

6 Views of other parties

6.1. In addition to our general advertisements inviting comments (see paragraph 1.6) we approached a number of bodies and organisations directly. Details of those approached are given in paragraph 1.8. All were asked for their views on the proposed transfer with particular reference to the following:

- (a) the relevance of the proposed transfer to concentration of ownership of the press;
- (b) the likely effects of the transfer on competition, efficiency, further expansion, closures and labour redundancy, and on the accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion;
- (c) the future prospects of the newspapers; and
- (d) any other matter which might be thought to affect the public interest.

Views of the CBI

6.2. The CBI told us that it did not wish to make any representations.

Views of organisations representing newspaper proprietors

6.3. The Newspaper Publishers Association, representing national newspapers, did not wish to advance any views. The Association of Free Newspapers did not offer any comments on the merits of the proposed transfer.

6.4. The Newspaper Society told us that it did not believe the proposed transfer would be likely adversely to affect competition, employment or editorial independence. In view of EMAP's record and policies, and of the guarantee of no title closures which the Society understood EMAP to have given, the Society concluded that the proposed transfer would be of long-term benefit to the health of the regional press in the area, and therefore in the public interest.

Views of the trade unions

6.5. We invited representations from the TUC, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT '82) and the National Graphical Association (NGA). The NGA made no comment.

6.6. In a written submission, SOGAT '82 told us that it was opposed to the proposed transfer. It felt that there had been a continuing trend towards fewer and larger companies in the industry. Despite the comments of successive Royal Commissions on the Press this trend had continued. The proposed merger would only continue this adverse trend. SOGAT '82 said that it felt the increasing degree of concentration of ownership of newspapers, which was mirrored in the control of local radio and independent television companies, was contrary to the public interest. SOGAT '82 suggested that in the past the Commission had totally ignored the concentration in the ownership of the press and that the time had come when we should look seriously at the issue of concentration when considering the proposed transfer. Following its submission, our invitation to attend a hearing was not taken up by SOGAT '82.

6.7. We received comments from the Leamington and Warwickshire branch of the NUJ, and from the union's Leamington Courier chapel. Both were in favour of the proposed transfer.

Views of the professional and trade associations

6.8. The Institute of Journalists did not offer views on the proposed transfer.

6.9. The Guild of British Newspaper Editors felt that the proposed transfer would be unlikely adversely to affect accurate presentation of the news or free expression. It drew attention to EMAP's practice of allowing editors independence while maintaining a high editorial standard.

6.10. The National Federation of Retail Newsagents told us that it thought the proposed transfer would not have much effect on its members so long as current titles were maintained. It did, however, voice some disquiet about the growing degree of concentration in the industry and thought there could be an adverse effect both on competition and on the free expression of editorial opinion.

Views of customers of Courier's printing services

6.11. We sought views from the Methodist Recorder, the Stratford-upon-Avon Herald and South Warwickshire Advertiser, the Llanelli Star and the Carmarthen Journal, all newspapers with printing contracts with Courier. All expressed themselves content with the continuity which EMAP had told them would be afforded by the proposed transfer: none objected to the transfer. The Hinckley Times, which also has a printing contract with Courier, expressed itself satisfied with the continuity which would be afforded by a transfer to EMAP. It did not object to the transfer and also felt that the merger would not inhibit news or free expression of opinion. The Patent Office told us that it had no reason to object to the proposed merger.

Views of local and provincial newspapers

6.12. We sought views from 11 editors of newspapers operating in and around the areas of operations of EMAP and Courier as well as from the Chairmen of three newspaper companies in the same areas. We only received comments from the Lincolnshire Standard Group: these are described in Chapter 5.

Views of The Press Council

6.13. The Press Council expressed a general concern about increasing concentration in the industry, but concluded that it could see no reason to believe that the particular proposed transfer would be against the public interest.

Views of advertising organisations

6.14. We asked 15 advertising agencies, advertising trade associations and other bodies involved in advertising for their views. We received representations from six of these. All responded favourably to the proposed transfer though one felt the regional rather than national impact needed to be assessed. Four drew attention to their high regard for EMAP's professional competence and concluded that the proposed transfer would have a beneficial effect.

Views of others interested in acquiring Courier

6.15. Mr Robert Jarman, who was involved in the initial bid for Courier by Marshquest, told us that the proposed transfer to EMAP would give the company a significant degree of concentration over a wide area. He did not think that Courier needed EMAP'S support, or that there was any essential synergy between the two companies.

6.16. Neither of the companies which had put in bids at the same time as EMAP wished to make any comments about the proposed transfer.

Views of local councils

6.17. We wrote to 11 county or borough councils seeking their views. Six replied offering no comments. The Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council said that any changes which led to the loss of the Banbury Guardian would be regrettable in view of the service which it offers in maintaining contact between Oxfordshire County Council and people in the north of the county. The Chief Executive of the London Borough of Camden said it was unlikely to favour further concentration of ownership of the press and hoped the transfer would not adversely affect job opportunities in Camden.

Views of chambers of commerce

6.18. We sought views on the proposed transfer from 16 chambers of commerce or trade. Of the six which replied three made no comment and the remainder raised no objection.