

# NEWS FUTURES 2035

## Final Report

May 2024

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Over 18 months, the News Futures 2035 initiative brought together more than 300 thought leaders from various backgrounds, including industry, policy, regulation, civil society, and academia. Their goal? To address concerns about the sustainability of trustworthy public-interest news.

The initiative confirmed these concerns are valid, but also highlighted that solutions exist. A key outcome was a clear definition of public-interest news. This definition emphasises the importance of identifiable news producers and distributors working together. This would ensure high-quality information is accessible to everyone. The public must also be literate enough to understand the news, evaluate its credibility, and have practical means to address grievances.

This News Futures 2035 report calls for a united front. It urges all stakeholders to work together in a structured and inclusive manner. This collaboration aims to address these critical issues and pave the way for action through the creation of the News Futures Forum.

The Forum will be a structured, multi-stakeholder process operating under the Chatham House Rule. It will foster mutual understanding among participants and inspire collaborative actions to ensure a reliable supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK for the next decade - and beyond.

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**Presented by**

Dr François Nel

Dr Kamila Rymajdo







# Contents

1. The Project Team And Partners	1
2. Foreword	2
3. Executive Summary	5
4. Introduction	7
5. Research Question And Definition Of Public-Interest News	11
6. Methodology	13
7. Scenarios Of The Future	19
8. Issues	21
9. Key Recommendation: News Futures Forum	43
10. Conclusion	60
11. References	61
12. Defining Our Key Terms	66
13. Appendix	68
14. Additional Project Insights	75

## For citations:

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# The Project Team And Partners

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News Futures 2035's Principal Investigator was Dr François Nel, Reader in Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Central Lancashire. Dr Kamila Rymajdo was the Post-doctoral Researcher.

Collaborating partners were Bloomberg, Chrysalis Transformations, Digital Editors Network (DEN), HBM Advisory, the Independent Community News Network (ICNN), the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) and Reach Plc.

The Project Advisors were Dr Bruno Tindemans, Chief Foresight Officer for the government Department of Works in Brussels; Alain Wouters, a strategy consultant formerly of the Group Planning department at Shell.

The Steering Board included Jeremy Clifford, Director, Chrysalis Transformations; Alison Gow, Editorial Consultant and Fellow of the Society of Editors; Jonathan Heawood, Executive Director, Public Interest News Foundation; Alan Hunter, Co-founder, HBM Advisory; Lisa MacLeod, Director, Head of EMEA, FT Strategies; Emma Meese, Director, Independent Community News Network; Inga Thordar, Chief External Relations Officer, Ocean Born Foundation; and Laura Zelenko, Senior Executive Editor, Bloomberg News.

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# Foreword

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The News Futures 2035 foresight initiative responds to concerns about the future of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK, and beyond.

To address this challenge, the News Futures 2035 consortium of news associations, publishers, and individual industry thought leaders embarked on a participatory, action-research project. With the support of the Google News Initiative, more than 300 experts from industry, policy, and civil society have actively engaged in this rigorous facilitated process over more than 18 months.

Two critical uncertainties impacting the future supply of public-interest news were identified and examined in depth: one is the body of policies and regulations that might be either constraining or enabling. The other is the relevance of public-interest news to audiences and the wider society, on the one hand, and the vision, mission and business models of news-producing organisations and individuals, on the other.

In the process, a clear and authoritative definition of public-interest news emerged. It emphasises that the sustainable supply of such news depends on identifiable news producers and distributors ensuring high-quality information is accessible to all. It further underlines that the public must also be literate enough to understand and assess the relevance and benefits of the news - and have practical and timely means to address any grievances about the work of news producers and distributors.

The project clarified that concerns about the sustainability of public-interest news are neither unfounded nor insurmountable. It also identified several potential solutions to these challenges, which build on recent government inquiries and initiatives from the public, private, and third sectors aimed at addressing these concerns.

In doing so, participants recognised the importance, not only of the insights, but also of the participatory process of generating them. We came to recognise that efforts to address the challenges facing public-interest news are more likely to be successful if they are informed by a better understanding of the issues, inclusive of a diversity of voices, timely and, where appropriate, joined-up.



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**Dr François Nel**

*Principal Investigator:  
News Futures 2035*

As such, this report is a call to action for all stakeholders who care about the future of public-interest news. If you believe that public-interest news is vital for the health of the information ecosystems on which the well-being of communities, markets, democracies and our planet depend, and if you recognise that it informs citizens, holds power to account and supports knowledgeable decision-making, then you will agree that stakeholders need to work together in a structured, inclusive way to address the critical issues facing this essential service.

If all stakeholders put the public interest first and come together to address the findings and recommendations that have emerged from this rigorous and inclusive process, we can together outline a roadmap for action through the News Futures Forum.

We urge you to join us in making these recommendations a reality.



# The News Futures 2035 Process

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- **Q2 2022**  
SECURED FUNDING AND ESTABLISHED THE NEWS FUTURES 2035 STEERING BOARD

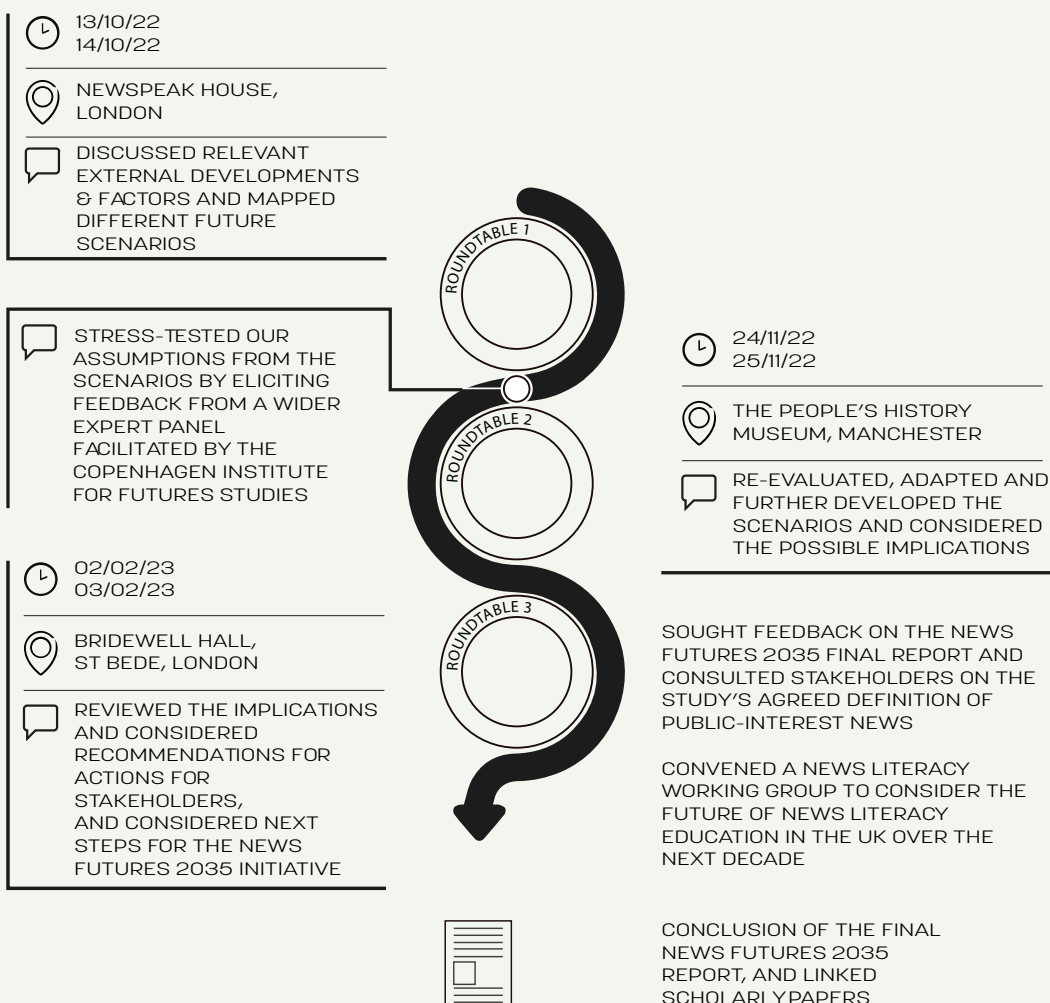
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- **Q2 2022**  
FORMED THE NF2035 CONSORTIUM

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- **Q3 2022**  
DEVELOPED THE DISCUSSION PAPER, BASED ON EXPERT INTERVIEWS

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3

## NEWS FUTURES *Forum*

THE PROJECT'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT OFFER A POTENTIAL ROADMAP FOR MOVING FROM A FIXED-TERM PROJECT TO A NEWS FUTURES FORUM

# Executive Summary

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There is a crisis affecting public-interest news. Audiences are disengaging, business models are challenged, and policymakers are struggling to respond to the worsening situation.

Across the UK, many people are working hard to address this crisis: news industry leaders, journalists, academics, activists, policymakers, regulators, technology companies, and others. Despite their best efforts, the situation remains critical.

Stakeholders who share underlying values find themselves isolated or even at odds with each other because they sit in different parts of the news media landscape. As a result, initiatives are duplicated, energies are wasted, and opportunities are missed.

In this report, we set out a simple but far-reaching remedy for this situation. We recommend that everyone who has a stake in the crisis affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of public-interest news should come together to create a News Futures Forum – a long-term initiative, modelled on track two diplomacy,<sup>1</sup> where participants with very different perspectives are able to meet in a high-trust environment to talk about shared challenges and find solutions.

A News Futures Forum would have many benefits:

- The Forum would **get people out of their bunkers** and create new relationships across the news industry and beyond.
- The Forum would **remove unnecessary duplication** between stakeholders, so that they don't waste time reinventing the wheel.
- The Forum would **build a shared understanding** between policymakers and experts on the ground, making policy interventions more likely to succeed.




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“Our best chance to identify a sustainable future for the provision of trustworthy public-interest news is for all stakeholders in the media industry, including publishers, tech platforms, academia, industry and regulatory bodies and those with a vested interest to find a way to come together in an environment where they are able to collaborate and work constructively, putting their differences to one side.”

**Jeremy Clifford**

*Co-author of the News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper and member of the project steering board*

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<sup>1</sup>Louise Diamond and John W. McDonald, *Multi-track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace* (Kumarian Press, 1996).



- The Forum would **shape an ongoing conversation between news providers and their audiences**, so that public-interest news genuinely meets the public's needs.
- The Forum would **remove the walls** that divide news industry leaders from activists, journalists from academics, and technologists from regulators, building a community that is committed to securing the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK.

The vision of a News Futures Forum was inspired by the News Futures 2035 project, which was the first-ever opportunity in the UK for news industry stakeholders to come together and discuss public-interest news, using foresight methodology to imagine different versions of the future.

News Futures 2035 was a strategic foresight study which aimed to cultivate shared visions concerning the future supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK. Stemming from concerns raised in the 2019 Cairncross Review,<sup>2</sup> which advocated for urgent public intervention, the study noted ongoing efforts but recognised the consensus for further action.

More than 300 participants engaged in the process between Summer 2022 and Spring 2024, contributing through expert interviews, two surveys, four workshops, and multiple consultations. A core group of approximately 30 participants utilised a multi-stakeholder methodology to discern issues affecting the provision of public-interest news, culminating in the development of four scenarios during three in-person plenary roundtables, further refined through online consultations with diverse stakeholders.

We hope that this report is of value to anyone who cares about the future of public-interest news. We would be delighted to work with you to create the News Futures Forum.

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<sup>2</sup>Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism* (House of Commons, 2019), accessed May 15, 2024, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779882/021919\\_DCMS\\_Cairncross\\_Review\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779882/021919_DCMS_Cairncross_Review_.pdf).

# Introduction

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Public-interest news informs and empowers the public about issues of shared concern, from community initiatives to international relations. Without public-interest news, people wouldn't know what was going on around them, wouldn't be able to hold power to account and wouldn't be able to contribute to public debate. Communities would be infected by misinformation and polarisation and, ultimately, democracy would fail.

In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the old models of public-interest news have come under massive, sustained pressure from new technologies, changing audience behaviours, political turmoil, and economic upheaval. As we look ahead, there is a growing risk that some forms of public-interest news – particularly local and investigative journalism – will disappear altogether.

How can we build a better future, in which public-interest news not only survives but thrives? How can we improve on the public-interest news of the twentieth century, which represented the views of some members of society, but excluded others? These are complex issues, with intertwined challenges and diverse stakeholders, including news providers, policymakers, technology companies, civil society organisations, and academics – and of course the public.

In the UK, there have been five major inquiries into public-interest news in the past five years: the Cairncross Review (2019);<sup>3</sup> the House of Lords Communications Committee's inquiry into the future of journalism (2020);<sup>4</sup> the Scottish Government's Public Interest Journalism Working Group (2021);<sup>5</sup> the House of Commons DCMS Select Committee's inquiry into the sustainability of local journalism (2023);<sup>6</sup> and the Wales Public Interest Journalism Working Group (2023).<sup>7</sup> Collectively, these inquiries have made dozens of recommendations, of which barely a handful have been implemented, with limited impact, in part because stakeholders are divided and preoccupied by short-term solutions that are not joined up.

In the News Futures 2035 study, we did not set out to repeat the work of these valuable initiatives. Instead, we brought stakeholders together from across the news industry and beyond to talk openly and honestly about their hopes and fears for public-interest news.



Moreover, as a strategic foresight study, News Futures 2035 did not attempt to offer definitive answers about what lies ahead – foresight understands the future as an emerging entity that is only partially visible in the present. It aimed to foster shared visions while considering the implications and the opportunities of various scenarios, by answering the focal question:

**How can the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK be secured?**

Although there was no agreed shared definition for public-interest news amongst the stakeholders at the beginning of the process, after consulting participants throughout the study, a definition emerged that has significant implications for policy and practice in service of the ultimate beneficiaries: the public (see p. 11).

During the News Futures 2035 process, which took place between Summer 2022 and Spring 2024, over 300 participants took part in two surveys, three workshops, and 10 consultations. A core research group of circa 30 participants applied a multi-stakeholder methodology to identify the driving forces affecting the industry as well as critical uncertainties that might impact the future supply of public-interest news.

The core research group drafted four scenarios to develop a shared vision of what the future of public-interest news should look like – and what it should not. These were stress-tested through the online consultations with wider stakeholders, including industry executives, policymakers and regulators, academia, and civil society actors.

<sup>3</sup>Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism*, 2019.

