

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: BBC Royal Charter Review, HC 140

Tuesday 9 June 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 9 June 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Mr Bayo Alaba; Vicky Foxcroft; Damian Hinds; Dr Rupa Huq; Natasha Irons; Jeff Smith; Cameron Thomas.

Questions 168-254

Witnesses

I: Iain Dale, broadcaster, author, journalist and podcaster; Jordan Schwarzenberger, Chief Executive Officer, Arcade Media.

II: Dame Elan Closs Stephens, former interim Chair of the BBC; James Harding, Editor-in-Chief, The Observer, founder of Tortoise Media, and former Director of BBC News.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Iain Dale and Jordan Schwarzenberger.

Q168 Chair: Welcome to this morning's meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Today is the third oral evidence session of our BBC royal charter review inquiry. For our first panel, we are joined by Iain Dale, broadcaster, author, journalist and podcaster—a list of achievements as long as my arm—and by Jordan Schwarzenberger, CEO and founder of Arcade, and also very well known as a key figure in the Sidemen collective. You are both very welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

I remind Members to declare any interests when asking questions. I will kick off with you, Iain. What is your answer to the argument that the BBC is a public good and should be paid for by households irrespective of whether they watch live TV, watch BBC News or only listen to the West Ham game on Radio 5 Live?

Iain Dale: First, thank you for inviting me to give evidence. I should say that I am speaking in a personal capacity and do not represent Global Media in what I say.

I think that argument held up until maybe the last 20 years. People now have so much more choice as to how they watch and what they watch. You can see that in the drop-off in the number of people paying the licence fee. People do not see why they should have to pay it. Even though we could all articulate the argument that public service broadcasting needs to be funded by the public, most households now have subscriptions to Netflix, Disney or whatever, so they are used to paying for subscriptions. I think a lot of people resent the fact that they are effectively paying what we would have called a poll tax 40 years ago.

I remember writing a piece six years ago on the future of the BBC in which I said that it was up to the BBC to come up with alternatives, because it must realise that, as an entity, things will have to change at some point. I do not think it has risen to that challenge at all, either in terms of alternatives to the licence fee or in what it should and should not be doing as a broadcaster.

Q169 Chair: Do you think the whole idea of public service media with a mission to provide a universal service is now outdated?

Iain Dale: No, I do not think it is. In news and current affairs, there is still a need for a public service broadcaster. We have seen the provision of news proliferate and fragment over the past 20 years. People get their news from all sorts of different sources. Back in the '80s and '90s, you had only a couple of sources for broadcast news. People still want an impartial news provider that they can trust. The commercial sector is capable of providing that—I think we do a good job of it at LBC—but the BBC has such a track record that it would be a shame to throw that away. There is a case for public funding of a news and current affairs broadcaster. Whether there is a case for publicly funding Radio 1 Dance, I would question.

Q170 **Chair:** Thank you. Jordan, in one of the newspaper articles I read, you described the BBC as being like the Titanic. Can it avoid the same fate?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think it can. The way to do that is to go back to first principles on why it exists. The nature and landscape of the media have shifted so rapidly over the last 20 years or so, to the point where my consumption, as the resident Gen Z-er in the room—I am 28 years old now; never mind Gen Alpha and below—is so vastly different from that of the world that came before it. The mission of the BBC to provide for that old era does not really work in the same way today. That does not mean I believe that it should not exist—that it cannot avoid the iceberg, so to speak. I think it can, but that will require a quite drastic shift. From speaking to a lot of people there, they are aware of it. It is about just how quickly you can turn the tanker. There are assumptions around the mission and on how it can justify itself to a generation that maybe does not see it in the same way as their parents or grandparents. I think those are the principles that we will, hopefully, cover today.

Q171 **Chair:** That is fascinating, and it is what I was going to ask you. Obviously, I am not Gen Alpha or Gen Z, as much as I would like to be. How do you think younger audiences see the BBC and the concept of having to pay a licence fee?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Obviously, I am not speaking for everyone in my generation, but from anecdotal experience, and from seeing the way that this is talked about, there is a fundamental misunderstanding. The idea of public service broadcasting does not really equate with the Gen Z or Gen Alpha experience of digital media. If you think about it, they have endless choice. YouTube is their principal destination; social is their interface with culture. Why am I forced to pay and engage with something that is ultimately pressed upon me, which used to exist in one of four or five options? Today I have infinite options, infinite choice.

I think the biggest shift is the decentralisation of media going from central sources to where you and I can personally shape our own experience of what culture is and connect with media around the world. How does this work if we are saying to young people, "Yeah, but you have to engage with this, you have to pay for it and you also have to believe in it." Those key steps, and I think that is really hard. As we go down the line of the generations, and people get younger and younger and their media ultimately more and more personalised and decentralised, the mission needs to be even clearer to them, but I think there is a chasm there between those two things.

Q172 **Chair:** Are there any bits of what the BBC does that you think are valued by the younger generation, that you would hold on to and that are precious to you?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think if you asked the average 18 or 19-year-old, they might say, "Radio 1 when I'm going to school in the morning is great." They might say, "'The Traitors' was good because I got to watch it with the family." They might mention a few other shows from when they were younger such as CBeebies and other children's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

programming. They might have nostalgia towards that. But it is hard, when you are faced with a world of global choice, not to say, "That is a tiny part of my pie." The vast majority of their consumption is in Netflix, YouTube and the 100 creators that they enjoy—the Sidemen or whoever it might be.

Q173 Chair: Is there any strength in the argument that, without the BBC, we hear too many American voices, and young people are brought up with too many American voices? Do you think there is strength in the argument that we need to hear more British stories, more British voices, more British culture?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Yes. Standing up for British culture is the point of the BBC. Again, working to that definition is the bit that may be missing and has been lost culturally—I think that is a bigger question. In terms of hearing British voices, for sure we should, but the reality is, whether you like it or not, that you are now competing in the kids' sector with Ms Rachel or whoever—I know that has come up previously. The challenge is that—other than trying to get rid of Netflix or YouTube from existence—you are not going to get rid of the reality that global media now competes with British media. You have to either compete or provide something totally different. That is the existential question that is quite hard to reconcile.

Q174 Chair: Young audiences get most of their content through social media these days, and broadcasters like the BBC are encouraged to use social media so that they can reach those audiences. The Government is considering a social media ban for under-16s similar to the one in Australia. What is your view on whether we should restrict social media access for children?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I went on Sky News and said it is not actually a bad thing. Personally, I do not think it is that drastic. I think it is a bit overhyped, to be honest. The current rules are around the age of 13, so you are upping it by three years. I do not think that is a bad thing. Also, for me it is more of a signal that the Government understand and see that there is massive harm for kids on social. It is not one platform or another; it is the general mechanics of the way that the systems and platforms work, the pressures of school, etc. For me it is a good signal, and it gets parents to think, "Maybe this is not something I can just put in front of my kid and say, 'Go for it'." So, I am actually in favour of it, maybe controversially. I do not think it is that much of a controversy.

Chair: That is surprising. I did not expect you to say that.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I am sure you didn't!

Q175 Chair: Do you think it is possible to restrict access to harmful stuff? When I have spoken to kids in my own constituency, they have said, "We really value YouTube; we get a lot of our educational content from it." Do you think it is possible to restrict access to harmful stuff while allowing access to positive and informative stuff?



Jordan Schwarzenberger: Yes. I forgot to say that one problem with the social media ban currently—and this is the issue with Australia—is that YouTube is included. I have never understood why. YouTube has spent so many years protecting the platform, providing boundaries around safety, parental controls and so on. If you ask most young people, I think they would say that they learn most in their lives—probably more than in school—from YouTube. That is a way that young kids are empowered to learn about the world. I think YouTube should be excluded.

The mechanics and psychology of the short-form platforms are actually quite pernicious—don't shoot me! I am not a big fan of the slot machine mechanic and the high dopamine feed, which is all based on casinos. There is no way that is conducive to the good of children, without a doubt. YouTube, however, is a high-intentionality platform. You go there to make selections, make playlists and learn much more than on any other platform, because it is all about intention and choice, versus being fed something that you have to then siphon through. It is very different. If that is excluded, fine, but I would not include it.

Q176 **Jeff Smith:** Before I start, I declare an interest: I chair the all-party parliamentary group for the BBC. I will come on to funding, but before that, I think you said, Jordan, that there is no belief in or understanding of public service broadcasting among Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Is that because we have not made the case for PSB? If so, how could we do that?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: That is an existential question that cuts to the core of what British culture and values are. I think that if you ask a lot of young people, they might find more affinity with subcultures in Japan, America or wherever else around the world than they do with the notion of Britishness. The BBC has to defend that. I think there is a marketing job there to establish what Britain is and how it exists. Obviously, that is a hot topic at the minute, but I do not know if it is something that can easily be marketed. It actually comes down to the root of the way we are governed and policy. There are so many bigger factors that the BBC rests in, around what British culture is, that I do not know if that is an argument that can be marketed away. However, I think it can be changed if the country can find its confidence and sense of self again. That is a bigger question, but that is the fundamental reason why there is a disconnect.

Q177 **Jeff Smith:** Thanks. Iain, do you have anything to add on the concept of making the case for public service broadcasting?

Iain Dale: No. It is somewhat surprising, but I agree with virtually everything that Jordan just said.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Maybe we should have a podcast.

Q178 **Jeff Smith:** On funding, the Government have said that they will consider allowing the BBC to offer some of its services on a subscription basis. They said they want to keep the licence fee plus, if you like. Do you think that kind of hybrid model, where you have a licence fee plus a subscription for certain services, would work?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Iain Dale: It is very difficult to predict. My view is that the licence fee as a whole concept has probably had its day. I do not think that the BBC is willing to face up to that. If I was in charge of it, I think I would introduce a system of subscription plus a taxpayer-funded news and current affairs department. Of course, the difficulty with that is you then get people accusing you of being run by the state because you are paid for by the state, but in effect the licence fee kind of does that anyway. I think that a direct grant from the Treasury or the DCMS is probably the way that I would go, because you would still have news, current affairs and maybe one or two other parts of the BBC free at the point of use, but you would not have all the administration of the licence fee. You would certainly free up the courts quite a lot if you got rid of that.

Chair: Free up what, sorry?

Iain Dale: Courts. I cannot remember the statistic but quite a high percentage of magistrates court time is taken up with licence fee non-payers.

That is probably the way I would look to go. In the end, they have to decide which parts are absolutely integral to public service broadcasting and which are not. There are parts of radio that you could say are not; they could be done by the private sector, and, indeed, are already done by the private sector. I mentioned, rather flippantly, Radio 1 Dance earlier. That exists only because it was set up five years after Capital Dance. The BBC saw the success of Capital Dance and decided that, as a public sector body, it needed to compete with something that was already being provided by the private sector. If you are under pressure with the licence fee and your general funding, then you make out that it is not going to cost you anything because you are just going to play music—there will not be any extra staff involved—but then after a few years, you do employ staff and put it on DAB+, and it then costs millions a year to run. It is not just one radio station that does that—the BBC has done that for all sorts of others.

I think it rather sticks in the craw of a lot of us in the private sector when we see the BBC capitalising on things that we have innovated, when it does not actually need to.

Q179 **Jeff Smith:** What about something like, say, Radio 3, which puts on maybe more challenging and innovative products that might not be commercially viable?

Iain Dale: I do class Radio 3 as public service broadcasting. It is very different from Classic FM. Classic FM was set up to challenge Radio 3's hegemony in that area, but Radio 3 provides news. I think it has a breakfast programme that covers quite a lot of news. I would not put that in the same class as Radio 1 and all its ancillary stations, or possibly also Radio 2.

Q180 **Jeff Smith:** What content, in addition to the things you have mentioned, should not be behind a paywall?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Iain Dale: I think the BBC has a role in sports broadcasting, but not the traditional role. It has always seen itself as the predominant broadcaster of football. It no longer is. It has "Match of the Day" but that has a relatively small audience compared with what it used to have—somewhere between 2.5 million and 4 million every Saturday—and costs the BBC £75 million a year to get the television rights to broadcast it. I think most football fans would argue—although I cannot speak for everybody—that Sky Sports does a far better job of covering football than the BBC does now.

