



Communications and Digital Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The future of news: impartiality, trust and technology

Tuesday 26 March 2024

2.05 pm

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Members present: Baroness Stowell of Beeston (The Chair); Lord Dunlop; Baroness Harding of Winscombe; Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill; Lord Kamall; Lord Knight of Weymouth; The Lord Bishop of Leeds; Lord McNally.

Evidence Session No. 9

Heard in Public

Questions 95 – 99

Witness

I: Angelos Frangopoulos, Chief Executive Officer, GB News.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Angelos Frangopoulos.

Q95 **The Chair:** We now have our second panel, although it is only one witness. May I ask the witness to please introduce himself and his position at GB News?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I am the chief executive officer of GB News Limited.

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here. I know you have been watching while we have been hearing from Sky News; the same sort of approach will apply, and we will be covering similar categories of questions. I will move straight away to our first questions about the role of GB News, and hand over to Lord Kamall.

Q96 **Lord Kamall:** Mr Frangopoulos, thank you very much for coming here today. I want to start with a scene-setter rather than a deep question—I will leave that to the others. Could you tell me how you view GB News in the overall news environment? In particular, how do you see yourself vis-à-vis the public service broadcasters, such as Sky or the BBC?

Angelos Frangopoulos: Lord Kamall, thank you very much for your question. I thank everyone for the opportunity to assist with the inquiry into the future of news. I look forward to exploring the topic, because it is a great passion of mine.

Put simply, our role at GB News is to offer plurality and choice. When GB News launched nearly three years ago, we were the first new entrant to this sector in more than 30 years. We did so because we identified a gap and a need in the market. Our research revealed that there were communities in the United Kingdom who genuinely did not feel that metropolitan-based media reflected or reported what was important to them. They were underrepresented. Our focus, therefore, was and is to deliver that plurality, in a sector which, as I said, our research showed was missing. We are delivering on that.

GB News is aimed at mainstream Britain, and we have become, in this very short time, a part of the media landscape. We are serious about our commitment to playing a role in the British media ecosystem. We have invested very heavily in journalism and British storytelling, and particularly in political journalism. As you may well know, we have just recently opened a broadcast facility not far from here in Westminster, and we are broadcasting five hours a day across the UK from here. We chose to be regulated, and we invested with confidence, knowing that Ofcom had a legal obligation to promote plurality and competition.

Over these past three years, we have added a national radio station on DAB, worldwide distribution, and a very significant investment in digital news, and particularly video. The audiences on all these platforms are now significant, and they are growing. Year-on-year, our television service is up 50%, our radio service is up 40%, and online is up more than 300%. That is because GB News is more than news; it is about

discussion and debate, and it resonates with people. Importantly—I have said this publicly before—our journalism is not for other journalists; it really is about serving communities.

An important point to mention here is that we are bound by an editorial charter. We are not a PSB, but we actually have our own charter, and all our staff must sign up to it prior to commencing their duties with us. The growth in the audience shows that there is a need and a desire for a variety of news and current affairs programming. We feel that we are the voice of mainstream Britain.

We play a very different role from PSBs. We are not a PSB, but we are a public service. I like to think of us as being a fresh voice, with a different style of delivering journalism and debate, and a range of opinion, unifying particularly regional voices. We are an innovating business. The reality is that, as things stand, from the latest data, we have fewer viewers proportionately in London than either Sky or the BBC. There are parts of the United Kingdom where we have pockets with five times the audience of Sky News and the BBC. Clearly there is a need; there is an underrepresented part of the community that we are now addressing. It is because we engage with our audience; it is a two-way conversation. We have found that the response to that has been very encouraging, in terms of the trajectory of GB News and the business model behind it.

Lord Kamall: That raises two quick questions in my mind. First, could you be a bit more specific about what you think—not what others think—it is that you offer that others do not? Secondly, maybe you could tell us a bit about your charter, which you mentioned, and what is in it?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I have a copy of the charter here, which I will refer to in a moment.