<sup>4</sup>House of Lords Communications Committee, *The Future of Journalism: House of Lords Communications Committee Report* (House of Lords, 2020), accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/communications/future-of-journalism/211120-Future-of-Journalism-Committee-Report.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>Public Interest Journalism Working Group (Scottish Government, 2021), <https://www.gov.scot/groups/public-interest-journalism-working-group/> [no longer active].

<sup>6</sup>House of Commons, Digital, Culture, *Media and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee, Sustainability of Local Journalism: House of Commons DCMS Select Committee Report*, (House of Commons, 2023), accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/dcms/Report-on-the-sustainability-of-local-journalism.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>Wales Public Interest Journalism Working Group, *Of and For Wales: Towards a Sustainable Future for Public Interest Journalism* (Wales Media Institute, 2023), accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-08/of-and-for-wales-towards-a-sustainable-future-for-public-interest-journalism.pdf>.

In this report, we describe the complex issues that were identified by participants; and show how the News Futures Forum is our best – perhaps our only – chance of addressing these complex issues, through collaboration and creativity, rather than competition and conflict. We discussed a wide range of factors that will affect public-interest news over the years between now and 2035.

The first part of this report sets out the most significant issues that participants identified, as follows:

- Declining public trust in and engagement with news media
- Double exclusion: access is a challenge for the public and news producers
- Media literacy deficit amongst journalists and citizens, as well as public and political actors
- Inadequate funding for public-interest news, particularly local
- Concentration of news media ownership, particularly local
- The dominance of online intermediaries
- Industry solutions that ignore journalism’s democratic role
- Shortfall in the number and diversity of journalists
- Lack of AI skills among journalists
- Systemic constraints within policymaking
- Difficult relationship between governments and news media
- The climate imperative in media

Over a series of workshops and consultations, we boiled these issues down to two critical uncertainties that will determine the prospects for public-interest news in 2035 and beyond:

- Whether public-interest news is seen as **relevant** or **irrelevant** to audiences, media workers, organisational objectives, business strategies, and the broader society.
- Whether there is an **enabling** or **constraining** policy environment for public-interest news.

Putting these factors together, we set out four possible scenarios for the future:

## **The Wilderness Scenario**

This scenario depicts a future with minimal or ineffective regulations for content online and off. Public-interest news providers struggle to compete in this ‘marketplace of ideas’ dominated by powerful tech companies controlling news distribution. Additionally, they face fierce competition from



a surge of mis-, dis-, and malinformation actors. This lack of control leads to a severe decline in public trust towards all institutions, including the media. The public becomes disengaged and unwilling to seek out trustworthy news sources.

## **The Zoo Scenario**

This scenario envisions a future with overly supportive and restrictive regulations for news media. While these policies aim to protect public-interest news providers, they have the unintended consequence of hindering innovation within the industry. This stifling environment makes it difficult for news organisations to produce and distribute content that remains not only relevant to the public, but also engaging for a wider audience.

## **The Museum Scenario**

This scenario portrays a future where public-interest news is suffocated by excessively restrictive policies and regulations. These regulations not only stifle innovation within the news industry, but also severely hinder the ability to supply and distribute relevant news to the public. This creates a stagnant environment where public-interest news struggles to compete and audiences are left with limited access to valuable information.

## **The Nature Reserve Scenario**

This scenario depicts a future with well-balanced policies and regulations designed to foster a healthy information ecosystem. These regulations aim to protect, preserve, and promote a news environment that encourages ongoing innovation. This, in turn, ensures the continued supply and accessibility of highly relevant and trustworthy public-interest news for the public.

The final part of this report sets out our recommendation for a News Futures Forum that will build on this project by creating ongoing dialogue between stakeholders and members of the public, helping to ensure a future in which public-interest news is both relevant to the public and supported by an enabling policy environment.

*NB When this report states that participants in News Futures 2035 'agreed' with an idea, it does not necessarily mean that all participants agreed.*

# Research Question And Definition Of Public-Interest News

The research question, 'How can the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK be secured?' was developed collaboratively with the steering group. This collaboration acknowledged the complexity of trust, as it's understood differently by various stakeholders. News providers may strive to be trustworthy, but ultimately, trust hinges on audience perception.

The steering group also recognised the ongoing debate surrounding what constitutes public-interest news and how to measure its value. Different organisations, such as the Public Interest News Foundation and the National Union of Journalists, have varying definitions. Furthermore, the concept can be viewed from both producer and consumer perspectives.

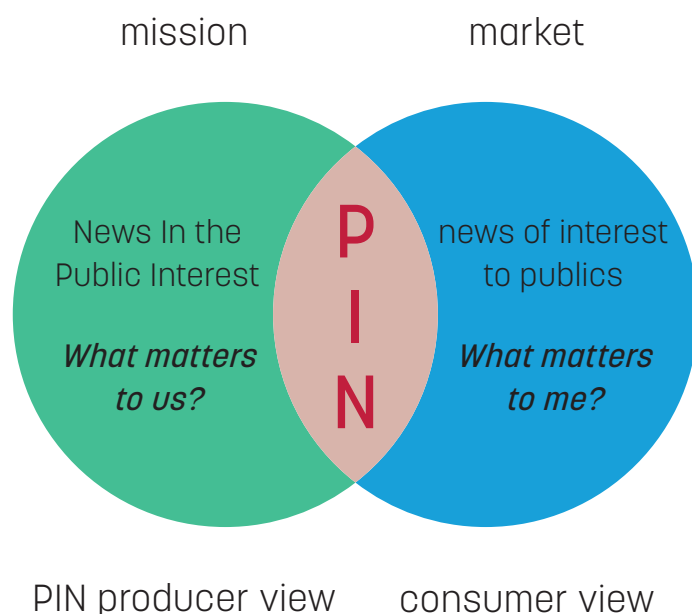
**RIGHTS** Fundamentally linked to the public's rights to be informed and to express themselves (Article 19 etc.), restrained by rights to privacy, security, etc. Information function + watchdog functions +

**PUBLIC/S** The Public (society at large) v the publics (specific audiences)

**IN/OF** IN the Public Interest (public welfare, public good) v OF interest to the publics of news providers

**INTEREST/S** In the Public interest (advantage) v of interest to the public (warrants attention and personally relevant)

**NEWS** is factual information from beyond one's own experience. News about public affairs (citizenship), news about affairs going on the world.



The use of the term 'supply' implicitly assumes the news ecosystem is fuelled by an industry consisting of identifiable public and private establishments, large and small, all actively engaged in providing public-interest news.

To underline the importance of considering the issues from the perspective of all nations and regions within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the steering group felt it important to include the term 'UK' in the research question.

Through these discussions, the study arrived at a working definition of 'public-interest news'. It refers to news and other information produced according to high ethical standards and best journalistic practices. This information must be accessible to the public, who can recognise its source, understand its content, and evaluate its benefits for themselves. These benefits are broadly categorised as:

- Informing citizens about matters relevant to their civic life.
- Raising awareness of local issues within communities.
- Equipping individuals to participate effectively in democratic processes that consider the well-being of all.
- Promoting matters of societal importance.
- Excluding information that is inaccurate or violates fundamental rights.

Consultations with participants further refined the definition. Participants emphasised that not only producers, but also distributors and redistributors, have a responsibility towards consumers. Both producers and distributors should be identifiable, committed to ethical standards, and responsive to public concerns regarding their output.

### **Final Definition**

The study ultimately defines public-interest news as: **news and other information from identifiable producers and distributors committed to high ethical standards and best practices in journalism, who can be held to account by the public. This content must be accessible to the public, who should be able to understand it, and assess for themselves its benefits.**



# Methodology

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The News Futures 2035 project applied a strategic planning method attributed to American physicist Herman Kahn, known for its application in various settings, from business to geopolitics, to facilitate long-term planning.<sup>8</sup> This methodology enabled the analysis of 'drivers of change' affecting the future of the media industry, encompassing social, technological, economic, environmental, and political trends, alongside demographic and geopolitical shifts.

The trends and drivers that emerged as both highly important for the future of public-interest news in the UK and highly uncertain in the external or macro-environment (such as consumer beliefs, government policies, or plays made by other actors in the space) were termed 'critical uncertainties'.

The plenary sessions identified 16 drivers of change, which were further examined through a Delphi study. This consensus-building process involved an expert panel ranking the identified uncertainties based on their perceived impact on the future supply of public-interest news in the UK by 2035.

Through detailed analysis, seven critical uncertainties were identified and explored by contrasting two fundamentally different potential outcomes for each, enhancing understanding of their unpredictability. A total of 34 participants took part in the Delphi study, which was conducted in November 2022.

The seven critical uncertainties identified were: the wider economic framework; nature of news provision (e.g. ownership, formats, origin, etc.); the relevance of public-interest news to the public; the role of the BBC; the role of technology; the wider role and shape of UK institutions (e.g. breakdown of trust, authority); and the public's changing information ecosystem.<sup>9</sup>




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"The strategic planning methodology used in the News Futures 2035 project is vital for understanding the key factors shaping the future of the media industry. By gathering expert insights and conducting thorough analysis, this approach helps us stay ahead in a rapidly changing landscape, ensuring the continued importance of public-interest news in the UK. Furthermore, this method can be adapted for use in other journalistic settings and countries. By customising the approach to examine local issues and uncertainties, media organisations around the world can better handle their unique challenges, strengthening the impact and relevance of public-interest journalism globally."

**Kamila Rymajdo**

*Post-doctoral Researcher, Media Innovation Studio, University of Central Lancashire*

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<sup>8</sup>Derrick-Philippe Gosselin and Bruno Tindemans, *Thinking Futures: Strategy at the Edge of Complexity and Uncertainty* (Leuven: LannooCampus Publishers, 2016), 23.

<sup>9</sup>François Nel and Kamila Rymajdo, "Securing the Future of UK Public-Interest News: Navigating Change With Foresight and Innovation," *Media and Communication Journal* 12 (2024): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.7497>.

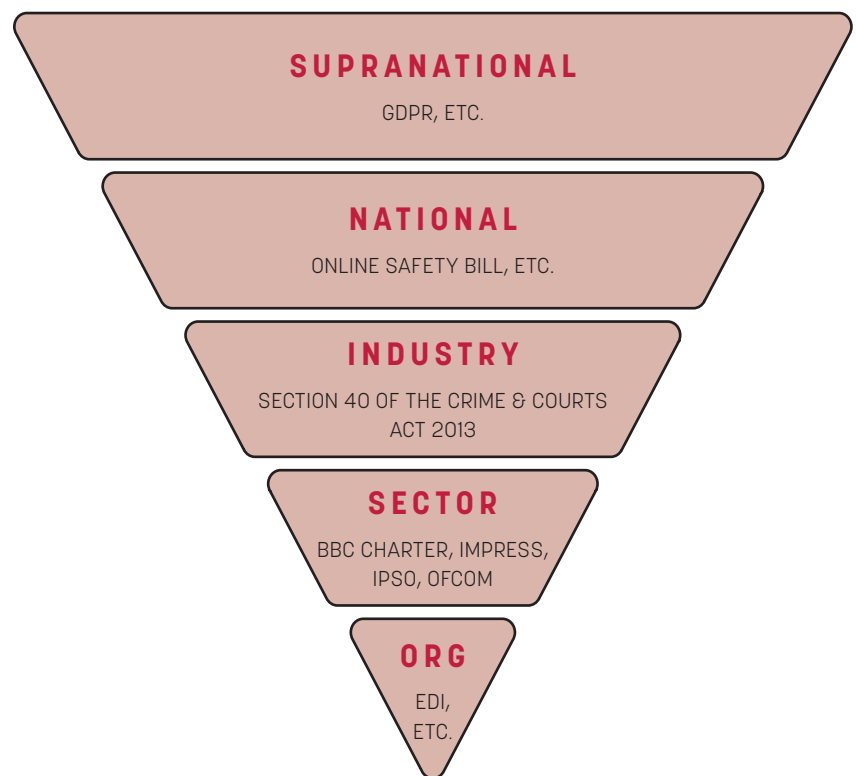
<p><b>From drivers of change to critical uncertainties:</b> These forces were identified during roundtable discussions and then voted on by all participants to identify priorities and further examined in the Delphi study.</p>					
<p><b>Cross-cutting contextual factors</b></p>	<p>Technology (21 votes)</p>	<p>Wider economic outlook (10 votes)</p>	<p>Societal resilience (1 vote)</p>		
<p><b>Critical uncertainty X:</b> body of policy, regulation, and governance at international, national, industry, sector, and organisational levels</p>	<p>Wider role and shape of UK institutions (5 votes)</p>	<p>The role of the BBC (5 votes)</p>	<p>Democratic functions (5 votes)</p>	<p>Regulation (3 votes)</p>	<p>Pressure of environmental sustainability (3 votes)</p>
	<p>Level of freedom of speech (1 vote)</p>	<p>Geopolitics (1 vote)</p>	<p>Role and operation of markets (0 votes)</p>		
<p><b>Critical uncertainty Y:</b> relevance of public-interest news to audiences, institutional missions, business models, media workers, and society at large</p>	<p>Nature of news (e.g., ownership, formats, relevance, origin, etc.) (8 votes)</p>	<p>Needs of audiences (7 votes)</p>	<p>Business models (7 votes)</p>	<p>Shifting social identities and values of audiences (5 votes)</p>	<p>Capabilities and role of journalists (0 votes)</p>

Among the critical uncertainties, technology and the broader economic environment were identified as overarching contextual elements. The remaining factors were categorised into two groups: (a) the body of policy and regulation; and (b) the relevance of public-interest news to audiences, media workers, organisational objectives, business strategies, and the broader society.

In choosing two pivotal uncertainties for further exploration, discussions included insights from the Institute for Government's 2022 Better Policy Making report which noted, amongst other issues, structural shortcomings within the civil service.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding regulation, the contentious history of press regulation in the UK, notably post-2012 Leveson Inquiry, were highlighted. Political instability's impact on media policy, including frequent changes in the Culture Secretary position, delays to the Online Safety Bill, and dilution of its provisions due to lobbying and free speech concerns, was also examined.<sup>11</sup>

A consensus emerged on viewing policies and regulation across various levels: supra-national (EU, UN, etc.), national (UK or its component nations), industry, and organisational levels. These policies may directly affect public-interest news content (e.g. Section 4 of the Defamation Act 2001) and operations (e.g. the Broadcasting Act 1990, subsidies for local democracy reporting, Press Complaints Commission, etc.), or have indirect impacts (e.g. General Data Protection Regulation, UK competition policy, Online Safety Bill, etc.).

