



Select Committee on Communications and Digital

Corrected oral evidence: The future of journalism

Tuesday 21 July 2020

3 pm

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Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Bull; Baroness Buscombe; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Grender; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Meyer; Baroness Quin; Lord Storey; The Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 22

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 187 - 197

Witness

I: Michael Jerney, Director of News and Current Affairs at ITV.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken.

Examination of witness

Michael Jermey.

Q187 **The Chair:** I welcome our witness, Michael Jermey, ITV's director of news and current affairs. Last week we heard from BBC News and Channel 4 News. Michael Jermey, as director of news and current affairs, is responsible primarily for ITV's regional output, which ITV produces itself, and has overall directorial responsibility for news at ITV. Michael, welcome. Thank you for coming and giving us evidence. There are a few areas that we want to talk to you about. You will have seen some of the evidence that we have already received, and thank you for the evidence that you have produced for us. Could you please start by giving us a brief introduction to yourself and to ITV News and exactly what you are responsible for in the organisation? Then we will talk to you about the impact of Covid on ITV. The session is being broadcast online, and a transcript will be taken.

Michael Jermey: Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to your inquiry, which is an important one. Public service journalism has never been more important in an era of fake news and other challenges, and the interest that you are showing in the subject will be welcome right across the sector. As you say, I am responsible for ITV News and current affairs—both network news, which we take from our newsroom in ITN, and our regional services right across England and national services in Wales, Northern Ireland, southern Scotland and the Channel Islands. We as an organisation are the biggest commercial public service broadcaster. News is at the heart of our schedule; it occupies about a third of the evening schedule every weeknight of the year.

ITV invests more than £120 million a year in regional and network news, and additional money in current affairs. ITV values being a public service broadcaster and feels that its news adds a great deal to British society, helps to support our democracy. We know that ITV viewers very much value the service that we are able to offer.

The Chair: We started this inquiry before Covid impacted us and it is a broader look at the future of journalism, including the training of journalists and the financial stability of news organisations, but obviously Covid has had a huge impact. Let us start with a discussion about the impact of Covid on your organisation.

Q188 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** Could you tell us about how your organisation has responded to the Covid crisis? In your answer, could you tell us not only how audiences have responded to your content over the last few months but how the crisis has highlighted the economic challenge to journalism posed by the major online platforms?

Michael Jermey: I think there has been no more extraordinary event in all the time that I have worked at ITV News and public service broadcasting more generally going back 35 years, and I am not sure there has been a similar event since television news started in the mid-

1950s. You could draw some comparisons with the Second World War; they would not be far off the mark.

Within the space of just a few days we had to move our news operation from newsrooms right across the country to a point where 80% of news staff were working from home, using digital technology to help to make the programmes, and only about 20% of staff were in the office. All our news operations kept going. We kept all our regional news services, our network news service and our current affairs programmes on air, and that was no small task.

I am immensely proud of all the teams in all our newsrooms, both at the network and right across the regions and the nations, for having done so. That was only possible because of the immense investment in digital technology over the last decade. If Covid-19 had happened 10 years ago, you would have seen very different things on your screens generally, certainly when it comes to news; there would have been a great deal less there.

It was vital that we stayed on air. I think we served a number of important functions. When I say we, yes, I am talking about ITV News but also about other public service broadcasters in this regard. We have put across vital public health messages and held power to account—that is just as important at a time of national emergency as it is at any other time—and have explained to viewers a complex and difficult message in clear language.

The other function that it is easy to overlook is the degree to which in those very difficult days of late March and April we offered vital reassurance to many members of the public. We received letters and emails from people that essentially said, "In a world that's been turned upside down where we feel we've got no certainties, it's really reassuring to see your news programmes on air", especially for local broadcasting. There is a relationship between regional presenters and an audience that a lot of viewers find really reassuring. During a really difficult time, to see those presenters still in the studio or, in the case of some, broadcasting from home—one or two presenters who were part of the programme were shielding, and one or two of them were in their late 70s, so they broadcast from home—people found that immensely reassuring.