On the first point, on what we offer that is different, we unashamedly cover British news in Britain. Having listened to the previous testimony from Sky News, I know it does an extraordinary job covering events in Haiti and Russia, and even the Baltimore bridge collapse today, which are of great interest to the community. But we are really unashamedly British, and we cover British news.

I have a little anecdote to show the significance of that. We launched our international distribution of GB news thinking that there might be some interest abroad, because, as the Sky News team said, you already have Sky News available on multiple platforms and on YouTube, and BBC World or the BBC News service is available as a worldwide service as well. What is different about us is that we have found that British expatriate communities around the world are turning to us because we are delivering British news. If you want to find out what is happening in Haiti or the latest on what is happening in Russia, the BBC and Sky News deliver outstanding coverage. That is not what we do. That is an important difference between us and the PSBs.

On the editorial charter, I would perhaps read the first few points, which state what we stand for as a media organisation. We stand for: “the independence of our journalism ... Putting facts first ... Respect for

opinions and those expressing them ... The right of every individual to form and share their views ... Holding our leaders, our society and ourselves accountable ... Bringing clarity to complex and contentious issues ... Celebrating the potential and achievements of the individual and communities in shaping their and our nation's future". Every single member of our team signs up to that. It goes into further detail, which I will happily distribute and send as a supplementary document to this committee.

The Chair: It would be great to get a copy of it as supplementary evidence.

Lord Kamall: I have just one last question. My colleagues will ask you about impartiality, so I will not touch on that, but one of the things that people value about the UK market is its diversity. One of the concerns about diversity is that people will access only news that reflects their opinion and may not be exposed to other opinions or diverse opinions. What is your reaction to that concern?

Angelos Frangopoulos: That is an important change that happened with our launch in 2021. I had the great privilege of being part of the Sky News team in the 1990s when—as you said earlier in the previous evidence—it was actually a disrupter. It is now very much part of the establishment. That is because it has matured and grown over time. I think there is almost a homogenous aspect to the way that news, particularly in broadcast, has been delivered up until now. We are a challenger; we look at things from a different perspective, and that perspective is because we frame everything in terms of the audience.

We super-serve our audience outside the M25. We have the data behind it to show that that is working. People see us as their voice—that we are part of the community. At GB News, we talk a lot about family, and about our team as a family that works together. More broadly, we hear our audience talking about how our presenters and team are part of their family. It is very different from the traditional approach of, "I am the newsreader and I am delivering the news". We are a warmer and much more unifying force in the coverage of journalism, because we have current affairs and we also have news bulletins in a more traditional sense that Sky News and the BBC News service and others deliver.

The Chair: We have a supplementary question before we move on to our next question.

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: I am a linguist by profession, and I am very interested in some of the language you use. I wonder if I could press you a little to say what you understand mainstream Britain to be. Everybody we talk to thinks they are talking to mainstream Britain, but does it mean "people who agree with me". Are they the mainstream?

Secondly, right at the beginning, you talked about setting yourself against the metropolitan-based media. But it seems to me that while the consumption may be broader, as you say, it is still very metropolitan, if you look at the people who are doing it.

Thirdly, I wonder whether there any limits or boundaries to what you

would regard as opinions that ought to be given a platform. For full transparency, I professionally used to read *Pravda* every day, and clearly there are limits anywhere to what you give a platform to.

The Chair: We might want to get on to the opinion stuff when we come to impartiality, but perhaps we can deal with the other points that have been raised.

Angelos Frangopoulos: Thank you, Lord Bishop, for your excellent questions. I also had the great privilege of studying linguistics at university, and it is a great passion of mine.

It is interesting; it is a word that comes back to us from our audience. In all the research that we did, building the case for GB News, or exploring whether there was a case for GB News, it was the language that kept coming back to us. There was a sense from those we researched that they felt they did not belong or did not fit into the narrative that was coming from traditional broadcasters. They saw themselves as the mainstream. It is interesting.