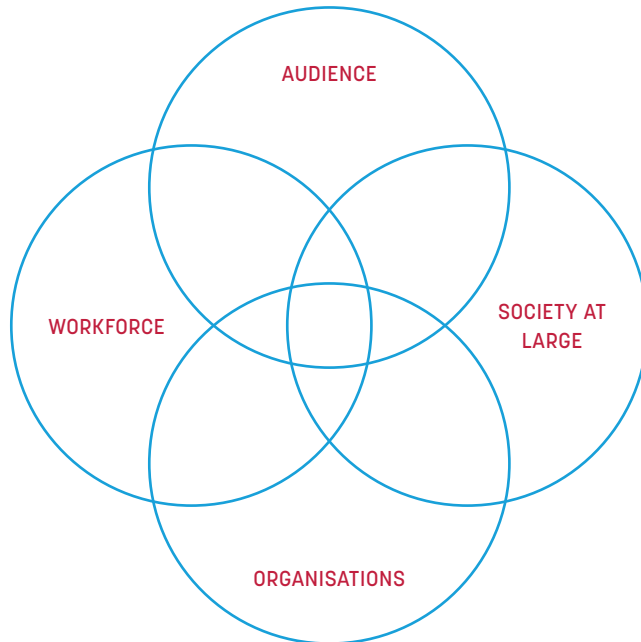


<sup>10</sup>Tom Sasse and Alex Thomas, *Better Policy Making* (Institute for Government, 2022), 6, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/better-policy-making.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Kirsten Eddy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Digital News Report 2022* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022), 58, accessed 15 May, 2024, [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital\\_News-Report\\_2022.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf).



Furthermore, the relevance of public-interest news was seen through four lenses: relevance to the audience (meeting needs, content framing, product fit, etc.); relevance to the organisations that supply it (i.e. vision, mission, business model); relevance to the aspirations and values of media workers; and relevance to society at large (to the democratic functioning, social cohesion, wellbeing).



Participants then further elucidated the essential qualities defining highly relevant public-interest news and also what makes news highly irrelevant. In the same vein, they also identified the characteristics of a highly-enabling policy and regulatory environment and also what characterises as a highly-constraining one.

**Highly relevant public-interest news** is characterised by:

- **Quality:** Participants emphasised accuracy, engagement, and informativeness, avoiding sensationalism, and maintaining trust and balance. They stressed the importance of well-funded newsrooms with experienced editorial teams and robust fact-checking mechanisms.
- **Value:** News should address pressing public health concerns, contribute to community well-being, and empower individuals for active civic participation. Ethical investigative journalism was highlighted, especially in addressing local issues.
- **Enabling Decision-Making:** Public-interest news should inform citizens about society, civic processes, and local issues, fostering participation and awareness. This includes the importance of reporters embedded within communities.

**Holding Power To Account:** Participants stressed the role of public-interest news in holding government and institutions accountable, promoting transparency and accountability within society.

**Highly irrelevant news** is characterised by:

- **Lack Of Alignment With Audiences' Needs:** News that lacks relevance to daily life and community interests, often prioritising corporate interests over those of the audience.
- **Bias:** News which is influenced by political or corporate interests, leading to biased reporting.
- **Generic, Event-Driven And Sensational Content:** News which is characterised by clickbait, with shallow event coverage overshadowing meaningful reporting on deeper issues.

**A highly enabling policy and regulatory environment** is characterised by:

- **Support For Diverse Funding Streams:** Policies should support diverse funding models, with participants emphasising sustainability and independent oversight of funding streams as particularly important.
- **Ensuring Press Freedom:** Participants stressed the importance of press freedom, including legal protections for investigative journalism, freedom of speech, and safeguards for protecting sources.
- **Promoting Media Literacy:** A media-literate population is essential, participants reasoned. As such, policymaking should prioritise media literacy initiatives and ensure they are on the public agenda.
- **Promoting Media Plurality:** Government should intervene to break up monopolies, ensuring a level playing field between independent/new entrants and established corporate publishers.
- **Transparency, Effectiveness, And Multi-Stakeholder Engagement In Policymaking And Regulation:** An environment characterised by transparency in policymaking, with stakeholder engagement at all stages, is crucial. Effective regulation, particularly in addressing ethical breaches, was emphasised.

**A highly constraining policy and regulatory environment** is characterised by:

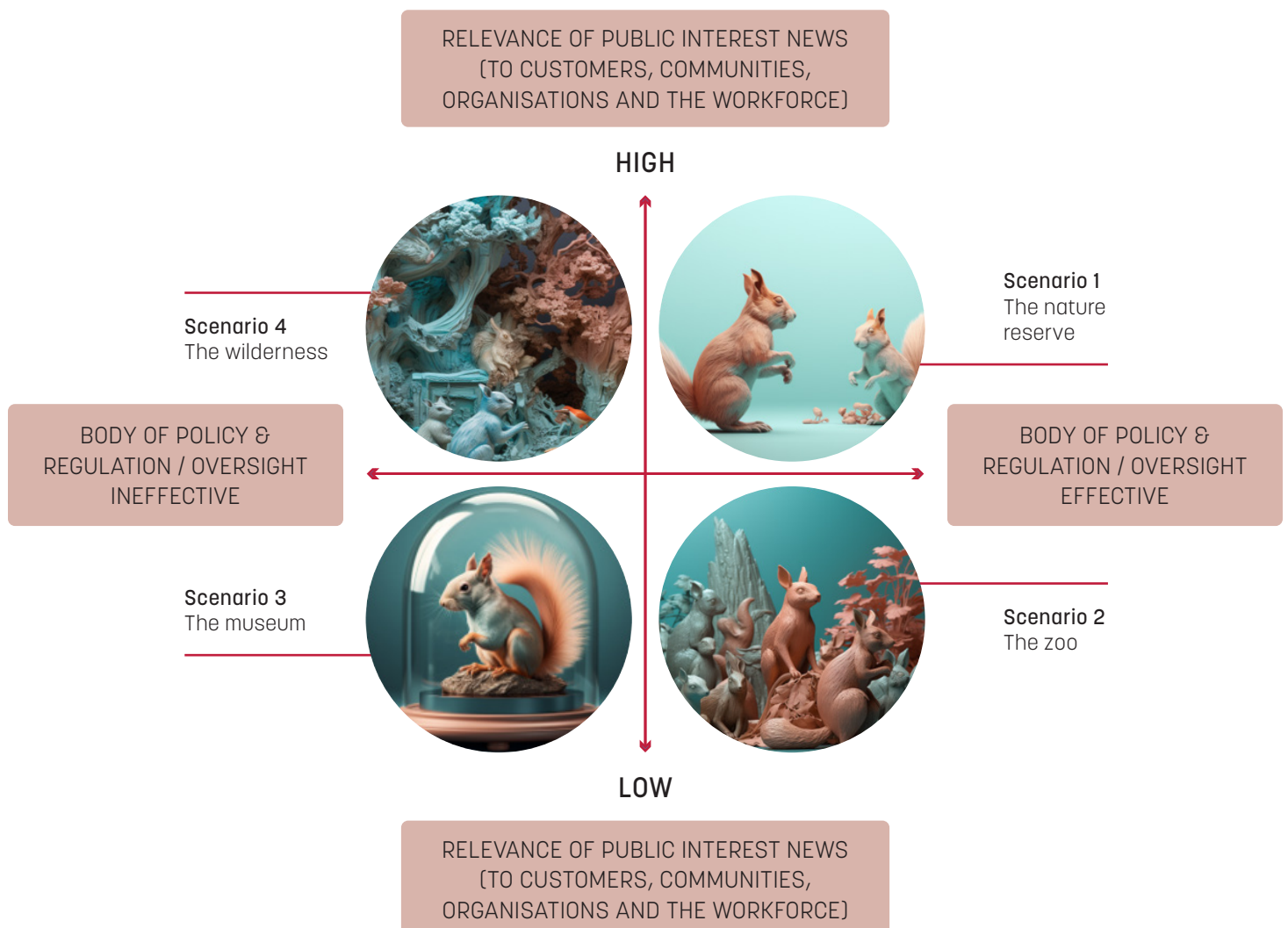
- **Censorship:** Participants highlighted censorship, both through legal means targeting journalists directly and indirectly through stifling regulations, as highly constraining.
- **Lack Of Diversity:** A shrinking diversity of news sources was noted as limiting the range of perspectives available to the public as was vested interest-linked journalism.
- **Press Freedom Being Constrained:** Interference from government, legal entities, and law enforcement can limit press freedom, participants noted.
- **Monopolies:** An environment which perpetuates monopolies, favouring big players and profit maximisation over fostering a diverse and competitive media landscape, was noted as constraining.
- **Lack Of Action On Report Recommendations:** Government entities failing to act on recommendations from reports, undermining efforts to address issues within the media ecosystem.
- **Opaque Reciprocities:** An uneven playing field, with big corporations monopolising funding and wielding disproportionate influence in lobbying government, can create opaque reciprocities, compromising public trust.
- **Constrained Funding:** Participants noted that funding is often tied to conforming to government positions or views on the role of public-interest news. This constraint extends to government regulations favouring big corporate news organisations in the distribution of public notices and advertising.

# Scenarios Of The Future

Participants then developed four scenarios with a horizon set for 2035. These scenarios explored different narratives of how the media landscape could evolve. Analogies such as a nature reserve, zoo, museum, and wilderness were used to contextualise these scenarios, reflecting varying degrees of relevance and policy and regulatory environments for public-interest news provision.

The scenarios were refined through stress-testing in online consultations with educators, policymakers, and media executives. Surveys conducted at journalism conferences further enriched the analysis, with more than 300 participants contributing to the validation of the scenarios.

The culmination of the scenario-refining process occurred during online consultations in March 2023, where the core research group stress-tested the scenarios and deliberated on their implications for stakeholders.





# Key Insights From The Scenarios

In the most accommodating scenario, the nature reserve, innovation was understood as both the adoption of new technology by traditional media companies that leads to positive change such as decreased costs, new audiences, and the flourishing of independent, local, and niche publishers, and the diversification of revenue streams. It was also understood as new thinking in terms of the information ecosystem and journalism's role within it, which results in positive initiatives, such as local communities coming together to create their own platforms (e.g. for the London Borough of Hackney), with the data owned by its users and serving these local communities.

The most important innovation in the scenario, however, is a cultural change to enable equitable access to public-interest news, which leads to increased trust in the media; higher media literacy which leads to better engagement with the democratic process; and a public willing to pay for news. To achieve it, actors such as publishers and policymakers come together and negotiate, which leads to a change in competition law resulting in news being widely available in different formats and users paying one fair price for all news content.

In turn, in scenarios such as the museum and the zoo, where developments lead to the collapse of the ecosystem, a lack of innovation within the business models of publishers as well as a lack of new thinking in the distribution of public subsidies were cited as key reasons for the downward spiral, characterised either by oversupply or news becoming too expensive leading to diminishing trust in the media, the public turning to alternative sources of information, and an increase in mis- and disinformation. Lack of foresight about the effect that changing laws pertaining to climate change and the sustainability of existing formats for news are also cited as leading to the collapse of business models.

# Issues

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Through the News Futures 2035 project, we set out to answer the overarching question ‘How can the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK be secured?’ Through the scenario methodology, participants identified a wide range of issues that have a bearing on this question. During their discussions, they also identified many complex questions that demand further attention. In this section, we summarise the issues that arose in the discussion and the questions that demand further work.

## Declining Public Trust In And Engagement With News Media

Trust in the UK news media is low. According to the annual Edelman Trust Barometer, of 27 countries surveyed, only Japan and South Korea scored lower than the UK.<sup>12</sup> Trust in the news has been in particularly steep decline since the Brexit referendum,<sup>13</sup> with trust among younger generations especially low: only 5% of the UK’s Generation Z have confidence in the press.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, news avoidance is growing, with almost half (46%) of the UK survey sample of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022 saying that they avoid the news sometimes or often, which is almost twice the level seen in 2016<sup>15</sup> and a figure that only marginally improved in 2023 (down by 5%).<sup>16</sup> Public service media is especially under threat, with the UK scoring much lower than other countries when it came to people declaring whether they thought publicly funded news

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<sup>12</sup>Edelman, 2023 *Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report* (Edelman, 2023), accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2023-03/2023%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2022*, 62.

<sup>14</sup>Bobby Duffy, George May, Kirstie Hewlett, et al., *Trust in trouble? UK and international confidence in institutions* (The Policy Institute, King’s College London, 2023), 28, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/confidence-in-institutions.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2022*, 62.

<sup>16</sup>Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Kirsten Eddy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Digital News Report 2023* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023), 22, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital\\_News\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf).

<sup>17</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2023*, 26

services were important – only 46% thought so.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, while more adult internet users are questioning the truthfulness of the online information they consume, evaluating such content comes with challenges. Ofcom found that 77% of internet users said they thought about whether the information they find online is truthful (up from 73% in 2021) but, when shown a genuine social media post, there was a lack of consensus on its validity.<sup>18</sup> This is troubling given that increasing numbers of people are consuming news through internet intermediaries.

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Rebuilding Trust In News Media:** How can we address declining trust in the news media?
- **Combating News Avoidance:** How can we address rising news avoidance?
- **Ensuring Relevance Of Public-Interest News:** How can we ensure that public-interest news is relevant to all?

## Double Exclusion: Access Is A Challenge For The Public And News Producers

Access to trustworthy public-interest news hinges on a fundamental principle: everyone must have access to the technological infrastructure connecting news producers and consumers.

While the UK established a legal right to high-speed broadband in 2020, certain user groups still face limitations. These include individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and

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<sup>17</sup>Ofcom, *Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2023* (Ofcom, 2023), 2, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/255844/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/255844/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023.pdf).

<sup>18</sup>Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, *Online Media Literacy Strategy* (House of Commons, 2021), 6, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f6a632d3bf7f56867df4e1/DCMS\\_Media\\_Literacy\\_Report\\_Roll\\_Out\\_Accessible\\_PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f6a632d3bf7f56867df4e1/DCMS_Media_Literacy_Report_Roll_Out_Accessible_PDF.pdf); Ofcom, *Online Nation 2023 Report* (Ofcom, 2023), 2, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/272288/online-nation-2023-report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0029/272288/online-nation-2023-report.pdf).

disabled individuals lacking accessible technologies.<sup>19</sup>

A recent Ofcom report revealed a persistent offline population: 7% of households lack home internet access, and nearly 20% of internet users rely solely on smartphones. This can be problematic because some devices are less suited for certain activities.<sup>20</sup> Smartphone-only users risk digital exclusion, often the same groups overlooked during new technology rollouts.<sup>21</sup> News Futures 2035 participants expressed concern about a widening digital divide due to potential economic deterioration. They identified young people as particularly vulnerable to finding news difficult and off-putting, potentially leading to news avoidance altogether.

Furthermore, participants voiced deep concerns about technology companies hindering public access to news providers. This stemmed from practices like opaque algorithms prioritising specific content and outright deplatforming or blocking of news producers.