Obviously the economics of broadcasting has been disrupted, as for so many industries. Advertising revenues in the immediate aftermath of lockdown plummeted by 40% or more. ITV made sure that it prioritised its daytime programmes and its news programmes. We stayed on air live for many hours a day. All of ITV's channels remained broadcasting despite that enormous drop in revenue.

Clearly we still face challenging times. Advertising revenues across the year for all advertising-supported channels will be significantly down this year. It coincided—if you are a producer/broadcaster, as ITV is—with production being closed down pretty much right around the world. So it has undoubtedly been an economically challenging time, but journalism

has come out very well. We kept our programmes on air, and so did other broadcasters, during an absolutely crucial time.

Probably a couple of lessons for journalism come out of the crisis. One is that audiences really do value public service broadcasting. I thought your Committee's very good report on PSB could not be truer than it is now. People value PSB and it is vital that we preserve it.

Although we saw an uptick in audiences—the average audiences for our regional news programmes was 4 million-plus at the height of lockdown, up about 20% year on year—there was also a great deal of consumption online. The modern ITV News is a well-known television broadcaster but also obviously has a digital presence, and one that will only increase over time. During lockdown we launched a new website that not only has a network version but 12 regional versions, and we launched a new app. Both those things were planned before lockdown but they coincided with lockdown rather well when more and more people were consuming digital news.

We also saw a very large uptick in news that we specifically make for a young audience. Last autumn we launched a programme called "The Rundown", aimed at 14 to 17 year-olds, which goes out on Instagram and other social media channels, and we found young people tuning into that in very large numbers.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Did it also highlight a challenge to journalism during this crisis?

Michael Jermey: Undoubtedly there is a challenge, and in a sense it is a challenge that is faced by UK media more generally: the shift in advertising from newspapers to online. The economic challenges to journalism that your PSB report brought out have probably been accentuated during this period. I do not think we are in easier waters than we were in before lockdown, but I certainly think that the importance of public service journalism has been emphasised during this period.

The Chair: You talked a bit there about regional and local news, which we would like to talk about next.

Q189 **Baroness Bull:** Thank you very much for those remarks. I am also interested in the impact of the pandemic, but I would like you to look to the medium term and long term and say what you think the impact could be—for good or for ill—particularly on the regional and local news industry.

Michael Jermey: The pandemic has clearly had a short-term impact. It is harder to tell what the long-term impact will be. That will probably be associated more with the pandemic's long-term impact on the economy, on consumer spending and on advertisers' willingness to advertise. I do not have a crystal ball as to where that will go.

The debate about the economic challenges for PSB and the future of PSB that we were all having in January or February before the Covid-19 crisis and the magnitude of it became apparent will still be the debate that we

have afterwards. Covid-19 may have accelerated some of that process, but I am not sure that it throws up utterly new issues. The speed of the digital revolution may have become greater, but the fundamental issues are to do with that rather than the pandemic.

If there were challenges to PSB before and a sense that we needed to ensure that it continues in the digital age, that is as true now as it was six months ago, but probably not infinitely more so. I am not sure that Covid has been a game changer in that regard.

Baroness Bull: What might the impact be on the workforce? I am thinking particularly about talent pipelines, opportunities, the diversity of the workforce and freelancers within the workforce. Do you have any views on that?

Michael Jermey: Yes. First, I repeat the observation that I made a moment or two ago: we are immensely proud of the ITV News workforce and the work that it did during the pandemic. We had television crews out in some of our big cities when they were almost empty. We had colleagues going into work, always socially distancing but ensuring that they got programmes on air at a time when there was immense nervousness around the country. They and other colleagues did a vital and important thing during those months of April and May, and I want to recognise that.

On the wider issue of diversity and talent pipelines, there is a challenge for the broadcast news industry to ensure that we are fully inclusive, that we represent in our newsrooms the audiences that we broadcast to. There has been substantial work in recent years to do positive things on that. I remember joining an industry that was very white and very male, with very few women in positions of authority and very few people of colour in positions of authority.