I have been asked on a number of occasions about the question of mainstream and establishment. I see GB News as serving a mainstream audience in the United Kingdom, because outside the M25 is a very different world. Capital cities tend to be countries of their own really, in many ways, and I have had the privilege of living in many of them. My wife is from the Midlands, and I know from my family up there that there is a different perspective from what you find in Chelsea or just down the road here in Westminster. I am not saying it is bad or good; it is just different.

On your question about being metropolitan, GB News is based here in London, that is true. That is for technical reasons. A lot of our presenters are living in London but we have a broad cross-section of individuals, including people who come from Hull and from the north. We have a very working-class background—I myself have a working-class background. We have a network of journalists who are based across regional parts of the United Kingdom, and we have a significant commitment to Northern Ireland. We cover the Midlands, and right across the north-east and north-west, really well, covering stories that are important to those communities, but on a national level.

Another important point which is overlooked about the journalism at GB News is that it is bringing those local issues to light in the national agenda. I have been really heartened by the trajectory of GB News over the past nearly three years; our competitors are starting to see that there is something going on with our connection to the communities we serve. Increasingly, I see other organisations talking about connecting with audiences outside of London or serving regional audiences and serving all perspectives. That is a really positive outcome of plurality; it has brought a different perspective and viewpoint, and other media are seeing that there is actually an audience there. We have helped in broadening out that perspective of journalism, which up until now has been very much focused here in London.

Q97 Lord McNally: You said that you were a disrupter and I think that is fair—it is a badge of honour in a way. One thing about coming to the House of Lords is that you meet people who have lived through quite a few disruptions. I remember the impact of ITN—to the good—on BBC news, when the BBC newscasters were still wearing evening dress and bow-ties. Sky had a similarly good effect. The jury is still out on what effect you will have, but I have no hostility towards disrupters in any part of the economy.

What I wonder about, though, is this. At its pomp, the slot in the middle of “News at Ten” on ITN used to be the most expensive piece of television advertising you could buy. How commercially attractive is news now? How much is it a product that you can turn an honest penny on?

Angelos Frangopoulos: Lord McNally, that is a very good question, and one that the entire industry is asking itself right now. We heard in the previous testimony about the need to diversify revenue streams. Let me be absolutely clear at the outset that we are a business, and management is under significant pressure to find a way forward for a business. The way forward for any media business is about audience—you need to be able to connect with and build an audience. We are doing well on that front.

The advertising sector, as you have noted, has many challenges. We are looking at different ways of diversifying that income. You may have noticed that we recently launched a membership programme, which I am pretty sure is the first time a membership programme has been launched in the United Kingdom for a broadcaster. This is something that we are looking at and developing further at the moment; in essence, it is about trying to build that connection and contribution and support from our community that is engaged.

While we have a growing audience and our advertising revenue has increased significantly—it had to, because in the early days we did not have much—the reality is that we are looking at all aspects of monetisation. We monetise our product on radio and on linear television, in the traditional sense, and we have our membership scheme. We are significantly investing in digital distribution, which has its own monetisation model around it as well, with video or text, and that is another area that is important to us. Being a multimedia business and being a start-up—less than three years old—has allowed us to make sure that all our content is platform-agnostic, so that we can look at where the business model goes. We are very confident about the future of being self-sufficient financially, but we have a lot of work to do.

Lord McNally: I heard what you said about your localism, but you included evidence that you are now broadcasting five hours a day from down the road, so there is a certain context in this.

We heard from Sky about the international feed, and we have heard about the strategy of the BBC with its global news service. You have pitched a very strong argument about understanding the country. There are a number of us on the panel that also come from outside the metropolis. Where is the international strategy versus the national or

regional strategy?

Angelos Frangopoulos: We think our international appeal is by being focused on the United Kingdom and regional markets. We have our breakfast show with Eamonn Holmes and Isabel Webster, or Anne Diamond and Steve Dixon, or Ellie Costello. Every morning, they are reading out messages such as, “Hi, I’m originally from Leeds and I’m watching here in Auckland”, or perhaps Johannesburg, “I moved many years ago with my husband”. It is about bringing these communities together.