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Ensuring Access To Digital Technology:** How can we ensure digital technology infrastructure is available to all?
- **Preventing Exclusion In News Access:** How can we mitigate the risk of excluding certain groups from accessing news?
- **Maintaining Public Access To Trustworthy News:** How can we ensure that trustworthy news providers are not excluded from accessing the public?

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<sup>19</sup>Ofcom, Online Nation 2023 Report, 2.

<sup>21</sup>World Economic Forum, Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach (World Economic Forum, 2019), 18, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Global\\_Technology\\_Governance.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Technology_Governance.pdf).



# Media Literacy Deficit Amongst Journalists And Citizens, As Well As Public And Political Actors

Recent studies argue that even journalists may suffer from a lack of media literacy, in a fast-changing technological and social environment.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, several authors argue that journalists should take part in the design and development of media literacy programmes<sup>23</sup> for the general public, among whom media literacy is also a concern.<sup>24</sup>

News Futures 2035 participants agreed that not only is there a deficit when it comes to media literacy proficiency amongst journalists and the general public, but there is also a need for evaluation resources that allow for the creation and promotion of more effective media literacy training programmes. Additionally, they were concerned that research has found that successive governments in the UK have cut funding to media literacy initiatives, including those run by Ofcom.<sup>25</sup>

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Enhancing Media Literacy Among News Producers:** How can we increase the media literacy of news producers?
- **Improving Media Literacy Among Public Servants:** How can we increase the media literacy of public servants and policy actors?

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<sup>22</sup>Caterina Foà, Vítor Tomé, Dina Margato, Miguel Paisana, Miguel Crespo, and Gustavo Cardoso, "Roles of Journalists in Media Literacy Initiatives: Trainees and Trainers. Continuity, Collaboration, and Sustainability of Media Literacy Trainings to Mitigate Disinformation in Portugal," *Profesional de la información* 32, no. 6 (2023): e320621: 4, <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2023.nov.21>.

<sup>23</sup>Kate Morris and Frances Yeoman, "Teaching Future Journalists the News: The Role of Journalism Educators in the News Literacy Movement," *Journalism Practice* 17, no. 7 (2023): 1573, doi:10.1080/17512786.2021.1992599.

<sup>24</sup>Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Online Media Literacy Strategy, 6.

<sup>25</sup>Wallis, Richard, and David Buckingham, "Media Literacy: The UK's Undead Cultural Policy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 25, no. 2 (2019): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1229314>.

- **Boosting Public Media Literacy:** How can we increase the media literacy of the public?
- **Evaluating Media Literacy Programmes:** How can we assess the effectiveness of media literacy programmes?
- **Resource Development For Media Literacy:** How can we create more resources for media literacy programmes - and their implementation at scale?

## Inadequate Funding For Public-Interest News, Particularly Local

Funding of public-interest news in the UK continues to be an issue, both as a result of the BBC licence fee freeze, which has reduced BBC local radio output, and because of audiences' unwillingness to pay for news – the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report found that only 9% of survey respondents in the UK currently pay for any online news.<sup>26</sup> This is an ongoing trend, especially for public-interest news and local journalism, and is why the 2019 Cairncross Review recommended that the government should launch a new fund focused on innovations aimed at improving the supply of public-interest news, to be run by an independent body.

The government partially accepted this recommendation and worked with Nesta (a charity which supports innovation) to develop a modest pilot fund that launched in October 2019. However, the pilot was discontinued the following year, and subsequent reports such as the House of Commons DCMS Committee's 2023 Sustainability of local journalism report, have recommended that further funding is necessary. Campaign groups, such as the Media Reform Coalition, make similar recommendations, arguing that funding models need to be supported by the public and the government alike.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2023*, 58.

<sup>27</sup>Media Reform Coalition, *Public Interest Journalism: Funding and Labour Issues* (Media Reform Coalition, 2022), 7, accessed May 15, 2024,

<https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PIJ-Briefing-Final-1.pdf>.

Whilst News Futures 2035 participants concurred that direct or indirect government funding is necessary for the survival of public-interest news, who should get funding and how it should be distributed was accepted to be a complex issue with no straightforward solution. However, participants felt that it was a pressing concern given the danger that smaller publishers can lose out by virtue of not being on funders' radars, or by not falling within the parameters of conventional measures of success. Participants also noted that alternative sources of funding, such as that coming from technology companies, can affect news providers' independence, which is a point also made by industry actors and academics.<sup>28</sup>

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Encouraging Audience Support:** How can UK audiences be encouraged and enabled to pay for public-interest news?
- **Government Funding For News:** Should the government provide funding for public-interest news, particularly local news?
- **Distributing Funding Fairly:** How should funding from public and private sources be distributed to ensure the independence and plurality of the news media?

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<sup>28</sup>Damian Radcliffe and Nick Mathews, "Building a Stronger Local Media Ecosystem: The Role of Media Policy," *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2023, 20, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.cjr.org/tow\\_center\\_reports/building-a-stronger-local-media-ecosystem-the-role-of-media-policy.php](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/building-a-stronger-local-media-ecosystem-the-role-of-media-policy.php).

# Concentration Of News Media Ownership, Particularly Local

The British news media is characterised by a concentration of ownership. As of 2021, three companies dominated 90% of the UK newspaper market.<sup>29</sup> News Futures 2035 participants raised concerns about the replication of information across different platforms owned by the same owners and the resulting lack of coverage and inclusion of groups such as minorities, young people, low-income people, migrants, etc. agreeing with reports that highlight the resulting disconnection of these groups from the media environment.<sup>30</sup>

Participants were concerned about the future of local public-interest journalism especially, deeming it particularly vulnerable to circumstances such as a worsening economic situation. Some feared that a diminishing prioritisation of local content could result in the BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service being curtailed or stopped. Local publishers were also deemed especially vulnerable to technological lag due to inadequate funding to invest in training and innovation.

Recent reports confirm these conclusions, with the Media Reform Coalition finding that years of regional newsrooms being hollowed out since the 1990s have resulted in gaps in the regional press in the UK and a concentration of ownership, with 83% of local newspapers controlled by just six companies.<sup>31</sup> The same applies to local commercial radio, with two companies, Bauer Radio and Global Radio, owning 70% of the UK's 279 local commercial analogue radio stations, a 20% increase in concentration since 2018.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, three companies, DMG Media, News UK and Reach, dominate 90% of the UK newspaper market, up from 83% in 2019.<sup>33</sup> When online readers are included, the same companies control four-fifths of the market, giving these publishers a strong position for setting the agenda for the rest of the news media.

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<sup>29</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 2023.

<sup>30</sup>Damian Tambini, *Media Freedom, Regulation and Trust at a Time of Information Disorder* (Council of Europe, 2020), 20, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/the-changing-paradigm-in-media-and-information-11-oct/1680990a58>.

<sup>31</sup>Media Reform Coalition, *Who Owns the UK Media?* (Media Reform Coalition, 2021), 2, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Who-Owns-the-UK-Media\\_final2.pdf](https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Who-Owns-the-UK-Media_final2.pdf).

<sup>32</sup>Media Reform Coalition, *Who Owns the UK Media?*, 2.

<sup>33</sup>Media Reform Coalition, *Who Owns the UK Media?*, 2.

Inquiries such as the House of Commons DCMS Committee's 2023 Sustainability of local journalism inquiry have also brought to attention the many issues facing local publishers, from the failures of the Future News Pilot Fund<sup>34</sup> to lack of access to statutory notices revenue,<sup>35</sup> while raising concerns about initiatives from the BBC to diminish local radio stations in favour of sharing more content online as part of their Digital First strategy.<sup>36</sup>

In turn, the pressure on democracy has been highlighted by various studies which demonstrate how reductions in local news are tied to declines in citizen participation in democratic processes.<sup>37</sup>

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Building A Plural News Media Economy:** How can we develop a news media economy with a range of ownership models?
- **Ensuring Diversity In News Media:** How can we create a diverse news media economy that includes all societal groups?
- **Safeguarding Local Public-Interest News:** How can we protect local public-interest news?
- **Strengthening Journalism And Political Processes:** How can we enhance the relationship between journalism and political processes with the ultimate end in mind: peace, universal human rights, social progress and better standards of life?

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<sup>34</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 18-19.

<sup>35</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 23.

<sup>36</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 3.

<sup>37</sup>Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, "The Decline of Local News and Its Effects: New Evidence from Longitudinal Data," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018): 332, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/694105>.



# The Dominance Of Online Intermediaries

Online intermediaries such as search engines, aggregators, and social media platforms are increasingly how people get access to the news. News Futures 2035 participants raised concerns about the effect of online intermediaries on media plurality and their negative effect on people's knowledge of news and ability to identify true statements. These issues were also raised in Ofcom's Media Plurality and online news report, which discussed their effect on people's trust in democratic institutions<sup>38</sup> and likelihood of circulating misinformation.<sup>39</sup>

News Futures 2035 participants noted that the market dominance of online intermediary platforms and news publishers' reliance on them to access the public has created an imbalance of power, meaning publishers cannot properly negotiate a fair commercial relationship. This was also a finding of the Sustainability of local journalism report.<sup>40</sup>

There is also a risk that dominant online intermediaries will reflect the biases of those who build them. The World Economic Forum's Global Technology Governance white paper counselled that 'emerging technologies have a political nature, embodying values, assumptions and principles that influence who they affect in society, and in what ways'<sup>41</sup> and how 'individuals, companies and governments invest, design and use technologies is affected by the experiences, assumptions and ideologies of the developers creating them, as well as the norms and values in the context within which they are developed and deployed'.<sup>42</sup> For example, 'whether AI systems have racial biases will be influenced by the choice of code, the data used to train the system and the population on which it is used'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ofcom, *Media Plurality and online news* (Ofcom, 2022), 28, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0030/247548/discussion-media-plurality.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/247548/discussion-media-plurality.pdf).

<sup>39</sup>Ofcom, *Media Plurality and online news*, 30.

<sup>40</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 4.

<sup>41</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 11.

<sup>42</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 11.

<sup>43</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 11.

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Collaborating With Online Intermediaries:** How can we work with online intermediaries to balance their influence over the news media while fostering productive partnerships that ensure open access to information and promote public-interest news consumption and distribution?
- **Reducing Bias In Digital Technology:** How can we mitigate potential biases in digital technology, including AI?
- **Fair Compensation And Bias Protection In AI Training:** How can we ensure that publishers are fairly compensated and that their news content is used in a way that minimises bias when training large language models?

## Industry Solutions That Ignore Journalism's Democratic Role

News Futures 2035 participants found that declining engagement with the news is compounded by the economic pressures on news providers, which are increasing – a concern also raised in the Reuters Institute's 2023 Digital News Report, which highlighted the low number of people willing to pay for online news (9%)<sup>44</sup> and decreasing print circulation for the biggest paid-for national titles – down by between 8% (the *i* newspaper) and 23% (the *Sunday People*), with daily local newspapers down 19% year-on-year.<sup>45</sup>

News Futures 2035 participants concurred with academic research that found the challenges journalism is facing, whether financial (e.g. diminishing numbers of people willing to pay for news) or functional (e.g. diminishing relevance of news to the general public),<sup>46</sup> are seen by the industry as one and the same.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2023*, 11.

<sup>45</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report 2022*, 62.

<sup>46</sup>Lúcia Castells-Fos, Carles Pont-Sorribes, and Lluís Codina, "Decoding News Media Relevance and Engagement through Reputation, Visibility and Audience Loyalty: A Scoping Review," *Journalism Practice*, (2023): 1–20. doi:10.1080/17512786.2023.2239201.

<sup>47</sup>Nico Drok, "Towards a Broader Concept of Innovation in Journalism," *Questions de communication* 34 (2018): 274. <https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.15999>.

As a consequence, the causes of both crises are considered to be of a technological or economic nature and the solutions are also sought in the techno-economic sphere.

They acknowledged that the resulting overfocus on technical innovation can distract from journalism's wider democratic purpose.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, they agreed that businesses often concentrate on solving their own problems rather than addressing the broader issues facing journalism as a whole.<sup>49</sup>

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Securing Media Finances And Democracy:** How can we secure the finances and the democratic role of the news media?
- **Promoting Cross-Industry Collaboration:** How can we encourage news providers and other key actors to work more collaboratively?

## Shortfall In The Number And Diversity Of Journalists

News Futures 2035 participants were concerned that public-interest news journalism was becoming less relevant not only to consumers but also to journalists themselves. They felt that the lack of an innovation culture within large organisations focused on cost-cutting would result in the industry failing to attract the diverse talent, including from technology, needed to transform it. Moreover, they felt that with the diminishing relevance of public-interest news to the public, a new generation of would-be journalists would not be interested in a career in this type of journalism, while those already working within the sector are at risk of leaving due to inadequate remuneration.

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<sup>48</sup>Brian Creech, Anthony M Nadler, "Post-industrial fog: Reconsidering innovation in visions of journalism's future," *Journalism* 19, no. 2 (2017): 182, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916689573>.

<sup>49</sup>Ana Cecília B. Nunes and João Canavilhas, "Journalism Innovation and Its Influences in the Future of News: A European Perspective Around Google DNI Fund Initiatives," In *Journalistic Metamorphosis. Studies in Big Data*, vol 70, ed. Jorge Vázquez-Herrero, Sabela Direito-Rebollal, Alba Silva-Rodríguez, Xosé López-García (Springer, Cham, 2020), 53; Radcliffe and Matthews, *Building a Stronger Local Media Ecosystem: The Role of Media Policy*. *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 40.

Recent studies have confirmed this analysis. The NCTJ 2023 Diversity in Journalism report found that, for the first time since 2016, the number of journalists self-identifying in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has decreased, from 108,000 in 2021 to 101,500 in 2022, and the number of journalists aged under-25 is also decreasing.<sup>50</sup> Class representation is an issue as well, with the UK media dominated by university graduates (91%), who are historically less likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>51</sup>

In turn, studies such as the Reuters Institute's Changing Newsrooms 2023 report found that while organisations are meeting their targets on gender diversity, ratings are considerably lower when it comes to whether journalists think their industry is doing a good job with political diversity (55%), supporting staff with disabilities (54%), or ethnic diversity (52%).<sup>52</sup> This is a point echoed by Ofcom's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in TV and radio report, which found that disabled people remain substantially underrepresented at all job levels: just 10% of all employees and 8% of senior managers who provided data have a disability, compared to the population average of 16%.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, the Reuters Institute found that 'newsrooms lack a structured and clear plan for diversity. Of the survey participants, 43% said their organisation has a systematic and articulated strategy for diversifying talent acquisition, but in other areas systematic strategies were relatively rare. When looking at retaining talent, only 22% of news leaders said their organisations have a systematic and articulated strategy and 37% have such an approach to reflecting diversity in stories produced.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Mark Spilsbury, *Diversity in Journalism* (National Council for the Training of Journalists, 2023), 9, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.nctj.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Diversity-in-journalism-2023-4WEB.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup>Spilsbury, *Diversity in Journalism*, 9.