Let us say that the BBC decided, "Well, we are not going to do that; we are going to concentrate on some minority sports that the commercial broadcasters just won't broadcast, for whatever reason." Women's football is an example of where the BBC has done that very well. Without the BBC, women's football would not be where it is today. It has given that a prominence that is probably outwith the size of its live audience—the number of people who go to see women's football. That number has increased, although I was reading an article yesterday that said that 41% of the people who go to see women's football go to see Arsenal, bizarrely—I cannot understand why they would.

I think the BBC has done a tremendous job there. We could go through a lot of other sports where it probably could have a role. But can it really justify paying £75 million a year? I do not think so any more.

Jeff Smith: I think the BBC does football very well, actually.

Iain Dale: I am not saying that it does not do it well; I am asking whether it should do it at all.

Q181 **Jeff Smith:** What about the argument that it brings people into watch sport on the channel? I go back to the example of cricket. Young people seem to not be as interested in cricket as when I was a kid and the test matches were on TV every day.

Iain Dale: Just to finish off on football, the BBC has just abandoned "Football Focus", a programme that has been running for 52 years. I have no idea what that programme costs to produce, but it has decided that it does not really fit any more—it costs too much. If you are going to cover professional football with any degree of professionalism, surely you need a programme previewing the matches as well as broadcasting brief highlights of the matches at the end of the day.

Cricket has all sorts of traumas because of the different forms of cricket. Again, I think many people would say that, without Sky, cricket would have disappeared from television a long time ago. I suspect I am a bit older than you, Mr Smith, but I certainly agree. When I was a child, watching five-day test match cricket on the BBC was brilliant. It had the best commentators and the coverage was fantastic. "Test Match Special" on Radio 4 longwave was just a cult thing. But cricket has not kept up with football in terms of its appeal to the general public, and broadcasters obviously react to the audiences they think they can get. They cannot

justify broadcasting cricket in the way that they used to. There used to be county cricket on the television, but you could not justify doing that now.

Q182 Jeff Smith: The consultation did not have an option of a BBC fully funded by subscription. Do you think it should have had that? What do you think about the argument that if you had a fully funded, subscription-led BBC, it would not be the BBC as we know it, and it would only commission what is commercially viable?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: My view is that the BBC is currently incentivised by numbers, growth and performance as much as anyone else, it seems. In a way, they follow trends and listen to audiences to try to keep up, so there would not be a massive divergence from the content they are currently making. I don't think it would change things too much. It would probably be a healthier dynamic with the audience, and that is ultimately the end goal.

My personal worry is that it would be too much too soon, and the animosity that has been built by the licence fee over these years would almost result in people pulling out, out of sheer frustration and anger. That would have a bit of a carpet-pulling effect, given that 65% is funded by the licence fee. For me, it would be too much to pull it totally. It might be about dialling down over time and then, maybe over the next 20 years, seeing where it sits—and with Gen Alpha and Gen Z now being the adults of the household, there may be a different dynamic that will re-engage them. It would be too much too soon, in my view.

Iain Dale: I think it would mean that audiences would be chased more than they are at the moment, and I would argue that, in some parts of the BBC, it does too much audience chasing. I used to run a book publishing company, and I would often get manuscripts where I thought, "This would be a brilliant book but it would probably only sell a couple of hundred copies. But it should still be published." I regarded part of my role as a commercial publisher to consider whether there was a public interest. I remember a woman approaching me whose husband had been arrested for having child porn on his computer. He was completely innocent and I thought, "This book needs to be published because if it can happen to him, it can happen to anyone else."

The reason why I tell that anecdote is because, certainly in radio and television, there are programmes that need to be broadcast that will not get a mass audience. The moment that the BBC just chases audience is the moment that it stops being a public service broadcaster. The commercial sector does this as well. I have done phone-ins on the wars in the Congo and in Sudan, and on the Indian caste system, not because I think I am going to get stratospheric audience figures, but because I don't know anything about it, so I imagine most of my audience do not. That, to me, is part of what public service broadcasting is all about.

I would not want to see a subscription model that made those kinds of things disappear from the BBC because they are important. Radio 4 could not broadcast half the programmes it does if it just looked at this from a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

commercial point of view. I am not a great Radio 4 listener, but you would not get "Book at Bedtime" and all that sort of thing. It just would not happen.

Q183 Natasha Irons: Just to pick up on that, Iain, you talked about the BBC being smaller and focusing on a much tighter remit of content. To tease that out a bit more, what things do you think it should be doing specifically? Should it just be current affairs, news and that sort of thing?

Iain Dale: Predominantly, yes. I cannot give you a rundown of each different department and whether I think it should go, but I think the general rule of thumb is that if there is a public service element to it, it should stay. However, you then get to the problem of BBC One, which is the BBC's most commercial channel. You could easily argue that programmes like "The Traitors" are not public service broadcasting. I do not watch it but many people do, so it obviously has a great appeal. A lot of BBC One's Saturday night broadcasting involves things that the commercial sector could easily do, so there's always going to be a clash. I don't want the BBC not to do any mass public-appeal broadcasting.

The BBC has effectively decimated local radio. It does not want to do local radio any more. You can see that from the amount of money they put into local radio now, compared with 10 or 15 years ago. The BBC has amalgamated programmes across different regions, so there is no longer a local radio service during many parts of the day, although at breakfast and drivetime they still have their own programmes. That reflects what has happened in the commercial sector as well.

Either you want to do local radio or you don't, and I think the BBC needs to make that decision. Either you want comprehensive politics broadcasting or you don't. Where are the Michael Cockerells of today? For the younger members of the Committee, Michael Cockerell was a documentary maker who used to make the most fantastic hour-long documentaries for BBC Two. He would interview somebody who had been Prime Minister or a senior Minister and take them through their career. It was the most gripping television, even for people who are not political geeks like me.

The BBC does not do that sort of thing any more. It has abandoned at least half of its regular political programmes and a lot of its foreign affairs coverage, to the extent that—Jordan, I do not know if you are like me in doing this—to get really good foreign affairs coverage, I now go to Al Jazeera English. It should not be like that. Because of successive rounds of budget cuts, the BBC's news and current affairs division has been hacked away at over the years, and we are now seeing the result.

When you ask, "How does the BBC get more young people interested in news and current affairs?", the answer is that it has not adapted at all to the new environment. I think we at LBC have. I am not saying that as a commercial boast, but our market penetration in the 15 to 24 age group puts BBC radio to shame. I could wax lyrical about how that has happened. It is all very well to say that you want to cater for younger

audiences, but unfortunately, the BBC has not managed to do that across most of its radio output.

Q184 **Natasha Irons:** Perhaps the argument for the BBC—and Jordan, perhaps you can say what you think about this—is that it has focused on content that it assumes younger people want to see. It will have put more into YouTube and it has the deal that it is trying to put together at the moment. Is part of the challenge not that the BBC has to stay relevant? We have been talking about attracting younger audiences, what they want to see and what they want the BBC to reflect in their lives. How does the BBC do that if it focuses only on content that younger people do not necessarily want to see?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: To your point, Iain, about the BBC chasing audiences, surely that is already happening—in the sense that you are looking at licence fees and saying, “This is effectively a subscription.” People are paying, and yes, there is a level of force there, but you have to stop the churn because prosecutions are hard to enforce. There are threats and letters that go through the door, but none the less you are trying to keep the licence fee payer happy. They effectively become a subscription payer. You are following the same level of incentive that the commercial sector has anyway.

On reaching young audiences, to Iain’s point, young audiences are drawn more to the spirit of social media and decentralisation because of its irreverence—content that is slightly more out there and has more edge. That may be driving audiences towards podcasting. As we know, in America—obviously, this is about Americans—74% of people get their politics and news from podcasters. The big question is why. In the audience’s view, there is a greater sense of honesty, a lack of bias—ironically—and more independence from the institution. That is debatable, but the BBC could bring back more of that palette of personalities.

To your point, Iain, most of the people you mentioned are big personalities who shaped the BBC. People of an older generation think of characters who shaped the BBC through the years and stood out. Think about the Andrew Neils of today, or whoever else. The BBC needs more of the characters who bring that edge.

Potentially, one of the challenges is that becoming a master of everything and trying to appease everyone is the hardest job. You are trying to present to a broad church and you end up with a neutrality that, ultimately, is not necessarily neutral and also does not really serve, because it does not have that edge or does not cater to those needs.

Natasha Irons: I suppose that is the challenge of public service broadcasting: it has to try to be for everybody while, at the same time, being for nobody.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Is there a fear of offending people or of cutting too much of an edge? Surely public service broadcasting should be about representing a palette of viewpoints and strong characters who can

communicate those viewpoints and galvanise people around them. It should almost be like a public square where everyone can come to a head on key issues.

Q185 Natasha Irons: That is a good point. Perhaps the BBC should be smaller and focused on a much tighter remit. However, is there also a position for it in looking at how we encourage more diverse algorithms and ensure that a broader churn of things is served to us, whether on other platforms or its own? At the moment, we feel quite polarised by what we are shown. You go down a wormhole and see a lot of the same content. The broader spectrum of opinions that public service broadcasting used to present is harder to achieve. Could that be part of the BBC's role in future?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think it is facing up to the reality of decentralisation, decentralised media and personalised feeds, and the fact that you now have to play in those arenas. Again, that means that you might have to be a bit more sharp and edgy to cut through, because people are driven more by their own tastes, viewpoints and beliefs. How does the BBC play a role within those rabbit holes that people can get themselves into? It is about being accounted to those and also having a voice that is not so vanilla that it doesn't cut through. That is the nature of communication today: it has to be a bit sharper, and that is one of the big points relating to news and current affairs. Why has LBC done so well? Because LBC does cut with a strong edge, and it understands clips and everything else. I am not saying that the BBC does not understand those algorithms, but the characters that it is backing maybe need a bit more sharpness to them.

Iain Dale: On that point about clips, during the Brexit referendum, as it went on for all those years, James O'Brien—although I totally disagreed with him on the Brexit issue—almost pioneered the viral clip, and that is what attracted a younger audience to LBC. I don't know whether this is still the case, but I remember hearing a statistic—this was probably in 2019 or 2020—that completely bowled me over: in the 15 to 24 age group, we were outdoing Capital Radio. You would never think that would be possible. As I say, I don't know whether that is still the case, but it took the BBC a huge amount of time. Because of their "Well, on the one hand, this" and "On the other hand, that" approach, which I completely understand, a lot of their current affairs presenters were not really able to go into it in the same way that we were. We as presenters are encouraged to have opinions and express them, and we encourage our audience to challenge them. There are BBC presenters who have gone slightly down that road, but I would not want to be one of them, because you step off that tightrope and your career is at an end.

Q186 Natasha Irons: Finally—I know a lot of colleagues want to come in—let me ask you about the idea of the BBC's role in the creative sector more broadly and its ability to be a bit of a catalyst for creativity, especially around the regions and out of London. Do you think that is something we need to push the BBC to do more of? Is that maybe what the role of public service broadcasting could be in the future, even leaning more into that creative base and ensuring that our creative sectors are supported?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Iain Dale: As long as it doesn't push out local content. One of the issues that the BBC has had to contend with over the years is that if it sees the commercial sector doing well in something, as I mentioned, it tries to create a rival to it.

I used to present on a digital station called Oneword, back in 2003. It was effectively what Radio 4 Extra is now—lots of books and arts things—and it did very well. The BBC noticed that and decided to create BBC Radio 7, which then became Radio 4 Extra, and within six months, Oneword was out of business. They have done that in so many areas, including in magazine publishing. When the BBC started "Match of the Day" magazine, two or three monthly football magazines went out of business. Why would the BBC feel the need to publish a football magazine?

We can look at BBC local news coverage, but I will give them a bit of slack there. It has been more difficult for local newspapers to survive and the BBC has stepped into a gap. We can argue that that may be a good thing, but not when it effectively becomes a monopoly. The BBC has a huge role in the creative sector more generally, but it has to be careful not to be over-dominant.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: On the point about entertainment and more public-appealing content, a massive role can be played for the production industry at large, which is struggling and is probably in its worst crisis ever. Two thirds of the business is out of work and most people are struggling as freelancers today.