There has been a lot of progress but not enough. If I look at our own regional organisation now, the majority of heads of news in our regions are women. That was not the case 10 years ago; it is an unrecognisably different picture. We have made progress in black, Asian and minority-ethnic representation in our workforce. If we go back quite a long time—10 to 15 years—we see that there has been progress, but still not to the degree that I would like.

If I look in our own organisation in London, our local news and our national news comes from ITN, where BAME representation is now at around 20%. It indexes a bit below London as a whole. Outside London, where we directly employ journalists as ITV plc, in just over half our regions we overindex compared with the 2011 census on BAME representation, but that clearly means that in a minority of regions we underindex and there is further work to do.

We are taking a lot of action to improve that situation. We have a trainee scheme which for a number of years has helped to increase representation of underrepresented groups. We ensure that it is not a graduate entry scheme but a wider scheme so that people who are not graduates are able to come through it. We have had a very good

relationship with the organisation Creative Access, which encourages greater minority-ethnic representation in the media. We are seeing progress on that front, but I would like it to go faster and be more extensive, which is why ITV recently launched a programme to accelerate diversity and inclusion right across the company.

Q190 **Baroness Bull:** I think we have strayed into the next question. I am particularly interested in whether you see any particular impact of the Covid pandemic on the workforce.

Michael Jermey: That is an interesting question. The vast majority of our employees in news at ITV occupy staff positions rather than freelance ones. Within news, we hardly furloughed anybody—there were one or two non-journalistic, non-technical roles that were furloughed; they will be coming back. Most of our journalists continue to work. So long as a strong PSB regime is maintained, we will continue to be a big employer in the news sector. I do not see within our own organisation a particular Covid-19 impact. As I referenced in my previous answer, I think the bigger issue is certainty around the future of PSB rather than specifically Covid-19.

The Chair: I think the Bishop of Worcester wants to pick up the issue of inclusion.

Q191 **The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** Thank you for being with us this afternoon, and thank you to you and your colleagues for all that you do for the common good, particularly what you have been doing during this terrible pandemic.

I want to tease out a bit more the question of inclusivity, to which you have already referred and said a bit about. We have consistently encountered from our witnesses, both in writing and orally, systemic barriers to the recruitment and retention of people from underrepresented backgrounds, some of which you have already referred to: increasing reliance on universities to prepare journalists; reliance on informal recruitment processes; the London-centric nature of the profession; the invisible characteristics such as socioeconomic background, education and religion, which are sometimes overlooked; and, finally, what might be referred to as, "It's not really for people like us" because of the way they are represented in the media.

You have said something about the good work that you are already doing. I wonder whether you could say something about how you feel public policy might help to remove some of those systemic barriers. I am thinking, for example, of better support for apprenticeships.

Michael Jermey: Lord Bishop, you have touched on a really interesting area. As I outlined, primary responsibility for this probably rests with us, with news broadcasters, rather than just turning to society and saying, "It's your problem, fix it for us", but I am sure there are public policy interventions that could help in this area.

The growth in apprenticeships has been one of the real positives of recent years, which, when used well, can increase access to

organisations such as ours in terms of social mobility, geography and so on. Your inquiry has previously heard about issues relating to the apprenticeship levy and how flexible it is. ITV pays some £2.2 million into the apprenticeship levy and, I believe, gets about 11% back. Yet we have a very good story to tell about apprenticeships. Across the company, more than one in four apprentices have come from ethnic minority backgrounds, a majority have been women, 70% have gone on to get permanent jobs in ITV and an additional 10% have gone on to get jobs in other media organisations. There is a very positive story to tell.

Greater flexibility in how apprenticeship levy money could be used—a training levy or what have you—could be helpful. One area that we have looked at, for instance, is that if you want to set up paid internships and ensure that those are available to people who perhaps are not able to find accommodation in London, if it is based in London, having some flexibility about that sort of thing could increase social mobility into the profession and the industry.

Another area to look at is that a lot of people come in through journalism college or through one of the technical and media colleges. I have talked to students in those colleges who are currently worried about the levels of debt that they take on to go through that process of education. Clearly that is not an easy issue to fix, and it is part of the wider question of the funding of tertiary education, but it is another barrier to entry to media organisations.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester: Do you think that pooling funds to create a training agency and allowing news organisations to spend some of the money on apprentices' wages would be a good way forward?