I am a true believer that, for media to exist on a global platform, you have to be authentic and you have to stand for something. We stand for Britain. That gives us a unique place in global distribution, particularly because we are looking at serving expatriates; we want to tell them the story of what is happening in Britain at the moment.

As I said earlier, if you want to watch what is happening in Haiti or with the Baltimore bridge ad infinitum, other services do that—and it is excellent coverage—and are available internationally. That is our point of difference.

Lord McNally: Most expatriates live on a diet of nostalgia for a Britain that no longer exists—that is always a danger.

One of the accusations made is that you are stretching your journalists, in terms of employment and cash, too thinly, and that that will negatively affect the quality of your journalism in the long run. Do you think that is a fair criticism?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I do not think it is a fair criticism because that applies to everybody. I listened to the number of staff that the previous witnesses said they had, and I wish we had half that staff. We operate in a very different ecosystem.

One of the advantages of being a start-up is that we have built in digital infrastructure in a way that allows us to do more with fewer. The evidence for that is that we are now rivalling the audiences of the other two 24-hour television news services here in the United Kingdom, with far fewer staff.

Quality is always a challenge. It is something that we work on. We have a combination of highly experienced journalists and a cohort of younger, up-and-coming journalists. I would like to think of our operation—I am sure our editorial leadership would feel the same—as a place where young people are brought on a journey of getting to know new technology and editorial standards. I think it is a really positive work environment. But the concept of doing more with less is not unique to media; it is something that all businesses are facing globally.

Lord McNally: The most famous mantra about broadcasting was from Lord Reith, which was that it should, “Inform, educate, and entertain”. In which order does GB News put that mission statement?

Angelos Frangopoulos: They are all important, but the one that really stands out for me is engagement, which is not one of those three. By

engagement I mean people feeling that they are part of something and have something to say. Media now is a two-way conversation. What happened with the internet and social media means that everyone has a voice, and the world has moved on from that. Engagement and being part of a community are important to consumers, and that is why we have seen our audience grow, because we are connecting and engaging with those audiences.

The Chair: Can I just ask one quick supplementary before we move on? Looking at what TalkTV has decided to do, in moving away from linear broadcast and going only online, is that something that you would ever consider?

Angelos Frangopoulos: That was a decision made by News UK for whatever reason. Our viewpoint is that we have to be where the audiences are, and that is changing over time. There are still sufficient and significant audiences on traditional broadcast platforms, but, just like ITV, the BBC and Channel 4, everyone is looking at how those audiences are transitioning off terrestrial broadcast, or DAB or DVB-terrestrial broadcast, or satellite, on to new platforms. Because we are platform-agnostic, we are already there in those platforms that TalkTV is going on to. It is really a case of monitoring the business opportunity as we move forward, and being where the audiences are. That will change over time, and everyone is in agreement that that is changing—at times rapidly—so we are keeping a watching brief on that.

Q98 **Baroness Harding of Winscombe:** I would like to ask a few questions about impartiality, but I wonder if we could start with this. One of the things we have been learning in this inquiry is the distinction between news, current affairs, and opinion. Could you set out for us how you at GB News think about those three different types of content?

Angelos Frangopoulos: We have a very clear delineation of how that content sits on our channel. We use features to make it very clear for our audience. I put current affairs and opinion in one bucket in the that way we think of it, and then news in another. When you watch GB News and a new bulletin comes up, GBNEWS is on the screen, and a separate newsreader comes on and presents the news—at times they do a financial report—and at the end of the news bulletin there is a closing video and then we move on to the other product. At the same time, on our screen, the logo changes from GBN to GBNEWS, to make it absolutely clear that there is a delineation between the news bulletin and the current affairs and opinion programming.

On compliance and the way we operate and our content is built, we adhere to that format, which we introduced some months after we launched. Obviously, when you are a start-up, you learn all the time. There was a demand from our viewers for news bulletins, and we introduced them about six or seven months after we launched. There is a clear delineation.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: That is the visible side, but how, from your editorial policy and editorial charter, do you think about the

distinction? What is news versus opinion?

