

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

From the Chairman

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Culture,
Olympics, Media and Sport
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

12th April 2011

Dear Jeremy,

I am writing to you following your recent appearance before the DCMS Select Committee, and the recent developments in the phone hacking story.

During your discussion with the Select Committee, the question was raised about public confidence in the PCC. You referred to a willingness to consider the evidence on the subject. While I know that the Government is a firm supporter of self-regulation, and is indeed committed actually to reducing the burden of state regulation, I thought I would let you know some recent polling evidence to offer you further reassurance.

I do so, not least because I am conscious that Lord Wallace of Saltaire gave the impression in the House of Lords last week that the Government could countenance the option of a statutory PCC. I cannot believe that is the case, but such comments run – in my view – the risk of wrongly raising the prospect of state interference in freedom of expression.

Our polling asked 2000 people for their thoughts on the PCC, and the results were nationally weighted. We learned the following:

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Baroness Buscombe

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- 79% have no concerns over confidence in the PCC (were either very confident, confident or neutral about it);
- 72% view the effectiveness of the PCC positively or neutrally;
- 86.2% regard our 24-hour helpline service (designed to deal with harassment or pre-publication concerns) positively or neutrally;
- Over half the population know something about the PCC and nearly 80% have at least heard of the PCC.

It may be worth pointing out that we conducted this research soon after the arrests of Ian Edmondson and Neville Thurlbeck, two News of the World journalists. They can be seen, therefore, in the context of widespread media coverage of phone hacking, and must surely indicate that public perceptions of the PCC remain strong nonetheless. We can of course do more, and are doing more, to improve on these figures.

The issue of phone hacking remains of serious concern both to me personally and the Commission as a whole. Following the statement from News International last Friday (in which it apologised for its actions and accepted its internal investigations had not been sufficiently robust), the Phone Hacking Review Committee of the PCC issued a clear statement (attached), in which it stated that it will be holding the News of the World to account for its actions and public statements.

I am keen to ensure that we follow due process here. I set up the Committee back in January, with the following aims, which I believe are in the public interest: to draw together the information that comes out of the legal process, so that we have a clear picture of what has happened; to require that the News of the World, and any other relevant newspaper, give a full and public account of itself in light of that information; to review how the PCC has previously addressed this entire issue, accept what we could have done better and ensure our own game is raised; and – most importantly – to proactively work across the whole industry to ensure that systems are in place to assure improved future practice.



I have consistently condemned the News of the World for its involvement in phone hacking. I am personally determined to do what I can to make sure it is, and remains, stamped out across the whole of Fleet Street.

I know you are a supporter of the PCC and its attempts to develop and become more effective. Next month we will be releasing our 2010 Annual Report, which contains the perspectives of a wide variety of people who have actually used the PCC (MPs, lawyers, charities, the police, and so on). I hope you will take the time to have a look at, so that you can remain informed about all of our work.

I would be happy to discuss the PCC with you, if you would like.

With best wishes,



Baroness Buscombe