Michael Jermey: Those sorts of ideas are well worth looking at. Training should not be a competitive area; it should be an area where we add to the industry. ITV spends a lot on training. We train journalists and technicians, many of whom go on to have long and successful careers in ITV. Some go on to other media organisations, and when they do we always wish them well and always feel that we had made a contribution to the industry overall. If there is a better way of organising some of those things, we would be very open to those sorts of discussions.

The Chair: ITV itself produces a huge range of regional news content. Let us talk about that for a bit.

Q192 **Baroness Quin:** Perhaps I could preface my question with a couple of comments. I looked at the presentation that Jane Luca sent through to us on ITV's Covid coverage. It seemed to me to respond, particularly in the regions, to the hunger for local news that there was at that time.

I apologise to my colleagues if they have heard me make this point before, but my own region is Tyne Tees, and because of past reorganisations the region is now rather more unwieldy than it used to be; it covers areas from Berwick to Harrogate, including areas that seem to be much more comfortable in a Yorkshire/Humberside context. As ever, I hope that the boundaries could be looked at again to make them more coterminous with the governance boundaries which the Office for

National Statistics uses.

However, the question is this. Particularly reflecting on Covid, how do you ensure that your news reflects the concerns of your regional audiences and their sense of identity?

Michael Jermey: The way we do that is the way the ITV regions have been doing that since the 1950s. We do it in a modern context with modern technology and we operate in different ways, but the key to ITV regional news is that it is deeply rooted in the regions in which it operates.

Decisions about what goes into our running orders on a nightly basis are not made at the centre; they are made in newsrooms in the regions. The Tyne Tees newsroom in Gateshead looks at the stories on offer, and people who live in the north-east make those decisions. All colleagues at Tyne Tees live in local communities and are very well tapped into the issues and questions that are of interest to people in the north-east. We further slightly institutionalise that by having panels representing all communities in the north-east, and our journalists sit down and talk to them and we get constructive feedback on our programmes.

I sometimes think that there is no closer connection in television between the people who make the programmes and the audience than exists in regional television news. Lots of programmes are made in London or in Salford for network audiences, and that close connection is probably impossible. In regional news we have 18 different services in regions across the country. Our journalists and technicians are living the same lives as our viewers and meet our viewers on a daily basis.

We sometimes do proper well-organised research with focus groups, and that has a use, but actually the same things that are being said in focus groups are being said to our journalists when they are out filming in Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough or Sunderland. Our journalists are in very close touch with audiences, and that is reflected in the programmes. I think there is still a special relationship between our 6 o'clock news programmes and the local audiences that we broadcast to.

Baroness Quin: I accept what you say, but I think the boundaries could be better aligned with a sense of identity, and I hope that one of these days ITV will look at that again and perhaps go back to the situation that there used to be and, if budgets allow, think more in the way of local political programmes, local history programmes and so on, of which most people's impression is that there used to be rather more in the past than there are now.

Michael Jermey: Let me take that in two parts. Nothing has changed in the basic geography of the regions, which is more to do with the transmitter network than anything else. In Harrogate, viewers should probably be seeing ITV Yorkshire, although that may have something to do with where you point your aerial. You will probably find streets in Harrogate where most people are watching Yorkshire and some others could probably redirect their aerial.

The proper region is replicated in satellite by postcode. More than 10 years ago, the Tyne Tees region, which at one point was split in two, came together as one, but it is very much a service directed at the north-east. There is a separate service for the Border region, a separate service for the east of the Yorkshire region, and a separate one for the west of the Yorkshire region. As I say, the country is split into 18 regions or sub-regions.

With reference to wider programming beyond news, you are absolutely right that 15 or 20 years ago there were more of what are sometimes described as non-news programmes—current affairs or lifestyle programmes—across the regions. The explanation of why those went away is essentially an economic one. Once upon a time there were monopoly profits in being a broadcaster with very valuable analogue spectrum, which not many people had access to.

