

## **ITN—written evidence (FOJ0076)**

### **Introduction**

The UK is unique in the world for its public service broadcasting ecology, featuring a range of different PSBs with individual remits and business models, alongside a strong commercial broadcast sector. ITN believes high-quality, regulated, impartial provision from multiple sources is essential to a pluralistic news environment in delivering choice and alternative viewpoints that form part of our democratic process, and this should be protected at all costs.

As the UK's largest independent producer of commercially funded broadcast news, ITN welcomes the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee's Inquiry into the Future of Journalism. There have been numerous reviews in the last decade into the future of news, but none has come at quite such a pivotal time, nor focused as exclusively on the issues relating to journalism.

This is a context in which the provision of trustworthy and reliable information is critical to how citizens will go about their lives, helping them navigate their way in an incredibly fast-moving, complex time and amidst a swirl of false information online. The professionalism of highly trained, experienced journalism is at the cornerstone of this. Broadcast news in the UK, with its obligated qualities of accuracy and impartiality is vital to this mission, and the present COVID-19 crisis should act as a reminder like no other of the importance of preserving it as a key part of the democratic life and wellbeing of the UK.

### **About ITN**

ITN is thought to be unique globally, providing news services for all three of the UK's commercially funded national public service broadcasters (PSBs) – ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. As part of the UK's unique PSB ecology, each of ITN's PSB partners has statutory obligations to provide news, with news a priority in the defined purposes of PSB – that is, "to facilitate civic understanding and fair and well-informed debate on news and current affairs" [Ofcom].

**ITV News** The biggest commercial news programme with award-winning output throughout the day, including at lunchtime, early evening and 10pm, alongside weekend bulletins and the ITV News website and presence on social media.

A dedicated current affairs team are responsible for On Assignment and Tonight specials in addition to programmes covering issues of national importance, including royal events and elections.

ITV News has also recently launched *The Rundown* on social platforms aimed at younger audiences, despite the fact that there is currently no regulatory remit to do so. ITN also produces the ITV News London, and while ITV, the broadcaster, is responsible for dedicated regional news programmes out of London, the national news services are committed to reflecting the voice of the nation with teams working all around the country. In keeping with ITV1, ITV News offers mainstream appeal to a broad audience demographic with almost half the audience in the C2DE demo and with a loyal audience of viewers in the North particularly. It places a premium on eye-witness journalism, reflecting stories and voices across the nation and its output is proudly populist.

**Channel 4 News** is the UK's only hour-long, peak-time PSB news programme. In keeping with Channel 4's remit, it offers a distinctive alternative with a focus on the day's news but an emphasis on investigative journalism, foreign coverage, reaching younger audiences and reflecting the full diversity of the UK.

A team of independent filmmakers are also commissioned to produce special investigations and exclusive films and have contributed to many of the 100 awards Channel 4 news won in 2019, including the BAFTA, Emmy, Best documentary at Cannes and the Peabody Award. It has been the source of many of the documentaries produced with ITN's in-house production arm, including the Oscar-nominated "For Sama" which was produced and edited in the Channel 4 Newsroom in association with ITN Productions.

Channel 4 News also has the biggest social media presence of any TV news programme on social media in the UK, including YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, Channel 4 News on TV has been securing audiences of 1.4m in the past month, 150 million viewers on Youtube in 2020 thus far and in 2019 had a total of 1.4 billion 'minutes viewed' on YouTube and Facebook.

## **5 News**

5 News provides two daily news programmes and regular updates through the week. It reaches a distinct audience, with women making up a majority of its demographic.

5 News at 5, presented by Sian Williams, covers all the day's main events, focusing on the experiences of people who've found themselves at the centre of the story. 5 News Tonight, presented by Claudia-Liza Armah, gives space to stories from groups who are often under-represented on broadcast news programmes.

The focus on ordinary people who've been through something extraordinary resonates with viewers across the UK – with strong share in the Midlands, Yorkshire, the North East, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Its digital output has high engagement and interaction rates, showing the stories covered by 5 News connect with the audience. Many of the distinctive stories featured on 5 News Tonight resonate on social media, showing how broadcast and online storytelling can be complementary.

