

Executive Summary

Setting the scene for a national, multi-stakeholder discussion series on the future supply of trustworthy, public-interest news in the UK

Discussion paper authors



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Expert interviewees



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Frances Cairncross

Frances Cairncross is an economist, journalist and academic. She is a senior fellow at the School of Public Policy, UCLA.



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Madhav Chinnappa is Google's Director of News Ecosystem Development, working on partnerships and collaboration between Google and the news industry.



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Natalie Fenton is a Professor of Media and Communications and Co-Head of the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London.



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Alison Gow is Audience and Content Director UK at Reach PLC (formerly Trinity Mirror).



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Sofie Hvitved is Senior Advisor and Head of Media at the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies.



Shelina Janmohamed

Shelina Janmohamed is a writer and commentator on Muslim social and religious trends and Vice President of Ogilvy Islamic Marketing.



Douglas McCabe

Douglas McCabe is a leading expert on print and digital publishing and Chief Executive Officer at Enders Analysis Ltd.



James Mitchinson

James Mitchinson is Editorial Director at the Yorkshire Post. Previously he was Editor at the Sheffield Star.



Nic Newman

Nic Newman is Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism where he writes on the future of digital media.



Onora O'Neill

Onora O'Neill is a philosopher who focuses on international justice and the roles of trust and accountability in public life.



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Helen Philpot is Regional Vice President and Media Industry Sales Lead at Salesforce.



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Kirsty Styles is a lecturer at University of Huddersfield and PhD candidate at University of Central Lancashire, where she's researching the environmental sustainability of the news media.



John Whittingdale

John Whittingdale is the Conservative MP for Maldon. He was Minister of State for Media and Data between 2020-2021.



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News Futures 2035 consortium

Society of Editors, Public Interest News Foundation, Independent Community News Network, Digital Editors Network, Bloomberg, Reach Plc and HBM Advisory.

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News Futures 2035 is a multi-stage foresight project that responds to concerns about the future of public-interest news in the UK, and brings together stakeholders from inside, alongside and outside the news industry to imagine, and create, a better tomorrow.

As a strategic foresight study, it does not attempt to offer definitive answers about what lies ahead – foresight understands the future as an emerging entity that’s only partially visible in the present. We aim to foster shared visions while considering the implications and the opportunities of various scenarios.

Our goal is not to forecast the future, but instead to provide actionable insights and inspiration for actors to envision and create the future our society needs to thrive.



🕒 MIDDAY 13/10/22
17:00 14/10/22

📍 NEWSPEAK HOUSE,
LONDON

💬 DISCUSS RELEVANT
EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS
& FACTORS AND MAP OUT
DIFFERENT FUTURE
SCENARIOS

ROUNDTABLE 1

💬 BETWEEN 1ST AND 2ND
ROUNDTABLES, WE WILL
STRESS-TEST OUR
ASSUMPTIONS FROM THE
SCENARIOS BY ELICITING
FEEDBACK FROM A WIDER
EXPERT PANEL
FACILITATED BY THE
COPENHAGEN INSTITUTE
FOR FUTURES STUDIES

🕒 MIDDAY 24/11/22
17:00 25/11/22

📍 THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY
MUSEUM, MANCHESTER

💬 RE-EVALUATE, ADAPT AND
FURTHER DEVELOP THESE
SCENARIOS AND CONSIDER
THE POSSIBLE
IMPLICATIONS

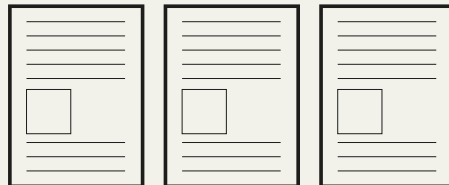
ROUNDTABLE 2

🕒 MIDDAY 02/02/23
17:00 03/02/23

📍 BRIDEWELL HALL,
ST BEDE, LONDON

💬 REVIEW THE IMPLICATIONS
AND CONSIDER
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
ACTIONS FOR
STAKEHOLDERS, AS WELL
AS CONSIDERING NEXT
STEPS FOR THE NEWS
FUTURES 2035 INITIATIVE

ROUNDTABLE 3



💬 THIS PHASE OF THE
PROJECT WILL CONCLUDE
WITH A FINAL NEWS
FUTURES 2035 REPORT,
AND LINKED SCHOLARLY
PAPERS. AND, OF COURSE,
THAT'S WHEN THE
EXCITING WORK OF
COLLABORATING TO ACT
ON THESE INSIGHTS
REALLY RAMPS UP

The definition

This paper has been written to help us start considering the future provision and sustainability of public-interest news (PIN), but first we have attempted to define what is meant by PIN. While it became very clear that people hold differing views, we take it to mean: news and other information produced according to high standards of ethical conduct and best practice in journalism and made accessible to the public, who are able to recognise its authorship, understand it, and assess for themselves its benefits.

These are broadly framed as the following:

- Informing members of the public about matters of relevance to them as citizens
- Enabling local communities to become aware of matters of common concern
- Providing information for people to feel equipped in the democratic process
- Promoting matters of importance to society
- Excluding information that is biased or inaccurate or impinges on a right to privacy

Political context

We have discussed the role of the media in holding people in power to account – set against the regulatory framework in which it operates and how independent it is of government intervention.