The public service compact was that in return for access to that spectrum the Channel 3 licences provided an array of programmes. When the digital revolution began 20-plus years ago, the value of that spectrum went down rapidly. At public service broadcasting reviews and licence renewal dates, the regulator decided that it was not possible to continue to afford that complete array of programming and decided to prioritise news, which I think was the right decision. I think that some of those programmes were fantastic—I started my career working on one of them—but I think it was right to prioritise news.

In recent years there has been no reduction in our news provision. There were some reductions more than a decade ago now, but in more recent times we actually increased the number of distinct services that we have in 2014, and in the last five or six years we have invested heavily in digital technology that allows our reporters to get out across the region and go live from any point in the region.

Regional viewers now are well served by a modern, relevant news service that still has all the best things that came out of that ITV heritage. The days of non-news programmes, to which I have a sentimental attachment, as you do, are gone. There were lots of positives with them, but the economics of broadcasting do not justify them nowadays. The flipside of that is that the digital revolution gave Britain hundreds of channels and lots of things that probably most people welcome.

The Chair: Let us stick with local and regional for a bit.

Q193 **Lord Storey:** I am in the Granada region, where the regional news coverage on Covid has been excellent and the support that it has given to the local community, again, has been excellent.

Before I ask my question, I would like to ask another question, which is a follow-up to what has been asked before about diversity. You talked about ITV and its diversity record. Does that include its independent production companies? We never seem to be able to get the figures for the numbers of their ethnic employees and so on. Are the figures that you talked about just for ITV or do they include the independent

companies?

Michael Jermey: The figures that I was quoting are figures that we are in a position to measure in our own organisation. The figures that I was quoting were in ITV News, ITV plc and ITN.

Lord Storey: It just seems a bit strange to some of us that you have purchased these independent production companies—such as Lime Pictures, which is just down the road from where I live—yet you are not able to give the figures for those companies.¹

Michael Jermey: We can write to the Committee on this subject. We could probably provide some of the data for independent production companies that ITV owns. We discuss the diversity of the productions of independent production companies that we commission, and make it clear that we want our productions to be genuinely diverse.

Q194 **Lord Storey:** When you write, it would also be helpful to know about gender pay.

My main question is this. We know how the public trust the broadcast media far more than the print media. Having said that, they also trust local print media very much. Do you have much collaboration with other regional and local news providers?

Michael Jermey: This is an interesting question. We have done things over the years with regional newspapers. It is probably worth recognising that we do something slightly different from most regional newspapers. Even though we have a footprint of 18 services, pretty much all those services still serve a significantly bigger part of the country than a single local newspaper would. If you talked to editors of local newspapers, they would probably not see us as a direct competitor. They probably see Granada as covering a big part of the north-west of England while their paper covers a city or a couple of towns. Clearly the other big difference is that we operate in the world of video and they still mostly operate in the world of text. So the overlap of things that we can both do is probably more limited than one might think at first sight.

For a while we tried an experiment, with one of our correspondents sitting in the newsroom of one of the big northern newspapers and swapping stories and finding ways of sharing exclusives. It worked to a degree but not as much as we hoped it might. We have a good commercial relationship with the REACH Group whereby we purchase its news wire, which brings together local stories from all its newspapers and releases that to customers like us shortly before publication. We would also be very open to a local newspaper that wanted to have access to our video on a friendly co-operative basis, but I am not sure that there are lots and lots that want to take that up.

I think we operate in slightly different worlds. They clearly have economic challenges and I am not sure that we are in a position to solve those, and to some degree we have challenges ourselves. Sometimes

¹ Note by witness: Lime Pictures is owned by All3Media

when you talk to newspaper editors or newspaper groups you find that they are quite happy to coexist with broadcasters but do not necessarily see the solution to their problems being the broadcasters doing more. In fact, in one or two cases I think they have seen that as unfriendly rather than friendly, and we want to be good neighbours to newspaper groups.

The Chair: You have spoken quite a bit about diversity, and you have referred consistently to diversity of representation and identity in your newsrooms and elsewhere at ITV. You have not talked about diversity of thought, which is something that we have had quite a lot of evidence on.