<sup>52</sup>Federica Cherubini and Ramaa Sharma, *Changing Newsrooms 2023* (Reuters Institute, 2023), 4, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/Cherubini\\_Changing\\_Newsrooms\\_2023.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-12/Cherubini_Changing_Newsrooms_2023.pdf).

<sup>53</sup>Ofcom, *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in TV and radio* (Ofcom, 2023), 3, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/~/media/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/273326/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-Broadcasting-2022-23.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/~/media/assets/pdf_file/0023/273326/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-Broadcasting-2022-23.pdf).

<sup>54</sup>Cherubini and Sharma, *Changing Newsrooms 2023*, 4.

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Strengthening Employment In Journalism:** How can we bolster quality job creation within the journalism sector?
- **Advancing Diversity In Media:** How can we enhance diversity within journalism to reflect broader societal perspectives?
- **Recruiting New Talent:** How can we attract and retain new talent to sustain and innovate within public-interest news?

## Lack Of AI Skills Among Journalists

News Futures 2035 participants concluded that without strategic adjustments in journalism businesses, the future could see a significant lack of Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy among journalists. This deficiency would hinder their ability to leverage AI effectively and safely, potentially leading to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

These concerns reflect recent UK reports that have highlighted a shortage of specialised skills in AI, machine learning, and data science, which affects companies' capacity to utilise AI technologies effectively.<sup>55</sup> Recognising this, the UK Government initiated efforts, including allocating £117 million to train PhD students in AI and providing guidance for businesses to upskill employees for AI-enabled tasks. However, concerns persist about the misalignment between the demand for these skills and the UK's educational and training infrastructure, as highlighted by a 2022 inquiry by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, AI's ability to generate realistic content, such as text, images, and videos, raises concerns regarding the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, often propagated through 'deepfakes'. To counter these risks, AI watermarks

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<sup>55</sup>Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), *POSTbrief 57: Artificial Intelligence – An explainer* (UK Parliament, 2023), accessed May 14, 2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0057/POST-PB-0057.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup>Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), *POSTbrief 57: Artificial Intelligence – An explainer*, 24.



are proposed to authenticate content, deter misinformation, and safeguard against misuse. Nevertheless, challenges related to robustness, privacy implications, and potential degradation of output accuracy persist, making the effective implementation of AI watermarks an area of ongoing research and development.<sup>57</sup>

The evolving landscape of AI integration in editorial media was also discussed in a report by Nordic AI Journalism under the umbrella of Utgivarna (the Swedish Publishers' Organisation).<sup>58</sup> To foster trust and accountability, the report suggests ways organisations can bridge the gap between their AI usage and audiences' understanding of it. Emphasising transparency, the report offers actionable measures for implementation, including: (a) transparency for AI with significant journalistic impact; (b) specificity in describing AI tools applied; (c) continuous reassessment of AI transparency.<sup>59</sup>

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Enhancing AI Literacy:** How can we build knowledge and understanding of AI among journalists?
- **Navigating AI Integration Trends:** What are the evolving trends and challenges in the integration of AI into editorial media, and how can organisations foster trust and accountability in AI usage?
- **Bridging AI Understanding:** What specific measures can journalism organisations take to bridge the gap between AI usage and audience understanding, particularly in terms of transparency and describing AI tools?

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<sup>57</sup>Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), *POSTbrief 57: Artificial Intelligence – An explainer*, 23.

<sup>58</sup>Nordic AI Journalism, *AI Transparency in Journalism* (Nordic AI Journalism in collaboration with UTGIVARNA, 2024), accessed May 16, 2024, [https://www.nordicaijournalism.com/\\_files/ugd/efd447\\_06c5eb91a6084cf78da840af828ce845.pdf](https://www.nordicaijournalism.com/_files/ugd/efd447_06c5eb91a6084cf78da840af828ce845.pdf).

<sup>59</sup>Nordic AI Journalism, *AI Transparency in Journalism*, 15.

# Systemic Constraints Within Policymaking

Participants in the News Futures 2035 project identified several systemic constraints hindering effective media policymaking:

**Structural Shortcomings Within The Civil Service:** Reports highlighted issues such as weak institutional memory, short-term planning, and a lack of specialised policy knowledge among civil servants.<sup>60</sup> These factors can lead to poor decision-making and implementation of media policies.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, resource limitations can further hamper effective policy development.

**Policy Lag In Response To Technological Change:** Similar to other countries, the UK struggles to keep pace with rapid technological advancements. Media policy often fails to adapt quickly enough to address emerging challenges and opportunities presented by new technologies.<sup>62</sup>

**Impact Of Political Instability On Media Policy:** The project participants acknowledged the detrimental effects of political turmoil on media policy development. Frequent changes in leadership roles (e.g., Culture Secretary) and delays in crucial legislation (e.g., Online Safety Bill) create uncertainty and hinder progress. Additionally, concerns raised regarding free speech, such as those documented in the Reuters Institute's 2023 Digital News Report,<sup>63</sup> can lead to a watering down of effective policy measures.

**Limited International Collaboration:** Findings from organisations like the World Economic Forum highlight the lack of robust, multi-stakeholder processes at the international level. These processes are crucial for sharing best practices, fostering innovation, and promoting coherence in media governance across different countries.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Emma Norris and Robert Adam, *All Change: Why Britain is so prone to policy reinvention, and what can be done about it* (Institute for Government, 2017), 3, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/report/all-change>.

<sup>61</sup>Tom Sasse and Emma Norris, *Moving On: The costs of high staff turnover in the civil service* (Institute for Government, 2017), 6, accessed May 16, 2024, [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG\\_staff\\_turnover\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG_staff_turnover_WEB.pdf).

<sup>62</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 11.

<sup>63</sup>Newman et al, *Digital News Report 2023*, 58.

<sup>64</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 4.

# Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Mitigating Systemic Constraints:** How can we address the structural weaknesses within the civil service to ensure more informed, long-term, and well-resourced policymaking?
- **Bridging The Technological Gap:** How can we develop more agile policymaking processes that adapt effectively to technological change?
- **Enhancing Policy Stability:** What strategies can promote greater stability and continuity in media policy, despite political changes?
- **Promoting International Coherence:** How can we foster stronger international collaboration and knowledge-sharing to develop more consistent and effective media governance frameworks across different countries?

# Difficult Relationship Between Governments And News Media

News Futures 2035 participants discussed recent reports which highlight concerns about the independence from government within media institutions, such as the BBC,<sup>65</sup> while also noting the UK was recently ranked behind almost every other European state in a new global index of freedom of expression.<sup>66</sup> They also underlined that the historical wrangling about press regulation in the UK, as discussed prior to and following the 2012 Leveson Inquiry, continues, while the BBC has long endured a contentious relationship with the government in relation to its Charter.

It was also noted that the lines between traditional formats - print, broadcasting, online - have blurred, as have the divisions between the arena where news is produced and distributed, making it hard to distinguish between traditional media and social media actors.

In turn, they agreed with concerns<sup>67</sup> that as media industries and governments develop new structures to regulate new media platforms and intermediaries, there is a danger that new forms of regulation could result in opaque reciprocities between the state and powerful media actors, which might undermine the transparency on which thriving democracies depend.

## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Safeguarding Media Independence:** How can the independence of the BBC and other media institutions be protected?
- **Strengthening Media Freedom:** How can media freedom in the UK be enhanced?

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<sup>65</sup>Newman et al., *Digital News Report*, 58.

<sup>66</sup>"Index on Censorship", Index Index, accessed May 16 2024, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/campaigns/indexindex/>.

<sup>67</sup>Damian Tambini, *Media Freedom, Regulation and Trust at a Time of Information Disorder* (Council of Europe, 2020), 3, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/8212-media-freedom-regulation-and-trust-a-systemic-approach-to-information-disorder.html>.

- **Regulatory Conflicts Of Interest:** How can we ensure that new media regulations do not create conflicts of interest?
- **Resolving Regulatory Tensions:** How can we resolve ongoing tensions around the scope and boundaries between news media regulators in the UK?

## The Climate Imperative In Media

Participants in News Futures 2035 acknowledged that news producers and distributors are both contributors to climate change and crucial players in addressing this critical and complex issue.

They also recognised that addressing this imperative effectively requires a comprehensive strategy that extends beyond mere content to encompass news production and distribution processes. The complexity of climate issues calls for an advanced understanding of the business models that underpin media organisations.

The media's role in shaping public perception and influencing environmental policy cannot be overstated. Accurate and extensive reporting on climate change is pivotal for stimulating public awareness and initiating action, thereby becoming an integral component in addressing environmental challenges.

Moreover, the multifaceted nature of climate change – spanning scientific, economic, social, and political dimensions – requires expertise from various domains to ensure effective interdisciplinary collaboration. This is essential for the media's ability to embed climate change within broader narratives, thus enriching public discourse and informing policy.

Additionally, the traditional advertising-supported business model, which typically encourages consumption, must be scrutinised through the lens of sustainability. It is crucial to align media business practices with Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that advertising revenues bolster responsible environmental reporting.



## Key Questions

These challenges raise several critical questions for moving forward:

- **Enhancing Climate Reporting:** How can the media improve the depth and accuracy of climate reporting to better inform the public and influence policy?
- **Sustainable Business Models:** What strategies can be employed to redesign media business models to support sustainable practices and responsible reporting on climate issues?
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** How can collaboration between experts from various fields be fostered to enhance the media's comprehension and coverage of complex climate issues?

## Recommendations To Avoid Undesired Outcomes

From these discussions emerged a number of recommendations that participants organised into what they thought the industry, policymakers and regulators should either stop doing, start doing and continue doing. This formed the basis of priorities for the News Futures Forum, which were discussed in consultations conducted in March 2024, detailed in the next section.

### Stop Doing

#### **Stop Shallow Reporting That Prioritises Attention Over**

**Comprehension:** Participants expressed concerns about shallow reporting that prioritises attention over comprehension. They emphasised the need to prioritise in-depth, fact-based reporting that fosters a clear understanding of complex issues, while minimising bias to ensure a well-informed public.

#### **Stop Extreme Concentration In Any Area Of The Media**

**Landscape:** Excessive market share concentration within any industry, including news production and distribution, raises antitrust concerns due to its potential to restrict competition and consumer choice. Therefore, implementing policies that promote access to a plurality of voices in both news production and distribution is crucial.

### **Implement Policies That Constrain Press Freedom And Diversity:**

Any regulatory measures that undermine press freedom, stifle access to information, or restrict the diversity of media sources should be avoided. Such policies not only suppress journalistic independence but also hinder the public's access to diverse viewpoints and information.

## Start Doing

**Invest In Diverse Funding Models:** To ensure the sustainability of public-interest news, there needs to be investment in diverse funding models beyond traditional advertising revenue. This may include support for nonprofit news organisations, philanthropic contributions, and innovative revenue streams such as reader subscriptions and memberships.

### **Intensify, Prioritise, And Coordinate News Literacy Efforts:**

Enhancing critical news media literacy across society is crucial. Coordination among all actors, including relevant government departments, educational institutions, the news industry, and civil society, is essential. The government should take the lead in promoting and funding media literacy efforts, ensuring that various stakeholders collaborate effectively. This comprehensive approach will equip the public with the necessary skills to critically evaluate news sources and identify misinformation, with the news industry playing a pivotal role in these initiatives.

### **Implement Policies Ensuring Press Freedom And Transparency:**

Policymakers should enact measures to safeguard press freedom and transparency, protecting journalists from censorship and harassment. Transparent regulatory frameworks can foster a conducive environment for independent journalism to thrive.

## Continue Doing

### **Support Producers Committed To Trustworthy Public Interest**

**News:** Continued support for the whole news industry is essential to maintain diverse and trustworthy news coverage. While prioritising funding and resources for local independent outlets helps sustain their operations and community service, it is also crucial to support large news producers, who employ the majority of journalists. Ensuring that policies accommodate the needs of all players is necessary to engage them effectively and uphold a robust news industry across all levels.

**Advocate For Policy Reforms Based On Authoritative**

**Recommendations:** Stakeholders should advocate for policy reforms based on recommendations from authoritative reports and expert analyses. This may include implementing recommendations from government-commissioned inquiries and collaborating with policymakers to address systemic challenges facing the media industry.

**Foster Community Engagement And Awareness:** Efforts to foster community engagement and raise awareness about the importance of public-interest news should continue. This includes initiatives to promote civic participation, educate the public about public-interest news and build trust between journalists and their audiences.

