



Select Committee on Communications and Digital

Corrected oral evidence: The future of journalism

Tuesday 17 March 2020

4.35 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Baroness Buscombe; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Greender; the Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 7

Heard in Public

Questions 56 - 64

Witness

I: Megan Lucero, Director, the Bureau Local [via audio link].

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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Examination of witness

Megan Lucero [via audio link].

Q56 **The Chair:** Megan Lucero, director of the Bureau Local, welcome to this House of Lords inquiry into the future of journalism. You will be joined by two other colleagues in a moment, but while we are waiting for them to connect to us, I wonder whether you could start today's evidence session by briefly introducing yourself and giving us a quick overview of your organisation. In your view, what are the key characteristics of local journalism, and it is evolving? Hopefully, we will get your colleagues to come in when you have finished your first answer.

Megan Lucero: As you said, I am the director of the Bureau Local. If you do not know, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism is a non-profit newsroom operating in the UK. There is a rise of these sort of co-operatives or non-profits operating, but I think that this is one of the few of its kind that operates across the UK. There is a resurgence in these types of organisations in the US. I have been on this project for three years. Before this, I was head of data for the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* in London, working to bring in innovation and the use of data in the newsroom.

The Bureau Local was set up as a response to the crisis in local news. It has operated for three years. The idea is that it is a people-powered network that tries to set the news agenda and spark change from the ground up. It was specifically set up in response to this crisis. I do not know how familiar you are with the Panama papers, but it involved a global collaboration of newsrooms. The original idea was to see whether there could be a collaboration of newsrooms in a single country, rather than on a global level, and whether data journalism can be an opportunity to provide resources, infrastructure and support.

It has quickly morphed into more than that over the past three years. It is now citizens, bloggers and journalists—everyone coming together to fill gaps in accountability reporting. We take on things that we think the mainstream media are not reporting on but need to be reported on and on what local people say needs to be done. We do a lot of work on the ground to do that. Our network is over 1,000 people—they are key members of the community—who are feeding this in. We all collaborate to help to tell a story that is bigger than the sum of its parts but also provides localised information. Where an area would not originally have had access to localised data or findings, it can now also be part of a wider story.

Your question about the defining characteristics of local journalism speaks to our approach. We believe that local journalism is a cornerstone of the democratic process. We believe that it is crucial in how people access information and have information to better their lives. Local reporters are advocates for a community—we hear that a lot from them. They believe that they are sometimes the last advocates—the last ones standing—to fight for what their communities need. That is very different from what some people might see as activism, but being an advocate is being someone who can shine a light on issues and make sure that they are seen in the highest places of power.

We believe that people should have access to information. We believe that storytelling plays a crucial part in revealing the things that need to be told and that journalism can act as a piece of the civic infrastructure. We are just one piece of the puzzle. Politics, government, activists and civic society all play a role, and journalism is another pillar in that remit. We believe that local journalism plays a role in that in making sure that there is factual information on the ground, so that people can act on that information and better their lives. Storytelling is an important way of ensuring that that information is compelling and understood.

The Chair: How do you select a story? Are you an agenda-driven organisation? Do you have a perspective that you apply across the kinds of stories that you choose to follow? Or are you driven by the titles that you work with?

Megan Lucero: It is a bit of both. We are an evolving experiment. Our criterion—this is not true of every local newsroom, obviously, because we are not a local newsroom but an infrastructure for local newsrooms—is that what we work on has to be systemic. For instance, if there are claims that someone is a corrupt local businessperson or councillor, we do not work on that unless we believe that there is evidence that that is happening systemically. The network's aim is to make sure that we are tackling issues that are of both local and national relevance. We need to be able to open up that information locally, so that is where we often look for data evidence, but we also need to be able to connect the dots to tell the national picture.

We also take on stories that we think are best done through the power of people. While the *Guardian* or other newsrooms could technically do some of the stories that we do, we argue that most of this stuff is best done when multiple people participate in the process. I do not know whether you want me to give an example of a story that we have done and say how we have selected it or worked through it.

The Chair: Yes, give me an illustration of what you would regard as the kind of story that you do.

Megan Lucero: One of the projects we worked on was our Dying Homeless project; also known as Making them Count. As many of you will know, there is a rising crisis in homelessness. A man died on the steps of Parliament, and there was an uproar in the media about it.

