

CorpComms Magazine

In defence of the Press Complaints Commission

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Jonathan Collett, director of communications at the PCC, defends the body's record and explains the future role it could play in regulating the media



The phone hacking scandal has been a shocking chapter which has stained British journalism. The subsequent public inquiry should act as a catalyst for improvement and a more independent Press Complaints Commission. There should be fundamental reform of the system and the PCC can play its part in this. It is already doing so, and this can inform the work of the inquiry and build on what is already in place. The opportunity provided by the public inquiry is a classic case of not throwing the baby out with the bath water. At present the PCC provides a valued and important service. Every day hundreds of members of the public come to the PCC for free help with a need for expert and trusted advice, and for help with issues about newsgathering techniques or articles that have been published. In 2010 we helped, advised and were in contact with more than 10,000 people.

The PCC service covers virtually all local newspapers, national newspapers and magazines of all shape and form including their online as well as printed material. Feedback shows that not only are people who actually use the PCC's services overwhelmingly happy with the service they receive, but that the wider general public also believe the PCC to be effective in performing its role. The PCC is open to the public 24 hours a day seven days a week. None of its staff have a connection to the newspaper industry. Indeed their primary motivation is to help the public. It's not just about responding to complaints.

Expert PCC staff advise people - through no fault of their own - who find themselves at the centre of a story, for example after a death or a high-profile incident. The PCC issues guidance and conducts training to journalists to improve standards. We hosted 60 seminars in 2010 across the newspaper and magazine industry. We liaise with and reach out to vulnerable groups, charities, officials and the newspaper and magazine industry to ensure reporting standards in sensitive areas like mental health, suicide, covering death and asylum and community issues.

To state the above is not to be complacent and not to ignore the need to recognise that change is essential to retain the British public's confidence in regulation of the press. The present phone hacking scandal is clearly of major public concern and the fundamental issues do need to be addressed. There is consensus between politicians' demands and the PCC's own vision to improve our service further. This is an opportunity to bring about genuine change and genuinely help the general public.

The PCC welcomes the challenge to respond to the issues at stake, and looks forward to contributing to a public discussion on how to improve newspaper and magazine regulation in the UK. If the outcome is building on the PCC's accrued knowledge, skills and public services and adding more powers, independence and effectiveness then the winners will be the British public.

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