# News Futures 2035 Final Report Launched At Newsrewired, News UK, London, 22 May 2024





# Key Recommendation: News Futures Forum

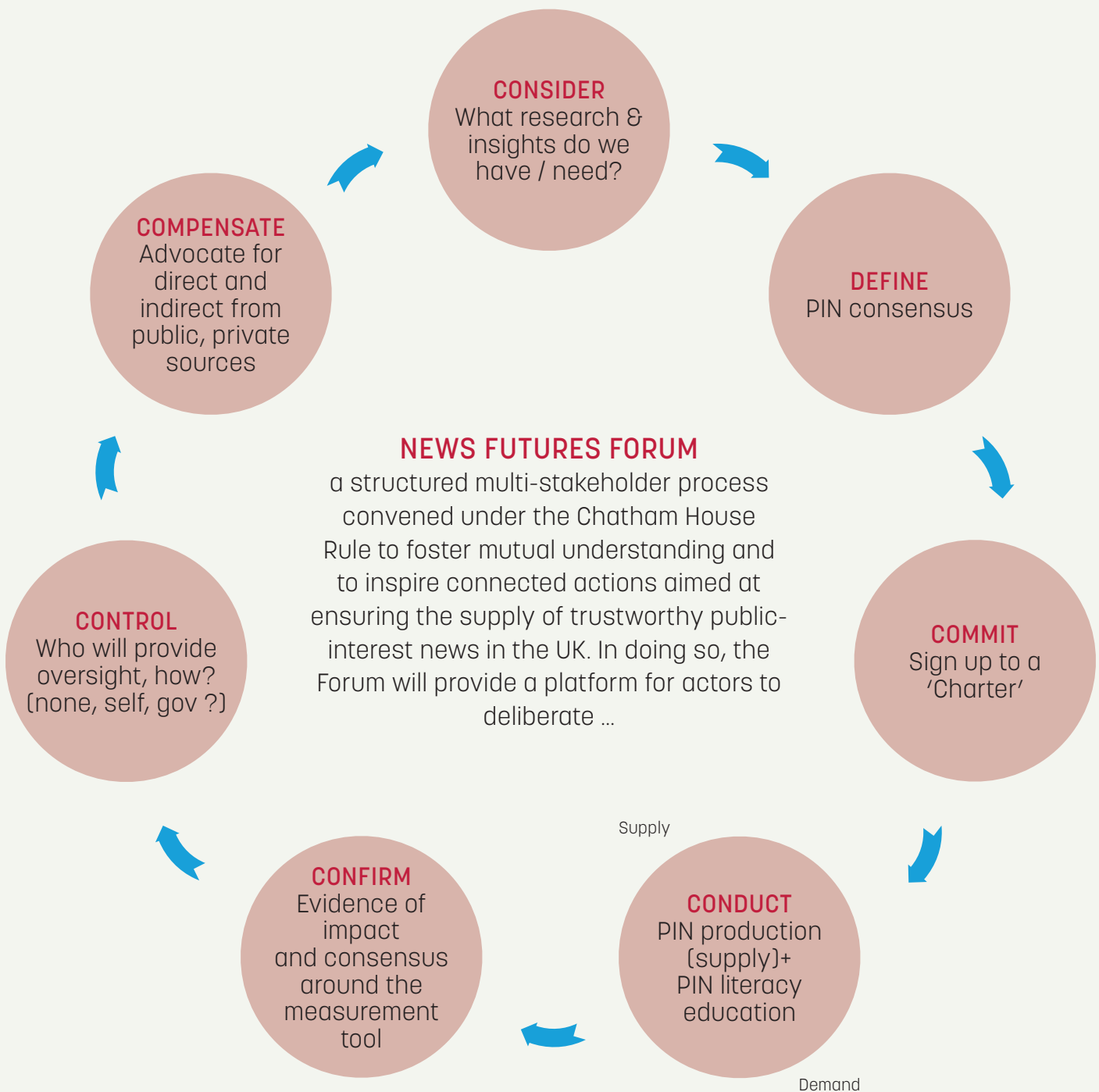
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Participants in News Futures 2035 were able to engage directly with people from right across the news media landscape and beyond. For many participants, this was the first time they had spent time with people they had previously criticised or debated from a distance. Unlike formal policymaking processes or internal industry discussions, the News Futures 2035 process was open and inclusive. It helped participants to build relationships with each other, and to imagine a future based on shared values. In the long-term, this emerging trust and understanding could be infinitely more valuable than small groups agreeing on recommendations that do not command widespread support.

Participants recommended any number of actions that should be taken to secure the future of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK. They called on policymakers, industry leaders, academics, and civil society organisations to take a wide range of measures. However, many of these recommendations were challenged by other participants, and it was not within the scope of this project to resolve these disagreements, nor to add to the wealth of recommendations that have been made by other inquiries, committees and working groups over the past few years.

By their nature, the issues and questions identified by the News Futures 2035 project are complex. They require multiple stakeholders to come together, not only to identify but also to implement solutions. Few, if any, of these challenges can be resolved solely by the government pulling policy levers. They will require many people to set aside their differences and work together, over the long term, towards a better future.

That is why, rather than repeating previous reports which set out detailed recommendations for policymakers or industry leaders, we are now making a single, far-reaching proposal – to channel the energy created by this project into a powerhouse for new ideas and possibilities by creating the world's first **News Futures Forum**.





The News Futures Forum would create a space for stakeholders to come together for frank and constructive dialogue, working towards consensus whilst recognising and understanding differences. Around the world, we have seen how seemingly intractable conflicts can be resolved through forms of ‘track two diplomacy’,<sup>68</sup> where people on both sides of a debate build trust and understanding and identify new possibilities to move forward. The issues affecting public-interest news may not involve physical conflict, but they do involve stakeholders with very different interests and perspectives, and this can lead to protracted disputes or stalemates which prevent anyone from implementing lasting solutions.

Even stakeholders who agree about things often lack the opportunity to collaborate or share ideas and resources. The Forum would address this gap. At the same time, it would also help stakeholders who are at odds – e.g. news publishing companies who are negotiating with big tech platforms, or activists who are criticising policymakers – to come together for constructive dialogue in a high-trust environment.

The Forum would have the overarching aim of **securing the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK**. It would pursue this aim through the following objectives:

- **Airing Diverse Perspectives:** The Forum would bring together people with extremely different perspectives, including news industry leaders, journalists, activists, academics, policymakers, and technologists. It would also provide a platform for the voices of those who have previously been excluded from industry or policy decision-making. The Forum would facilitate deep dialogue between all these stakeholders, so that differences are expressed and understood but do not become a barrier to conversation.
- **Building Shared Understanding:** Diverse stakeholders are unlikely to agree about everything. However, it is important to nurture a shared understanding of the key issues affecting the supply of public-interest news. The Forum would support this by coordinating and collating relevant research and encouraging stakeholders to listen deeply to each other’s views and experiences.

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<sup>68</sup>Diamond and McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace*, 1996.

- **Fostering Collaboration:** Even where participants do not all agree on a shared agenda, the Forum would facilitate collaboration between individual stakeholders – e.g. supporting policymakers to work more closely with academics on media literacy initiatives, or inspiring technologists and news providers to develop AI applications that support public-interest news.
- **Facilitating Public Engagement:** The Forum would engage the public in its work, either directly or by profiling the public engagement work of participants, such as listening exercises, focus groups, surveys and social media content analysis. Alongside private meetings where participants can speak to each other under Chatham House rules, the Forum would also hold public events and publish information about its work on its website and elsewhere.
- **Moving Towards A Shared Agenda:** The Forum would not necessarily result in a shared agenda – at least, not in the short term. There may be some issues where stakeholders will always take a different view because of their divergent economic interests, political perspectives or life experiences. However, the Forum would massively increase the likelihood of stakeholders finding common ground and agreeing on a shared agenda.

The programme will advance its objectives through a continuous programme of online and offline meetings, public events, reports, and other initiatives. The specifics of this programme will evolve based on the priorities set by participants and the public. Initially, the Forum will engage with the following key themes:

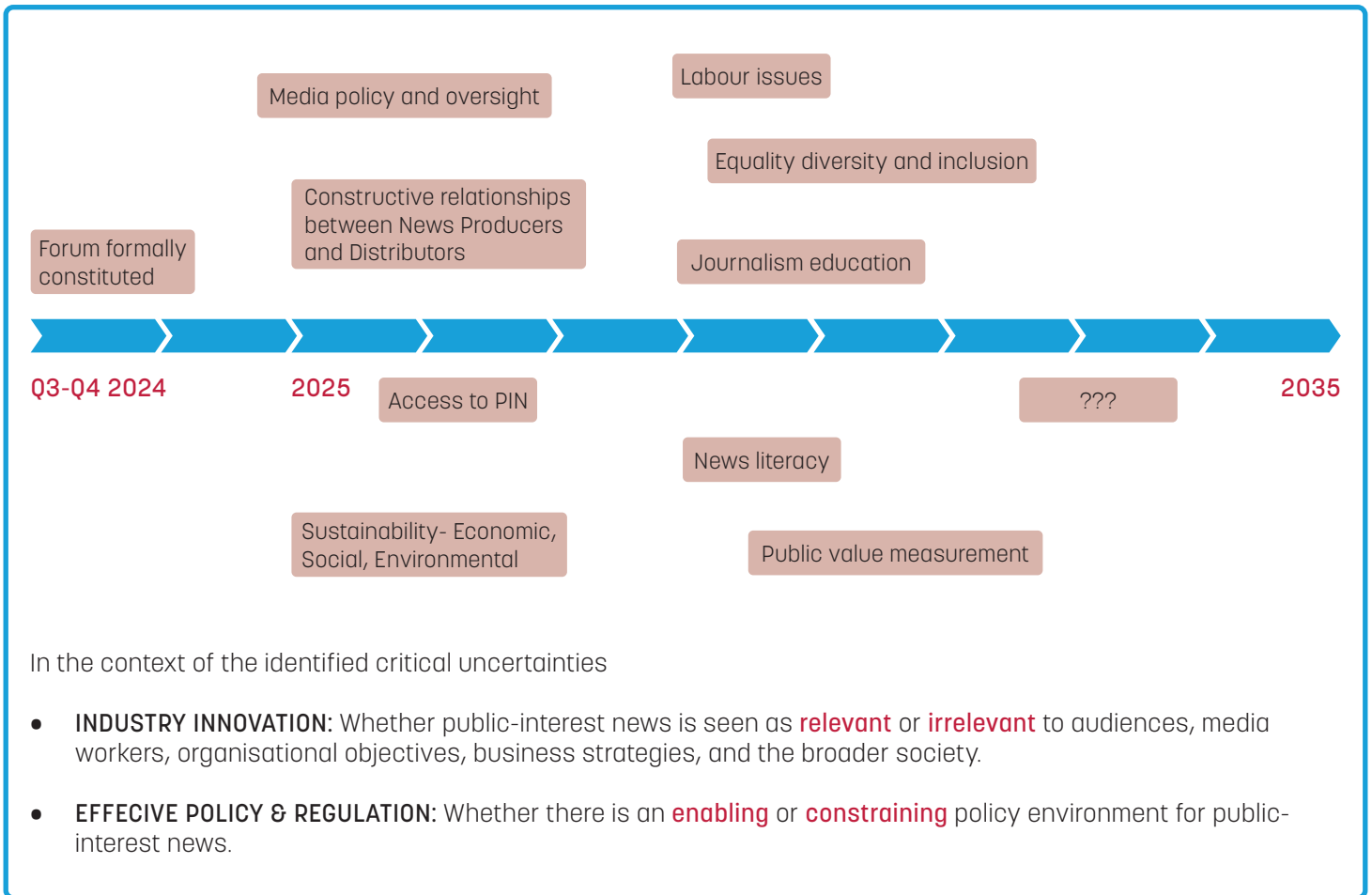
- **Technology:** Explore the multifaceted impact of emerging technologies and tech companies on news production and distribution. This exploration includes assessing potential regulatory responses and other adaptive strategies to address challenges and opportunities within the news industry.
- **Equality, Diversity And Inclusion:** Foster inclusivity within the media workforce and striving to ensure a broad range of perspectives in news content.
- **Comprehensive Media Literacy:** Strengthen efforts to enhance critical media literacy across all key stakeholders—news makers, producers, distributors, redistributors, consumers, and policy makers and implementors.

- **Journalism Education:** Considering diverse issues related to developing curricula that equip future journalists with the skills necessary for the digital age.
- **The Climate Imperative:** News producers and distributors face a critical role in addressing the climate crisis. This necessitates a reevaluation of their processes, practices, and business models.
- **Relevant Research:** To ensure research delivers both relevance and impact, stronger collaboration is needed between industry, funders, and researchers.
- **Media Policy And Regulation:** Examine existing policy and regulatory frameworks and suggest reforms to support sustainable journalism practices.
- **Journalism Funding And Revenue Models:** Explore innovative economic models to ensure the financial health of news organisations.
- **Public Value And Industry Collaboration:** Promote partnerships among media stakeholders to enhance the societal value of news.

These thematic areas will guide the Forum's initial activities and discussions, addressing the evolving needs within the media landscape.

We expect participants to focus on one or more of these themes, whilst also coming together as a whole to ensure maximum cross-fertilisation and inspiration.

In the remainder of this section, we suggest the kind of topics that participants might consider in relation to each theme. These topics attracted attention from participants in the News Futures 2035 project but were not straightforward to resolve because they touch on divergent interests and perspectives. They are therefore perfectly suited to the track two diplomacy approach of the News Futures Forum.





# Relationships And Regulation Of Technology Companies

News Futures 2035 participants agreed that effective relationships between news producers and distributors were essential to the health and well-being of our information ecosystem. These relationships are expected to become even more crucial with the rapid advances in technologies such as generative AI.

Such organisational relationships depend not only on mutual commitment, trust, and agreed-upon levels of control and satisfaction among the actors, but also on their dedication to considering the impact of their activities on the wider public. This requires participation from all stakeholders in formulating effective guidelines and proportionate regulation of the people and technologies used to create and disseminate public-interest news. They agreed with UNESCO<sup>69</sup> that any governance systems should draw from the expertise of human rights experts, academics, and civil society organisations, as well as recognised good practices from other governance systems. Indeed, given the speed at which technology is evolving, they agreed with the World Economic Forum that it is crucial that regulation and governance are more agile, cultivating evidence-based practices, learning from failures, and viewing technology policy as a continuously evolving process.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms* (UNESCO, 2023), 19, accessed May 16 2024, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387339>.

<sup>70</sup>World Economic Forum, *Global Technology Governance: A Multistakeholder Approach*, 26.

Some participants argued that online intermediaries should be regulated in line with the principles agreed at the World Summit on the Information Society (2003 and 2005) and reaffirmed by the UN General Assembly during the 10 year review process in 2015,<sup>71</sup> promoting respect for fundamental freedoms of expression, information and communication, and for privacy and other human rights,<sup>72</sup> while also ensuring that online spaces and emerging technologies such as AI benefit humanity as a whole.<sup>73</sup> This includes being conducive to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>74</sup> They argued that regulation should ensure openness about sources and the data used to build algorithms and safeguards against technology and AI companies preventing investigations into their operations.

Participants pointed out that academia can contribute to how online intermediaries and emerging technologies deployed in public-interest news are monitored and regulated and ensuring that emerging technologies utilised in delivering news operate in an unbiased way that serves all of society. They said that academia should focus on developing and testing innovations (especially AI) for making public-interest news more accessible.

## Comprehensive Media Literacy

Recent research has found a significant correlation between low levels of trust in journalism and a lack of knowledge about the news media industry.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, reports, including those commissioned by the government,<sup>76</sup> have found a lack of funding for media literacy initiatives and a lack of comprehensive and coordinated actions.

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<sup>71</sup>UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 12.

<sup>72</sup>UNESCO, *Operational guidelines on the implementation of the Convention in the digital environment* (UNESCO, 2017), 3, accessed May 16, 2024. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378132.nd> and McDona

<sup>73</sup>UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 13.

<sup>74</sup>UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 12.

<sup>75</sup>IMPRESS, *News Literacy Report: Lessons in building public confidence and trust* (IMPRESS, 2022), 34, accessed May 16 2024, <https://www.impressorg.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Impress-News-Literacy-Report-2022.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup>Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, *Online Media Literacy Strategy*, 9.