We had compelling evidence last week from David Jordan at the BBC, who recognised that in the past the BBC had succumbed, and probably still does, to what I think he was broadly describing as left-liberal groupthink, which meant that in particular it had problems in the past in its coverage of Brexit and, I think he said, immigration. I thought from his evidence that he was clearly concerned about the lack of diversity of thought in the newsroom. He also referred to the issue of the use of social media. You have not touched on any of those things. Do you think you have similar problems to the BBC in your newsrooms?

Michael Jermey: I listened to David Jordan's evidence with interest. David is a thoughtful, intelligent, honest and frank colleague, and I thought those observations were interesting. Without sounding complacent or defensive, I do not recognise a similar picture in ITV. The fact that we are a broadcaster that started in the regions and is still informed by its regional diversity probably helps in that regard.

I was interested, for instance, to hear that in newsrooms people were surprised by the Brexit result, although probably in some newsrooms they were. I watched ITV's regional broadcasting carefully throughout the referendum campaign. I heard an awful lot of voices across the country that were passionately committed to Brexit. I travelled in the two or three months before the referendum and talked to colleagues in Yorkshire, who told me what was happening there, in Tyne Tees and in the Anglia region.

I remember on the night of one of our big debates how our head of news in the Midlands, Liz Hannam, arrived at the debate in London and gave a very clear picture of what she believed was happening in the Midlands. Anyone who had seen all that evidence would not have been surprised by the referendum result. It would have been hard to predict it off the back of that; you probably would have said that the referendum was probably going to be pretty close and could not say which way it would go, and at 52:48 that was probably borne out.

Having journalists in every community across the country creates a diversity of geographical representation and probably taps the majority of our people into a world that is not part of the metropolitan liberal class. I can think of a lot of my colleagues who really do not come to London very much but spend their time making decisions in the regions. Some of that also informs our network newsroom.

It is important that there is not groupthink, and there is validity in diversity of thought. However, I would add to that: it is possible sometimes to think of diversity of thought as making sure that every political grouping is represented and having a big old political barney. I am happier with newsrooms where not everyone has enormous political motivation but there are people who are genuinely curious, genuinely believe in a plurality of perspectives and look to put people at the centre of their stories and hear what they have to say.

So my short answer to your question is that I do not recognise that picture in ITV News. It is something to guard against and not to be complacent about, and groupthink is a bad thing, but I think both our geographical diversity and the fact that ITV has always put people rather than issues at the centre of our stories help to make us a place where that problem is rather smaller than perhaps it is in some other places.

The Chair: In short, you think that socially conservative Brexit supporters would feel much more comfortable in an ITV newsroom than in a BBC newsroom.

Michael Jermey: I am not going to comment on the BBC. I have never worked for the BBC.

The Chair: You have drawn quite a contrast.

Michael Jermey: I do not really know what the BBC's newsroom is like. In the time that I have spent in ITV News, which is quite a long time, I would say that I have a sense of the politics of a small minority of my colleagues. With most, I do not know what their politics are. A lot of people work for ITV News because they passionately believe in impartial news that is popular and that gets to questions that people really care about, and they prioritise that impartiality over everything else. I hope that anybody, whether they voted Brexit or remain, would feel comfortable in our newsrooms.

The Chair: That draws an interesting contrast with the description given to us by some, including to some extent with the BBC newsroom.

Let us move to innovation and public policy-making in relation to the future of journalism.

Q195 **Baroness Grender:** Thank you, Michael, for your evidence so far. Many congratulations on the increase in the number of young people who are turning to you and other PSBs in this period. That is fascinating and it is not where we started from at the beginning of our inquiry. The increase especially in the number of 18 to 35 year-olds has been pretty extraordinary. Congratulations on that and the innovations that you have made.

I want to ask about innovations in the regions. Not necessarily with your corporate hat on, what innovation in regional journalism do you think you have seen that can be applied in future? Within that, there are all sorts of AI issues—machine learning, the good algorithms and the bad. Looking 10 or 20 years hence, give us a flavour and a sense of how regional journalism could be helped, especially in public policy terms.