Angelos Frangopoulos: News is covered separately under the Ofcom regulations, as opposed to opinion. A presenter is able to deliver an opinion. When it comes to news, we currently have a separate team that compiles the news. They sit in a separate part of the newsroom, and they adhere to the impartiality rules that apply to news. Our opinion and current affairs team sits somewhere else, and they operate under the rules as they stand, but separately. We have a very clear delineation between the two.

I might add that this is nothing new. When I worked at Sky News in the 1990s, there were discussion programmes and opinion programmes in the evening. It is just that its programming has drifted to be more like a PSB, which is absolutely fine, and that type of programming has ceased to exist. When we came along and introduced that type of programme, everyone felt it was a bit odd, but in fact it has been part of the British media landscape for a very long time.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: How do you respond to the concerns that others have raised about GB News's approach to maintaining impartiality?

Angelos Frangopoulos: We chose to be regulated. We have a very comprehensive compliance regime. Over time, we have built a compliance regime which I believe is the most comprehensive I have seen in my career. Every single member of staff gets training by a very experienced former senior board member at Ofcom, who is our compliance officer. We also have continual training on the outcome of Ofcom matters, so that our team can learn from what we hear from Ofcom. We are very dedicated to compliance.

The challenge is that we are doing something different. When the Communications Act was set up in 2003, the rules were set up for the "News at Ten" and the "Nine O'Clock News". It is a different world now, and our programming is different, certainly from Section 5. You can read it one way, or you can read it the other. We are currently working in a very collaborative environment with Ofcom, where we receive its viewpoints, learn from what it says, and adjust our compliance accordingly.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: I am afraid you lost me slightly when you got to Section 5; I wonder if you could just expand a bit on the different interpretations.

Angelos Frangopoulos: There is the right for a presenter to have an opinion. There is freedom of speech protection, which is separate and sits above the Ofcom rules. In Section 5, there is due impartiality, which applies in certain aspects of programming, whether the individual is a politician presenting a programme or it is a matter of some sensitivity in public policy. They sit within Section 5. I am not a lawyer, but I have a pretty good understanding of how this works. We believe that freedom of speech is paramount. Individuals have a freedom of speech right.

That does not mean that we have the freedom to say anything. There is the law, and we also have our editorial charter, which is our guiding pathway. Where we have got things wrong, and people have got things wrong on our screen, there are processes and procedures that we have put in place, and we have taken the relevant action.

We are confident about our compliance moving forward. It is something that we live and breathe every single day, because we know we are under a lot of pressure externally, particularly from those who may feel that we are not a positive contributor to the media landscape. I believe very strongly that we are, because our audience tell us so.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: Do you think that Ofcom's current framework for overseeing due impartiality is fit for purpose?

Angelos Frangopoulos: One of the challenges with the Ofcom process is that there is a large gap between an investigation being started and receiving the outcome of that investigation. We would prefer an environment whereby an investigation is carried out and that period is shorter, so that any learnings we take from an outcome of an investigation could be applied immediately. Receiving outcomes of investigations nearly 12 months afterwards is really difficult for us to operate, and makes the compliance even harder. We have received more than 50 inquiries from Ofcom over the past nearly three years, and we have responded to them diligently, professionally and on time, so it is only fair that we should ask Ofcom to also respond within a reasonable period of time.

We have one case in particular, with five separate investigations. There are five separate programmes being investigated relating to our Don't Kill Cash campaign. I want to give you some insight into how we find this a difficult area to navigate. Don't Kill Cash was in response to feedback we had from an observation by an elderly member of the community who had found that their local car park in their town no longer took cash and so they had to get a card—I think in their case they had to use an app. This was something that they could not do, and they were quite distraught about the fact that they could not park any more because they could not operate the app or use the machine.

