

## Leveson Round-Up: Has Cameron Shifted the Goalposts?

The **terms** of the Leveson Inquiry are extremely broad. But they do not include holding individual ministers to account. The government asked the inquiry to make recommendations for future policy and behaviour rather than to judge on behaviour of current and past ministers, and the **questions** that Leveson has chosen to ask are also explicitly directed at future policy.

David Cameron's claim that the Leveson Inquiry will provide scrutiny of the minister probably refers to the general transparency value of the evidence session, rather than any direct sanction that the Leveson Inquiry can provide.

By asking the Inquiry to hold Hunt to account Cameron is actually changing the original terms of the inquiry, and putting the Judge in an even more difficult position than **he was in** before.

If Leveson does report that media policy has been captured by media interests, and Hunt survives this, Leveson will be revealed as a 'truth and reconciliation commission' for the media and politics. Leveson will provide the evidence, and the court of public opinion can make a decision on Hunt – unless Cameron sees that as too costly for the government. But apart from the high level political fallout provided by the process itself – what is likely to come out of the process in terms of recommendations?

The April evidence sessions provided immediate and damning evidence for the claim that the media policymaking process has **been corrupted** by the reciprocities among media companies and politicians.

The appropriate response to that is not yet clear. Part of the response is new behavioural rules: reform of the PCC and its code, and a new transparency of meetings between owners and politicians are part of an emerging separation of powers between media and politicians, but Leveson's attention will soon turn to the structural issue: were media markets simply too concentrated?

The questions Leveson has set for himself – and for anyone who wishes to provide evidence – are focused on the concept of 'media plurality'. If politicians have been too accommodating of media owners – including in matters of media policy – this may be because they are simply too big and there are too few of them.

“Is there a need for plurality of voice in news providers within the press, in providers of other types of news media or across the media as a whole? How does access to news information through the internet affect the need for plurality? What level of plurality is required? Is plurality of ownership a sufficient proxy for plurality of voice?”

It is surely these questions of structure that should take up a growing part of the inquiry's deliberations during May and June, and we should see further debate of the **CMR proposal** for new ownership limits, and replacement of the 2003 **public interest test** with a more robust system of market reviews.

At this point, there is no way to predict how Leveson will link the structural and the behavioural questions, but in the meantime, as part of its **Policy Brief Series**, the Media Policy Project will be providing some answers to all of these questions before Leveson's deadline on June 15th.

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