ITN also produces the daily current affairs programme, Jeremy Vine through ITN Productions. The respected and award-winning broadcaster invites a diverse range of guests into the studio to debate topical issues for two hours every weekday morning.

## **ITN: a unique organisation**

As one organisation with three separate newsrooms, a production arm, archive and clips service and post-production facilities, ITN is in a unique position. It produces bespoke news for each broadcast client, spanning domestic and international coverage and breaking news stories and in-depth investigations. While there is a clear editorial divide between each service, each client benefits from economies of scale in terms of infrastructure and operations. Employing around 750 staff including 320 journalists, ITN provides a vital role both in the provision of high-quality journalism and in contributing to a plurality of news provision that is so important for a democratic society that holds power to account and informs citizens about matters of public interest.

On TV alone ITN's newsrooms reach an average of over 10m viewers programming every day. ITN's news services are also distributed via the PSB's on-demand services, ITV Hub,

All 4 and Demand 5. According to Ofcom, our three broadcast services are consumed by almost 70% of the British population.

We have demonstrated innovation in digital production and, crucially, distribution, with versions of our trusted and familiar services for online and social platforms. This includes Channel 4 News producing special investigations for Facebook Watch and achieving record numbers on its YouTube channel including half a billion 'minutes viewed' since the Coronavirus story broke, a 200 per cent increase in viewership.

Although online is not currently regulated in the same way as broadcast news, ITN makes no distinction whether our news services are delivered by broadcast TV, social media or the official PSB website. We insist on a level-playing field of quality.

In addition to news coverage, ITN also makes investigative and current affairs programming through the ITN Productions' creative and commercial content division. Best known for its current affairs and factual entertainment programming, the division boasts commissions from every major UK broadcaster as well as a number of series commissions in the US. ITN is able to play on the key strengths of ITN – i.e. fast-turnaround, quality journalism on topical issues, whether bushfires in Australia for Channel 5, or the Coronavirus specials for Discovery in the US. In addition, ITN Productions also specialises in commercials and branded content and supplies digital news and entertainment content to major newspaper sites and news aggregators.

### **Importance of PSB to Journalism**

The success of the PSB ecology has been supported by enlightened intervention by Parliament to ensure PSBs are incentivised to fulfil their remits; obliged to make broadcast news accessible to all and tightly regulated for quality. Two systems underpin its world-renowned status for high-quality and trusted news. Firstly, the law (the Communications Act) requires PSBs to provide high quality news programmes which deal with both national and international matters and which are both accurate and impartial. In the case of ITV, the law also requires ITV to provide a news service which is able to compete effectively with BBC News – thereby providing vital plurality in high quality news. Secondly, the law is reflected in the Ofcom licences under which the PSBs operate. This means that regulators have real powers to sanction those broadcasters behaving inappropriately – and indeed Ofcom has utilised this power in the past through fines and even the ultimate sanction of removing a licence to broadcast, as was the case with Press TV. In addition, Ofcom specifies the minimum number of hours of high-quality news which the PSB's must broadcast and also ensures that news programmes are provided regularly at appropriate times each day.

In return the PSBs are granted benefits to support these interventions. For the quality and range of news to be maintained, it is important these policy mechanisms are fit for purpose for a digitally-focused era. The Committee may consider new funding or regulatory models so that social media platforms can support quality journalism online in the same way, with professionalism, accuracy and balance taking precedence over profit-sharing arguments. At present, there is no more financial benefit for providing content of high journalistic value than there is of providing fake news. In fact, fake news which 'goes viral' may be of more value to the social platforms, with the advertising model rewarding sensationalism and fake news far more than it does thorough, accurate and impartial journalism.

The PSB's face unprecedented downturns in ad revenue this year meaning the pace of change from linear to digital will accelerate and their funding pressures set to intensify. The

result could be that the PSBs look to make cost savings in news and other non-commercial areas of output.

News also plays an important part when it comes to 'soft power' and ensuring the key issues of the nation are presented accurately and responsibly abroad. ITN's 65-year heritage ensures it has a world-renowned reputation for providing trusted news and it is able to draw on one of the UK's most extensive news archives, making it a valuable creative export to our international clients, from CNN to Associated Press.