For me, the BBC should play a role there, and I think they do, but it should be an increasing role of lifting up the creative economy and providing opportunity and distribution for creatives and storytellers who might not get their stories heard in an increasingly competitive sector. We can look at the likes of Netflix and others and have a lot of love for them, but they almost sit at the top of an avalanche of pitches and briefs. Everyone is competing for a tiny space and the BBC can open that up. They have the distribution to do it and to provide space and oxygen, essentially, for storytellers in this country who are not currently heard, or who have ideas and are trying to get them funded but who do not have that funding.

I see it more as a grant maker, a VC if you will, of the next wave of exciting and brilliant creatives who do not currently have a route to get commercially funded. I think that is a massive role. That is why, in my belief, there should be that strong entertainment beyond news and current affairs, because they can make the bets that the private sector just will not, because it might not make money in the sense of having a conventional return.

Q187 Chair: Iain, to go back to your point about the BBC stepping on the toes of others—whether we are talking about publishers, broadcasters or commercial radio—do you think there is a greater role for Ofcom to step in?



Iain Dale: To Ofcom's credit—they are obviously a wonderful institution, because they regulate me—they have already started doing this. We can look at all the farrago about BBC Radio 2 Extra. Radio 2 had effectively ignored their traditional audience—the over-55s and over-65s—and had brought in a lot of ex-Radio 1 people, who naturally appealed to a slightly younger demographic. So Boom Radio was started as a digital and internet-only station by two guys, Phil Riley and David Lloyd, who were running LBC 20 years ago, so I know a bit about them. Almost from day one, they got an audience of over half a million listeners a week—people who should, in theory, have been listening to Radio 2. They have grown that audience since they started. The BBC decided to do exactly what they did to Oneworld and effectively launched a rival to shut it down. Ofcom saw exactly what was happening—it did take a bit of time, but Ofcom got there in the end—and they told the BBC, “No, you are not going to do this, because it will have a terrible effect on the originators of Boom Radio”.

So I think you are absolutely right with that question—I think Ofcom has a key role to play here. I cannot blame BBC executives for wanting to get as many listeners as they can—we all do. It is a natural thing to do—if you are in the industry, you want to attract listeners—but you cannot do it to the market exclusion of others.

Q188 **Cameron Thomas:** I am not really sure whether I have a question, but I have been listening to what you have been saying, and Iain, it sounds as though you did not want the BBC to go after football because Sky Sports does it better. Don't let me put in words in your mouth, but it sounded as though you lamented some of the stuff the BBC has walked away from, like the precursors to matches. Jordan mentioned the popularity of podcasting among Gen Z. I look at my activity there—I watch Gary Neville, Jamie Carragher and Roy Keane having those conversations around a table. Any Tottenham supporter loves ArsenalFanTV when they lose. It is gripping in a way that “Match of the Day” simply isn't. I think Iain mentioned that the BBC is stuck in the past, 20 years ago. Should the BBC be doing more along the lines of those gripping podcast-type formats and clips, alongside its sports coverage?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think BBC Sounds has actually done a really good job of leaning more into that and becoming more decentralised in the way that they work with creators and talent. Some of the shows do cut—it is just that BBC Sounds is one part of the BBC. I think there is that spirit of BBC Sounds, and arguably of Radio 4 as well, in some of those programmes that do cut to the edges and are willing to go there, which is why people like those shows because they do not have as much of a sense of filter. Again, if you are competing now with more unfiltered global content compared with your offering, a quite steady, neutral, filtered BBC just does not have the same level of appeal. I think Sounds is where they have been able to push that boat, but that needs to transcend into every area.

Iain Dale: Format is everything. “Match of the Day” has effectively got the same format now as it had in 1960-whatever-it-was when it started. I did think when Gary Lineker left that was an opportunity and we were told



HOUSE OF COMMONS

it was going to be very different. The only difference is that they have now got three random presenters rather than a single one and a deputy. You have to innovate to stay relevant. I am not having a go at "Match of the Day"—well, I am, but I watch it, purely because I always have.

My generation—and I plead guilty to being a boomer—has a very different perspective from Jordan's but there is a crossover. I totally agree with what Jordan said about podcasts. I got in quite near the beginning of the second wave of podcasting in this country when I started a podcast with Jacqui Smith called "For the Many". It became quite a culty podcast, particularly among a younger audience, because we deliberately tried to make it relevant to a younger audience as well.

We can all get obsessed about our own particular hobby horses—you have worked out what mine are—but everybody will have a different view. What we don't know is what the BBC's own view is, because it has been very bad and has lacked strong leadership in terms of saying, "This is where we see the BBC going over the next five to 10 years. We recognise that we are not going to do everything, and these are the areas we have decided that we are not going to continue with."

They just do not do that, because they feel they have to placate all the different interest groups. I have some sympathy with that, because whenever they announce a radical change, like closing 6 Music, for example, the audience for 6 Music obviously does not want them to, and reacts badly, and then the BBC backtracks and says, "No, we won't do that after all." There are lots of other examples of where they have done that. They will argue, "Well, we are listening to the people" and to an extent, they are.

If you asked me what I thought Tim Davie thought the future of the BBC should be, I am not sure I would be able to give you a very coherent answer.

Q189 Dr Huq: I guess my declaration of interests is that I was a very lowly BBC employee in the 90s, when Radio 5 first started. I learned how to splice up tape on a Uher—I don't think they exist any more; it is a very old-fashioned big tape recorder.

This is really interesting stuff. I want to carry on some of these themes and talk about the overlap with YouTube. The new director general is an ex-Google executive, which I think has raised some eyebrows among some of the staff that he is not a programme maker who knows the cutting room floor and all those pressures of doing editorial. I have heard on the grapevine that he is quite interested in commercialising stuff. You have said, Jordan, that there has been a drop-off of under-50s watching linear TV and that we have to move with the times. What do you think of this YouTube relationship that we are hearing about? Do you think it is going to work?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I am probably a bit biased here, but I love it and I think that this is the right type of person for the role; Matt comes



HOUSE OF COMMONS

with a deep understanding of how to evolve and innovate over 20-plus years at Google, leading the company that has probably innovated the most of any company in the sector. Him coming in is that sort of revolutionary change, actually, in the statement that it makes—that the BBC is not going to stay where it was, it is going to push forward, and it will have to take bets that will sit outside of the traditional media paradigm, because Matt is not from that world and he will not see it in that way. I am actually quite energised by it.

It is also about understanding that YouTube is a pipe. Ultimately, YouTube is the equivalent of Google. It is not social media; it is a search engine for video, and the BBC must and should have a presence in that search engine in order to be seen by the huge audience of young people, and older people—it is not just young people watching YouTube—who are now consuming it on the big screen and on the small screen and so on. It is a pipe of content.

I think Matt understands that deeply. It is good that he carries with him those deep relationships from YouTube, because he will hopefully be able to bridge those two worlds. As we know, relying simply on linear distribution is not going to work. To Iain's point around clipping and syndication, getting out there is the biggest challenge, more so in a way than the substance itself. I am very energised by Matt's appointment. I think he will be great.

Iain Dale: Look, I don't know him. All I know is that he came from Google. On the face of it, I think it is a good appointment.

When there is a senior vacancy—chair or chief executive—there is a lot of people in an organisation, where you think, "So-and-so, he or she has been here for 40 years, they know the BBC inside out." That is exactly why they would not be good in this job. Sometimes, you need an outside perspective. You don't have to have been a doctor to be Secretary of State for Health. In some circumstances, it might give you a bit of insight.

It is a bit like the fact that good company boards have a range of non-executive directors who can bring a fresh outside perspective. I think that is what he hopefully will do here.

I remember the days when a lot of people said, "Why don't they make David Dimbleby director general of the BBC?" He is a brilliant journalist, a brilliant presenter and a good businessman in his own right. Would he have made a good director general of the BBC? We will never know, but you could argue that having been effectively institutionalised might not have been the best background to be a director general of the BBC.

I think that he stands a reasonable chance of bringing in a fresh approach with an understanding of the internet broadcasting world.

Q190 Dr Huq: I think that there is going to be a deputy. The BBC is so vast—it is almost like the NHS—and he was juggling a lot of plates. Does the new model not mean there will be a deputy as well and maybe that person can

provide balance?

Iain Dale: I think that there has always been a deputy.

Q191 **Dr Huq:** I do not think that there was under the last director.

Iain Dale: Well, there may not have been under the last one, but there certainly was back in the day.

Q192 **Dr Huq:** Right. I am talking about my immediate experience on this Committee and when the whole hoo-ha happened in the autumn.

Matt Brittin has also said that YouTube could teach the BBC a thing or two and it needs to be braver. Is the danger not that when you get algorithm-driven content, it rewards strong emotions and particularly anger. Is the casualty in all this not original journalism? There was a lecture that *The New York Times* publisher, A. G. Sulzberger, did the other day on this subject. Iain, you talked about the Michael Cockerells of this world and those lovely documentaries with his soothing voice about inside No. 10. However, we talked about things being clip driven; if you just get the pure clip that is just rewarding hatred, anger, bile and those kinds of things.

Iain Dale: It can do. I do not know what it says about me that I just get dog videos on Instagram. However, most of the music I now download is downloaded because I have seen somebody singing a new song on Instagram or YouTube that I quite like and so I then go and see what they have done. I think that you can translate that to current affairs. If you see somebody saying something interesting, whether it is angry or not, and you do not know who they are, you look them up and use that to educate yourself. We get slightly obsessed about all the hatred and anger stuff, but it is not all like that. Most people, once their brain has developed, can hopefully weed out what they think is the horrible stuff that maybe they do not want to continue watching. It goes back to what we were saying at the beginning about young minds not necessarily having that ability to filter that out. They might well take something as fact, even though to the rest of us it might not seem that way.

Q193 **Dr Huq:** One thing that I found surprising was that in the last week, LBC did a clip—and I know that you said that you are not a spokesperson for Global—that I cannot imagine seeing on the BBC. It was almost like a party-political broadcast. It was Nigel Farage talking about “pure, cold rage”. I can imagine him saying the same things on a BBC clip, but there would be a Victoria Derbyshire or someone asking a question and providing a bit of challenge.

Iain Dale: Well, there was: Nick Ferrari.

Q194 **Dr Huq:** No. It is this clip here on my tablet. I can send you the link or I can send it around. It is from 2 June. It is him pictured in a field and he is just talking. It is intercut with some footage of the last—

Iain Dale: He is the leader of a political party. Are you suggesting that a newsroom should not broadcast a clip of a leader of a political party making an interesting statement?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Huq: I do not think that there was an equivalent of Keir Starmer or Kemi Badenoch saying the same thing. It just seems surprising because usually there is some challenge, and because the stuff that he is saying was not in the judgment and was not what the family said. I know that you are not a spokesperson for Global, but I do not think you would get that on the BBC.

Iain Dale: With respect, I think you absolutely would get that with the BBC because any leader—

Q195 **Dr Huq:** Could you find another example?

Iain Dale: I could easily find an example of Kemi Badenoch or Keir Starmer speaking.

Dr Huq: I do not know what Ofcom's role is in regulating X—

Chair: Rupa, be careful in using props, such as the video on your tablet. It is a bit being like being in the Chamber—*Hansard* cannot record them.

Dr Huq: I will send round the clip. That is clip culture for you.

Iain Dale: I totally disagree with you. I think you have completely misinterpreted that, if I may say so. Where any political party leader makes a statement—and that was billed as a sort of emergency statement—if you are a broadcaster, you are going to broadcast what that person says, whether it is Nigel Farage or anyone else.

Dr Huq: I do not know if any other leader had an equivalent film, but I suspect—

Iain Dale: I could probably provide you with 20 examples of each of them if you would like me to.

Q196 **Dr Huq:** The other thing I want to ask both of you is, what would you say about the drop in morale at the BBC? Apparently, there is a huge slashing of staff coming.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I will go back slightly because that was an interesting point. LBC and alternative news have garnered far more appeal partly because they are willing to broadcast Nigel Farage and others. It should be the default of the BBC to have that broad stroke of appeal, even if it is not something that everyone agrees with. That spikiness or that feeling of, "That shouldn't be there," is the thing that has probably been holding the BBC back, in a way, over the last however long. You expect a Kemi or a Keir to be on there, but not a Nigel, and that is probably the tension that has led to an audience drop-off.