Our network and local people were telling us that that news passed, but people were still concerned about it but did not feel that the news was playing an effective role in communicating what could be done about it and where the pressure points were. We put a call-out on the network and asked who was interested in looking at the rise in homelessness. As journalists we began to ask how many people were dying homeless and then set out to find out. We called coroners, councillors, doctors—we called all around—but everybody basically pointed to someone else until we realised that no one was counting; there was no record of how many people were dying homeless.

We asked the network whether this was of interest. There was an overwhelming response from people who wanted to be involved. Then, we

created tasks that allowed everyone to collaborate. Local newsrooms sent us all their cuttings of all the local deaths they had reported on. Charities sometimes held records of these, as did local coroners; there were different kinds of record making. It turned out that the information was collected but often locally. Our job as investigative reporters was then to verify each of those deaths.

I know that it was a huge underestimate when we reported that there were 800 deaths over two winters, but it obviously called on the Government and the ONS to respond. The ONS reached out to us and asked for the database, and now it records and publishes statistics on the number of homeless deaths.

But there was more than just data. There were local reports telling of the lives of those who died homeless and investigating how those people ended up there. Councils obviously have a safeguarding responsibility for vulnerable adults, so there were a lot of stories locally that led to change. Councils realised that they could find effective ways of monitoring and safeguarding adults.

That is how a story like ours will come out; there is a common theme, to what we report on. But then different iterations of local stories and local support comes out of that. Stories often start with a single local incident or concern, but we mobilise a group of storytellers around a story, it begins to have a life of its own and an increased amount of information and reporting comes out of it.

The Chair: Thank you. I think we have a sense of what you do. We move on to talking about journalism as a profession, how it is changing, and its role.

Q57 **The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** Could you give us your view on how local journalism has been changed by the growth of digital media?

Megan Lucero: Sure. I will start by speaking about newspapers, because there are different markets, as you know. In all honesty, journalism was never fully supported. A newspaper used to act as a bundle; people needed that newspaper to be an active citizen in their space. You got the sports pages, the weather, the TV listings, the school listings; you got a lot of additional pieces that produced a bundle, and there was some core public-interest journalism in that. Advertisers were paying for eyeballs on those newspapers, but when you really looked at it they never specifically said, "I'm paying for public-interest news".

Now, digitisation has happened and the internet giants and various companies have come in, which has disaggregated that bundle. You can get weather, the sports listings, the TV listings somewhere else. All that separates, and all that is left of the newspaper is public interest—the story of a community. The business model has completely altered. That is when we saw the rise of click-based advertising, which again is slightly problematic, as we all know, because it was not a sustainable model.

You can see how local journalism was affected, and you can't talk about that without talking about the business model, because most of our local

media is owned by larger organisations. In this crisis, the business has taken a hit, so they will often shut down local outlets and create regional ones. You see fewer reporters deeply embedded in a space, they are physically removed, and now you have reporters who often report on larger beats. That has altered how we see local journalism, because people often do not see themselves or their stories reflected in it. That is often the result.

I am not here to criticise the existing media; we collaborate with loads of them. But I do think that the way the business model and these organisations have responded to the crisis is a huge element of the way local journalism has changed.

Q58 The Lord Bishop of Worcester: Thank you. As the business model has collapsed in the way you have suggested, is there a way in which local journalism can remain financially sustainable in the midst of this?

Megan Lucero: That is the challenge that we are all hoping we can meet. Hopefully you will get an opportunity to speak to Bristol Cable, which I know is meant to be on this call. It is an extraordinary example of the building of a co-operative that really speaks to the community's needs and is embedded in that.

But it is worth saying that they were young people who were able to set it up, and they were not paid for two years during its creation. They have said that publicly, so I do not mind passing this on. I am sure they will tell you more about that experience. They are seen as one of the beacons in this space and a beacon of how a really effective, amazing local outlet can serve a community, but the only way they could get off the ground was by working in bars and other areas for two years, and they did the work unpaid.

This is the kind of investment that you need. A lot of the evidence that we gave to Cairncross was about the need for investment and thinking about how you build strong foundations for the future. Bristol Cable and the Ferret, which are two cooperatives operating in the UK, are really great examples of that. Mostly, though, the jury is still out on how exactly that will work. I am not saying that we need to set up co-operatives; I think we need diverse approaches and different financial models. But at the moment it is uncertain how we can make that sustainable.

A lot of people are pushing the membership or subscription model, but even if you run a really effective local outlet, in a local community that might only be 5,000 engaged readers. It could be an effective local outlet and it is serving its purpose, but how do you sustain that when potentially only 5,000 are reading it, leaving aside whether they can pay or not?