### **The importance of Journalism**

This submission considers the questions set out by the Committee in its Call for Evidence from the perspective of broadcast journalism and associated online and social media news provision (and does not comment specifically on the newspaper and publishing sectors).

While there is widespread agreement that professional, reliable journalism is important – and arguably more important than ever – there are increasing pressures on its funding and reach to audiences. As the Cairncross Review in 2019 [<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/lln-2020-0041/>] found there are now around 6,000 fewer journalists than a decade ago and print circulation of national and local newspapers has halved.

Broadcast news is also under increasing pressure from intense digital competition, with online and social platforms having grown rapidly as a primary source of news, particularly amongst younger people.

As the Committee recognises, the importance of high quality, authoritative and trustworthy news has regularly been thrown into sharp focus in recent years. This reflects increasing concerns about professional journalism in light of the proliferation of myriad, unaccountable online sources, the rise of fake news and the use of online platforms to spread misinformation or misuse personal data for either financial or political gain (as so powerfully brought to light by Channel 4 News' Cambridge Analytica coverage). These factors have led to legitimate concerns about the impact on democracy and societal engagement, as well as the sustainability of authoritative journalism in this new competitive landscape.

The arguments contained in this submission are those that would have been made when this Inquiry was first launched. However, at that point, no-one could have predicted the crisis enveloping the world as a result of the **Covid-19 pandemic**: this provides as sharp a reminder as any of the importance of high quality and reliable journalism that can be accessed and relied upon by citizens around the globe. It is notable too that in the UK, viewing to 'traditional' broadcast bulletins have seen enormous increases in viewing levels and ITN has successfully met the demand for extended programmes and specials. This implies a deep connection with broadcast journalism across all age groups as the central source of reliable information. All the ITV News bulletins have seen their best viewing share figures on record' the Lunchtime News has averaged 1.19m viewers and the Evening News averaged 3.9m viewers in March, its highest in five years. 5News is up year-on-year and as reported in the trade press, C4News hit a six-year high in March.

**Case study:** *In January 2016 Waad al-Kateab started documenting the horrors of Aleppo for Channel 4 News in a series of devastating films simply titled Inside Aleppo.*

*The reports she made for Channel 4 News on the conflict in Syria, and the most complex humanitarian crisis in the world, became the most watched pieces on the UK news programme – and received almost half a billion views online and won 24 awards – including the 2016 International Emmy for breaking news coverage.*

*Waad was a marketing student at the University of Aleppo when protests against the Assad regime swept the country in 2011. Like many hundreds of her fellow Syrians, she became a citizen journalist determined to document the horrors of the war.*

*She taught herself how to film – and started filming the human suffering around her as Assad forces battled rebels for control of Aleppo.*

*She stayed through the devastating siege – documenting the terrible loss of life and producing some of the most memorable images of the conflict. When she and her family fled Aleppo in December 2016, she managed to get over 500-hours of her footage out. C4 News partnered with ITN Productions to produce a documentary which became the most nominated documentary in Bafta history and was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 2020 Academy Awards. It has won over 70 awards.*

## **Executive Summary and ITN Recommendations**

High quality journalism that can be accessed by all and relied upon to inform citizens about the world is a vital force in any well-functioning society and democracy. As such, public policy has a critical role to play in ensuring it is supported, particularly when faced with the spread of fake news online, and when levels of digital disruption pose serious risks to the long-term sustainability of quality journalism.

ITN's ability to play such a pivotal role in the journalistic life of the UK is largely dependent on the health of the PSB system. The rise of global online TV distribution platforms (mirroring the rise of platforms online more generally) and their disruptive effect on national TV ecosystems through progressive marginalisation is a key consideration. We believe that intervention to address this new ecosystem is key to the future of PSB and this lies at the heart of the debate around platform inclusion and prominence.

### **There are a number of policy areas we believe need to be addressed:**

Continued support for a regulatory system covering TV/video news (both quality and quantity) across all platforms as PSB news transitions from linear to on-demand and online. High-quality, regulated news is a bulwark against atomised, undifferentiated, or untrustworthy news.