In terms of morale at the BBC, it needs to come with that sense of mission, galvanising, confidence and a sense of permanence. Where is the BBC going for the next 20 or 30 years? Where is the manifesto? That is what Matt ultimately has the opportunity to set down. It needs that guiding light of, "This is where we are going. Some people will like it and some won't, but we are heading in this direction and you can buy in or



HOUSE OF COMMONS

jump off the Titanic,” to use that analogy again. For me, that is the bit that has been missing, because it feels like the BBC has been in survival mode for a long time. I am excited now because it feels like it has an opportunity to lead the way, and if you do that, you will galvanise audiences with you.

You had Alex from Channel 4 here recently. Whether or not everyone liked what she did, you knew exactly what she stood for and exactly where she was going. I think she was immensely effective as a leader of Channel 4 for that reason. It was polarising but there was a sense of direction, and that is what leadership is. If you try to appeal to everybody, you ultimately appeal to no one.

Iain Dale: If someone clips up this Committee hearing today, they will clip up the exchange that you and I just had because it was a little bit spiky.

Q197 **Dr Huq:** Well, I don’t know. It was not you who was responsible for putting that out, but it looked like something you would not see on the BBC. I know you are not a spokesperson for Global, but Ofcom has rules about impartiality and those sorts of things, and usually you get a bit of challenge and somebody saying something back.

Iain Dale: It absolutely does, and in 16 years I have never had an Ofcom judgment against me.

Dr Huq: No, I am not saying that you have. I am just saying that clip was a bit surprising.

Q198 **Natasha Irons:** I just have a quick follow-up question. Originally it was about the relationship that the BBC can possibly have with YouTube. There has been a discussion about prominence and ensuring that public service broadcasting, given that we all pay for it, has a greater weighting if something is algorithmically driven. Jordan, given how you have managed to create your own brand, platforms and success, how would you feel about public service broadcasters being given more prominence on YouTube?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: That is what got me a bit riled up in that Titanic article, because I was asking why the BBC should have a leg-up on a private platform like YouTube, when the whole premise of YouTube is that it is totally meritocratic. All the scary algorithm really does is signal whether the content is good and liked, and if audiences are choosing to watch it. That does not mean that you have to provoke negativity and emotion. Of course, by virtue of fallen human nature, we are drawn to those emotions. None the less, you need to have an understanding of packaging and retention time, and the rules that everyone has to play by to succeed on the platform. The BBC should not be devoid of that. It should have to enter that arena and compete for quality of content in the way it is distributed on a private platform. I do not personally agree with that.

There is one potential distinction for two lines. YouTube Kids is effectively a controlled space by YouTube anyway; it does not play to those same rules. I also think there is a space for that with news, but on the entertainment side of things, I would not regulate.

Q199 **Dr Huq:** I agree, Iain, with your point that foreign news seems to be a casualty. The programmes “HARDtalk” and “Dateline” are gone.

Iain Dale: They are cheap to produce as well—that is what I could never understand. What can be expensive about having a black studio, a presenter and a guest?

Q200 **Dr Huq:** No, they are not even expensive. I fear that this will get worse. People say that they watch France 24 in English, as you said you do with Al Jazeera. I fear that if we have total YouTube-isation, those analysis programmes—the Michael Cockerells—will be gone.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: The challenge for YouTube is that it needs to set a global template. It cannot give the UK special treatment, so as long as there is a way for it to give prominence to public service broadcasters around the world in a way that is local to those territories, that is fine. Again, Matt is a good person to help do that. There could be value in it to the point that you could then distribute, but the reality is that, in a world where everyone has choice, if the content is not good and it does not appeal to them, they will not click it anyway. I think that is the ultimate piece today.

Natasha Irons: Is it actually choice, though? I forgot to declare an interest. I used to work at Channel 4 and my husband still works there. I always forget to do that—sorry. An algorithm editorialises what you see, so it might be that you have unintentionally watched a lot of dog videos, or, if you are an MP, watched a lot of other MPs and all you get is that, which is great content.

Iain Dale: That’ll teach you.

Q201 **Natasha Irons:** I have two accounts: one that is dogs and one that is MPs. You are not necessarily actively choosing what you watch; it is being editorialised on your behalf. Given that, should there be more transparency on what is constructed within the algorithms so that you have genuine choice about what is editorialised and put in front of you?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: It depends on the platform. Yes, social media—which YouTube is not—puts recommendations to you for you to swipe through to help the algorithm to work out what you like and then serve you more of that. Famously, with TikTok, it is said that you can be on the platform for 20 seconds and it will know everything about you, and in terms of your preference, it probably will.

YouTube is not like that: it is a combination. It is recommendations—so, as you say, “up next” and recommendations on the side, as well as the explore page, finding content that might be good for you. It also has a hype metric: people can up-hype the video, which serves it to more people. There are various ways for content that you would not necessarily



HOUSE OF COMMONS

see to break out. Yes, the majority of what you see will be around your interest areas, but YouTube is specifically intentional in the way that it runs. It is not like other social platforms, so I would not conflate them.

The premise of YouTube is there being ultimate choice on the platform, which is why it is so liked. You can discover content at range, but ultimately, you make the choice. With social, it is far more in your feed, which is why anger, shock and all those things are used to draw you into content. You could argue that there is a level of coercion in the way they are framing the content to pull you in. YouTube is not like that.

Q202 Mr Alaba: I declare an interest, as I have done a lot of work with Beta Squad: I am a guest or support artist, or however you want to describe it. Yep—my kids think it is quite cool. Anyway, Jordan, how can the BBC be more relevant and reach new audiences?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: There are a few things. One is about understanding that the decentralised culture of content consumption that we exist in is highly competitive and a different tone is required to cut through. Relevance will come with a tonal shift that moves away from neutrality and more towards the slightly harsher, more raw and edgy content that young audiences are craving. That does not mean that truth and substance cannot be in that frame, but it is about leaning into it a bit more, rather than the suit-and-tie neutrality that the BBC is known for by older audiences, who lived in a society that is very different to today's. It is about changing the tone slightly.

In terms of commissioning, which I think the BBC is doing very well at the moment, it is about commissioning creators who are growing audiences natively and backing them in the same way that you would have backed presenters to come through the BBC ranks in a previous era. How are you doing that for content creators of the next era?

The other thing is about leaning into the formats on YouTube and other platforms that are more debate-style, allow different viewpoints to really come head to head and do not have a line where they say, "These are the views we just don't touch," because again, that draws people to other sources of news and political coverage, which is why they are booming and, as Iain mentioned, the BBC is struggling on that front. It is about tonally leaning into the content that people are seeking, which is less of the neutrality and slightly more edge. It might be a bit prickly for some people to see the BBC playing in that field, but otherwise, I feel that it risks irrelevance.

Iain Dale: Does it not come back to the word "brave" and being that, instead of catering for an audience the wants of which you think you know? BBC Three is a prime example of this: it may be because of my age, but if I happen to see a programme on BBC Three, I think, "What on earth is going on here?"

Jordan Schwarzenberger: It is not on any more.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Iain Dale: No, I know, although you can get it on Sky. An example is comedy. On the internet, one of the biggest names in comedy is Matt Rife—I do not know how many of you have heard of him, but he comes up on my Instagram all the time and is one of the funniest people I have ever seen. His humour is, shall we say, quite dark, and he will pick on people in the audience, particularly if they have an unusual characteristic. He is hilarious.

I have never seen him on the BBC—nor, frankly, on Channel 4 or anywhere else—but he has sold out three nights at the O2. That shows the power of the algorithm. I was thinking, “How do people in this country know of him if he does not exist as a personality?” but he does on various forms of social media. You would never get him on shows—I doubt even “Have I got News for You” would have him on, because they would think it too risky, but sometimes, you have to take a few risks.

Q203 Mr Alaba: When I look at the BBC and see the back catalogue, heritage, size and scope of the organisation, I do think it could back itself a bit more. Iain, you just said “brave”. Jordan, you were talking about sharpness, grant making and VC—venture capital—support. That is certainly important for the BBC, because it has access through BBC Studios and things like that. Do you think that that is something else that it should be driving?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Yes, I think it is. Given the palette and landscape of creatives in this country who are not being heard or funded, we are asking where this amazing British talent is. How can we back and support it, and—ironically—help people to come out of social and on to a bigger distributed platform, with the support and the backing of the BBC to nurture the IP being made on the ground?

There are so many creatives. Look at what SNL has done with the incredible comedy talent in the UK: it actually made that brave choice, to pluck creatives off Instagram, to give them a platform on SNL and, ultimately, to have them taken in as Sky comedy talent. For me, that is a missed opportunity for the BBC.

Those creatives have been there for many years, but why was the BBC not finding them and giving them that platform and backing? The results speak for themselves. For me, it is having that A&R mindset of looking at social and the world of culture today in the country, as it pertains to new talent, and backing people in a way that I think the BBC used to do maybe more of at a bigger scale.

Q204 Mr Alaba: Iain, I would like you to answer that same question, but one caveat would be: do you feel that the BBC operates to a higher purpose, apart from its PSB element, in terms of what it has been set up to do and what it has been delivering over many years? Of course you have to innovate, but do you feel that we should also hold on to that higher purpose? That is very difficult for private organisations sometimes, because they have a slightly different mantra.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Iain Dale: Yes, but that phrase “higher purpose” would be regarded by the very same people who use the word “uniparty” as being quite elitist. They would ask, “Well, what is this higher purpose?” If we went around the table here today, every one of us would probably come up with a slightly different definition of what that is.

The common thread—cynics would say—is saying, “We know what is best for you”, but we do not live in that age any more. The age of deference has gone. In too many aspects, the BBC has put itself forward, or portrayed itself, as feeling—you raised this earlier, Jordan—that it knows what is best for the viewing or listening public. But actually it does not: the listening and viewing public know what is best for them, and sometimes they do not see BBC programming reflecting their priorities.

My partner, who is a couple of years younger than me, is one of those people who will rant at the television when there is something on that he thinks the BBC should not be doing, usually to do with—to coin his phrase—“bloody football”, because he thinks there is far too much of it on the BBC. Every time he wants to watch the programme normally on at a certain time, it is replaced by football.

Everyone will have their own different priorities, but in the end we all think that we know what is best, and what should be broadcast and what should not. Sometimes the BBC does not reflect that.

Q205 **Chair:** Jordan, do you think that there should be more cross-pollination between the online world, the influencer world and the BBC? For example, should we see the Sidemen on celebrity “Gladiators” or something? Do you think that the BBC would benefit from reflecting more the culture of new media?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: We have had tons of those conversations; we have a really good relationship with the BBC team. The challenge is that it has to really work for the creatives. The Sidemen are at the very top of that tree, so what they need for it to work for them commercially—in terms of time and resources—is going to be very different from what would apply for creatives starting off.

It is less about that top tier of creatives and more about what the BBC is doing. I have said this to it—I have been invited to speak at lots of things, which is the BBC really wanting to learn about this space: there is this world of creatives in this country trying to break in and trying to find audiences. The BBC has the distribution to help them to do that, and it has the money to support them in their careers to do that.

Creative careers are very fragile. Typically, creatives live brand deal to brand deal, and some do not get any for a period of time—there is a lot of volatility. How can the BBC provide the financial stability to back their careers and give them a platform on which to shine? It can do that better than any other institution, because it will not be guided purely by commercial ends and principles.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

For me, the issue is about looking at the world away from the likes of the Sidemen. Ultimately, we have tried lots of times, but it is very difficult for it to work. The Sidemen might go, "Hold on, we have a video over here", which will generate them this amount of money and have that amount of resource, so, "That is worth our time", but spending however long on a "Gladiator" set might just not work for them. Again, that is the divergence between those two worlds; they are not one and the same.

Chair: Not to mention the Lycra.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Oh, yes—and the Lycra.

Q206 **Natasha Irons:** I want to talk briefly about iPlayer. In this changing landscape, BBC iPlayer has been quite a good thing for the BBC. It was a big bet that they made quite early, and it has worked out pretty well for them. Jordan, what do you think they should do to maximise the potential of iPlayer?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I love the iPlayer. If you asked a lot of young people, "What is the BBC?", they would say, "The iPlayer." The numbers bear that out: the majority—at least half—of BBC consumption among younger audiences is on iPlayer, because linear has gone off a cliff for them.

