

Supplementary evidence submitted by Reach

Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying. While the questions seemed simple at first sight, two required speaking to a number of people, with conversations interrupted by holidays.

The three questions were:

1. Why is Reach not engaging with a public interest journalism review in Wales?
2. What are the pay scales at Reach for local news?
3. What is the churn rate for Local Democracy Reporters in the North East of England?

1. Why is Reach not engaging with a public interest journalism review in Wales?

I have spoken with our team in Wales, who have confirmed it was never our intention to not take part in the public interest journalism review. Our editors in Wales have now made contact with people tasked with running the review on behalf of the Welsh Government and a senior member of the Media Wales team took part in the most recent meeting of the working group on August 17, with the next taking place later this month. We take our commitment to public interest journalism seriously across the whole of Reach. Our free-to-air, scale model is designed to support public interest journalism, both in terms of creating the revenue to sustain public interest journalism, and also to create the interest in public interest journalism which is required if public interest journalism is to have the impact on society it needs to.

2. What are the pay scales at Reach for local news?

Pay scales across the regional operations of Reach vary based on local factors. However, Reach has minimums in place for various roles:

Pay scales across the regional operations of Reach vary based on local factors. However, Reach has minimums in place for various roles:

- Trainee journalists
 - £21,5000 - if studying for the NCTJ Diploma
 - £23,000 - Having completed the Diploma prior to joining Reach and working towards senior qualification
- Senior journalists
 - £25,000 for journalists who have completed the Reach Certificate of Journalism, or the NQJ qualification.
- Engagement producers: (People who work on our off-platform presence, eg Facebook or Twitter): £23,500
- Social Media Editors: Managers who are responsible for social media output): £28,000
- Content Editors and Visual/Audio Editors: £30,000
- Community Curators (Sourcing content from communities): £22,500
- Senior Community Curators: £24,500

In London, trainees receive £25,000, Seniors £30,000 and Content Editors £34,000.

Local Democracy Reporters all receive at least the minimum senior salary rate listed above. The BBC contract stipulates we pay at least a floor salary set by the Corporation or our minimum senior rate, whichever is higher.

All of our LDRs are on the latter. There are separate arrangements in place for trainee LDRs, something introduced by the BBC during the last contract negotiations.

All salaries are reviewed when the various minimum wage/real living wage announcements are made.

Reach also funds itself additional roles to support the LDR scheme, to ensure we meet our contractual obligation including several LDR editors. Prof Fenton is quoted as saying 'local democracy reporters are paid less than the average.' This is not the case at Reach. Nor, as Prof Fenton and others suggested, is the LDR scheme a subsidy to publishers. We only cover the costs of providing the service through the LDR funding, and also fund additional roles ourselves to fund the scheme. The content produced is available to multiple partners at the same time as our newsrooms. The LDR scheme funds a level of council reporting which had become unworkable for publishers of all shapes and sizes, and all now benefit from it.

3. What is the churn rate for Local Democracy Reporters in the North East of England?

I can only offer an answer for the LDR contracts we hold - Teesside, Newcastle and Northumberland. National World are responsible for LDRs in Wearside, and Newsquest for County Durham.

We have six LDRs in the North East part of the region.. Of these six, we've had two changes in the last 12 months, although one of these was within the contract we only won in 2021. The other was someone who had been with the LDR scheme since the start.

We work hard to make the LDR role one journalists wish to remain in, and overall we see churn levels for LDRs below that experienced in other reporting roles. At Reach, we have created an LDR network led by our LDR editor, which provides formal and informal (peer to peer) support, training and advice.

Clarifications

There were two further areas I wanted to cover. There were various comments made by Professor Fenton about the operations at Reach which were not correct. The most obvious was the following statement:

David Higginson will correct me if I am wrong here but when you have 15 large offices serving 110 titles, what you get is a lot of recirculated press releases, cut-and-paste journalism and journalists who are not embedded in local communities, as Paul was saying. It is becoming a very different type of journalism.

We have 15 hubs, and multiple smaller bases in places such as universities for our titles. Most of our journalists work from home, not from hubs, dedicated to specific titles. There is no link between the hubs and how stories appear in our titles. Our journalists are now more embedded in their communities than they were pre-pandemic, as a result of working from home. Stories can appear in multiple titles, but only if relevant to that particular title. Our focus on digital audience means we use far less press release material than ever before, due to our analysis of audience data. We simply do not recognise Prof Fenton's description of our local journalism, but are always open to discussing how we operate with any parties expressing an interest in local journalism.

Finally, we heard several references to the Charitable Journalism Project's Local News Deserts project, including the LDR salary statement. Having read the report several times, it seems impossible to draw a real parallel with American news deserts, where there is essentially no local news. At Reach, for example, we remain active publishers in Tiverton, which was subject of a by-election earlier this year. We are there week in, week out - and indeed our team on the ground were contacted by many national news organisations ahead of the by-election. There may be fewer journalists on the ground in some of the areas focused on in the report, but this is not the

same as having a news desert - Barrow in Furness still has a daily newspaper, while Corby and Whitby still have weeklies. We have also launched local news operations at Reach in Wiltshire, Cumbria, Yorkshire and London which serve some of the areas listed.

It does, however, point to the urgent need for a re-balancing of who gets to benefit from the content publishers big and small invest in - at the moment, too little makes it back to the publishers investing in journalism.

Thank you for taking the time to look at local news in the UK. Reach is committed to creating a bright future for local journalism, and your time listening to the evidence is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

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