1. It is essential that high quality, regulated journalism remains universally accessible to all, free at the point of consumption. As such news obligations need to remain a core part of the remits and requirements of all public service broadcasters. In turn, they need to be able to continue to operate on a free to air basis, with business models that can support this, whilst also enabling continued investment in high quality news.
2. ITN recognises that the PSB system is under increasing strain and how PSB is defined, incentivised and regulated is out of step with how content is increasingly distributed and consumed. It is essential that the PSBs have a more equitable, regulated, commercial relationship with the main TV distribution platforms and increasingly with new global TV platforms such as Google and Amazon (which are becoming major players in TV distribution).
3. Questions around how social platforms can be similarly incentivised to support quality journalism, financial or regulatory, should be considered. Currently there is no more value to them providing quality news than there is of providing fake news. Indeed, fake news which 'goes viral' may be of more value to the social platforms, with the platform advertising model arguably rewarding sensationalism and fake news far more than it does thorough accurate and impartial journalism.
4. One particularly pressing matter is the prominence afforded to PSBs across the full range of means of accessing PSB content, whether on Smart TVs, streaming sticks or TV apps, and increasingly through voice technology. Regulation across these platforms needs to be urgently updated, in line with the recommendations from Ofcom in July 2019, to support the overall health of PSB. We welcome the Lords previous support for this in the 'PSB: As Vital as Ever' report and the Government's positive words, which now need to be taken forward in statute.
5. In light of the innovations the PSBs have made to increase reach and impact (particularly with harder to reach groups), the Ofcom PSB Review, and any ensuing

legislation, would be an ideal moment to reshape the definition of PSB to take fuller account of all the ways in which news is delivered.

6. The overall strength of the PSBs is inextricably linked to the investment that can be made in news. And therefore, debates around inclusion and prominence should consider a broad range of PSB content. The news is partially paid for by other genres of more profitable content and it is prominence for them that will help underwrite news funding.
7. News should remain the cornerstone of any definition of PSB and of the requirements placed on public service broadcasters. Any increased flexibility afforded to the PSBs in terms of content requirements or forms of delivery should ensure news provision (TV and online) is safeguarded.

### **Remuneration and data**

There needs to be a greater policy focus on the relationship between platforms and news providers regarding access to data about news consumption and the financial relationship between them. The dominance of online global players in the ad market is impacting on news organisations' ability to generate commercial revenue to reinvest into journalism.

1. Ofcom to convene time-limited negotiations between platforms and news organisations with a view to agreeing a voluntary code which it is confident will be adhered to. However, if necessary, we would support more stringent regulation and/or the introduction of a mandatory code.
2. Payment by platforms – news is premium and expensive content, and distribution across a wider range of platforms requires additional editorial and technical resource, at additional cost, to drive continued innovation, whilst reaching audiences who might otherwise not be reached with authoritative journalism. We believe that the new mandatory code in Australia (outlined in Q9 below), is a potential model to consider.
3. Greater access to data about consumption of news services (which can be limited in some cases, giving little insight into what is being viewed and by whom, and the real value to the platforms of news content) in order to maintain and build audiences.
4. ITN welcomes the launch of the Competition and Markets Authority study into online platforms and digital advertising, and that this includes examining transparency and data sharing. This should consider matters pertaining specifically to journalism, and once its findings are published, policy makers should be urged to act on recommendations supporting journalism as a priority.
5. We believe the CMA study is vital to examine how the dominance of Facebook and Google impacts on the ability of smaller online platforms to grow and the ability of content providers to suitably monetise their content when it is carried by the digital giants. The lack of regulatory equality in TV advertising and online advertising can facilitate bad practice to the detriment of consumers and brands.
6. We also welcome the forthcoming DCMS review of online advertising which will explore similar issues, including this regulatory imbalance and the importance of fair competition and adequate consumer protection.