I think the iPlayer is brilliant. One of the challenges is that it is seen as a catch-up player, which is how it started. Is there a bolder shift into being more of a subscription-style service in waiting? That could become a home, and the BBC could really own that space. Then does it have to broaden out from being a player to being more of a destination or a platform in its own right? But I think it is great. It is probably the best thing that the BBC has, from a content perspective, because it leans into the reality that on demand is where people are today; they are not on linear.

Q207 **Natasha Irons:** We have obviously talked about YouTube and its algorithm quite a lot. One of the good things about iPlayer is that it is the BBC's own walled garden, so it can create tech and algorithm recommendation tools in line with public service broadcast values and what the BBC is for—if we ever find out what the BBC thinks it is for.

How can iPlayer strike a similar balance to a platform like YouTube, which is privately owned and privately run? How can it be in spaces where the tech and recommendation tools are not in line with its public service values?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think YouTube is about that top-of-funnel, mass awareness. It is branching out and reaching audiences at scale. We have to understand that the platform has certain parameters—click-through rate, average view duration and the need for thumbnails. That is how you reach huge, mass audiences, and that should be the focus on YouTube.

We were talking before about things like prominence. To your point, iPlayer can prioritise and curate in the same way as Netflix. It can give you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

recommendations. You cannot force someone to watch something, but it can definitely keep a better sense of prominence, and it can advertise to the audience on iPlayer in a way that simply cannot be done on YouTube.

For those shows and products that are not necessarily going to reach a mass audience on a platform like YouTube, which is very brutal and cut-throat, in the sense that people either like it or they don't—it is a marketplace of content—on iPlayer you can be more editorial. It should have that space for shows and programming that people won't go to YouTube or social media for.

Q208 Natasha Irons: I guess that is tricky. It is a global market, and you are trying to retain people on iPlayer. You are going to want to catch their eyeballs as they land on that first page. You want it to be the thing that they have heard talked about on YouTube and whatever.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: Yes, it is about pulling people in. YouTube is important because it reaches a mass audience and has top-of-funnel awareness, and that hopefully drags people into iPlayer.

Q209 Natasha Irons: Yes, and they want to see the thing they have seen there when they get on to the platform. You are going to have to track it through—sorry, that is getting a bit into the weeds.

My final question is to both of you. There has been talk about trying to bring other public service broadcasters on to iPlayer to make it a much better destination for British content and British public service broadcasting. Do you think that is a good way to go?

Iain Dale: What, so you would have Channel 4—

Natasha Irons: And ITV or whatever.

Iain Dale: Wasn't that the original idea behind BritBox?

Natasha Irons: Yes, but—

Iain Dale: I can't say I have a strong opinion. If I were a BBC executive, I might regard that as going a bit too far, because why would the BBC want to contain content from rival broadcasters? I am not sure that would get a very positive reaction from them.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I don't think it is needed, especially because they are all free; it is not like you are creating a competitive, paywalled service. Maybe when the paywall inevitably comes down the line and the licence fee is no longer sustainable—whenever that may be—then potentially: you could build a competitive service that had a paywall. But for now, I don't think there is a need.

On the point that there is a distinction between the BBC, Channel 4 and others, I think that distinction is healthy tonally. If you try to push them all into one and make it a British amalgam of everything, you lose that sense of distinction and choice for viewers. You would probably create



HOUSE OF COMMONS

more resentment because you would be trying to push everything into one thing, with the sense of, "This is good."

Q210 Vicky Foxcroft: I have found this really interesting. You have touched on quite a few things in terms of improving the BBC, but there are two things that I want to talk about, which both relate to working-class people. One is the BBC providing less sport. I would think that paying for Sky Sports is dramatically more expensive than paying for the TV licence, so why would we not make sure that people get access to more of the sport that they want to consume and therefore get a path into other areas of sport?

The other thing—I know these are different questions, but I'm just getting my one in quickly—is about creators, the fact that there is lots of volatility and so on, and managing to get more working-class people to come through. Not being paid and having to take a lot of risks and so on is quite a challenge.

What more do you think the BBC can do to make sure that, as a universal service, it is representative of everybody—particularly working-class people, who at times can feel a bit out of it?

Jordan Schwarzenberger: The creator point is a key one. If you think about it, the one leveller of opportunity right now is the ability to access an audience via social media and to create your own audience. That is the biggest leveller, from a class perspective, in this country. It is maybe not talked about enough that you can build an audience, whoever you are—we see it all day, every day—on the likes of TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Look at someone like Angryginge and his story. He is now one of the biggest creators in the country. He grew up in an incredibly difficult area, was the son of a single mum and went through so much. Look at how somebody like that can transform his life in the space of three to four years and go from where he was to where he is now. That is the power of social media.

So how can the BBC help to amplify and accelerate those opportunities? It is a question of finding the talent who are trying to build those audiences and of accelerating that through financing and through distribution. Socials and the whole landscape that we are talking about are the leveller and the way I personally think the BBC can have the biggest impact.

Iain Dale: I will tell you one thing that they could do for creators—have an accounting system that pays them on time. I am not sure this goes to the working-class point; creators are from all sections of society, but the BBC have just introduced a new system for freelance people to be paid, which everyone can see is a complete cluster-whatever. It is outrageous.

Why is it that every time I want an invoice so that I get paid for an appearance on *Any Questions?* or whatever, I get in the post two pieces of mail—one acknowledging that I appeared on the programme and, secondly, the VAT invoice? Each time they do that, there is the cost, and I think they send them first class. And I am thinking, "Well, if they have all these budgetary constraints and they know my email address, why can't they use that?"



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is a pernicky point, but it indicates a malaise in the system. Apparently, they did not even tell their programmes that they were introducing this system. So freelancers would go to the programme producer and say, "Why haven't I been paid?" And then they discover that there is a new payment system and they have not even been informed.

On your first point, it is absolutely fair to say that not everyone can afford a Sky Sports subscription, because it is relatively expensive—far more than the licence fee. But in the end, the rights holders for the sports have a duty to maximise their income. We all know that the premier league is now the pre-eminent league in the world; everyone wants to watch it. That is because of the money that it has had from Sky Sports over the years. It would not be the case had Sky Sports not existed.

I go back to what I said earlier about minority sports. You would still have to class women's football as that. The BBC have done a brilliant job in popularising that, and there are other examples. So I am not saying that the BBC should necessarily pull out of sport completely, because I accept the need to cater for all sorts of audiences, but there is a balance between the needs of the sports bodies and the rights holders, and the needs of an audience.

Q211 Vicky Foxcroft: Sports are quite often—football in particular is traditionally quite a working-class sport to engage with.

Iain Dale: You're obviously not an Arsenal supporter!

Vicky Foxcroft: No, but you know what I'm saying. The ability to consume that on TV, at a cost you can afford, or go to the pub and so on and watch it—that is the reason why I was linking the two.

Iain Dale: To be fair to YouTube, through the Sky Sports channel, it now has all the goals before the BBC does. They are free to watch on YouTube, so you do not necessarily need a Sky Sports subscription to watch football.

Jordan Schwarzenberger: And that is the challenge for "Match of the Day", right? What is the point if you can get your highlights immediately—however many hours earlier—from every platform that is broadcasting them?

Q212 Damian Hinds: Very briefly, Iain, I wanted to come back to what you were saying about iPlayer and whether it should host other PSB content. You rightly said, "Why would the BBC host competitors' content?" That is probably fair. You could also say, "Why would competitors want to be effectively subsumed into the BBC's platform?" We had the experiment of BritBox, which still exists in some form but clearly did not work as intended.

Is it not the case that what you have now is not stable equilibrium? We have multiple PSB platforms that do not host anybody else's content, while Netflix does, hosting some BBC content and so on, and YouTube, which hosts everything. If you are a PSB trying to compete as a platform and present people with a full range of choice, can you really do that unless



there is some kind of joint shopfront, even if it is not a full merger?

Iain Dale: It is a logical point to make. In the end, there will be a coming together of some of the different broadcasters. I do not know about you, but I think it is only possible for each of us to use three or four of these platforms. I have Disney, Apple and Paramount subscriptions. Do I actually watch much of them? No, because if I am not watching linear television, I will be watching Netflix or Amazon Prime. Everyone is different, but I would challenge anyone to really use six or seven of these services. I have just paid £4.99 to ITVX because I wanted to rewatch all nine series of "24" without adverts.

Damian Hinds: I've got the DVDs, Iain.

Iain Dale: So have I, but it is just so much easier. The problem is that you pay £4.99 thinking you will not get adverts, and then, where there would have been an advert break, you get trailers for other ITV programmes. People say—and we have not even talked about this—"Why not allow advertising on the BBC?" There is advertising on the BBC. If you listen to 5 Live, it has more adverts than we do on LBC; it is just that it is advertising itself or other BBC programmes.

I think there will be a concentration of these platforms over the next 10 or 15 years. How it will pan out, I do not know, but the consumer will drive that.

Q213 **Chair:** I said that was the last question, but I actually have one more for you, Jordan. When it comes to the governance of the BBC, if it is to avoid being the Titanic, does it need someone like you, who understands modern media and younger consumers? Do you think someone like you should be on the BBC board?

Iain Dale: I do!

Jordan Schwarzenberger: I think there could be more of a diversity of views and a bit of challenge generationally. It is not personal; it is almost existential. Having people who can press that is helpful.

Again, with the appointment of Matt, I think the BBC is in a position of real strength and opportunity because he can bring that same level of revolution internally. It starts from the top and bleeds down. I am more hopeful than ever that it will avoid that iceberg and do a good job. Would I be happy to help? Of course I would. It is an existential point that is bigger than any one of us. But yes, the more diversity, the better.

Chair: Thank you both so much for your time today. It has been a great pleasure to see you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Elan Closs Stephens and James Harding.

Q214 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel this morning. We will now hear from Professor Dame Elan Closs Stephens, former interim chair of the BBC, and from James Harding, editor-in-chief of *The Observer*, founder of Tortoise Media and former director of BBC News. Thank you so much for joining us today; you are both really welcome. You both heard our previous witnesses, so later on I will be very keen to hear some of your thoughts on what we heard from them.

I will start with you, Dame Elan. We are going through the BBC charter review process at the moment, and it has surprised me how few people are engaged with it. There is very little public conversation about it, and to me that feels different from charter review processes in the past. What is your sense about the level of public awareness around what the BBC does, why it is needed and what is at stake now that we are going through this charter review process?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I totally agree. The present charter discussion has been slightly invisible. There are multiple reasons. If you take the Iran war, the cost of living and the discussion about the efficiency of the present Government, there has been a lot of news. I suspect that in a less news-crammed atmosphere there would have been more discussion. *The Observer* might have filled more pages with it.

I would like to dwell a little bit on this vital point about the discussion with the public. Thinking about the evidence that has come into you so far, there has been a lot of talk from the BBC and from the British Broadcasting Challenge. I think you had the chair of the council of Cardiff University, Pat Younge, very ably discussing his group's paper. They have all gone for this concept of a forever charter. It seems to me that unless you unpick the whole infrastructure—who sets the licence fee, who makes the chair appointment—

Chair: We will come back to the permanent charter in a minute. I want to know from you about the level of public awareness.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I will come back to the forever charter, but what I am saying is that the idea of fully and extensively consulting the public every decade or so is a very good thing.

Q215 **Chair:** Interesting. Who should be making the case for the BBC at the moment? Who should be out there banging the drum, explaining to people what the BBC does, why it is needed and why this current conversation is relevant to them?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: There are a number of people; I count myself among them, as somebody who sat there and looked in detail at the way things worked from a board perspective. There are people like the British Broadcasting Challenge, who are forming the voice of the listener and viewer. You might be tempted to say, "Those are the usual suspects," but those are people who might be regarded as having an "old-fashioned



HOUSE OF COMMONS

affection", in inverted commas, for the BBC. I find nothing wrong with an old-fashioned affection for the BBC: things like Radio 4 depend on that audience loyalty and interaction.

Q216 Chair: James, what would you say about the current debate on the future funding of the BBC and why the BBC is relevant? Do you feel that it is different from the last charter?

