Tighter press controls not priority, say 99% of voters

The political establishment's appetite for further press regulation is not supported by the public, with only 1 per cent believing that it should be a priority for the government, a survey has found.

The survey, commissioned by the News Media Association (NMA), which represents Britain's newspaper publishers, found that young voters, who are the least likely to read newspapers, were the most concerned about regulation.

Three per cent of those questioned aged between 18 and 24 said that press regulation should be one of the government's top four priorities over the next few years. Labour voters were three times more likely than Tories to consider regulation a priority.

The top priorities across all voters were Brexit (53 per cent), health (48 per cent), immigration and asylum (45 per cent) and the economy (44 per cent).

Karen Bradley, the culture secretary, is due to make a decision on implementing Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 after the consultation.

Section 40 would require newspapers that are not members of the officially approved regulator to pay all legal costs of those who take cases to court even if they lose.

Lynne Anderson, the NMA's deputy chief executive, said: "It is abundantly clear that there is absolutely no public appetite for further activity from the government in this area, such as the reopening of the Leveson inquiry, where there are other much more pressing priorities at hand."

Half of the 1,632 people who responded to the YouGov survey believed the government should foot the bill.

The survey, commissioned by the NMA, found that 82 per cent of voters believe that newspapers should be more tightly regulated than social media.

If you wish to write a response to the government's consultation, which closed on January 16, visit www.research.net/r/9WH5LV3.

Complaints scheme will close papers’

David Brown

Local newspapers face closure if forced to pay the costs of defeating complaints under a scheme operated by the state-sponsored press regulator, publishers warned yesterday.

Newspapers will have to pay up to £3,500 for an arbitrator to rule on a complaint and would not be able to recover their legal costs even if successful. In contrast, victorious complainants face no charges and could claim up to £300 an hour — to a maximum of £3,000 — for their lawyers.

As arbitration is less risky for claimants than pursuing an expensive libel action in the High Court, there are fears it could mean many more cases being brought against newspapers.

Max Mosley, whose family trusts are the main financial backers of Impress, is due to make a decision on implementing Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 after the consultation.

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Lynne Anderson, the NMA’s deputy chief executive, said: “It is abundantly clear that there is absolutely no public appetite for further activity from the government in this area, such as the reopening of the Leveson inquiry, where there are other much more pressing priorities at hand.”

Half of the 1,632 people who responded to the YouGov survey believed that the government should foot the bill.

The poll also found that more than half of voters believed that Facebook should have the same level of regulation as newspapers following complaints about ‘fake news’ on social media.

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