.

Finally, I note that Impress has declared itself willing to accept funding from one large donor in particular, the Alexander Mosley Charitable Trust. Details of this organisation's funding are opaque, but I fear impress may be willing to subject itself to influence from a source which supports the curtailment of rigorous, popular investigative journalism. That would be additionally deplorable.

I call upon the Press Recognition Panel to abandon its efforts to find a regulator willing to comply with the criteria for recognition under the Royal Charter. It is plain that no reputable newspaper, national or regional is willing to submit to such a regulator. It should be equally plain that genuine self-

regulation by IPSO, or their own internal procedures, are the only solutions acceptable to those titles our fellow citizens choose to read.

Yours sincerely,

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Professor Tim Luckhurst MA, FRSA

Head of the Centre for Journalism

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