As such, News Futures 2035 participants felt that various stakeholders, from policymakers to the journalism industry and civil society organisations can help support efforts to improve citizens' media literacy through informing all citizens of the importance of analysis and critical thinking in the consumption of information.<sup>77</sup>

News Futures 2035 participants felt that educators, in particular, should play their part in media literacy initiatives aimed at the general public. This is a finding echoed by UNESCO, which states that educators have a role in helping learners of all ages understand the wider digital environment in the context of rapid technological changes.<sup>78</sup> However, for this education to be effective, policymakers should ensure that actors in all the nations of the UK have equal access to ongoing media literacy provision. In turn, academia should focus on how to better evaluate the effectiveness of provision on offer. Industry actors can encourage media leadership, enabling citizens to be part of the public discourse about what their communities need for their information needs to be met, especially within the context of the unequal access that citizens living in different parts of the UK have to quality local information and media.<sup>79</sup>

## The Climate Imperative

Climate change demands a transformation across all sectors, including the news media. Effectively addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach encompassing not just news content but also production and distribution processes. The intricate nature of climate issues necessitates a sophisticated understanding of the business models underpinning media organisations. As the News Futures Forum gathers diverse stakeholders, integrating climate-related topics into their collaborative agenda becomes even more imperative.

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<sup>77</sup>Nozima Muratova, Alton Grizzle, Dilfuza Mirzakhmedova, *Media and Information Literacy in Journalism* (Baktria Press, UNESCO, 2019), 46, accessed May 16, 2024. [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/mil\\_eng.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/mil_eng.pdf).

<sup>78</sup>UNESCO, *Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms*, 23.

<sup>79</sup>Sameer Padania, "Local news is missing from the conversation about place, inequality and wellbeing. A new pooled fund aims to change that," *Funders Collaborative Hub*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.funderscollaborativehub.org.uk/blogs/local-news-is-missing-from-the-conversation-about-place-inequality-and-wellbeing-a-new-pooled-fund-aims-to-change-that>.

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception and influencing policy on environmental issues. Accurate and comprehensive reporting on climate change is crucial for driving public awareness and action, becoming a key element in tackling environmental challenges. Wolfgang Blau, a former Director of Digital Strategy at The Guardian, emphasises that effective reporting requires a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of global systems and the impact of human activities.<sup>80</sup>

The complexity of climate issues spans scientific, economic, social, and political dimensions, necessitating expertise from various fields for effective interdisciplinary collaboration. The media's ability to contextualise climate change within these broader narratives is crucial for fostering informed public discourse and shaping policy.

The traditional advertising-supported business model, which often promotes consumption, needs to be re-evaluated through the lens of sustainability. Aligning media business practices with Sustainable Development Goals to ensure advertising revenues support responsible environmental reporting is essential.

By incorporating climate issues into the News Futures Forum agenda, the forum can bolster its capacity to develop media practices that are not only informative and educational but also contribute to a sustainable future. This strategic emphasis supports the broader objectives of responsible journalism and public service.

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<sup>80</sup>Wolfgang Blau, "Climate change: Journalism's greatest challenge," *Medium*, February 7, 2022. <https://wblau.medium.com/climate-change-journalisms-greatest-challenge-2bb59bfb38b8>.

# Journalism Education

News Futures 2035 participants argued that if journalists are technology-enabled through continuous training, and AI is incorporated into workflows, technology can be a force for positive change within the journalism sector - decreasing costs, attracting new audiences, and enabling independent, local, and niche publishers to flourish. They advised that every employee within news organisations, from journalists to board members, needs to have a basic level of understanding of technology and AI, understanding how to use technology and AI responsibly, ethics and use cases. All actors within the news industry need to have a mindset of learning and be curious about what comes next.

Moreover, they advised that the needs of young people should be addressed by public-interest news providers investing in delivering public-interest news through channels being used by young people.

Participants felt that academia has a role to play in understanding audience motivations for consuming news and public-interest news in particular and applying this knowledge to producing more relevant courses that teach outcomes as well as theories. They agreed that there are opportunities for academia and industry to work together to ensure that journalism courses are up-to-date and address the challenges that the journalism industry is facing, particularly related to rapidly evolving technology.

# Relevant Research

The News Futures process highlighted the critical need for robust insights that effectively inform policy and practice. To ensure that research is relevant and impactful, strong collaboration among industry professionals, funders, and researchers is essential. Such cooperative efforts lead to a more comprehensive and timely research environment, ultimately producing practical solutions for real-world challenges.

Firstly, collaboration between industry, policy actors and researchers strengthens the relevance of research topics. Several studies support this notion. A 2011 article in *Research Policy* by Perkmann et al.<sup>81</sup> found a positive correlation between university-industry collaboration and the likelihood of research addressing industry-relevant problems. Similarly, a 2013 study in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* by Carayannis et al. highlighted that industry involvement in research agendas can lead to a stronger focus on practical applications.<sup>82</sup>

Secondly, interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial in formulating comprehensive research agendas that address complex challenges. By integrating researchers from diverse fields, a more holistic understanding of issues is developed. Funders are pivotal in this process, supporting collaborative research proposals that transcend disciplinary boundaries. This broad approach not only deepens understanding but also leads to more effective solutions.

Moreover, collaboration is essential for translating research findings into practical outcomes. Effective knowledge exchange between researchers and stakeholders is key to maximising the impact of research. Researchers and stakeholders working in tandem can fine-tune communication strategies to transform complex research findings into actionable insights for both industry and policymakers. Funders can enhance this process by promoting the development of platforms for knowledge sharing. Such collaborative efforts ensure that research extends beyond academic circles to address tangible issues.

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<sup>81</sup>Perkmann, Markus, Zella King, and Stephen Pavelin, "Engaging excellence? Effects of faculty quality on university engagement with industry," *Research Policy* 40, no. 4 (2011): 539-552.

<sup>82</sup>Carayannis, Elias G., and David FJ Campbell, "'Mode 3 and Quadruple Helix': toward a 21st century fractal innovation ecosystem," *International journal of technology management* 46, no. 3-4 (2009): 201-234.

In conclusion, fostering collaboration among industry, funders, and researchers is vital for producing relevant and impactful research. This collaborative approach focuses on addressing real-world problems, promotes well-rounded research agendas, and aids in the practical application of research findings. By uniting these diverse stakeholders, we can establish a more effective and timely research environment, driving beneficial changes in both the industry and wider society.

## Equality, Diversity And Inclusion

News Futures 2035 participants felt that public-interest news should cover all the angles and be representative of the whole of society, and, as such, argued that diverse perspectives need to be represented within the news ecosystem, both in the content produced and in the personnel of news organisations. They advocated for the industry to create more pathways into journalism for people from underrepresented backgrounds and different disciplines. To ensure that careers in public-interest news journalism are attractive to future generations, public-interest journalism itself needs to become more engaging and accessible. Moreover, participants felt that the industry needs to be alert to biases in the technology and AI used to create and disseminate public-interest news.

These findings echo calls from organisations calling for greater diversity within the media ecosystem, such as the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media and Diversity at Birmingham City University, which through its journal jointly published with Cardiff University advocates for such issues as better representation of Black staff at mid- and senior-level management at the BBC,<sup>83</sup> provides guidance on protecting LGBTQ staff from abuse<sup>84</sup> and diversity and inclusion principles for the responsible use of generative AI in journalism.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Wanda Wyporska, "Black Programming at the BBC," *Representology: The Journal of Media and Diversity* 5 (Summer 2023): 39, <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/representologyissue05spreads080923-133386401829134804.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup>Finbarr Toesland, "Are media organisations adequately protecting LGBTQ journalists from harassment and abuse?," *Representology: The Journal of Media and Diversity* 5 (Summer 2023): 14, <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/representologyissue05spreads080923-133386401829134804.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup>Paul Bradshaw, Diane Kemp, and Marcus Ryder, "Six Diversity and Inclusion Principles for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Journalism," *Representology: The Journal of Media and Diversity* 5 (Summer 2023): 46, <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/representologyissue05spreads080923-133386401829134804.pdf>.

# Journalism Funding

News Futures 2035 participants felt that when it came to limited public funding, there needs to be a clear distinction between news that can be described as a public good and news that can be classed as a rivalrous good. Subsidies should be provided for accessible basic information in the public interest and policymakers should incentivise the best providers to make it available.

Moreover, they felt that whether from government, philanthropists, levies on technology companies or the licence fee being shared amongst a greater number of players, funding is not necessarily the sole answer to the problem of securing public-interest news, because funding can potentially encourage stagnation. Participants felt strongly that any funding cannot simply support failing commercial models: rather, it should encourage innovation.

Funding should be targeted (e.g. towards those who are least well represented within the media ecosystem) and transparent, with a body overseeing its distribution that ensures that there is a level playing field between independents and new entrants and established corporate publishers. Regarding local journalism funding, they agreed with reports which recommend communities themselves could be part of the decision-making process.<sup>86</sup> Participants also felt that public-interest news organisations should be able to gain charitable status.

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<sup>86</sup>Bradshaw, Kemp and Ryder, "Six Diversity and Inclusion Principles for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Journalism," 46.



Many participants' recommendations echoed calls in recent reports and academic papers, such as supporting non-profit structures for both new and existing companies, tax credits for local publishers<sup>87</sup> and funding journalism like a public utility, e.g. a community electing to tax themselves per household depending on what they deem appropriate.<sup>88</sup> Other funding ideas that find some commonality with those proposed by News Futures 2035 participants include a peer-based research funding model that incorporates funding from government, foundations and private donors,<sup>89</sup> and participatory grantmaking that would ensure that public funding for journalism is subject to democratic control and accountability,<sup>90</sup> bringing it in line with best practice within arts funding, where community engagement and participatory elements are now standard.<sup>91</sup>

## Industry Collaboration To Reassert Journalism's Public Value

News Futures 2035 participants felt public service media organisations such as the BBC should move away from the generalised mantra of 'inform, educate and entertain' to agreeing a framework for evaluating the public value they create and measuring its impact. While public value is difficult to define, scholars studying the issue suggest that a 'commitment to citizenship, regional economic promotion and the guarantee of credibility'<sup>92</sup> are key factors. Furthermore, their findings emphasise that, in a context in which these aspects are threatened, defining and applying public value is more important than ever.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Radcliffe, D. and Mathews, N. (2023). *Building a Stronger Local Media Ecosystem: The Role of Media Policy*. Columbia Journalism Review. [https://www.cjr.org/tow\\_center\\_reports/building-a-stronger-local-media-ecosystem-the-role-of-media-policy.php](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/building-a-stronger-local-media-ecosystem-the-role-of-media-policy.php), p. 22

<sup>88</sup>Radcliffe and Mathews, "Building a Stronger Local Media Ecosystem: The Role of Media Policy," 27.

<sup>89</sup>Maria Latos, Frank Lobigs, and Holger Wormer, "Peer-based research funding as a model for journalism funding," *Journalism O*, no. 0 (2023): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231215662>.

<sup>90</sup>Deborah Grayson, *Funding journalism using participatory grantmaking* (Media Reform Coalition, Public Interest News Foundation, Institute for Welsh Affairs, 2023), 3, accessed May 16 2024, <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/PIJ-Briefing-Final-1.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup>Grayson, *Funding journalism using participatory grantmaking*, 7.

<sup>92</sup>Azahara Cañedo, Marta Rodríguez-Castro, and Ana María López-Cepeda, "Distilling the value of public service media: Towards a tenable conceptualisation in the European framework," *European Journal of Communication* 37, no. 6 (2022): 599, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231221090777>.

<sup>93</sup>Azahara Cañedo, Marta Rodríguez-Castro, and Ana María López-Cepeda, "Distilling the value of public service media: Towards a tenable conceptualisation in the European framework," *European Journal of Communication* 37, no. 6 (2022): 599, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231221090777>.

More widely, participants felt strongly that a wider industry recognition of the importance of public-interest news and reassertion of its democratic purpose was necessary. This necessitates a longer-term, more strategic view of the industry and a shift in policies that re-emphasise this type of journalism, with bold new ideas in how to deliver public-interest news in a publicly palatable way so that it is more valued by and of more value to audiences.

News Futures 2035 participants recognised that public-interest news providers are struggling to remain relevant to consumers because of multiple factors such as changing consumption trends, economies of scale, reduced capacity of news producers and the need to focus on the most lucrative part of the market that is most desirable to advertisers. These concerns align with the findings of inquiries such as the Cairncross Review, which found that the unbundling of content has had a detrimental effect on the visibility of public-interest news;<sup>94</sup> Ofcom's finding that, while BBC One continues to have the highest reach of any individual news source, it is showing signs of gradual decline;<sup>95</sup> and the Sustainability of local journalism report, which highlights that navigating and engaging with the online advertising market, setting up a subscription service or devising other types of business innovation, requires technical and financial resources which smaller publishers often lack.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism*, 6

<sup>95</sup>Ofcom, *News consumption in the UK: 2023* (Ofcom, 2023), 5, accessed May 16, 2024, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/264651/news-consumption-2023.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/264651/news-consumption-2023.pdf).

<sup>96</sup>House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Sustainability of Local Journalism*, 10.

Because of these factors, News Futures 2035 participants felt that there was a disconnect between publishers and communities, whether local communities or communities of interest, as well as a lack of adequate representation of those who are traditionally underserved by the news media and lack of interest in meaningfully addressing citizens' public-interest news needs. Some participants recommended that, to reverse these developments, publishers need to address local news deserts, engage with communities and find out what their public-interest news needs are, address lack of provision for traditionally underserved groups and incorporate audiences into decision-making processes.

News Futures 2035 participants felt that innovative content sharing and collaboration between public-interest news providers and other media would help address specific communities currently underserved by news or most at risk of mistrust and news avoidance, and called for thinking outside the box when it comes to the delivery of public-interest news. This is reflected in reports which have found positive examples of collaboration between traditional media, hyperlocals and new start-ups, and different models that yield fruitful results, from temporary and separate to ongoing and co-creating.<sup>97</sup> However, for successful collaborations that ensure sustainability across all models, they advise that collaboration must result in measurable gains for the journalism organisations and audiences involved.<sup>98</sup> As such, News Futures 2035 participants advised that future content sharing and collaboration should be more targeted, specifically innovating on the way that public-interest news is delivered to encourage citizens to 'eat their greens'.

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<sup>97</sup>Sarah Stonbely. *Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism* (Center for Cooperative Media, 2017), 15, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://collaborativejournalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Models-for-Collaborative-Journalism-research-paper.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup>Stonbely, *Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism*. 61.

# Conclusion

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The looming threats to public-interest news in the UK underscore the critical need for structured, collaborative efforts to navigate the complex landscape of policies, regulations, and consumer relevance. The foresight methodology utilised throughout the News Futures 2035 participatory action research study revealed a multitude of drivers of change anticipated to impact its future provision. Among these, two critical factors stood out as both highly influential and challenging to predict. Firstly, the encompassing domain of policies, regulations, and governance can either enable or constrict the future of public-interest news. Secondly, the crux lies in whether the present and forthcoming industry can innovate sufficiently to ensure that public-interest news remains highly relevant to consumers, suppliers, and society at large.

