

DAVID YELLAND,

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Kim Brudenell,  
Solicitor to the Leveson Inquiry,  
C/o The Royal Courts of Justice,  
Strand,  
London,  
WC2A 2LL

23 August 2011

Dear Ms Brudenell,

Thank you for your letter which I opened yesterday upon returning from holiday and to which I am replying as quickly as possible. I have taken the view that I really don't require any legal assistance - and as I explained to you on the phone yesterday - I do want to assist you as I believe the Inquiry is very important.

I left The Sun in January 2003, having edited the paper from June 1998 to the end of 2002. I will answer all your questions to the best of my ability, but I hope you will bear in mind that the bulk of my time at the paper is now ten years ago or more, that I retained no documents when I left and that I have chosen, since 2003, to move well away from my old world and have very little contact with it.

I propose to go through your questions and answer them one at a time:

1. My name is David Yelland. I was born in 1963 and at a young age decided to be a reporter. I became a journalist in 1985 as a graduate trainee on the Buckinghamshire Advertiser, which was then part of Westminster Press, a subsidiary of Pearson. I was indentured for two years on that paper, passing the proficiency test set by the National Council for the Training of Journalists in 1987.

I moved from there to the Northern Echo where I was the industrial editor in Darlington, then the industrial correspondent of the North West Times in Manchester. I was subsequently a city and financial reporter in London for Thomson Regional Newspapers for two years, covering business news for the Western Mail, Newcastle Journal, Aberdeen Press and Journal and others.

In 1990 I was hired by The Sun, to be a city reporter on the small 'Sun Money' page. Later that year I was made City Editor. In 1993 I was sent to New York as the paper's New York correspondent and later that year transferred to the New York Post as deputy business editor, later becoming business editor.

In 1996 I became deputy editor of The Post and in 1998 I came back to London as editor of The Sun.

In January 2003 I left the paper and went to Harvard Business School and then joined the company in New York. I left News Corp in 2004 and divided my time between being a business consultant, a writer of children's fiction for Penguin Books and a parent, especially after my first wife passed away in 2006.

2. I reported to Les Hinton, who was Executive Chairman of the company. In practice, this was my day to day reporting structure. In terms of corporate governance, I had the PCC rules to work to and I took them seriously partly because of the respect I had for Lord Wakeham, the then PCC Chair. I am on record as saying I made mistakes in my early days, which I did, but I quickly developed a good relationship with the PCC.

I cannot think of anything else to add on corporate governance although there may be some relevant information in my answers below. In reality, Les Hinton was my boss and I would talk to him at least once a day, face to face, unless he was away. I would talk to Rupert Murdoch less frequently. I would usually speak to him once a week or every two weeks.

In terms of financial controls, the reporting structure was quite tight. I had a budget to which I worked and within which I was supposed to keep.

From memory, I was not able to then just 'spend' all the money on anything. I was held accountable for the weekly run rate, ie the amount we were spending as went along. Every Monday morning at 10am there would be a titles meeting for The Sun (each newspaper had a titles meeting.) At my titles meeting Les Hinton and the managing director of News Group (ie The Sun and the News of the World titles) would go through the previous week's circulation figures and budget.

In terms of budget, at titles meetings, I would rely on my managing editor to answer the bulk of these questions unless there was a large spending item, which I would expect to know about. At News International the managing editor is the person who is, to all intents and purposes, the paymaster general. Having said that, I had responsibility for the budget overall.

Titles meetings would be attended by me, my deputy editor and my managing editor. If I was away then my deputy would attend for me. On the management side, these meetings were attended by Les Hinton, the MD, the finance director of NI, the commercial director, the advertising director and certain other executives who I now cannot quite remember. Rupert Murdoch would attend very occasionally.

I felt I had a responsibility to set a leadership position in terms of what the paper would do and what it would not do. I was by no means perfect but the answer to your question about

'lawful, professional and ethical' conduct is that each editor sets a tone by the people he or she employs and the stories he or she is interested in and the degree of pressure put on the staff.

3. Each of the staff had the PCC code to work to and from memory it may even have been in our contracts. In terms of 'corporate governance' this would be the only thing that most staff would see, I think apart from the normal employment contract.
4. The paper lost a small number of PCC rulings when I was there, especially in year one. I took responsibility for these but made a huge effort to stop them happening after the first year. I did not like the experience of being found to have broken the code; So in practice the code worked better than many thought at the time. For example, Lord Wakeham (PCC Chairman) or his representative would often call me about privacy issues surrounding Prince William and Prince Harry. I would always comply.
5. I don't think they changed when I was there.
6. The head of news was responsible for news, the features editor for features and the sports editor for sport. However the vast majority of this would have been news. From memory other departments would have been the Bizarre desk (showbiz), New York office, the city page, women's page and health pages. An example would be if the head of news came in with a story about (from memory) Tony Blair having said he wanted some policies with 'eye catching initiatives.' I would speak to him and often the reporter (eg Trevor Kavanagh) to ensure I was confident that the story was correct. I would ask enough questions to be satisfied of this but I would not expect to always know the source. I was lucky to have some very experienced and respected reporters who I trusted and I have no reason to think I was wrong to do so. It is also true to say that there were hundreds of stories per week so I would have no idea of the source of most of the stories in the paper.
7. See answer to 6.
8. Each of us has to take ethics very seriously and each of us is responsible for our own actions, especially when given a role such as a national newspaper editor. What do they mean? In my view they (ethics) mean being true to oneself and doing the right thing no matter what the circumstances, remembering that you will not have this power forever and that you will be judged for the rest of your life and career on how you exercised that power. I am on record as saying I took this seriously and I did.
9. The Executive Chairman and the Chairman (ie Les Hinton and Rupert Murdoch) held me to account as Editor. I felt pressure of a commercial/financial nature of a degree that I think would be expected. Having said that, I found both of them to be reasonable and I would not want to characterise this pressure as of a ridiculous nature.
10. I did not. I never felt any financial pressure to find or print exclusive stories. I did feel a pressure to compete editorially, but that is a different thing and to be expected.

11. To the best of my knowledge, no.
12. N/a
13. N/a
14. N/a
15. N/a
16. This would be handled by the managing editor of the paper, which is the person at the newspaper responsible for financial matters.
17. See answer to 16.
18. I tried to balance these issues as best I could at the time and learned from some early errors to err on the side of caution. I was acutely aware of the temporary power I have been given and tried to exercise it with responsibility.
19. To the best of my knowledge, no.
20. N/a

I hope you will understand that I have no documents to send you and given the fact I have clearly been thinking about these matters (given what has happened on the News of the World) I have had time to think about my time at The Sun and have therefore been able to answer these questions quickly and honestly.

Yours Sincerely,

David Yelland (Sent via email)