Michael Jermey: I think we live in a really exciting era. It is possible to talk about the threats to journalism and the challenges that local journalism faces and too easily ignore lots of the really positive things that are happening that are improving our journalism and should continue to do so.

A lot of it is rooted in technology. It is easy if you sit in London in a political or media bubble to imagine that journalism in the regions is stuck in some era in the past and is probably not as modern as activities in London, New York or what have you. In lots of ways, the opposite is true. Some of the economic pressures of the last decade have meant that regional news has had to innovate.

I would love members of the Committee to come to any of the ITV regions and see our newsrooms in operation, where we have a lot of bright young journalists and lots of very experienced and older journalists, all using lightweight technology to get them into communities right across the region. They use lightweight cameras or even, on occasions, mobile phones and go to corners of the region that once upon a time might have needed one or two hours' drive and then hightailing it back and trying to edit something for 6 o'clock.

Now, journalists are able to spend time in a community, talk to a lot of people, capture what they say on video, edit on a laptop and send the signal back using 4G mobile phones. We have well over 100 pieces of live view technology, the size of a paperback book, that allow journalists to go live from any corner of the United Kingdom.

That agility has improved our programmes. It has meant that we have a closer relationship with our audience. People comment that they see our correspondents in their communities. Some of our regional correspondents have made really good use of the best side of social media. In Dumfries and Galloway, for instance, our correspondent talks to the community that she reports on and represents using her Facebook page. You could have a two-way communication, and that sort of thing happens elsewhere.

Your inquiry has heard about some of the bad sides of Twitter, but actually you get regional correspondents who are in touch with the community that is particularly interested in the story that they are covering. That can be a sensible, two-way conversation surfacing concerns that people have that can make it on to a digital broadcast or on to television. A lot of the benefits of lightweight technology, used by good journalists whether young or old—some of the best operators of the new modern technology at ITV have been working for the organisation for 20 or 30 years, so it is not just for the 20 or 30-somethings—can improve our journalism. I can only see it continuing to go in that direction.

Some 10 years ago, if the Covid-19 crisis had happened, we would not have been able to keep all our regional services on air. Not only have we kept them on air but we were able through digital channels to communicate with people in the community about the story and address their concerns.

It is an exciting time. So long as the essence of public service broadcasting can be continued into the next decade, there could be a very exciting 10 years ahead of us.

Baroness Grender: I would like to clarify something. It is really interesting that you are using some of the mainstream social media organisations right now. Which ones do you think have been most innovative and helpful in growing great local journalism and regional journalism?

Michael Jermey: It is less the organisations particularly deciding to invest or help in that regard and more the tools that they have created, which have enhanced so many people's everyday lives. Our journalists are using those in a constructive, positive way, whether that is Facebook or Twitter. There is an ability for us all to communicate using social media. You can use that in a positive journalistic way, as well as some of the more toxic things that we have all heard of in recent months and years.

Q196 **Baroness Buscombe:** ITV Hub is a really good innovation, so why does ITV not make regional news bulletins available on the hub? Can mandated prominence for ITV Hub be justified if it does not include your regional news, which, I agree with you wholeheartedly, is a deeply embedded part of everything that is essential and central to ITV?

Michael Jermey: I shall start my answer by saying that I absolutely share your desire to have more regional broadcasting available on the hub. I will give you both a technical answer to your question and perhaps a slightly more encouraging one about the direction of travel in future.

Historically, the ITV Hub worked off the same technology, the same computer software, that drove the network schedule, so that anything that had run on the network schedule could easily be put on the hub. Putting anything else on required a very laborious manual process. The ITV Hub historically was a catch-up service. ITV fully recognises that viewer habits and patterns and what people want are changing, and we are moving the hub from being a catch-up service to being in a sense the centre of what ITV is, where you can watch live television, you can catch up or you might be able to watch programmes that have not been there at all.

With an investment programme over the next three or four years, we hope to get to a stage where you can tune in and see your regional version of the news. You will probably not have all the programmes on the hub in the form of catch-up, because on the whole that is not how people watch news; they want to watch it live. Alongside the main bulletins—national, international, regional—that you can watch as they go out live, you would also have short-form videos so that you could see specific stories whether national or regional.

