

Friday, 17 May 2013

Dear Parliamentarian,

As you will be aware, parts of the press are still opposing the all-party agreed Royal Charter on press conduct that was approved in the Commons on 18 March. The Charter – supported by the victims of press abuse - embodies the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry, which heard evidence from all parts of the press at length.

Rejecting the balanced and fair proposals of the judge, these newspapers have instead proposed their own draft charter, which is worse even than the 12th February draft of the Charter which was rejected in the cross-party talks and which itself resembled the 'Hunt/Black' plan put forward during the Leveson Inquiry. The judge said of that scheme that it 'does not go anything like far enough', while David Cameron declared it 'not good enough'. In fact the press industry Royal Charter is essentially the discredited PCC with a Royal make-over.

The press industry's charter would make an arbitration system optional, negating a vital initiative which will give the public better access to justice. It would not create a self-regulator that was genuinely independent or impartial. The self-regulator would lack important powers, for example to ensure appropriate placing of corrections and apologies. And their charter would permit working politicians to interfere in the regulation process at all levels.

Although the press industry's watered-down Royal Charter has been sent to the Privy Council and – by the rules of due process - is now the subject of a brief 'period of openness', there is no cause for concern. We are confident that the signed agreement that the party leaders have made which each other and the promises they made to the victims of press abuse will not be torn up.; and that the press industry charter will be rejected. At that point, the cross-party agreed Leveson charter will be put to the Privy Council, which is expected to happen soon after 21st June.

Parliament's Royal Charter creates a powerful opportunity for change, but it will take time. A recognition panel must be established by the independent process set out and a news publishers need to set up their own regulator which must then be approved by the panel. This part of the process does not require the support of the whole of the press or even most of it. Once a recognised regulator is in place, the incentives relating to court costs will take effect and publishers will see the financial and other advantages to joining.

In supporting the Royal Charter and the supporting legislation this Parliament has taken a historic step to protect citizens from abuse while at the same time safeguarding our free press from political interference. We can be proud of that, and we can now look forward to the introduction of effective, independent press self-regulation.

I attach a summary of the top 12 flaws in the Press Industry's Royal Charter along with the key findings of the latest Yougov poll on press regulation, conducted on behalf of the Media Standards Trust. The survey found that the public distrust the press's scheme and strongly support the stance that Parliament has taken.

Please contact me if you require any further information or would like to meet with Hacked Off to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

John Dickinson-Lilley
Head of Government & Parliamentary Relations, Hacked Off