

## **Written evidence from Sir David Bell (STI0005)**

*I served as an Assessor on the Leveson Inquiry and attended most of the public hearings. I am submitting these thoughts at the suggestion of Baroness D'Souza. I am not in a position to comment in any detail on questions 2-5 in the letter from Lord Norton so I have limited my comments to questions 1 and 6.*

As Assessors we met from time to time as a group with the presiding Judge and we discussed possible lines of approach with him. We did not have – and did not want to have – any role in the questioning of witnesses and it was always clear that it was for the Judge alone to reach conclusions. But the Judge did discuss some elements of his thinking as he began to develop his report.

The Inquiry had a considerable immediate impact in large part because it was live streamed and the evidence could thus be broadcast. As Assessors we were particularly keen that the proceedings should be as widely accessible by as many people as possible and they were. To that extent the process was Effective but I felt it was far from perfect for the following reasons:

1. It was held in a court and presided over by an excellent judge. Counsel for the Inquiry was also very able and forensic. But it was never quite clear whether this was indeed a judicial 'event'. Witnesses were required to attend and did so. But the 'rules of evidence' did not seem to be as they would have been had it been a full scale court of law and counsel sometimes did not have the resources or the time to press his argument as he would have done in Court.
2. The result was that on occasion issues were 'left hanging' and statements were made which might not have survived in a court. The Inquiry team worked very hard and often developed good lines of questioning, but follow through was sometimes missing.
3. The Judge did an excellent job overseeing the proceedings and keeping the Inquiry on track and followed it up with a very comprehensive report which I am sure has stood the test of time.
4. But the process was hugely slowed down by the number of designated core participants and by the fact that each of them seemed entitled to see all the statements of all the witnesses and on occasion to challenge them at length. Here again the 'rules of

evidence ` were unclear and the Inquiry team did not usually have the resources to challenge statements that were made by core participants which on occasion `clouded` the process.

5. In this case many of the key participants were media companies with deep pockets who could pay for teams of lawyers . Others – who did not agree with the positions taken by the media companies but had much less money- were clearly at a disadvantage .
6. In retrospect the Inquiry largely failed to achieve its objective to improve the system of regulating the press. Part Two was never held and the conclusions of Part One were stillborn largely because the government had no wish to implement them.
7. The terms of reference did not leave much scope for the Judge to broaden the Inquiry to include the impact of the internet and social media. Even as the power of the printed word seems to be ebbing so the reach and influence of social media was growing even as the Inquiry progressed.
8. It was not clear to us as Assessors whether there was any way in which the terms of reference could have been broadened as the Inquiry continued. In the event we probably missed a trick.

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