One of the problems, as we all know, is that the internet giants make this a little difficult. Google is based on volume, not on relevance. I have heard our local reporters saying loads of times, "We were the first people to report on the floods in our area, but because it got picked up by the much larger organisations, such as the BBC or the *Guardian*, that came up first in search and news". Digital advertising will go to the larger outlets first. The system for accessing local information at the moment is not built towards relevance; it is built towards volume. That is one challenge that they face.

Even if every one of the 5,000 people paid for that content, it would still be hard to imagine a financial model. This is something where government, not-for-profits, charities, local businesses and journalists can play a role. I would love to see a world in which it could be split into thirds: a third supported by local people, a third supported through different kinds of grants or subsidies, and a third supported by local businesses stepping into that space. For me, that would be ideal, but that has not been tested fully enough to know whether it is sustainable.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that. We will move on.

Q59 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** You have just explained to us the financial difficulties of local journalism and newspapers, and you have put forward various models, but the most effective, the Bristol model, is a co-operative in which people had to work for nothing for two years. Where does that leave the recruitment of staff? I imagine that hardly anybody is being recruited in-house anymore and that most people are freelance or even volunteers. What does that mean for the training of staff?

Megan Lucero: I forget the name of the report that was commissioned for Cairncross, but it talked of a brain drain, which is really important. You had these incredible veteran reporters who know the ins and outs of that community. We are seeing that level of skill and expertise changing. In our network, we do not see people stay for more than a year or two. With the salaries they are paid, reporters cannot sustain that for families or for the long term, so we are seeing a huge turnover at the moment and, exactly as you said, a lot of people volunteering.

I am sure you have all read the Port Talbot research. I always come back to that because it is so striking. Rae Howells, who wrote it, spoke about the demographic deficit and said that when the paper was gone, voter turnout reduced, volunteering reduced, and the number of FOI requests reduced. That was her way of demonstrating that, but what was most interesting in her report was that, although that was really hard, it was when the journalists were gone that you really saw that demographic deficit. For a while, even if the newspaper was not there, people who cared about accountability or about the public interest were still finding ways to support that community or act in that interest, but when those people were gone, that deficit was what was most concerning.

That is what the Bureau Local has seen. For three years, we have operated as this network of people, and slowly but surely we keep losing reporters to newspapers shutting down or whatever. We have quite a few volunteers, but the amazing success of the Bureau Local has been based on the pure will of people who are passionate about this and passionate about their communities. However, I fear for the resilience of that in the longer term, which is why I am particularly interested in business models: I want to commit to this network to help this continue. My fear is just, exactly as you state, that it is hard to see where the capacity, the long-term mental health and resilience and mental health of volunteers and people who are in this space will go in the future.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Traditionally, journalists started and got

their training on local newspapers. They had to get an NCTJ diploma and they hoped to get on a regional or a national newspaper. It provided a really good, regionally diverse stream of talent for those national newspapers. Is this erosion of local journalists and journalism having a knock-on effect on the way the national press recruits?

Megan Lucero: That is a good question. I do not think I can fully speak to that with my expertise. If I were a national newspaper editor, would I see a lack of knowledge in my reporters about local councils or whatever? I do find that our network has become more dependent in this space. One of the beats we cover is council finances and accountability, and ever since the Audit Commission was shut down, we have been told by experts like Tony Travers and others that we are the Audit Commission for councils. Every time we get a story, any national jumps at it, because they say we have this wealth of knowledge on the interworking between councils' work, the budgets, the levels at which it happens. I can speak only for the fact that it is always incredibly welcome when we bring that knowledge to a newsroom. They often say that they do not have the time or resources to do it, or that there is not the in-house understanding or capacity to know the ins and outs. It is an important point.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Does it mean that, with the lack of money to pay for journalists, you find that it is increasingly staffed by freelancers, which is a particularly unstable and erratic form of employment? Does that militate towards middle-class, possibly urban people? One of the great complaints is that journalism is far too metropolitan and does not know enough about the small towns or what happens out in the countryside, as we saw with the Brexit campaign.

Megan Lucero: Absolutely. Diversity in news is a huge problem, and there is an elitist element to that in the types of people who can do this kind of unpaid training in London. It only works for a certain group of people, and the perspective on the news, what we think matters and is important, ends up in the hands of a homogenous group of people.

