

ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS

Call for information about the success or failure of the Press Recognition Panel

1. I am writing to give Associated Newspapers' response to the Press Recognition Panel's Call for Information about the success or failure of the system of oversight of regulation of which the PRP is a part.
2. Associated Newspapers is a member of the News Media Association. We have read the NMA's response to this call for information and endorse it in full.
3. As the PRP will be aware, we have never accepted that the Government's Royal Charter, supported by the penal provisions of the Crime and Courts Act, is an appropriate means of overseeing regulation of the Press.
4. As the PRP correctly recounts in its 'History of the System' Lord Justice Leveson recommended the Press should continue to regulate itself. The Royal Charter was written and agreed by politicians, in conjunction with the Hacked Off lobby group, after the Press were excluded from negotiations. Any system of regulation that is obliged to follow the Royal Charter Criteria is therefore not self-regulation.
5. In truth, with the exception of wartime censorship, this is the first time since the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 that the British state has attempted to dictate to the Press the terms under which it should operate.
6. These are the fundamental reasons why the industry believed it necessary to set a up a system of genuine self-regulation, in the form of the Independent Press Standards Organisation, which covers virtually all newspapers, magazines and their websites, and has now been operating successfully for nearly two years.

7. This has left the PRP with an existential dilemma. It has spent the best part of two years, and approaching £2 million of tax-payers' money, overseeing nothing.
8. In November 2017 the public money runs out, and to continue in existence the PRP will have to fund itself by charging fees for periodic reviews of recognition.
9. But so far it has failed to recognise a single regulator. And the only application it has before it, from IMPRESS, is fatally flawed.
10. We find it astonishing that an application from a regulator with no track record, no members of any substance, no Code of Practice, and a total reliance on funding from one very wealthy, agenda-driven, private individual, should have been given any consideration at all.
11. Instead the PRP, which has no other functions to perform, has spent five months considering IMPRESS's application without coming to any conclusion other than that it should be given a second shot at submitting it – an opportunity which IMPRESS took without making any significant improvements to its case for recognition.
12. The PRP should recognise that no system of regulation will work unless it has the support of the overwhelming majority of the established Press, and no system will get that support unless it is genuinely a form of self-regulation, independent of the state.
13. The PRP can only continue in existence by approving IMPRESS's application, in which case it, like IMPRESS, will become wholly dependent on funding from Mr Max Mosley.
14. I am afraid we cannot categorise this as anything other than failure. The PRP should recognise this and wind itself up.

Peter Wright

Editor Emeritus

Associated Newspapers

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