

Raad voor de Journalistiek

BY E-MAIL

The Leveson Inquiry
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London WC2A 2LL
Great Britain

Amsterdam, 18 November 2011

Re: submission to the Inquiry from the Netherlands Press Council

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

With reference to the invitation for submissions, as mentioned on the website of your Inquiry, I herewith would like to inform you as follows.

The Netherlands Press Council is of the opinion that the right to freedom of expression and information is one of the fundamental human rights and a cornerstone of democracy. In order to exercise this right, the public needs reliable information which enables it to form an opinion on matters of common interest.

In this respect the media play the role of 'public watchdog'. This means that media professionals must be free to scrutinise the words and actions of public authorities. Considering this role of the media it seems best that they are regulated by the state as less as possible. After all, state-regulation may lead to a restriction of the freedom of the media to analyse actions of the government and thus to censorship.

Therefore, self-regulation seems to be the best alternative. In several Western and Eastern European countries the media accept their responsibility and support the self-regulation system in their country, to prevent that the government interferes severely. This self interest of the media is an important factor when it comes to the working of a self-regulation institute.

In The Netherlands a self-regulation system exists for over 50 years. The value of well functioning press councils in general, and the Netherlands Press Council specifically, increases almost every day. As a body that can be easily approached by private persons and organisations alike with complaints about journalistic conduct, the council is pre-eminently suited to deliver self-regulation in the media. For each case, it can investigate whether reporters have abided by professional ethics. In addition, the council is also the institute responsible for shaping opinions and developing journalistic norms, since its rulings establish general principles (for example, about granting the right of reply). The amalgamation of all rulings ever made creates a good picture of the Dutch journalistic ethics.

Raad voor de Journalistiek

The Board of the Netherlands Press Council Foundation – which facilitates the press council – has been focusing for some time on improving the council's standing. Many steps were taken over the last few years to improve the council's position.

During meetings of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE), attended by the council's secretary, it emerged that a fair few differences exist between the various press councils in Western European countries, both in terms of their organisation and working methods. Therefore the council was of the opinion that the experiences of Press councils in our neighbouring countries – like the British Press Complaints Commission – could be extremely helpful to answering the question about in which manner the position of the council could be strengthened further.

With an allowance of the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Pers (promotion fund for the media) the Netherlands Press Council has done a comparative research, from September 2007 until July 2008 inclusive, among several other European countries including Great Britain.

On the basis of the results the Netherlands Press Council has taken certain steps to improve its organisation. The council has attracted five 'public members' through an open selection procedure. Further, as from March 1st 2010, new regulations for the council's activities have become effective, in which is provided for more mediation activities, a simplified procedure for processing complaints (by the chairman and secretary together) and the possibility of reviewing decisions of the council. Moreover the staff of the council has increased with a paid chairman and an assistant secretary. To implement the improvements, the council needed more funding and therefore it has applied for additional financial support by the government. This support is granted for a temporary period of three years.

For your information I have attached more detailed information about the work of the Netherlands Press Council. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if some further explanation is desired.

Yours sincerely,


Daphne Koenig
Secretary General

Attachments:

- Media self-regulation in The Netherlands
- Guidelines from the Netherlands Press Council
- Brochure Netherlands Press Council
- Annual Report 2010/2011 – Highlights
- Report AIPCE meeting 2010 (held in Amsterdam)
- Report Press Councils in Western Europe

Raad voor de Journalistiek

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

**Daphne Koene,
Secretary General
Netherlands Press Council**

Date

26 June, 2012