7. An enhanced advertising premium could be explored, whereby PSBs (and other quality news providers) could receive preferential rates for their advertising inventory (at the expense of the platform). It is also notable that, contrary to prevailing views, recent data shows that a hard news context may enhance consumers' reception of brand messages (Lumen Research, April 2020) and according to a Newsworks and Neuro-Insight study, the average ad dwell time is 1.4 times higher in a hard news environment (45 seconds versus 32 seconds).  
<https://www.newsworks.org.uk/resources/hard-news-project>

### **Tackling fake news & news prominence**

There are several steps that policy makers could take to tackle fake news. As discussed in response to question 3, this should include policies such as tech and social platforms being required to do more to reduce the volume of fake news and give greater prominence to PSB news and other quality news providers.

1. Quality news providers should be kite-marked with platforms to pay a premium for this content.
2. More stringent measures to take down fake material. Having clear and strong sanctions for internet companies that breach the rules is paramount. These sanctions should mirror those which apply to broadcasters, which face losing their licence to broadcast if Ofcom finds them to be in consistent breach of the Broadcasting Code. Regulatory fines can be treated as an easily-absorbed "cost of doing business" by the largest new tech companies.
3. Giving greater prominence to legitimate and reliable news sources on social platforms – as well achieving this for news via PSB prominence this could include, for example, voice assistants including PSBs as 'default providers' of generic news services.
4. Online video news services from the PSBs and aimed at a younger audience often cut through on platforms that are owned by others – YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat. The Lords Committee has rightly identified the importance of younger audiences accessing impartial, accurate news online. Therefore, ensuring the prominence of youth-skewing services such as ITV News' *The Rundown* on Instagram should be considered in the wider debate about news prominence and monetisation.
5. Greater overall prominence of PSBs across digital services and user interfaces, giving associated reach and prominence to news services within them.
6. Innovation, training and diversity/apprenticeships – supported by government bursaries.

ITN welcomed the Cairncross recommendation and Government acceptance of the creation of the £2m pilot Future News Fund, to be run by Nesta aimed at 'the supply of public interest news'. Now that the fund is launched, its effectiveness should be closely monitored and, if successful, consideration should be given to extending and expanding it to fund further innovation in at-risk parts of the news media.

## **Fiscal incentives**

As we transition from a linear world to a digital world, the value of gifted spectrum is declining and there is going to be increasing strain on PSBs to subsidise non profitable PS activities such as news and current affairs. There may need to be transitional financial support of some kind until the regulation of digital platforms becomes more standardised and supportive of PSB news.

1. The Cairncross Review's recommendation for a Public Interest Journalism Tax Relief should be taken forward, supporting investigative, international and local reporting. The proposal is modelled on existing tax relief for High End TV Production, which has been widely recognised as contributing significant investment in the UK production sector. (*House of Lords Comms Committee: PSB: as vital as ever*).
2. Government should commission independent work to propose eligibility for the relief, including consulting with broadcasters, the press and digital-only news providers to assess the cost of such a scheme.

## **Responses to Lords Communications Committee questions**

### **1) *How should journalism be defined and what is its value to society? What is the difference between 'citizen journalism' and other forms of journalism?***

Journalists, journalism educators and scholars take different pathways in their efforts to define journalism. Journalism is a phenomenon that can be seen in many ways - a service, a profession, an institution, people, a set of practices, a mirror. These ways of thinking about journalism suggest various routes through which we might approach journalism, the press, and the news media. They are useful here because each offers a way to think about how journalism should work today to best serve society.

In a world in which nearly anyone can produce and distribute material that is or purports to be informative and newsworthy, the degree to which that material is professionally created, or follows a set of practices, is significant. In addition, we believe that journalistic intent is also an important consideration, and a differentiating characteristic to some elements of purported journalism. Unlike some sources its overall purpose is to inform the public. Professional journalism should therefore reflect both the expertise and the purpose of its production. Less important is the means of distribution per se, and the definition is more to do with the editorial process.