There is a really great programme, which I am sure you will have heard of, called PressPad, which is essentially journalists offering spare places in their flats to enable people to stay with them during internships. It is the news industry's response to help to make our industry more diverse and allow people to afford to do that, but again that is based on most of us volunteering our sofa beds to people.

You made the point about the effect all this is having on the dialogue about Brexit and everything. People are incredibly frustrated, and local news is contributing to trust in news, and countering the lack of trust. There were reports that local news is more trusted than national; they are still connected and trying to represent elements of themselves. We see this quite often. Our network often shares national stories, saying, "Can you believe they've written about it like this? They didn't even come to Leeds to report on that". That is even among journalists; we feel as though the narratives are not right and we are not really representative.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Sure. With the models that you have suggested—co-operatives, getting grants and local subsidies—if you can get

any of those to have some traction, do you think you could then start to recruit local people for local news in a much more effective and sustained way, rather than having the year-long churn that you have just explained?

Megan Lucero: Yes, I think so. It comes down to resources. What is really difficult is that all the grants that are out there at the moment are in what is called the accelerator format; this has happened with the Government's fund, through NESTA, and there is a European journalism one. Accelerators are building on the idea of the tech industry, but the problem with that analogy and that crossover is that the tech industry is properly resourced and accelerators help to push it further.

What people struggle to understand about the resources in local journalism is that they have been gutted to such an intense degree that you almost need to build back a base level ratio of reporter to community, or reporter to the time and resources they need, and then you can build innovation on that. What is difficult is that funders want to see innovation, and it is quite unsexy to say, "Let's build back the basic ecosystem and infrastructure that we need. I fully take the point that we need to innovate this space, but it is incredibly difficult to do with short-term thinking.

Q60 **Baroness Grender:** Given your background on the digital side, and the fact that you have successfully recruited coders as well as journalists, are you working on anything in particular? We hear a lot on this Committee about algorithms that push people towards the bad, if you know what I mean—an endless diet of something on Insta or TikTok or YouTube for a particular generation. Are you aware of any element that is about developing algorithms for good or great journalism, rather than the algorithms that we normally come across in this area?

Megan Lucero: That is a good question. When I was working at the national level, that was what was happening; that was what I was building. At the time, I was not building a data team that was going to add to the reporting; I was building a data team that would be integral to how you find information. As our world is digitised, more data is being processed, as we speak, on our phones and our computers, than a human could ever process, so my approach to digital journalism has always been to ask how computers can aid humans and support them to report in a digital world.

One of my biggest concerns about the future of this space—obviously, I am coming from an investigative point of view—is that only a handful of people will understand the data systems and the algorithms of big data, and they will control most of how we interact with it. If we do not equip journalists, or even government bodies, with the ability to scrutinise those things, if we do not create the ability to scrutinise it, those people will hold the power; they hold a knowledge that none of us can touch or even begin to question if we do not understand it.

When I was at the *Times*, my job was to do much more in that space, using tech to find stories in ways we could not do previously. So I helped break stories on Russian doping at the Olympics and the World Championships, processing lots of data to tell important stories. That is what we are also trying to do here at the bureau.

I would be cautious of anyone promising a robot journalism future. Digitised information for journalism could be really important in cutting down mundane tasks that do not need to be done, such as being able to quickly analyse how a stock change compares over time, or how a salary increase compares with other companies. To be able to do that analysis quickly is really important but, as we all know, we still want humans to be a really important part of understanding the public interest elements.

Data journalism can be used for good if it helps us to navigate this digital world more easily, more effectively, and more efficiently, but I feel, and I do not know about you, that there is a general understanding that certain things still need to be done by humans, or at least the decisions need to be made by humans, whether that is the ultimate decision on how we allocate services or how we tell important stories about corruption and things like that. Both can be integrated in a good way.

The Chair: Thank you. We will move on. I shall return towards the end to a couple of the issues you have raised.

Q61 **Baroness Buscombe:** How could news providers better engage with and appeal to different communities, including those least likely to trust journalists or follow the news? You have already touched on the issue of trust, and the financial model, which plays into all this.

In answering, could you also say how you can square saying, as you have, that journalism needs to be the cornerstone of the democratic process—I absolutely agree—and at the same time suggest that subsidies, government grants, or whatever, can play a role here? Surely one of the reasons why people turn to news is their search for something independent of government, independent of relying on such a source. For example, many of us, once a month or once a quarter, receive something printed through our doors that looks a bit like a newspaper but is actually produced by the local council and paid for by the local council tax payer—us—and is anything but something we should trust, I believe. It is rather a convoluted question, but I would like to hear your views.