The editorial team, independently, said, "What a great story. Why don't we go and campaign on this?" The team went off and built a campaign, and called it Don't Kill Cash. There was even a blow-up piggy bank that was part of the campaign. The campaign really resonated with people. We had more and more individuals via email and social media saying, "Hey, that's me. This is really hard for me", or that their elderly mother or father could not use the apps for parking and for other matters. We had support across the political spectrum, from the Government, Labour MPs and Liberal Democrat MPs. We even had support from the trade unions.

Yet Ofcom found that it was in breach, on what we believe was a technicality. It was determined by Ofcom that those were the opinions of the licence holder, not an independent third party—not a campaign run by, for example, a presenter. We have learned from that.

Ofcom found it was in breach, but we have five more cases relating to Don't Kill Cash that are still outstanding. We would prefer to have some clarity, so that we can move on and continue to do the work that we need to do as journalists. We continue to wait. I am sure Ofcom has challenges with workload and so on, but there needs to be a better way forward for us, so that we can have certainty to deliver the service to the community.

It is also interesting that that campaign led to 300,000 signatures on a petition, which was then presented to No. 11. We think that representing and standing up for our community is an important part of what GB News is. We want to deliver on our public slogan, which is what we believe we are. We believe that we are the people's channel. If people feel that they are not being heard or are facing challenges, we should be able to campaign in their interests.

Baroness Harding of Winscombe: Do you think that audiences have different expectations of impartiality for different channels?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I think they do. Audiences are very discerning.

One of the interesting things about the regulatory framework here is that there is a sense of treating the audience like a single common denominator. Audiences now are very sophisticated; they receive news through multitudes of services. Look at the print industry, for example: the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Sun* and the *Mirror* give a whole kaleidoscope of different perspectives on the same story. That is fine; we understand that print is a different regulatory environment.

In broadcast, we compete on the open playing field—the digital playing field. We believe that it is important that we are part of an ecosystem that reaches as many people in the United Kingdom as possible. We respect the fact that we have been able to launch on broadcast platforms, whether it be television or radio, but the regulatory environment does not allow for the ability of the audience to discern. I think Ofcom has an obligation to consider the various markets that broadcasters address, which is another layer to that conversation.

In short, there is no homogenous viewpoint that all audiences will just sit there and take. It is important, for a democracy, that there are different perspectives.

The Chair: I have one supplementary before we move on, which is linked. I will try to ask it in a straightforward, simple fashion. Bearing in mind that, from what you were saying earlier, GB News is seeking to serve a particular audience, how does that relate to the challenge of being impartial for you? How does that affect your approach to being impartial? Do you think it is different from the way in which Sky or the BBC might approach that?

Angelos Frangopoulos: Thank you for that question. The reality is that we are about topics which interest people. The impartiality in the discussion is something totally separate, which are obligated to do as part of our Ofcom licence. By serving audiences, it does not interfere with our delivery of impartiality. It is about the subjects that matter to

them. The reality, as I said earlier, is that we are not going to cover global events. We are going to cover events that are happening in your village, town and city, or on your high street. That is the distinction between us and other broadcasters. Impartiality is an overlay that exists with the regulatory structure to which we have signed up.

Q99 Lord Knight of Weymouth: I want to move the conversation about regulation on to future regulation. First, you have made a strong pitch for the uniqueness of GB News being about Britain and British. Is there anything unique about the British news environment that we should always protect, and that the regulator should always protect?

Angelos Frangopoulos: That is a very good question, Lord Knight. British broadcast news has a global reputation. I started in regional journalism at a very young age, a very long time ago. The BBC was something that we were taught about at university, when I went to journalism school. There is a really important role for the PSBs, but that does not mean that there should not be other services that also provide public service. Public service is not exclusive to the PSBs.

It is important that ways are found to make the BBC and the journalism it produces sustainable. I am somewhat alarmed, though, at the idea of the BBC entering the advertising market. That is a worrying and very concerning development, particularly when it would make it even more difficult for new entrants such as us to operate in the marketplace.

