The Press Complaints Commission and the Media Standards Trust: game over?

Last week I expressed my puzzlement at the Media Standards Trust report on reform of the Press Complaints Commission. Indeed, this blog then became a little piece of a battle field that rapidly developed between the two organisations – one a journalist research and lobby group, and the other the industry self-regulation body for newspapers.

I thought the report was ill-conceived. Apart some disagreement with the actual content, I wondered why have a preliminary ‘stage one’ report without consultation which had so obviously made up its mind about the conclusions?

Anyway, various radio interview arguments, stiff letters and blog comments followed. Now I find myself in (slightly unexpected agreement) with Roy Greenslade:

“I was shocked when I read it because its scatter-gun attack on the PCC was such a missed opportunity. When it was released 10 days ago, I did my best to see some of the questions it raised in a positive light.

But it failed hopelessly, lacking any academic rigour. It also lacked any sense of history, either of press self-regulation in general or the PCC in particular….One of its key claims is that trust in journalists is low, “and overall may be declining further” (note the may). As I pointed out in my London Evening Standard column, we journalists have grown used to the public saying they do not trust us. ‘Twas ever thus.

The report’s major mistake, however, was in calling into question the PCC’s statistics. This is territory that Meyer and his able director, Tim Toulmin, can command with ease. If one is to have any hope of defeating them, proper investigation and analysis is required”

But we all make mistakes and this does not mean that the MST are wrong to want reform of newspaper regulation. As Roy Greenslade puts it:

“The PCC is imperfect (and I readily agree that self-regulation in any form is never going to be perfect). It does require reform. But the trust may as well abandon part two of its report now because no-one will take it seriously. That does not mean that we should give up the struggle to reform the PCC. We have to find a way of raising concerns, most definitely at the upcoming select committee hearing, without being trapped inside the statistical web spun so brilliantly by Meyer.”

You can read a report of the dispute, including the PCC letter to the MST here.

You can read the original MST report with links to the Director’s blog here.

You can read the MST Director’s response to my original blog within the blog article itself, but also a response from report co-author Stephen Barnett in the comments.

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