In 2018, Dame Frances Cairncross' seminal review into the sustainability of high-quality journalism, which was commissioned by the government, produced nine recommendations for action.

Cairncross made a case for an urgent need for public intervention to safeguard the sustainability of PIN. Since then, there have been some efforts to provide this through limited government funding and the establishment of a Local News Partnership between the BBC and the News Media Association – representing legacy print publishers and benefiting the local news industry.

But there is a profound belief that more needs to be done. The difficult question – that has not yet been answered – is by whom and how, to ensure ultimately that the provision of PIN remains independent of government.

There is also the matter of regulation – not least concerning the big tech companies that have destabilised the traditional provision of properly funded public-interest news. This paper discusses the role of the government in introducing legislation to control how tech companies operate and, particularly, establishing a mechanism for ensuring a fairer distribution of the revenues they generate from content produced by news publishers.

Economic context

It is of little surprise that economic challenges for the media industry are at the heart of many people's concerns about the future provision of public-interest news.

It is probably true that by 2035, we will no longer have printed newspapers. We already know that large, legacy print publishers, particularly in the local sector, are struggling to monetise their move to a digital-first operation – some already call this 'market failure'. As national titles seem to be faring better, it is in local communities where the loss of reporting of local democracy and decision-making will be most keenly felt.

There is general agreement around a need to embrace 'innovation' for publishers to thrive – and that innovation is coming from outside of the legacy sector. Niche media publishers of unbundled content packages are likely to prosper, by identifying the needs of an audience – who are also prepared to pay.

Experts are divided on whether there should be national intervention to subsidise the provision of public-interest news in the future.

Social context

The rise of social media, declining feelings of trust, growing news fatigue and even news avoidance are big-impact issues for those involved in providing public-interest news.

The Reuters Institute has reported on a worrying decline in trust in the news media – a finding echoed by the world-renowned Edelman Trust Barometer. Yet, the public also has low trust in alternative providers of PIN, such as social-media platforms.

That need for trust drives at the heart of the role of PIN as a provider of information that should help support the democratic process. Some commentators question whether the media is to blame here – for not suitably acknowledging the social impact that a lack of trust can have, or responding adequately.

There appears to be a disconnect between publishers and the community, a lack of understanding of what the community needs and expects. This cannot be discussed without acknowledging the continued lack of diversity in reporting, newsrooms and leadership – something that is not being addressed seriously enough.

Technological context

Technology has been a force for both good and bad in the history of the media in the UK and beyond.

On one hand, it has created hugely negative disruption – responsible for structural damage that the industry is still yet to come to terms with. Just one issue here is the ‘atomisation’, or separation, of different content, which has exposed public-interest news as being expensive to produce, while being of less interest to audiences, therefore rendering it uneconomic to produce.

On the other hand, technology can act as a force for positive change. New technologies can make people’s jobs easier, while new platforms help us showcase content, reach new audiences and lower the barriers to entry for new entrants.

There is always a question of how the industry acquires the skills to adapt and use new technologies. There is a lack of AI literacy today, not enough training, or perhaps not enough time to train, and a culture that often still resists big change – all of these work against the need to adopt and adapt quickly.

Those that embrace these new opportunities, and are prepared to be bold and to experiment, are the ones most likely to prosper.

Legal context

The issue of press regulation has been unresolved since the Leveson Inquiry in 2012 – while the BBC has endured an uneasy relationship with the government in relation to its Charter for many years now.

It is important to ensure that the media industry remains independent and is protected by legislation so that it can hold power to account, while also ensuring there is justice for victims of intrusion or abuse.

Environmental context

As our environmental challenges mount, our newsrooms are slowly adapting to the need to properly report on this global, complex and dynamic story, which is both impacted by and impacting the way we live on the planet.

Efforts are being made to put environmental concerns at the heart of all reporting – but our experts suggested it may take a change of leadership to make this a reality everywhere – something that may not happen quickly enough. Solutions journalism, or reporting that focuses on the human elements in these stories, offer us hope. But at many titles, there is still no breakthrough, in terms of getting the appropriate column inches or air time, and therefore the budgets, to finance this type of reporting.

This section also discusses some of the wider harms embedded into our businesses – in the very production and consumption of journalism, and the reliance on advertising as a business model, which asks people to buy more, while simultaneously reporting on the harms that can produce.

Conclusion

This paper does not set out to reach any conclusions. It lays the groundwork for the plenary debates about the opportunities and challenges facing the sustainability of public-interest news reporting. It should provide enough background information for participants to feel more informed as they contribute to the forthcoming discussions and the solution-finding sessions.

Next steps



News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper

We advise that you read the full News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper.



Introductory meeting video

Our Introductory Meeting took place on Thursday 6 October.

News Futures 2035 recap video

The News Futures 2035 plenaries took place in October and November 2022.

Further consultations

We are also considering other ways to consult with stakeholders between Plenaries 2 and 3, and between Plenary 3 and the release of the final report. Activities will include online executive briefings and feedback sessions (sounding board session, if you will). Do be in touch with any questions, suggestions or invitations to host /co-host a session online or in-person.

Who else? The invitation for others you think should be consulted for this project remains open. Please ask them to complete the Expression of Interest Form [here](#), or send the name and email contact details directly to us at NewsFutures@uclan.ac.uk.

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Google
News Initiative

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