I think there is something really important about what PSBs deliver. It is for the regulatory environment and Parliament to decide what is the best way of moving forward with that.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Ofcom currently has its regulatory role, and you voluntarily wanted to be regulated, as you have told us a couple of times. It will be extending its regulatory role. It is already extended to the BBC's online content, but there is now discussion around whether that should be extended to PSB online content more generally. Would you agree with that? Would you welcome it for your online content too, given your partnership with Ofcom?

Angelos Frangopoulos: It is a very interesting area. In short, we think it would be very difficult for Ofcom to regulate the internet. Others have tried; nations have tried, as we well know, and it has not worked out, other than just disconnecting the internet altogether. On content that goes online as opposed to content that goes on to the regulated platforms, we are bound by our editorial charter, and our journalism is bound by that, and that applies right across whatever we do. As I said, our content is platform-agnostic.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Does that apply equally to news and current affairs?

Angelos Frangopoulos: Yes. Anyone who consumes our digital content, our YouTube content, and consumes content via an aerial connected to a TV anywhere in the United Kingdom, will find that the quality is the same, that the perspectives are the same, because we are serving an

audience. I think regulatory oversight of other platforms would be very difficult to deliver.

One thing that people forget about the Ofcom regulatory environment is that it is self-regulation. The way it works is that it is up to us to regulate ourselves to conform with the Act. Self-regulation has great challenges. In the early days, we asked Ofcom, "Do you think we could do that?" Its reply was, "We can't tell you. You'd have to make your own compliance considerations and see if it works". Obviously, in some cases, it worked; in other cases, it did not work. To extend that online would be a great challenge, and would create a two-level market and put British media websites and British media content online at a disadvantage to international organisations, which would not have that same challenge.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Just keep it to the BBC on its own, which is the unique British proposition.

Angelos Frangopoulos: The BBC is a different proposition, because it is currently funded by a licence fee and has its own protections. We are a commercial broadcaster operating in the wilds of the commercial world, which is a very different and challenging environment for anyone to operate in.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: I understand what you are saying about the difficulty of regulating the internet. In this Parliament, we have charged Ofcom with some considerable responsibilities for online safety, for example, and, as you say, to ask the big tech companies to publish their codes of practice. There are similar issues in respect of the tech platforms and news. There are worries that the algorithms will prioritise engaging more polarising content over public service news. Do you think must-carry obligations on the big tech platforms, once they are big enough, are a good idea in respect of ensuring that we have public service news, given the prominence that it needs on those platforms?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I would go one step further: I believe that all UK broadcasters, whether they be PSBs or not, should be given prominence. We are filling a gap in the marketplace, and we are serving a purpose and a community. For that not to be included as part of a must-carry obligation on those tech platforms would be short-changing the community.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: "All" is quite a big word, given that it is only three letters. The next insurgent could come along and have a tiny market share, or something like Russia Today could come along with a tiny market share, and then must be promoted. What is the threshold for "all"?

Angelos Frangopoulos: That would have to be discussed, but what we have shown is that there is scale, and there is a connection with community. There would have to be some kind of threshold. I could not sit on my phone and stream and expect to have prominence as a UK broadcaster coming from the Thames, here in London.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: We also have a lot of concern about misinformation and disinformation and how easy it is for that to be

created, and it has been in the news about foreign actors potentially spreading more misinformation and disinformation. Do you think, as part of a regulatory responsibility, Ofcom should ensure that there is something that marks out truth? Do we just leave it to BBC Verify and other services to do fact-checking? How do we help your audience online navigate and find truth from misinformation?

Angelos Frangopoulos: To be frank, the idea of a kitemark used subject to a government statutory body sounds very much like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to me. Ultimately, I go back to my earlier statement: audiences have to be able to discern. The GB News logo and what we stand for is our kitemark. There are a multitude of challenges with any third party putting in a kitemark or a badge to say that something is good to consume. Who makes the decision? How is it monitored? Do you have to pay? Is there a committee? Does it hold back the ability for new entrants into the marketplace?