James Harding: Yes, I think so. It is a really interesting place to start, because if you think about what is dominating our thinking at the moment, and the reason why we are not all talking about the BBC charter, it is that in the world of media, information and technology we are talking about two things: social media bans for under-16s and the AI age. I think it is sensible that the world is really consumed by those things, and it is actually a really good way of getting into thinking about the BBC.

I found it interesting listening to the conversation with the last panel. When you step back and think about this charter and the future of the BBC, what we are really asking is, "How is the BBC going to compete in a much more globalised world of information, entertainment and content? How is it going to compete in a world where AI completely remakes the information landscape?" I think it makes sense.

Just to follow on from Elan, I am also in the spot that says, for those people who believe in the BBC, that this is the moment when you stand up and make its case. I very much hope that the Committee ends up taking that view.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I also think it is vital communications infrastructure of the United Kingdom, particularly in times of crisis. For example, during covid, 15 million people tuned in to listen to the then Prime Minister, Mr Johnson, talking about staying at home in a disaster. If we are to retain that kind of infrastructure—one that speaks to all the communities in the regions and nations with its 39 radio stations, for example—that is something cohesive in a very divided society.

Q217 Damian Hinds: Dame Elan, you were starting to talk about the concept of a permanent charter, which has been much talked about, including by the Secretary of State and others. What is permanent about a permanent charter?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I suppose, on the pro side—

Damian Hinds: Forget the pros and the cons; what it is would be a great place to start.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think it just means that it is permanent rather than every 10 years.

Damian Hinds: But what is permanent?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Well, exactly.

Damian Hinds: Go on—keep going! Develop this theme.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: There has been a tradition that every 10 years you pick up the BBC by the roots, shake it around and find out whether it is still alive and whether you want it to be still alive. That is a good discussion with the public, but it takes an enormous amount of time and preparation from DCMS and the BBC itself. I suspect that in the ninth year of the 10 years, very little else consumes the board or the executive.

The point I was trying to make earlier was that if you take away that vital discussion about existence—that conversation with the public—you should not just replace it with an infrastructure that talks about who appoints the chair and who advises on the cost of the licence fee, because you would be providing a complete imbalance.

At the moment, there is a balance between the Government's grasp of the finances of the BBC and the renewal of vows with the public, if I can put it that way. That happens every decade, and that is part of the charter. You should not put that out of kilter by putting all the instruments into the other side without any modernised infrastructure. I am not against having an open-ended charter; I am only saying that it is dangerous to do so unless you have another form of infrastructure underpinning it.

Damian Hinds: Forgive me, but I am still trying to nail down exactly what it is. The Secretary of State, in talking about a permanent charter, has said that "the terms, the structures and the funding for the BBC will continue to be negotiated every several years". So what is a permanent charter? Is this just a buzz phrase, or does it mean something?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: The dangerous part of it is that it takes away the role of the public in having a say.

Q218 **Damian Hinds:** Not according to Lisa. As far as I can make out, there is this snazzy thing called a permanent charter, which everyone seems to think is a good idea: "We like the BBC and we want it to continue, so let's make it open-ended." But there also seems to be a recognition that it is very difficult to do that when you have all the public policy considerations and ultimately the funding mechanisms. It is very difficult to do that without agreeing periodically what it is going to do and how much it will cost. So what does it mean? Is it a thing we need to worry about, or is it actually a "no" thing?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: It is a thing you need to worry about if all the instruments of finance and appointments remain as they are. I think the whole infrastructure has got to change and this is the opportunity to change it.

Damian Hinds: Do you want to add to that, James? I am going to come on to appointments, but maybe you want to say something.

James Harding: I think it is a symbolic thing. It is really relevant only in what it is not. So the oddness of the BBC—

Damian Hinds: Love that!



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Harding: The oddness of the BBC is that if you are a university established by royal charter, the expectation is that you go on until the end of time. The weirdness of the BBC is that it has a charter in which its actual existence has to be recommissioned by Parliament, by politicians, every 10 years, so it is a signal to say, "We believe in the existence of the BBC, and we are not going to keep it on such a tight leash. The politicians themselves can decide whether it exists or not." It is one of those things that is symbolic. To me, it is important as a good signal of making the BBC truly independent, but you are probably right not to fixate on it.

Q219 **Damian Hinds:** I am a strong supporter of the BBC. I would say the BBC is more important than ever, but it sounds crazier than ever to say, "This will never change." With the rapidity of change happening in the wider media landscape, the news landscape, misinformation, disinformation and the whole shooting match, it seems an extraordinary moment to make the decision to say that something is permanent within that. You might have made that decision in the 1970s or the 1990s, but to make it now would seem rather peculiar, wouldn't it?

James Harding: I do not think a permanent charter means that you establish it and on these terms for ever. It just means that you recognise that you believe in its existence and you do not think that politicians should be able to intervene every 10 years to stop its existence. That is all it is.

Damian Hinds: Although politicians are accountable to the public.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: The BBC, in a sense, is accountable to the public because it depends on people paying the licence fee—

Damian Hinds: Well, they are legally obliged to pay the licence fee.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Indeed, but the number of people who also have a legal right not to have increased and the finances drop.

Damian Hinds: Yes, but that is a bit different.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: It is in their interest to listen to the public; that is what I am saying.

Q220 **Damian Hinds:** Every public body, and indeed every private body that is sensible, will listen to the public. But I do not think it is possible to say that the fact that people might not pay the licence fee gives accountability to the public, when we know that the force of the law is used to make people pay the licence fee.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: My own preference would be universal television, and to use the extended funds that would come in with that to bring in more people who would have a mitigation of their licences.

Damian Hinds: On independence and appointments—

Q221 **Chair:** Can I interrupt very quickly? When the Secretary of State gave a speech to the Society of Editors in March, she seemed to imply that there was a price for a permanent charter. There was a kind of quid pro quo



HOUSE OF COMMONS

where, in exchange, there needed to be increased “accountability of the leadership” and more commissioning decisions outside of London. Would you be open to that, as a trade?

James Harding: First, I do not work at the BBC, so I am not sure I am in a position to do that. I really do not think it is worth fixating on the idea of establishing the BBC as a charter, and misunderstanding permanence in that sense. All I am trying to say is that I think it is a good thing to get rid of the idea that every 10 years you could actually put an end to the BBC. It creates too much uncertainty and perceived political influence.

On the substance of what the Secretary of State was saying—“Do we need to rethink the way in which you have accountability, and should we think about opening up programming at the BBC?”—yes, of course that is a good idea.

Q222 **Chair:** Effectively, what you are saying is that we need to avoid the current situation, where if we do not have our act together by the deadline next year, the BBC will run out of road.

James Harding: The dynamic of that is not particularly healthy; I think we will get on to more substantial things about real independence and how you get there. That is why I think it is symbolic.

Chair: Talking of independence, back to Damian.

Q223 **Damian Hinds:** In response to the “Our BBC, Our Future” questionnaire, 91% of people said that it was important for the BBC to remain independent from the Government of the day. That makes you wonder slightly about the other 9%; maybe they rejected the premise of the question or something. Clearly, we all believe that—

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think any election would go for 91% as being pretty certain.

Damian Hinds: Obviously, we all believe that the independence of the BBC is very important. James, do you believe that the BBC is politicised?

James Harding: I worry about three things. I worry about perception—people feeling that there is political influence and interference—and I worry about processes that do politically interfere. I also worry about the structure of the BBC.

When you work there, in comparison with working in journalism outside the BBC, you are much more alert and alive to currents of political thinking and personalities in politics—and rationally so, for two reasons. First, politicians appoint the most senior people at the BBC; they appoint the chair and the majority of people on the board. Ultimately, the executive and the senior editors are then answerable to people who are politically appointed. Secondly, the most important newsroom in the country—that is where I worked in BBC News—in effect has its budget set by a combination of the Secretary of State for Culture and the Chancellor. The capacity of politicians to essentially set the terms by which the BBC works has an impact on the way people think and operate within the BBC.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

When I was there, I found amazing resilience in the people who work at the BBC in saying, "Look, we serve audiences; we do not serve politicians."

We are kidding ourselves if we do not think about those three things, including the perception issue and the process issue. I know that you had Robbie Gibb here a few months back, for example. It is clearly the case that the way the board configured itself and thought about intervening around news issues has had an impact on the way many people, including me, worry about political interference at the BBC.

Q224 Damian Hinds: I think everybody—certainly everyone around this table—believes that editorial independence is paramount for the BBC. What the organisation does, how much it costs, what its scope is, its effect on other markets and so on are all public interest questions, and ultimately politicians are accountable to the public. You may not like us, but we can get kicked out—entire Governments can and will get kicked out after four or five years if people do not like what they are doing. The question really is: if politicians will not be making these appointments, who will be? What reason do you have to believe that you would get a better, more trustworthy outcome?

James Harding: I do not for a minute think that you can have an organisation that is as important in the country—not to mention funded by the public—where you do not have any means of accountability. There is a democratic accountability that goes to politicians and Parliament, a separate accountability for public organisations, and an accountability for anyone who operates in the public square. I think we can see that there are different versions of that.

What really troubles me—this goes back to the Chair's point at the start—is the idea of an organisation in a world in which you have algorithmic polarisation in social media and disruption of safe information in an age of AI. As you say, the importance of the BBC is greater than ever, particularly as a public meeting place to think and talk about politics and the way the country works, and you have the chair and the board appointed by politicians, as we have seen.

This is not a party-political point. Margaret Thatcher appointed Marmaduke Hussey; Tony Blair and Boris Johnson had their appointees. It just means that the culture of the organisation is more answerable to and more alive to whoever is in 10 Downing Street than I think is healthy.

Q225 Damian Hinds: Do you really feel that?

James Harding: I really feel that.

Damian Hinds: As well as being someone who has worked there, you are a consumer of the BBC. When you are listening to the radio in the morning or watching the telly, do you really feel that there is a Government slant on what is coming through?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think, with respect, you are confusing two things here. There is a difference between the valiant resilience inside the organisation to produce what I would say is a neutral public square and the perception by the public of the appointment procedure. So far I think that the BBC has managed to separate those two things. The danger comes when the news agenda is embroiled, as happened with “Panorama”.

James Harding: I agree with Elan. Culturally and because the BBC drills into you the idea that you are answerable to the audience—the public—not to politicians, and because of the expectations of accuracy and impartiality, I really think that the journalism strives to make sure that it does not come to you with any political angle or agenda. I am trying to point out that you are putting the most important journalistic organisation in a very difficult position in terms of perception and trust, because people look at the extent to which the most senior positions and the budget—both people and money—are really quite tightly held by a very small number of people in politics.

Sorry, I am taking a long time to answer your question. There is a different way of doing it. You could say, as you do with other public bodies and broadcasting organisations, that the chair will be appointed by Ofcom and the chair and the board will then appoint the other directors. It is worth pointing out that, in the nature of the four nations of the UK, the four national directors are effectively appointed by the nations. They are also more susceptible to that kind of politics. I think that it would be an easy change that would signal a commitment to the independence of the BBC.

Q226 **Damian Hinds:** That argument is perfectly respectable. There is a counter-argument though. One thing the BBC possibly stands accused of more than being susceptible to points made to it by the Government of the day is its being susceptible to a kind of groupthink, metropolitan view of the world. The question is: if the BBC board appointed itself within the broader system, critics might call it a luvvie-ocracy. Is that more or less likely to produce something trustworthy and reflective of our society than the system we have today?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: The current board is pretty metropolitan based, so the present system does not really go for regionality in a big way.

Q227 **Damian Hinds:** Well, I am talking about a way of thinking: it is not mostly a geographical question, though there is a geographical angle to it, but famously there are things that the BBC has totally got wrong—it has misunderstood the mood of the nation. In any big organisation you get variations of it: people hire in their own image, famously. My question is: in a world where the BBC would be hiring in its own image its own governance, or where the wider system would be hiring in that image, would things be better or worse? I genuinely do not know; I am interested in your view.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: James has cited Ofcom. I would put it another way. Because Ofcom is essentially, from its past, geared towards the commercial sector, there should be a separate appointments commission for public appointments. We call them political appointments but they are essentially public appointments, such as at the V&A, the Natural History Museum and so on. At the BBC, that has a particular resonance because of the way in which the licence fee is dealt with and the sensitivity of news. I would suggest a cross-party commission of some sort, where you get more than one pair of political eyes on that appointment. You say, "Well, you can kick a politician out." Fortunately that is true, but you can do an awful lot in five years.

