

### Submission for Module 4 – Leveson Inquiry

1. I have approached this submission from 2 perspectives - firstly as the victim of press intrusion, and secondly, as a member of the public and avid newspaper reader. I am not an academic and would not presume to get into deep areas of regulation about which I have no knowledge or experience, however it is clear that the balance between the freedom of speech and freedom of the press is out of kilter with the freedom and privacy to which the rest of us are also entitled. During the Inquiry some witnesses chose to take the moral high ground expounding historical examples, academic theories with idealistic rhetoric refusing to take off their rose-tinted spectacles, believing the victims who came forward to be no more than acceptable casualties sacrificed on the altar of free speech.
2. Like so many others I watched some of the evidence to the Inquiry unfold with incredulity, as it shone an increasingly bright light into the dark recesses of print journalism. The collective evidence relating to that of tabloid newspapers, particularly the News of the World, left the overwhelming impression of an organisation driven by nothing more than ego and greed where news editors and journalists had clearly lost their moral compass. So much so that they came to believe that they were doing nothing wrong and lost the ability to question either their own actions or that of their colleagues. Their instincts were to act without consideration to either the law or the impact on their targets. They were allowed to continue because large profits were being made, and the culture did not allow for questions to be asked, or challenges to be made, without serious repercussions.
3. Intelligent and honest journalists joining organisations like the News of the World were brainwashed into believing that they could do anything they wanted to – justified by an all-encompassing and unquestioned attitude that everything was justifiable in the public interest if they deemed it so. Those that did ask questions were bullied and expelled from the organisation.
4. I admired enormously the courage of those who were honest enough to talk about what went on. Some witnesses appeared as if they had suddenly been woken up and finally seen, with a sense of perspective, the world in which they had worked for what it was. Others had realised at the time but feared losing their jobs or reputations in the business, and were understandably concerned for their careers if they spoke out.
5. In addition there was the collective amnesia and denial from others, which did nothing to alter my opinions. Some tried to grab the moral high-ground with outrage that anyone should dare question their methods or right to free speech, and yet none of them were prepared to take personal responsibility for the effect of their words or actions. When complaints came in, most hid behind corporate lawyers and that perennial cop-out 'public interest', which has now been so devalued that we are in dire need of a new definition.
6. I believe that an element of personal responsibility should form part of any new guidelines that are introduced. Signing up to an individual code of practice – giving access to a press card – may also afford journalists some protection from unscrupulous news editors and proprietors making it harder for them to be forced from their jobs should they resist attempts to make them act either unethically or illegally without proper public interest. Particularly if there are rigorous sanctions

should they persistently break the code, ultimately establishing whether they are a fit and proper person to hold a press card. It may also encourage whistle-blowers to come forward where previously they may not have felt able to do so.

7. A code for individual responsibility would also reinforce ethics and maintain standards as journalists move across different organisations whether as self-employed, casual, staff journalists – print or online. With such an accreditation as least the public would know that someone adhering to a set of standards has written what they're reading, wherever it has been published. It would also assist where a publication has opted out of joining any regulatory authority.
8. My next recommendation emanates from my personal experience. I don't propose to go over the details again, but the elements that I believe have wider implications involve the issue of transparency when editors/journalists feel it necessary to intrude on an individual's privacy or indeed in the interest of the public, break the law. It is clear that the Inquiry has no wish to suppress free speech or the press's ability to follow through on stories, and I can't imagine anyone taking an opposing view. However on those occasions where journalists/news editors have no choice if they are to fully investigate or report on a story in the public interest, I believe that a time-stamped record of the decision making process should be kept for disclosure if a complaint is made at a later date. Again this would afford the publication some protection to show that they acted in good faith and in the spirit of free speech/expression and public interest, even if later they were proved to be wrong.
9. This log should be made available together with related documents to a regulator (or whatever authority is in place) immediately when a complaint is made, in order that a quick judgement as to whether further investigation is warranted or explanation given to the aggrieved party. This could help speed up and simplify the complaints process and provide a degree of satisfaction to the complainant about the intentions of the publication, thus potentially preventing misunderstanding and the need for legal action. As I am all too aware as an investigator, mistakes can be made which can have extreme consequences, but I would not want the fear of making a mistake to, in any way, constrict the media from pursuing stories which are genuinely in the public interest. I'm sure it's not necessary for me to highlight again how crucial Investigative journalism is to society.
10. It is clear that this issue of openness and transparency is also one the police need to debate and conclude on for the future. The public's faith in the honesty and integrity of the police service has been severely damaged and drastic action needs to be taken in the way the service communicates with the public.
11. The Police have conducted several reviews into its relationship with the media in the past year and I would not presume to go over the same ground however, I believe that changing one basic principal may assist in changing the culture of secrecy currently the cause of so much misinformation.
12. By necessity many aspects of police work have to remain confidential until such time as a case or investigation is concluded or because of legal constraints. However the general principle has been that before information is released into the public domain, consideration is given as to whether it should be, and quite rightly the implications of doing so. My belief is that policing should consider turning this principle around and look at it from the perspective that all information should be released, unless there is a justifiable reason why it should not.

13. Whilst this change is subtle it would give rise to a completely different mindset. Yes there would be embarrassment when details of mistakes or misdemeanours are released, but better they are dealt with early before there is time for cover-ups or denials which are often so much more damaging. It would not take long for everyone to get used to the idea, and would establish a much more publically credible voice for the police service at a time when confidence amongst the public is low, and may even drive up professional standards.
14. On the wider issue of the new regulatory authority, like many others I'm sure, I would wish for something independent, accessible and cheap in dealing with complaints. Also I believe that it's important for it to be pro-active in maintaining standards and picking up potential problems early by monitoring press output both print and electronic. This would encourage debate and openness about newsgathering methods and style, and therefore could have a positive effect on how the profession develops in the future.
15. I have tried to keep this submission brief and to the point, many others more eloquent and learned will I'm sure make better ones. If requested I will of course be happy to expand on areas I have touched upon.
16. In conclusion I do believe that as well as laying bare the malpractices of the past, the closing stages of this Inquiry should also seek to draw a line under what has occurred in the past and look to the future. The majority of the British press is, and always has been, outstanding. This is a huge opportunity for the UK to repair it's tarnished reputation, set new world standards for journalism and establish itself as the benchmark for freedom of the press with ethical standards. Perhaps then I, and many other ordinary members of the public, will begin to forgive the past and feel once again, justly proud of British journalism as a whole whether it's tabloid, broadsheet or electronic.



Jacqui Hames  
29<sup>th</sup> June 2012