When we launched in June 2021, there was the BBC, Sky, ITN and others. If there was a kitemark, we would probably still be fighting to this day to have a kitemark, and that would be a real negative for plurality and democracy. I understand where the thinking is coming from, but if your brand does not have the trust—and our brand does have trust with our audience, because we track it—that is what the kitemark should be all about.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: My final question is slightly off topic. You say that you reflect your mainstream audience and are uniquely exclusively British. On your inclusive definition of Britishness, according to your website you have one presenter, Nana Akua, who is not white-skinned. Do you think you have a fully inclusive representation of Britain?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I would welcome you to our newsroom to walk around and see just how diverse it is. It is a melting pot of the United Kingdom; it even has migrants like me there.

The Lord Bishop of Leeds: I would like to go back to the question I asked earlier about whether you believe that there are limits or boundaries. You talk about audiences, and being a linguist you will know that there are always audiences for all sorts of terrible things. Where are the boundaries? What boundaries do you impose, and what is legitimate or helpful to democracy, a word you used a moment ago?

Angelos Frangopoulos: The boundaries are the law, and we adhere to the law. We also adhere to what is decent, in accordance with our editorial charter. Where it has strayed, we have taken action. Freedom of speech is not an ultimate freedom to say anything you want. There is still decency, and there are values that have to be reflected in a media company that are then reflected back on to the community and then back on to the nation. We feel very passionate about that. There are very clear limits.

Lord Kamall: I go back to the question about diversity and impartiality and that spectrum. One of the criticisms you have come in for—and

please tell me if this touches on a case and I should not talk about it—is that you seem to have presenters from one party, or political presenters tend to be from one political party. Do you not have some concerns about that and whether you are representing only a niche of the British mainstream? In that mainstream that you are trying to reach, there will be people of all different political opinions.

Angelos Frangopoulos: We have 34 presenters, and three of them are serving politicians. One is a Conservative MP; one was a Conservative MP and is now a Reform UK MP; the other is not a serving politician but the leader of a political party, Reform UK. We have been trying very hard to encourage members of other parties to come on board and join them to present programmes.

Lord Kamall: Is that an invitation to my colleagues?

Angelos Frangopoulos: I see some candidates right here, right now.

It is interesting. This is not by design; we would love to have a wide range of MPs on our channel, in the same way that stations such as LBC does. We have had discussions with political parties. Some say that they are not encouraging their MPs to take second jobs, but it is an ongoing conversation. It is purely because we have yet to find someone to say yes. Maybe after this session we will get a yes.

Lord Kamall: On that note, if you take up any of my colleagues from other parties, I may charge them commission.

The Chair: Consider that an advert. You do still have Gloria De Piero.

Angelos Frangopoulos: We have Gloria De Piero, who is a former Labour MP, and she hosts our PMQs programme, with Christopher Hope, on Wednesdays when Parliament sits.

The Chair: A final question before we wrap up. Is there any response from you to the criticism that the channel and the network have received from more established journalists over the last few years around the way in which they perceive you?

Angelos Frangopoulos: One of the things I have learned in my career of journalism is that journalists tend to enjoy impressing other journalists. That is not what we do. We are really about the community. Sometimes we talk about things which other journalists would say is not a story, but we know it is a story because the audience—our community—are telling us it is a story. It is a really big point of difference to us. As I said earlier, we are not journalism for journalists; we are journalism for the people. It is a big distinction between us and others.

Interestingly, we have gone through the whole range of emotions of a start-up. People have said, "They'll fail", "they won't last", or "They've got three months to go", and then when the three months came, "They've only got another three months to go". We are now in the position that our competitors are starting to see that there is a part of the United Kingdom that has not been served, and maybe they need to start doing that too. What a great outcome it is that we have come along

and encouraged other media companies to also go down this path. It is good for democracy, and it is good for the United Kingdom.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony this afternoon and for contributing to this inquiry. I will bring us to a close.

As I said to the other witnesses, if there is anything that you want to follow up with, please do submit further written evidence. If you could send us the charter that you have referred to, that would be very helpful to receive. Thank you very much indeed.

Angelos Frangopoulos: Thank you, it has been a pleasure.