

BUSCOMBE ADDRESSES SOCIETY OF EDITORS

Baroness Buscombe, Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, has delivered the Society of Editors annual lecture at its conference in Stansted.

In a wide-ranging speech, she said technological developments in the way in which people communicate amount to "an historical and permanent shift in favour of free expression over the forces of censorship and restraint" - but warned the media that she will expect the PCC to be given "the freedom to develop rapidly - if necessary - to exploit the opportunities presented by media convergence".

She said it was a "constitutional outrage" that the use of so-called super injunctions was preventing proper democratic scrutiny of the way in which the law of confidence was developing, and called on the government to do something about it "without delay".

She also dismissed suggestions that the PCC should be reconstituted as some sort of quasi-legal regulator, saying:

"In a world where individuals can communicate en masse and bypass traditional media altogether - just think of Stephen Fry and his almost one million Twitter followers - it is just no longer possible to restrict the free flow of information from the top down. The sooner that regulators, legislators, and lawyers realise this, the better... In this new environment, frameworks of good practice, coupled with easy, accessible complaints mechanisms are the way to keep standards high".

She also said that politicians should learn to ignore the press sometimes, telling the assorted editors: "You are not always right; and I know that you do not claim to be. But the power of a shouty headline is intense, believe me. It can spook all but the most robust of politicians. And the result can be bad legislation and a steady erosion of freedom."

ENDS

Notes

1. To read the speech, click here.
2. Baroness Buscombe has been Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission since April 2009. Click here for her biographical notes:
<http://www.pcc.org.uk/news/index.html?article=NTYzNg==>
3. For more information about the Society of Editors, click here:
http://www.societyofeditors.co.uk/page-view.php?page_id=140&parent_page_id=0
4. For more information call Stephen Abell on 07980 264359 or Bob Satchwell, Executive Director of the Society of Editors on 07860 562 815.

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