Megan Lucero: There are a few points here. We are doing lots of experiments in our team relating to trust. One of them applies what we call a circular model in thinking about how we include people in how we find stories, how we develop them and how we tell them. Through data, we have identified key areas around the UK that are affected by the housing crisis, for instance, and have run events in those spaces called story circles in which allow people the opportunity to participate. We have an open-source way of investigating so that anyone can follow and take part, but then we also go back to those communities and tell those stories, and there is a circular element to it.

It is a national approach, because we cannot be in every community, but it is probably what most people expect local journalists to do: people know that they are there from beginning to end and are not being parachuted in or extracted from. That is what we hear at the moment; some journalists are reporting on their communities by coming in then going out. Building trust is about commitment to communities, about showing your face,

putting the time in and making sure that that does not come with an agenda or an objective, being really honest and believable. These are all things which most people would tell you, if they had the time and resources, would help to build trust.

Your point about government is completely right. There is a lot of scepticism about government interference and things like that. There is a lot of scepticism in our network about council papers, as you mentioned. But there could be government initiatives like the most recent one, where the money allocated is administered through NESTA. As a society, how much do we commit to and believe in this? You can almost equate it to a public health crisis—I know we are going through one at the moment—and I have found myself thinking about it that way. If we believe in the public good, everyone deserves access to information so that they can participate in society. To what level are we willing to invest, or how much are we letting the private market respond to that?

It is the difference between thinking about the public health space and having access to cheap fast food that might lead to an obesity crisis, versus really expensive, farm-to-table, gorgeous food which only the elite can have and that keeps them healthy. You can think about information in that way: are we allowing poor levels of information to slowly feed our society, and how will that shape how our society makes decisions or acts, versus high-quality information that is obviously a lot more expensive but produces a more informed and participatory society?

If you think about it on that level, we might decide that the farm-to-table version of journalism is too expensive, but there must be some way we can provide an element of this as a society. How should government approach a public information crisis, and how should they support initiatives through arm's-length grants and things like that, to ensure that we are thinking holistically about it?

Q62 **Baroness Buscombe:** There could be a difficulty in making these news outlets too dependent, in a sense. I have a slight cynicism—forgive me, because I think what you are saying is so important—but I want to test a little further, because the truth is that for generations the problem has surely been that the focus of the large newspaper organisations has been on cutting costs by clearing out or reducing content and by streamlining news whereby you have the same news across very large areas, in order to save money, rather than investing in journalism. It has been a catch-22: the news that is being delivered is less and less relevant to local communities, so income from that information has reduced, and they have responded by reducing the number of journalists again.

I put that to you as one who is actually quite optimistic about the future of local journalism, because I think it is generally believed that the industry at its best is a cornerstone of our democratic process and we need to know the truth about what is happening locally. In a sense, that brings me to my second question about the role that citizen journalism should and could play at a local level. Can you talk a little more about that, please?

Megan Lucero: Yes. I will just quickly respond to what you said previously. I agree that we have to be careful about dependency, but for me it comes back to investment. Three years ago, the Bureau Local was funded through the Google digital news initiative and, three years on, if we did not have two years' worth of funding I would not have been able to get to where I am now, with nine different investors, different revenue streams, coming into the project. We were given that starting chance to build a new economic model. What is difficult is that people are not able to do that.

On citizen journalists, we need to be careful, because there is a trade to journalism and a quality to it. You see a reluctance to allowing citizen journalists to take on legally sensitive stories—or even citizen journalists themselves being reluctant to do so. That is something to be wary about.

We have loads of citizens who are part of the Bureau Local and they are, as we say, committing acts of journalism. They are not interested in being a journalist. They are interested in bringing their level of expertise to journalism—it might be a lawyer, a teacher or whoever. We can decentralise that to some degree, but you will come up against the problem of tricky stories that are legally difficult, which often only get taken on by the organisations that have the backing to be able to do them. That is something to factor in.

I heard that when the BBC was deciding on its local democracy scheme, it knew that there was a demand for court reporting but ultimately decided to stick only with councils. One reason for that was the legal element. How do you support people to write about family courts, which are incredibly complicated and where the people reported on need a lot of protection? That level of reporting requires a lot of additional resources. Things like that have to be factored in.

Baroness Buscombe: There could be a way around that. Let me test you with it. For example, if court transcripts are digitised, what is to stop those transcripts being sent out to local news, which can then discriminate, just using those transcripts? That surely need not cost very much at all.