Q228 **Damian Hinds:** What appointments do you have in mind? Do you have some individuals in mind who have done this terrible damage because they have been political appointees and so on?

Chair: Also, five years—it would be a fine thing if Parliament lasted that long on every occasion.

James Harding: On groupthink, when I think about independence, you can step back and say, "The BBC is an amazing thing in this country. It is the place for understanding, learning and a good time"—that "inform, educate and entertain" promise. If you are then thinking to yourself, "There is this perception and reality of groupthink over decades," I personally do not think that that gets resolved by the appointments on the board. There are much deeper structural things. One thing I hope we come on to is how you open up the provision of news and information in the way the BBC did years ago around entertainment so you have many more sources and different points of view. I think that you could do something there, and it would do a lot for trust and perceptions of independence because you would get a variety of stronger views.

My point about the governance and the oversight of the people in charge is about confidence in the people who work in the BBC, and the perception either internally or externally of a political mood in the place. When I have had this argument before, the argument made about keeping the chair appointed, in effect, with the oversight of the Prime Minister has funnily enough not been that the Prime Minister will somehow ensure a greater diversity of thought and representation of conflicting opinions. The argument has been that, when it gets nasty, Downing Street has to be able to call the BBC and have someone say, "You are in charge of a lot of the public's money; you need to think about the way you are behaving." I have seen over the last 20 years that that does not work because, when it is really difficult politically, neither the Prime Minister nor necessarily the chair can be seen to be working on the basis of that call. You would actually have healthier and more direct accountability if there was an independent appointment.

Q229 **Dr Huq:** I want to follow up on a couple of those bits and bobs. In your MacTaggart lecture, you said that the BBC will attract better people when it is not felt that they are a political stitch-up, and you mentioned Robbie Gibb. Usually I mention him, but you did it without me having to say



HOUSE OF COMMONS

anything. There is a perception that he wields a disproportionate amount of influence. Can you expand on that?

Is there not a perception that these great and good figures—Dame Elan, I guess you count as one of them—are all a bit samey, even if you take the politics out of it. I remember being on the Justice Committee, and we interviewed someone who was going to be the head of prisons. They had never stepped inside a prison but had done similar roles on other bodies, and since then—this was ten years or so ago—they have done other ones. Is there a replication of the same sort of person doing these jobs? I am also interested in the political point.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I am sorry if I come across as the great and the good—

Dr Huq: No—there are many good things to be said about these people with public service qualities.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I am delighted to be called that because it has been a long journey from the quarry valleys of north Wales in a deindustrialised, really poor sector.

Dr Huq: Girl power as well.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Yes. Being called the great and the good is a great privilege, but that does not mean, when you see me in my current incarnation, that I am incapable of knowing where I have come from or where other people are coming from. I think that one should be a little bit wary of the current look and the experience in the past.

However, I think that you, Chair, asked a question on a younger digital board member. There is a problem about the amount of time a BBC board asks of you and the payments that are made. For young entrepreneurs seeking to push their company forward and possibly get on to the stock exchange, it is really difficult to give that sort of time. That is why I was looking at the complete structure of the board; it does not really allow for people not either retired or with plenty of private time to give that kind of commitment, so you end up with a certain age group, inadvertently. That is something to be looked at.

James Harding: There were two questions; one was about who shows up on boards, and I suppose the other was about a sort of sense of politics, particularly around Robbie Gibb. I am concerned about that. I worked with Robbie Gibb when I worked at the BBC, and I have no doubt at all that he is a serious person who is seriously concerned about the BBC and has strong views about it. I completely respect that. However, I do think it is a problem if you have gone from working for the BBC to being the press secretary—the political representative—of a very political project, and then you come back to the BBC and adjudicate on the news. I think that is a problem.

I also think it is a problem to set up this kind of committee and delegate certain responsibilities. I worry about the chilling effect that has on the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

way in which BBC News operates. The director general should be able to talk to the head of BBC News and say, "Look, we have got a problem with a programme, and there should be consequences."

I really worry about having this small committee—this star chamber—and it is really a problem if that is led by someone who, just in perception terms, regardless of what he did, has a very strong political background allied to one political party, particularly given that, in the world we are in today, that political party had quite a polarising agenda in the world, and he was a part of that. There is plenty of that; I will not go on on that front, but there is plenty to say there.

On the appointment of people, I think too many people think that, when it comes to getting a job on the BBC board, that is decided by politicians—they have their favourites—and there is not necessarily any point in applying. That means you do not get the best possible people for the BBC. If you think about it, the BBC is the most important source of information in the country; it is the most important driver of the creative industries in this country; and, historically, it has been the most important technology pioneer in this country. You would wish it to have the best possible group of people, with not just a mix of views but that mix of experiences.

Q230 Chair: You heard the stuff I was asking about independent journalism; isn't that going to be the casualty if we do move towards algorithm-driven content and all of those things? With the GB News model—or LBC or talkRADIO—it is Ofcom-regulated, but all these things are going down a particular route. Is this not the precursor to a Fox-isation of the UK media? It claims that, within the channel, it has other people who can counterbalance things, but it is a slippery slope, is it not? James, you are linked to this; at the MacTaggart lecture, you touched on some of these things.

James Harding: The truth is that no one knows where we are going with this or where this will take us. We have to be absolutely clear; I do not think there is any version in which there will not be algorithms making decisions about the way in which news is distributed and presented, so you are going to have to be intentional in thinking about how you want to make the BBC work for everyone, in a world in which so much more content will be produced than we have ever seen before.

The importance and the values of the BBC are why I keep coming back to this point about its independence. The fact that people trust that it is not being manipulated for some commercial gain by an algorithm or a tech platform is more important than ever. There is not going to be a world in which you have a BBC that is—as I think I heard you describing—sort of cutting radio tape. I do not think there will be a kind of analogue broadcasting platform and then a world of AI; the reality is that AI is going to be plugged right into the BBC. I certainly hope it will be.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Can I add to that? I do not think we have really experimented with algorithms being ethical. At the moment, a lot of that stuff is profit-driven and pushes people towards purchases or towards



HOUSE OF COMMONS

certain lifestyles. We know from our bitter experience about young people being influenced, even being influenced to self-harm, and the amount of depression and mental illness that is around. In fact, the Prime Minister's intervention on social media is a case in point that we have suddenly woken up to the fact that they are not all beneficial.

The question is can be the BBC be financed enough and be, as James has said, at the technological forefront once again, to use those algorithms beneficially? For example, when Alexa comes on in my house without my saying anything to it, and it says, "There is a book out by an author you have purchased before. Would you like to put it on your wishlist?", but I have never been able to hear, "There is a David Attenborough out", or "There is a 'Panorama' that is really interesting". How can we use those algorithms beneficially to create a public space? Broadcasting as a concept is dying. The idea that everyone listens at the same time to the same thing, linearly, is sort of gone. You can create a public space once again, but you have to do it through catching individual attention and nudging, and being part of the individuality of this generation, so that you get them into a public square but not in the old way.

Q231 Dr Huq: A couple of yes/no questions. There is going to be a 15% cut in news staff. Should there be a 15% cut in the size of the board?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I do not know what that would achieve, really.

Chair: Could we make our answers just a little quicker, as I am conscious of time.

Dr Huq: That sounds like no. James?

James Harding: No, but we have got to talk about restoring funding for the BBC.

Q232 Dr Huq: Do you agree there should be BBC staff on the board? I have asked that before, because there is a real morale issue at the moment. On the all staff calls, people feel they are ignored when they raise, for instance, the Gaza documentary that was dropped by the BBC and taken on by Channel 4.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: The current board does have four executives. It is a unitary board, so a mixture of non-executives and executives. So there is the director general, head of news, the chief operating officer and, it varies, I think there was possibly—

Q233 Dr Huq: But maybe more people at the coalface rather than the high ups?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Well, it would be difficult for them to talk on behalf on the DG, I imagine. The model of the unitary board was put in operation to make it easier for the company to behave as a company. Regulation had gone in large part to Ofcom and therefore you have the idea of helping to run the company.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Harding: No, it does not. You are right to point out the problem, but it doesn't fix it.

Q234 **Chair:** James, I need to you clarify that when you said earlier, "this committee", you meant the BBC editorial guidelines and standards committee?

James Harding: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. I just needed to get that on the record.

Q235 **Jeff Smith:** Just to finish off on governance, Dame Elan, you have talked about the different structures. You worked on both the BBC trust and the unitary board. Which do you think works better?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I am afraid that ship has sailed in a sense, because there was a possibility for the trust to be a kind of mutuality—a thing where the BBC ran itself and then you kicked the tyres. It became a unitary board, which is more of a company board, with regulation moving somewhere else, to Ofcom mainly. I know there are people who would want to adjust that again. My worry is that we are spending a lot of time simply moving the board around and having different manifestations of a board. You have had the governors up to 2010 or something, trust until 2017, unitary to 2026—try something else. As James said, I do not think it answers the fundamental problem of things like appointments and finance, simply because—you talked a lot about competition in the last session—the competition is not with the UK broadcasters. The competition is outside the UK and in our sitting rooms.

Q236 **Jeff Smith:** Just to finish off on that point, I think you both said that we need some kind of independent appointments commission—maybe Ofcom appoints a chair and then the commission appoints the rest of the board. Is there anything else you would like to add about the processes?

James Harding: I would just say that Ofcom appoints the chair and then the board appoints the board; you do not need to appoint another.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Although I would say that Ofcom would then have to be strengthened in the nations, and that would be a good thing. Currently, although it has offices in the nations, it is not really fully regulating in the nations.

Q237 **Mr Alaba:** Good morning to you both. Dame Elan, this question is to you. The BBC has recently announced that there will be £500 million in savings. How confident are you that those cuts will not affect the BBC's plans to invest outside the M25?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I am very worried about that.

Q238 **Mr Alaba:** Could you give me two or three quick points about why that is?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: When Tim Davie was director general, he brought in a paper, "Across the UK", that set out that commissioning and senior positions might remain outside London. For the first time, you had the possibility of a senior career in the BBC without moving to London. The



HOUSE OF COMMONS

effect on the creative industries in those regions is profound. You only have to look at the cluster that has arisen in the creative industries in Cardiff, for example, including such mega-successful companies as Bad Wolf, to understand that by moving out and giving more money to the regions, especially in entertainment—in drama in particular, and that cascades because of the need for 100% of the commissioning outside of news to be contested—that automatically increases the creative industries in those areas. I am worried that further cuts might cause you to centralise, because it is cheaper to centralise.

Q239 Mr Alaba: In that vein, do you fear a repeat of the 2023 cuts to local radio?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Local radio has already been cut in part in the afternoons, where there is shared programming. There have been some cuts to actual stations, and I believe that the BBC is the only provider of a full speech, music and news radio left. In fact, probably the only other regionality I can think of is the valiant provision by ITV of the regional news at 6 pm. Obviously, if the BBC has to make cuts, and if ITV is taken over by a company that does not see the strength of regionality, the voices in this country, which already feel disrespected and unheard, will increase.

Q240 Mr Alaba: Do you see, or would you like to see, a scenario where those cuts could be reversed?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I do not want to see any more, let's put it like that. That is the problem.

Q241 Cameron Thomas: Good afternoon. The new director general has recognised the importance of editorial standards to the BBC's reputation. What is your sense of what the problem is? What should be done?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think James has put his finger on the fact that you have to be very careful about an editorial standards committee, its membership and powers, and whether that has a chilling or inappropriate effect on news content. I am happy to note—I think applications have closed and the interviews have happened—that there is going to be a deputy DG with a firm editorial brief. I suspect that announcement is imminent, and I think it will go a long way towards reassuring people about neutrality. I find impartiality a difficult word, but I am conscious that integrity and trust in BBC News and current affairs needs to be very solid.

Q242 Cameron Thomas: You referenced the membership of the editorial committee. Who should and should not be on that committee?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think there should be a variety of strong views and a proper induction of board members by DCMS, with a view to looking at the Chinese walls between being a non-executive and an executive. By that I mean: how often do you wander the corridors or talk to people, and should you be notifying a head of news or the DG of your intention?

