

‘Breaking the rules in investigative journalism’
by Francis Bennion

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Breaking the rules in investigative journalism

Sir,

The article by Mark Thompson, the Director General of the BBC, (22 July 2011) cites approvingly John Witherow’s statement that investigative journalism sometimes requires ‘breaking the rules’. Which rules would those be? Do they mean legal rules? If not, what do they mean? Neither Witherow nor Thompson are clear on this.

At the select committee hearing on 19 July both Rupert Murdoch and his son James Murdoch insisted that investigative journalists should not break the law. Mark Thompson ends his article by saying that we want ‘a serious discussion about the difference between good and bad investigative journalism and a complex but necessary debate about where the boundary of acceptable journalistic practice lies’.

The debate need not be complicated. We are proud to live under the rule of law. To break the law because that seems expedient is to apply the shoddy doctrine that the end justifies the means. So the acceptable boundary is between breaking the law and observing it. And that means civil as well as criminal law.¹

References

None

¹ Published in *The Times* 25 July 2011.