

## Is PressBoF Winning the Royal Charter Race?

The Privy Council has initiated a consultation on a Royal Charter for the establishment of a recognition body for press self-regulation. **This consultation**, which ends on 24 May, is not however on the version agreed to by the political party leaders and accepted by Parliament on 18 of March. Instead it is the **version** proposed by a group of publishers on 25 April.

This caused some **confusion in the House of Lords** yesterday and Baroness Jones of Whitchurch posed the question. "Why is not the Privy Council also considering the one put forward on an all-party basis?" The answer she received was that maybe the Privy Council can only consider one petition at a time for the same area, but did the cross-party one actually go to the Privy Council?

Could it be that after all the back patting and face saving over the political deal made to implement Leveson's recommendations on 18 March no one actually petitioned the Privy Council?

According to **that agreement** the Commissioner of Public Appointment was to start off the process of forming a Recognition Panel by appointing an Appointments Committee, but at what point was the Charter supposed to go to the Privy Council? Royal Charters are usually applied for by already existing institutions.

The **PressBoF**, the Press Standards Board of Finance, petitioned the Privy Council with its version of the charter on 30 April. The PressBoF's membership currently includes some of the Leveson Inquiry's harshest critics. However, given that the organisation was established by newspaper publishers and has been raising the levy that funds the PCC, PressBoF can certainly claim meet the **Privy Council's criteria** for applicants:

*(a) the institution concerned should comprise members of a unique profession, and should have as members most of the eligible field for membership, without significant overlap with other bodies;*

*(b) corporate members of the institution should be qualified to at least first degree level in a relevant discipline;*

*(c) the institution should be financially sound and able to demonstrate a track record of achievement over a number of years; (. . .)*

Now in the hands of the Privy Council is a version of a Royal Charter that has been **deemed by some** to be the furthest from Leveson's recommendations. Since that version was submitted **a change was agreed** that would drop the qualified majority on the appointments to the new regulator's board, which would have essentially given publishers a veto. The statement announcing this agreed change included the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, both of which had previously opposed the version of the charter proposed by others in the industry.

If Hacked Off, the NUJ and others that find fault with PressBoF's version of a Royal Charter respond to the consultation, is there a chance the Privy Council will reject the application? If the small changes suggested really bring the rest of the industry on board it might be hard to find reason to do so.