We also have the ambition to create a live window on the hub, which would allow us to have a news channel when you want a news channel, rather than in the many hours of the year when, to be honest, not much is happening. So in that live window you could have the Downing St

press conferences during Covid-19 for which there is clearly an appetite, or a big regional story for which there is an appetite, but only put it up when there is viewer demand to do so.

I absolutely agree that prominence is important, but it is important that we have a service that justifies prominence. If there is a happy outcome for the PSB settlement, ITV will continue to invest to enhance the hub, which will include more news and more regionalism. You will see that progressively rolled out over the next three or four years.

Baroness Buscombe: That is brilliant. I was really hoping for that answer, in a sense, because it is the versatility that is constantly changing, improving and adapting, as you say, to the way people use their broadcast media and so on—

Michael Jermey: Absolutely.

Baroness Buscombe: —which is fantastic. May I add one thing? My colleague, the Chair, talked about diversity of thought. Of course, for a lot of us, diversity of thought has nothing to do with politics. I just want to make that point to be a little more upbeat, because a lot of people, not just in London but across the regions, are not interested in politics. Speaking as a Member of the House of Lords, this might seem odd, but I think it would be wonderful if diversity of thought was less about politics and more about how people actually lead their lives. I just leave that with you.

Michael Jermey: That is a very astute observation. It is easy for those of us who spend some of our time at least in the London political and media bubble to forget that. As you travel across the ITV regions and watch our programmes, you will get a real sense of that. We cover politics responsibly; I think we had something like 6,500 appearances from Members of Parliament on our regional programmes last year.

That is important, but our programmes are not all about politics; they are about life in the regions. We at ITV believe that most people like where they live, so we ensure that our programmes celebrate a sense of place and that there is quite a lot of positive news in our regional programmes. As you travel around the country, if you tune in at 6 o'clock you will see the rich diversity—in every sense of that word—of the United Kingdom, and if you watch a programme in Aldeburgh in the Anglia region you will not see the same output as you would if you were watching in Truro or Manchester.

Baroness Buscombe: Or where I am.

Michael Jermey: It is great that our programmes reflect that diversity in Britain. In the autumn, we are launching a programme on Sunday mornings that will take from the regional programmes across the country some of the uplifting feature items that you see and bring them all together in one show, which we are calling “All Around Britain”, to almost celebrate the rich diversity of people and places right across the country.

The Chair: It sounds to me as if you are bringing back “Nationwide”.

Michael Jermev: It was a very fine programme, and I am sorry that it ever disappeared.

The Chair: Indeed. I am very nostalgic. We are a bit over time. Baroness Meyer has a quick question.

Q197 **Baroness Meyer:** I want to come back to diversity and inclusion. Are we not forgetting another route? For instance, following the campaign that you are promoting to give black people a platform to share their stories, should there not also be another platform to give voices to the underprivileged? I am thinking particularly of the elderly living on state pensions and poor white people, whose children come at the bottom of the educational heap in all surveys. Their voices are not heard, and I think that people tend to misunderstand their problems. I would like to know your thoughts on this.

Michael Jermev: I agree that it is important that the news media include everyone. In a sense, that is what diversity and inclusion is all about. It is not about one particular group; it is about everyone. Rightly, there is a heightened sense of the need to ensure that ethnic diversity is properly reflected, because it is an area where the media generally have not always achieved what they should, but I also agree that every group in society should be properly represented. If you watch ITV regional news programmes, you will find that an awful lot of them cover some of the issues that you have just referred to, more perhaps than a lot of the national UK media do.

The Chair: Thank you very much. This has been very interesting evidence. I am very interested to hear about the work that you have been doing in the regions, particularly at the height of Covid when your journalists were out there producing very local stories for people who were at home and very often frightened. It was clearly critical work.

Thank you to all the journalists working for your organisation, and indeed for other organisations, who were there on the front line. Sadly, we have run out of time. Thank you again for giving evidence. We will produce a report in the autumn, and we hope you find it of interest.