Participants' findings suggest that rather than techno-economic solutions, what is needed is a holistic analysis of journalism's role in the 21st century. For example, they recommended that what is needed is public-interest news that is accessible to all of society and delivered in a way that makes citizens feel empowered to participate in public life. What this refocusing on serving the whole of society and empowering citizens means however, is making public-interest news accessible to all via the reassertion of it as a public good to be protected. There were also crossover findings around issues such as the plurality of the media landscape, AI and media literacy, the need for diversity and inclusivity within the news media.

Our core recommendation offers a pathway to tackle the pressing challenges confronting the provision of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK. Advocating for the establishment of a collaborative forum underscores the urgent need for greater understanding and cooperation among stakeholders. This initiative, inspired partly by the Cairncross Review's proposal for an Institute for Public Interest News, aims to provide a structured environment for industry, civil society, academia, and regulators to address critical concerns akin to backchannel deliberations or track two diplomacy, which aim not to replace official policymaking and regulation, but to enhance it by engaging a wider range of stakeholders.

We urge anyone who cares about the future of public-interest news in the UK to take this recommendation seriously and work with us to create a Future News Forum along the lines suggested here.

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# Defining Our Key Terms

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For clarity, we offer our working definitions of key terms in our research question: How can the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK be secured?

## Supply

Implicit in this term is our assumption that the news ecosystem is fueled by an industry that consists of an identifiable group of public and private establishments, large and small, that are all actively and constructively engaged in providing public-interest news.

## Trust, Trusted, Trustworthy

We start by accepting Rawlins' argument that 'trust is one party's willingness – shown by intention and behaviour – to be vulnerable to another party based on confidence developed cognitively and affectively that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open... As such, to gain trust, one must trust others, because trust is reciprocal. One must also be trustworthy, which seems to be best measured by whether one is perceived as having competence, integrity, goodwill, reliability, and is open'.<sup>99</sup>

Whatever else, trust is about people. In particular, it is about the choices that trustors make about the trustworthiness of the objects of that trust. Thus, news providers may endeavour to be trustworthy; whether they are trusted depends on the perception of audiences.

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<sup>99</sup>Brad L. Rawlins, *Trust and PR Practice* (Institute for Public Relations, 2007): 5-6, <https://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Rawlins-Trust-formatted-for-IPR-12-10.pdf>.

# Public-Interest News

Public-interest news is defined as news and other information from identifiable producers and distributors committed to high ethical standards and best practices in journalism, who can be held to account by the public. This content must be accessible to the public, who should be able to understand it, and assess for themselves its benefits.

## Secured

We take this to mean to make certain that the industry supplying trustworthy public-interest news is sustainable and protected from danger or risk.

## UK

While our plenary sessions took place in the north and south of England, we actively sought to involve individuals and consider the issues from the perspective of all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

# Appendix

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## Exploring Possible Futures: The Full Scenarios

### The Squirrel Analogy

To enable better understanding of the scenarios methodology for wider stakeholders, participants were encouraged to come up with an analogy that would connect the four different scenarios of the future. Participants agreed that the environments of a nature reserve, a zoo, a museum and the wilderness were apt analogies for frameworks where public-interest news was either of low or high relevance and operating in a highly enabling or highly constraining policy and regulatory environment. It was also decided that the red squirrel, a species native to the UK, would be an apt animal to represent public-interest news in these environments because both are endangered in the UK and reliant on a wider ecosystem for its survival.

### Scenario Framework: High Relevance Of Public-Interest News, Highly Enabling Policy Context

#### Name: The Nature Reserve

**Summary:** Government policy has addressed the tech company oligopoly. A levy from tech platforms is distributed to news organisations that have the vision for how communities can function in the new information and communication 'nirvana'. A change in competition law means consumers are able to pick and choose from a variety of different publishers, paying one fair price, while those who can't afford to pay for public-interest news get it for free at the point of use, like the NHS. By 2035, all digital technology is simple and accessible. Media literacy is high and people are able to confidently navigate through the complexity of the world.



In this scenario 5G WiFi is available everywhere. Government



policy has addressed the tech company oligopoly and social media companies have taken responsibility for content, now regarded as publishers as well as platforms. A levy from tech platforms is distributed in a democratic manner to organisations that have the vision for how communities can function in the new information and communication 'nirvana'. They create a central information infrastructure, with data such as live weather and transport updates turned into journalism people find useful.

Increasingly, technology is seen as a force for positive change within the journalism sector, with the widespread implementation of machine learning and artificial intelligence resulting in decreased costs, new audiences and the flourishing of independent, local and niche publishers. An onus on more equitable access to public-interest news means consumers are able to pick and choose from a variety of different publishers, paying one fair price. In turn, those who can't afford to pay for public-interest news get it for free at the point of use, like the NHS. This is achieved through a change in competition law and co-operation between publishers. As such, news is widely available in different formats across platforms where people spend time - mitigating news-avoidance, increasing media literacy and trust in the media.

There is also new thinking in terms of social media, with the government promoting UK-owned platforms. This results in local communities coming together to create their own platforms (e.g. for the London Borough of Hackney), with the data owned by its users and serving these local communities. The resulting increased sense of community between citizens leads to the creation of local information and communication hubs, which include a news service where people can go in order to discuss and deliberate with one another, and act as a collective when addressing shared problems.

By 2035, all digital technology is simple and accessible; there are no barriers to accessing content any place, on any device, any time. Media literacy is high (i.e. everyone has an understanding of what they are consuming and where it is coming from) and people are able to confidently navigate through the complexity of the world. The metaverse plays an increasingly important role in people's lives, enabling access to information such as local authority updates. Journalism in the metaverse enables citizens to experience the story themselves; to interact with it and see a variety of perspectives, while also being able to ask critical questions and get answers. This model, created thanks to publishers' willingness to invest in

technology, means people see its value and are willing to pay for it. In turn, media companies are run with a broad range of business models and ownership.

## Scenario Framework: Low Relevance Of Public-Interest News, Enabling Policy Context

### Name: The Zoo

**Summary:** Regulation fails to protect journalists from online abuse, meaning many leave the profession, leading to a crisis in the news industry. This government implements recommendations from the Cairncross Review and anti-SLAPP legislation is passed. Public subsidies for public-interest news are introduced but largely go to mainstream actors of the national media. As a result, grassroots organisations lose out. The Local Democracy Reporting Service is expanded, but does not increase engagement. By 2035, trust in the media is extremely low. The industry is seen by citizens as being too closely entwined with those in power.



In this scenario, the media are failing to reflect the diversity of the population, resulting in news avoidance. Simultaneously, the digital divide continues to grow because of the wider deteriorating economic situation. Regulation fails to protect journalists from online abuse, meaning many leave the profession, leading to a crisis in the news industry. In turn, this leads to a political intervention where recommendations from the Cairncross Review are implemented and anti-SLAPP legislation is passed.

Public subsidies for public-interest news are introduced, with the funding coming partly from the BBC License Fee being shared amongst a greater number of players, and partly from a levy on technology platforms. However, unlike in other countries such as the US, where subsidies address news deserts in local areas, subsidies in the UK largely go to the mainstream actors of the national media and the government does not address criticism that there should be a barrier between politicians and the distribution of funding, such as the Arts Council (as suggested by the Cairncross Review). As a result, grassroots organisations lose out.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service is expanded, but

does not increase engagement. In fact, audience numbers fall. Still, publishers stick to the model, even in the face of figures suggesting news avoidance continues to increase, especially amongst younger people and those less educated.

Regulation fails to address media ownership and there is a rise in disinformation tools such as deepfakes, further eroding trust in public-interest news providers, who are also struggling due to supply chain issues and a scarcity of resources.

These problems are compounded by a lack of investment in media literacy amongst the population. Because media companies have lost their societal meaning, there is also a lack of journalists who want to work in public-interest news, with inadequate remuneration fuelling dissatisfaction amongst those that remain.

By 2035, trust in the media is extremely low, and it is seen by citizens as being too closely entwined with those in power. As a result, citizens feel that there is nowhere where politicians are hearing their concerns. As such, the media that remains is so irrelevant that, while it continues to supply thanks to subsidies, it has no audience. Instead, people are getting news from each other and from content uploaded to unregulated social media platforms. In turn, the number of people being susceptible to disinformation continues to increase. The combination of these various factors leads to social unrest, public disorder and rioting.

## Scenario Framework: Low Relevance Of Public-Interest News, Highly Constrained Policy Context

### Name: The Museum

**Summary:** The Online Safety Bill and Media Bill pass. The National Security Bill passes without public-interest defence. The Digital Markets Bill is dropped and Google blocks third party cookies. The Office for National Statistics reclassifies news subscriptions as a luxury good and tree felling for publishing is criminalised. A public outcry regarding the state of the news industry is followed by government subsidies. This leads to there being too many actors, a lack of innovation and oversupply. The supply chain fails and the industry collapses. By 2035, there is no instant news, with people getting their news from private message groups.



In this scenario, the unbundling of news reporting has proved public-interest news, whilst of long-term strategic importance, is uneconomical to produce from a short-term and profit-driven perspective. The number of journalists allocated to public-interest news is shrinking rapidly. Increasing news fatigue and news avoidance further threaten the survival of public-interest news providers. The national redtops are especially in decline. This further exacerbates a lack of interest and lack of understanding of public-interest news, especially among the less educated. Within local media, there is disconnect between publishers and communities.

The Online Safety Bill and Media Bill pass. Thereafter the National Security Bill passes without public-interest defence. Soon after, a news editor is charged for a National Security Bill breach. The Digital Markets Bill is dropped and Google blocks third party cookies by 2024. Algorithms are squeezing out news discovery.

Among the publishers that are still in business, there is a lack of AI literacy, not enough training and a culture that still resists big change, while shareholders of media companies are fixated on profits at the expense of innovation. Platforms become risk averse. Audience numbers continue to decrease due to rising subscription costs, and consumers shun news for entertainment content. Simultaneously, there is also a growing mistrust of social media companies, with their power diminishing as a result.

A worsening economic situation and a series of climate disasters means there is a publishing crisis (Headline: This headline cost £2), with the Office for National Statistics reclassifying news subscriptions as a luxury good. Simultaneously, there is increased consumer guilt around any print product because of its impact on the environment. Tree felling for publishing is criminalised. Because of low demand, digital TV and radio are switched off, meaning all advertising moves to the metaverse as it is the only arena left that makes business sense.

These developments are followed by a public outcry of sorts (not necessarily people marching in the streets, but potentially a synthesised public outcry where media organisations say they are failing and thus need subsidies, presenting it as a public outcry). However, with an effectively wholly-subsidised industry, there are too many actors, which leads to a lack of innovation and oversupply, while at the same time, the industry fails to address the needs of the people. Finally, the

supply chain fails and the industry collapses. By 2035, there is no instant news, with people getting their news from private message groups. The general public have no faith in (what remains of) the media, to be able to hold power to account.

## Scenario Framework: High Relevance Of Public-Interest News, Highly Constrained Policy Context

### Name: The Wilderness

**Summary:** A worsening economic situation in the UK leads to a crisis in the news industry but no subsidies for public-interest news are introduced. In light of closures and reduced operations of remaining titles, niche publishers pick up the mantle of public-interest news reporting. The BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service is stopped. The continuing deterioration of the economic situation leads to all public-interest news being behind a paywall and too expensive for most people, with the majority of the public getting their news from highly biased online media platforms and social media. By 2035, only a few national titles remain online.



In this scenario, publishers are forced to increase prices due to the worsening wider economic situation, further destabilising the short-term economic viability of news providers, especially at the local level. AI increases the supply of content but not necessarily the number of journalists. Several national and local newspapers close, including most of the free titles. The publishers that do survive reduce their staff as shareholders continue to expect the same profits. With local media disappearing, the BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service is stopped. Across the board, there is no scope for investing in innovation due to economic constraints and there are no subsidies.

In light of the closures and reduced staff numbers at remaining titles, niche publishers pick up the mantle of public-interest news reporting. Hyperlocal online publishers in wealthier areas are especially thriving, having adopted an unbundled content model and utilised emerging technological innovations, which are coming from outside the legacy sector. However, the continuing polarisation of the country and battle for audiences' attention has affected the quality of the news and it is not presenting the breadth of perspectives. There are calls from

some sectors of the industry for the creation of algorithms that can help readers find diverse and constructive news content. With wages continuing to decrease across the board, journalists are leaving the industry and no progress is made on diversifying the media.

The combination of these events leads to all public-interest news being behind a paywall and too expensive for most people. The remaining journalists work for free. As such, the majority of the public are getting their news from highly biased online media platforms and social media. However, there is still a section of society who value public-interest news and some established publishers continue to exist catering to better-educated middle-class readers, though their operations are much reduced. They continue operating under the same business model of subscriptions, donations and advertising, though advertising for polluting industries has been banned. Printed newspapers become a niche product.

By 2035, there are no more printed newspapers, with only a few national titles remaining online. The remaining local newspapers have cut back repeatedly, reducing personnel and moving their offices away from the communities which they are supposed to serve, further exacerbating a disconnect between publishers and readers. Media literacy is low. Grassroots news organisations are microclimates of diversity, but only for the short to medium term as they fail to retain staff due to low wages. Given that they are so small, there is a lack of scale, and most do not survive.

With the widespread disappearance of news providers and a decrease in media literacy, there are calls to start teaching media literacy within the context of rights movements, with one possibility being that the government intervenes, and another that there are community campaigns. The outcome is that people start believing the news is worth paying for. This may have been activated by specific situations occurring in the wider world – crises like wars or pandemics, or environmental factors such as floods, etc.



# Additional Project Insights

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For further understanding and detailed information about the News Futures 2035 project, refer to the resources listed below.

**News Futures 2035 Website:** The News Futures 2035 website summarises the project and contains information about the core research group.

**News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper:** The scene-setting discussion paper set out the main issues affecting the news industry at the start of the project in Q3 2022. An Executive Summary is also available.

**News Futures 2035 Interim Report:** The Interim Report summarises the project's initial findings following the three in-person plenaries which took place between October 2022 and February 2023.

**Plenary Recap Videos:** Two short videos were made during plenaries 2 and 3 of the News Futures 2035 study. They summarise the methodology employed and include interviews with some participants reflecting on the process.

Download the News Futures 2035 reports and register your interest in the News Futures Forum by visiting our website [mediainnovationstudio.org](https://mediainnovationstudio.org) or scan the QR code below.









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