



Response to the Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBoF) petition for a Royal Charter on press regulation May 2013

Women's organisations that gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry do not support the PressBoF proposal for a Royal Charter. We do not believe that this proposal is compliant with Lord Justice Leveson's recommendations (see below), nor do we have confidence that it will address the issues that we raised before the Inquiry. The debate following the Inquiry has not produced the hoped-for positive, open and inclusive discussion on a better way forward. We believe the PressBoF proposal represents no change to the previous regime and therefore in the alternative we support the cross-party agreement on a Royal Charter.

Endemic sexism in the British press

Our four organisations, along with the Turn Your Back on Page 3 campaign, made written submissions to the Leveson Inquiry and were subsequently invited to give evidence in January 2012. In November 2012, we published a report, *Just the Women*, of a two-week media monitoring project that examined 1300 articles or reports showing endemic sexism in the British press.

Issues we raised before the Inquiry and in our report include: The failure of some parts of the press to report accurately on crimes of violence against women; news reporting which upholds myths about sexual and domestic violence, prostitution and crimes against ethnic minority women; news reporting which implicitly blames women for violence committed against them or eroticises such violence; the normalisation of images and stories which sexualise and objectify women and girls; the absence from much of the media of the diversity of women's lives and experiences; the frequent vilification and infantilising of women, particularly those in political office; and the UK government's responsibility to ensure that the media does not discriminate against women.

Lord Justice Leveson, in evaluating the evidence, concluded that:

"The evidence as a whole suggested that there is force in the trenchant views expressed by the groups and organisations who testified to the Inquiry that the Page 3 tabloid press often failed to show consistent respect for the dignity and equality of women generally, and that there was a tendency to sexualise and demean women."¹

"Importantly, these criticisms of the Page 3 tabloids do not derive from the fact those newspapers contain an image of a topless woman on Page 3 (or not only from that fact). They are criticisms for which evidence can be found on a reading of all the pages in those newspapers as a whole."²

"The impact of discriminatory or prejudicial representations of women in the Page 3 tabloids is difficult to judge. There is credible evidence that it has a broader impact on the perception and role of women in society, and the sexualisation of society generally³...[Bailey Review footnoted.]

¹ The Leveson Inquiry Report, page 664, para 8.18

² Ibid, page 665, para 8.19

³ Ibid, page 665, para 8.21

“What is clearly required is that any such regulator has the power to take complaints from representative women’s groups. Consideration should also be given to Code amendments which, while protecting freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, would equip that body with the power to intervene in cases of allegedly discriminatory reporting and in so doing reflect the spirit of equalities legislation.”⁴

Our concerns about the PressBoF Royal Charter:

- PressBoF proposes very narrow circumstances in which expert women’s groups, and other representative groups, would be able to make third party complaints about media reporting. This is a curious position from a body allegedly dedicated to freedom of speech
- The proposals lack mechanisms to promote equality, including equality expertise on the independent regulator or the Recognition Panel
- The proposals do not enshrine the independence from the press industry that Leveson requires in order that a fair balance be struck that preserves self-regulation and the principles of free speech with the minimal independent oversight in the public interest to hold the press to its own standards
- The proposals would give a “Code Committee” exclusive control over the Code of Practice without any provision for public consultation. This risks a further skewing against the public interest in securing equality, individual free speech and self-determination⁵.

We note that 13 out of 16 members of the current Press Complaints Commission are male and that PressBoF has an all-male Board with no expertise of equality issues which are relevant to press regulation. We believe this has a clear impact on the proposals put forward and underlines the need to rectify issues around equality representation on any new body.

Political and social context

The debate on press regulation is taking place at a time when serious abuse cases, including Jimmy Savile, Stuart Hazell and the Oxford sexual exploitation case, are highlighting the high levels of violence against women and girls in the UK⁶. There is much evidence about the media’s role in providing a conducive context for violence against women to occur by condoning, tolerating and normalising the abuse of women⁷.

Moreover, at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women this year, the United Kingdom along with other UN member states meeting to address the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls agreed “...to develop and strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms [of the media] to promote balanced and non-stereotypical portrayals of women with a view to eliminating discrimination against and the exploitation of women and girls and refraining from presenting them as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects and commodities and instead present women and girls as creative human beings, key actors and contributors to and beneficiaries of the process of development.”

The Home Office cross-departmental strategy, *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*, has preventing violence against women and girls as a key objective. Action to tackle the sexualisation of children is being addressed by other media regulators, including the ASA and Ofcom. The PressBoF proposals, on the other hand, appear to entrench power away from the recommendations suggested by Lord Justice Leveson to reflect the spirit of the equalities

⁴ Ibid, page 665, para 8.22

⁵ See for example the submission from Professor Rae Langton to the Leveson Inquiry at <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Submission-from-Professor-Rae-Langton.pdf>

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97905/vawg-paper.pdf

⁷ See for example factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence, Prof. Dr. Carol Hagemann-White et al at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/funding/daphne3/multi-level_interactive_model/understanding_perpetration_start_uinix.html

legislation and into the hands of the same editors among whom are those whose past decisions have not even reflected the spirit of the Press Code.⁸

We believe robust and effective press regulation must include:

- An effective 3rd party and group complaints mechanism – the press should be held accountable through fair public scrutiny in line with its own press code

Why third party complaints are important



The sexualised and intrusive coverage by The Sun of the killing of Reeva Steenkamp by Oscar Pistorius exemplifies the need for the new press regulator to take complaints from third parties. In this case, the PCC refused to accept a complaint from a member of Object even though the front page prominent reporting of this case was clearly a matter of importance to gender equality in the UK. Eroticising Reeva Steenkamp's tragic death, and reducing a victim of violence against women to a sex object has wider, harmful implications on male attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls.

“In this instance, however, you were seeking to complain on behalf of another party, who had not consented to the submission of the complaint.”

- A clear definition of discrimination in line with equalities legislation and the government's international obligations on equality⁹
- The integral and permanent involvement of people with expertise in equality in drawing up and overseeing implementation of the code
- Consistency with the broadcast media with respect to sexual material such that material that contains images of nudity and/or language of a strong sexual nature which is not justified by the context should not be printed in newspapers or magazines (including online versions), which are not age restricted. This includes sexualised imagery, and advertising for, or promotion of, the sex industry including pornography, sex webcams and prostitution services
- Child protection must be properly addressed so that newspapers and magazines which are not age restricted should always be suitable for wide audiences, i.e. for audiences including

⁸ See, for example, *Just the Women*, pages 15-19.

⁹ The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has repeatedly noted with concern the stereotyped images of women in the UK press and has called on the government to address these

children and young persons. This means that all content, including advertising, must be suitable for children to consume if they choose to buy the publication, or if they should come across it unawares

- The code should prohibit stories, headlines, language, photographs, or imagery which sexualise children or promote the sexualisation of children.

About us

Eaves is a charity working against all forms of violence against women and undertakes research, campaigns, advocacy and casework www.eavesforwomen.org.uk

End Violence Against Women is a UK-wide coalition that campaigns for action to end all forms of violence against women and girls in the UK www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk

Equality Now is an international human rights organisation working to address violence and discrimination against girls and women worldwide www.equalitynow.org

Object is a human rights organisation that campaigns against the sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture www.object.org.uk

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