Q243 **Cameron Thomas:** What do you think about that, James?

James Harding: I think we should scrap the editorial standards committee. A board should be able to take views on editorial output of all kinds and set up groups and committees to look at particular problems. But this standing committee has been led by someone who comes at it with a political agenda, and that had not been healthy or helpful for the BBC.

Your initial question is such a big and important one: what is the editorial standards problem? If you listen to, watch or read BBC News, the depth and breadth of what it covers is unbelievably impressive in a fast-moving world. If you think the BBC, like no other, is there to answer two questions—what is really happening and why—it does an extraordinary job.

The editorial standards challenge—I will turn it on its head—is that you have got three things happening at the same time: massive technological disruption, huge changes in what audiences expect in terms of place, age and experience, and a much more fragmented political world where people are polarised about information. Meeting those challenges is the way I think about editorial standards.

To come back to the point about restoring funding, if you really care about independence, you can do some things about governance. But for more than a decade, the BBC has been talked up as a great cultural institution and an important editorial institution, and has then been chipped away. If we really want to see the BBC providing the infrastructure public service that Elan talked about in the UK and being as important in the world as we all believe it can be, we have to open a conversation about how we start restoring funding, rather than holding it or chipping away at it.

Q244 **Cameron Thomas:** James, what is your view on the appointment of a director general with a role to oversee editorial standards?

James Harding: Do you mean the deputy?

Cameron Thomas: Yes, the deputy.

James Harding: This is really in the weeds of how the place works. For what it is worth, I am not in favour of it. I think it is really important that the head of news answers to the editor-in-chief. The reality is that when it gets difficult, it is going to end up on the desk of the director general, and having that direct line matters. People go back to and pray in aid the Mark Thompson-Mark Byford relationship as the reason for doing this. The reality is that those were different times and people.

The job of the head of news is to take responsibility for that output and, when there is a problem, to be directly answerable to the director general. I understand why the BBC is considering doing this. I understand, given the transformational challenges and the charter review, that there is a sense that says, "Look, we need to have someone who has their eye on what's happening day in, day out on the content of the BBC," but the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reality is that if there is a real problem—and there always is at the BBC—the person you in this Committee will want in front of you is the director general, to understand what the process was whereby we got to the problem that emerged.

Q245 Cameron Thomas: On the 2025 editorial scandal, the BBC is obviously facing a \$5 billion lawsuit. Is there anybody on the board who you think is ultimately responsible for that?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Well, the director general is on the board and, as James said, he will ultimately have to be responsible for it, but the board will also have to take the decision on whether they are going to fight it, and they have. That to me is a positive step. A board could have said, "This is terrible—we will try to find some sort of rapprochement, make a really humble apology and make it go away." They have sought to carry on with the lawsuit, and that is to their credit.

Q246 Cameron Thomas: Have you any other thoughts on the events leading to that lawsuit?

Damian Hinds: They could have made an apology, right? They are fighting the lawsuits, but when you say they could have made a humble apology, you are not suggesting that they should not have apologised for the footage, I hope.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: They did apologise for the footage. What I am saying is that they could have rolled over and said, "It was a grievous harm and we seek to give the President a sum of money and come to a settlement." They have not come to a settlement. They made their apology, quite rightly, and then stuck to their guns on the \$10 billion or whatever it was.

Q247 Chair: On the basis that it did not meaningfully impact the outcome of the election, which is what they were alleging.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Yes.

Q248 Cameron Thomas: Have you any other thoughts on that topic?

Witnesses indicated dissent.

Cameron Thomas: Thank you for your time.

Q249 Vicky Foxcroft: I will start by declaring an interest. I worked for a trade union for more than a decade before I was an MP. I am coming back to the point about workers on boards, which James said is very difficult to achieve, but I think there could be a lot of value added to the BBC if it made sure it did this. There have been different times and different eras, and you pick up on different things in terms of how those things happened, but the people who tend to actually know are the workers on the ground. I think where there is a will, there is a way, so I invite you to re-answer it and say, "Yes, if there is a will, there is a way".

James Harding: Yes, what I was trying to say is that I do not think that putting a worker, a journalist or a creator on the board of the BBC will

address this. The different problems we are talking about here within morale—

Vicky Foxcroft: Put on loads.

James Harding: Put loads on them—exactly! It is not as if that board is too small. If you think about it, you have really quite different jobs at the BBC, with people doing very different things. That is one practical thought. My real point is that if you take, for example, the area I worked in, news, there are real concerns about the way the BBC approaches the news, what is happening in the world and the way the organisation itself works. These are in the heart of the newsroom. I really think they should be addressed in the newsroom.

Whether you are going to set up a group to deal with diversity, regional voices or attitudes to really divisive issues, you have to do that in the newsroom and with the relevant people. What happens is that people hope that you put a single person on the board and that that person is somehow going to raise the profile of these issues. Actually, I do not think that necessarily fixes the things you are really talking about here.

Q250 **Vicky Foxcroft:** Sometimes you can kind of do that by fixing the systems, in terms of how you manage to do that. If you are talking about trying to get more across the organisation, there could be a way of using trade unions and so forth to do it.

James Harding: Yes, I get it. Let's take a real example: Israel-Gaza. Good people have really different views on this, and it is a really difficult issue within the organisation and the newsroom. I am not sure that, by having a single representative on the board, you necessarily help to address that. You have to do that with people in the newsroom.

Vicky Foxcroft: This is not the question that I am supposed to ask, but I will just push one more time.

James Harding: Go for it.

Q251 **Vicky Foxcroft:** In terms of changing the culture and getting more working-class people into the organisation, I think the mistake is to narrow things down to one issue that needs resolving, rather than seeing that there can be a whole benefit in the round from doing it.

James Harding: I think that I am saying almost the same as you are there. By the way, this goes back to the question about how you appoint the rest of the board. Throughout the BBC, the question is: how do you set the right expectations for who you want in different positions? And the BBC, being a public body, has amazing leverage in making that happen.

The BBC can make changes if it wants to. While I was there, one thing that was really rewarding about working at the BBC was that you could really change the senior people in charge of programmes, or the editors. You could make those changes. That is my point. I am not sure that a single appointment to the board makes that difference.



Dame Elan Closs Stephens: I think that it is just about the variety of skills and experience around the board. That is why I come back to the point that there should be a broader base of an appointments panel, rather than simply funnelling through DCMS to No. 10.

Q252 **Vicky Foxcroft:** I will just make a final point. My experience has been that, when you do have those workers on boards—it might be that there is not just one and that there needs to be multiple people—*[Interruption.]* I can see that I am pushing the Chair's kindness and patience, so I will ask the question that I am supposed to ask, which is on AI and innovation. If the BBC had the funding it needed, what would an ambitious and innovating BBC look like? And how should the BBC use AI in its news and current affairs?

James Harding: That is the best and most interesting question that whoever comes in and takes over the job as director of news or head of news will have to answer.

Two things stand out. One is that I think the BBC has an amazing opportunity to act in the vanguard of all news organisations in the UK by having conversations with these big platforms. One of the problems is that we are all, if you like, price-takers from the likes of Claude or ChatGPT, whether that is in terms of the way in which they all ingest all our content and then distil it, mark it and sell it. Actually, the BBC has a chance to go in and say: "You know what? The UK is an amazing provider of information and entertainment. We want to make sure that that is properly priced and rewarded." And you could do something that would defend the interests of licence fee payers—the public—but you would also defend the interests of the entire news and information ecosystem. You could do something really important there. I would really like to see the BBC be in the lead of that, in conversation with the big AI platforms.

The second point—and I know that we often hark back to the iPlayer age—is to think and go back to first principles. If you do that, the idea is that the BBC is there to provide a secure public square for reliable information for citizens, so that they are able to make good choices. Actually, you could see a world in which an AI-enabled BBC would be thinking in a very deliberate way about how you make the most reliable information available to the largest number of people. The pull of the algorithms in those other AI platforms is not necessarily directed in that way.

The thinking of iPlayer is, "We are coming to a streaming age, so let's make this available to everyone." Well, we are coming to a tailored-information age enabled by AI, so how do we make that work in the best interests of society? That is the BBC's job.

I am not directly answering your question by saying, "Okay, listen, here's how we are going to remake the 10, and this is what we could do with 5 Live," but what I am saying is that you definitely need to make AI an absolutely integral part of the BBC, although you should lead with a version that goes back to what you can do for everyone.



Dame Elan Closs Stephens: Regulation comes into it as well. Regulation needs to be swifter and less constrictive, because in the past, when iPlayer was developing into a library rather than being a catch-up service, there were restrictions imposed on the BBC, through Ofcom, as to the amount of content that could be put on the iPlayer. That is nonsense because we are not seeing competition within the UK. I think that ITV and Channel 4 would agree that there is a competition for linear eyeballs and so on, but in the greater context, we are competing with very powerful competitors that do not identify as being English, Welsh or any flavour of identity of the people in the UK.

Q253 Natasha Irons: I am interested in the question of the BBC driving technological development in line with public values—not just commercial imperatives—and how that can work along with AI. How much investment would we need to put behind the BBC to get it to where it is not necessarily in competition with those massive international players, but at least has the kind of backing it needs to develop that type of technology? How would we scale up that kind of investment?

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: The figure of £500 million over five years has been rehearsed. That is just to give a push in the right direction. That is not doable as a long-term investment. We live in a very constricted age where anything more going on the public debt sends shivers through Governments.

James Harding: I do not know and I do not have a number. However, I often think that the way we have a conversation, particularly between Westminster and the BBC, does not necessarily get the best out of the BBC. What if you went to the BBC and said, “All right, if we doubled the money, what would you do so that we could begin to imagine what a next-generation BBC would be like.” This Committee is not in a position to double that money, and the Government would choke at the thought, so I am not suggesting it. However, we have endlessly discussed the consequences of cuts for so long that we have not stopped to think about how we are living in a fundamentally different age of information and technology. If you believe in the founding idea of the BBC, what do you do now? I do not think we ever really get a chance to listen.

In response to the point about independence and governance, the reason that I came back to the small point about opening up BBC News is that you could begin to see a world in which AI would help you to provide a sort of BBC newsstand through which you would get lots of different opinions and voices. You would bring up lots of voices, whether they were local or had specific specialist interests. Suddenly, the BBC could then be a platform in TV for news and information—in the way it has with iPlayer. I think that could be really interesting.

Q254 Natasha Irons: We have talked about algorithms and how we are living in an age of endless content and information along with the power of algorithms to editorialise what we see and shape the collective individualism we all have with our screens. What are the practicalities? I think that the aspiration should be there for the BBC to absolutely be the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

public service voice in that. In terms of practicalities, what kind of regulation and strong-arming would we have to do to ensure that a public service broadcasting algorithm is available on YouTube or any of these platforms?

James Harding: This is not a very specific answer on AI algorithms—and I cannot give you one—but I remember starting at the BBC, showing up to my first “Question Time” and asking someone how we picked the audience, because presumably how much people clap or cheer at different answers will really matter to the audience. They said, “Yes, we think a lot about that, and we map each constituency and then try to make sure that the audience maps the voting intentions of those people.” I remember thinking to myself, “That’s really interesting. Where in the BBC charter does it say that the ‘Question Time’ audience must map as closely as possible to the constituency that it is coming from?” Of course that is not in the charter.

However, what is in the charter is a set of expectations about the BBC’s output as a broadcaster, and that is where I think we could do something really powerful in the age of AI. If this Committee—if Parliament—set expectations for the BBC and said, “Now you go out and figure out how best to use AI, and set the algorithm to make sure that those public needs are met”, I think the BBC could be an incredibly powerful actor in the age of AI, and different from anyone else.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens: One also wonders whether there can be partnerships with some of the bigger tech companies without the public perception that the BBC has been privatised—that is the problem. When we have a space such as this Committee to ask these sorts of questions, I think, like James, that we need to have deeper conversations about what is at stake. Without sounding dramatic, I am a first-language Welsh speaker, and I have seen the erosion of the language over time, simply because the glittering lights are somewhere over there in English. Without sounding like a doomsday scenario, the glittering lights are elsewhere for the UK at the moment.

Chair: Thank you both very much for your time and for all your thoughts, for which we are really grateful.