Megan Lucero: Yes. One of the big challenges is the lack of digitisation in the courts, which is exactly what you are speaking to. But there are still issues to do with reporting on children under a certain age and having legal restrictions on identifying people. I learned about these things through close relationships with editors, who taught me about media law and how you report on allegations or rape victims, for example. Different levels would need guidance, but I completely understand that we are talking about the broad level, and of course digital elements will help with that.

Baroness Buscombe: It is the duty of care and the question of responsibility, is it not?

Megan Lucero: For instance, we are a tiny non-profit and we have noticed recently that there is an increased level of legal issues. I've recently had to wade through five different legal threats from individual companies, relating to our journalism.. We do a huge amount of legal due diligence in our team, but we are noticing that private companies are amping up their legal threats

to journalists. That takes a lot of time and resources. These are things to think about.

Baroness Buscombe: Thank you. That is very helpful.

The Chair: Baroness Grender has a question, then sadly we will have to wrap up quite quickly.

Q63 **Baroness Grender:** Thank you for your contributions so far. We wanted to get your perspective on the BBC local democracy reporter scheme. Could you give us a sense of your view, from the work that you are currently doing, on whether that has been working? Also, could you tell us a bit more about scope for collaboration with other local news organisations?

Megan Lucero: I am sure that you had a lot of feedback about the BBC's LDR scheme. We all know that it is not perfect. We know that there are many ways in which it could be better. But the best thing they are doing is building back the bare bones of what is needed. It is putting people in courtrooms who were not there before. But we hear from a lot of the LDR reporters that they are going to council meeting after council meeting and they type up their reports, but because of that volume they do not have a lot of other capacity.

As I mentioned, one of our areas is local power and local finances. We reach out to those reporters and say, "Hey, we have this really great story", but they are not able to do anything long-term. Again, this is not necessarily a criticism of the BBC, as they are responding to a basic lack of daily reporting. We are responding to the investigative journalism. You need both those things.

The BBC has taken important steps towards responding to the lack of reporting in the councils. It has reached out to us asking whether our team could work more closely. We are putting the resources into connecting the dots of local daily reporting painting bigger pictures. We have not quite taken that step, because it is a bit complicated, but I am flagging that. The BBC is seeking to fill a very specific void, which is the lack of daily reporting on what happens in council meetings, but there is still a lot of work to be done on how you make sense of that and scrutinise council budgets or whatever over time.

As I said, it was a shame to hear that there is not going to be as much court reporting. Access to justice is a big thing. Researchers from Bristol went to every magistrates' court for a week. There were shocking and under reported results. They were law students and journalism students and they filled out a little sheet. They found that a majority of the courts did not have a journalist there. They also found that more than half the people in the courts were representing themselves; they had no legal aid or legal representative. These are important stories that need to be told. That is something that will speak to you.

Q64 **The Chair:** Sadly, we need to draw to a close, but I just want to ask you a brief question. We spoke earlier about diversity. Oliver Dowden, the new DCMS Secretary, talked the other week about the importance of diversity of thought as well as diversity of background in newsrooms. He was talking

particularly about the BBC. Do you agree with him that there is a lack of diversity of thought across some sections of the media?

Megan Lucero: A lack of diversity across the media?

The Chair: A lack of diversity of thought. He talked about the importance of diversity of thought as well as diversity of background. Do you agree with him?

Megan Lucero: I would, but I think that one is a by-product of the other in a lot of cases. The reason why you are not necessarily seeing different perspectives is that there is a more homogeneous group of people, who may not have been exposed to some of these things or other perspectives. I would say that it is just representative of the BBC - it is true of most media. I believe that news should be objective and factual, but news is becoming increasingly polarised and opinionated. We hear that a lot. The problem is also that people read opinion articles and think of them as news.

The Chair: I think his point was that, if everybody thinks the same, it is difficult for them to approach stories and agendas in an open-minded way and that it would be better if newsrooms had a variety of different thoughts.

Megan Lucero: Yes, I agree with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You managed to get through a whole hour on your own, when we had intended to have two colleagues with you—for technical reasons, they were unable to join us. You gave us very great value and answered our questions comprehensively, so thank you very much for your time. The inquiry will probably take a different form, given the current coronavirus situation, but we will continue with it. We have a substantial amount of written evidence still to come in, so keep an eye on the inquiry. Your evidence will be an important part of it. Thank you very much and keep safe.

Megan Lucero: Thank you very much for your time. Best of luck with the inquiry.