With these factors in mind a useful definition for this Inquiry might be along the lines of:

**News and information that is investigated and/or sourced, verified, reported, analysed, produced and distributed to a defined set of standards. We believe quality journalism is a public good with substantial benefits for democracy.**

In addition to this, in broadcast journalism there is a further set of statutory regulations that are defining characteristics, particularly for ITN and its PSB broadcaster partners. These essentially introduce additional requirements for broadcasters to be accurate and duly impartial, enshrined by Parliament in Statute<sup>1</sup> and translated into the Ofcom Broadcasting Code to establish the following principles:

*To ensure that news, in whatever form, is reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality [and] to ensure that the special impartiality requirements of the Act are complied with.*

**Beyond the statutory obligations of the PSBs for accuracy and impartiality on TV, these standards are also voluntarily applied on our online and social media services, in order to maintain the same rigorous levels of quality and trust across all our output.**

Other forms of professional journalism such as the print media works to some, much lighter, self-regulatory codes and behaviours, whereas online and social media (including citizen journalism) currently have no formal structures in place at all

**No other medium is subject to, or adheres to, such stringent standards as broadcast news.**

### ***What is citizen journalism?***

In contrast to professional journalism, citizen journalism can be described as being created and distributed by individuals and is akin to other forms of user generated content. Typically, this material is distributed via social and online platforms, which have opened up a plethora of ways for members of the public to communicate between themselves and directly to the wider public. By and large this material will not be made by professionally-trained journalists and will not be directly distributed on professional channels such as TV, radio, print and their associated online and social services. While citizen journalism has brought benefits, it does not adhere to the same principles and standards of professionally produced – and in particular broadcast – journalism. As broadcast news providers vie more fiercely to cut through, citizen journalism is a significant element of this crowded environment and a contributing factor to the confusion amongst audiences about what is accurate and reliable.

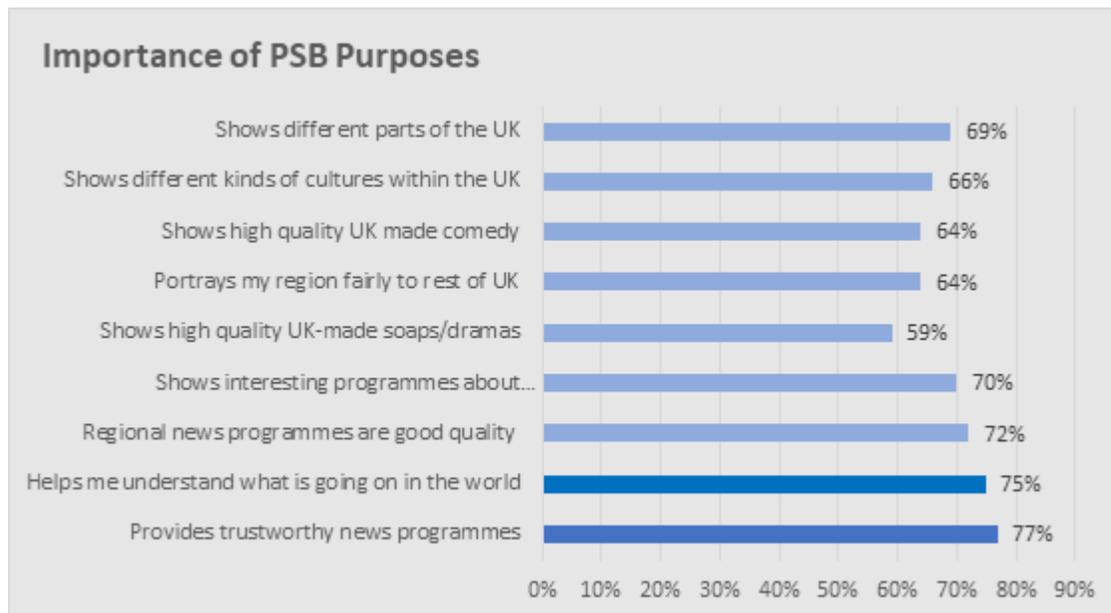
On the other hand, citizen journalism can make a positive contribution to the gathering of material. With most citizens equipped to be able to film and report news events as they unfold this provides a source of additional on the ground reporting, particularly as events are unfolding. For example, citizen journalism has featured at events such as the Manchester Arena bombing, and to report from conflict zones around the world. These have proven valuable in being able to access events or parts of the world it would otherwise be near impossible to cover first-hand.

However, it is worth noting that where citizen journalism is used in these circumstances, the same rigorous regulatory standards are applied at ITN so that it is only ever used within the framework required of any broadcast news service. For example, an editor on C4News ensures all footage from Syria is verified for accuracy and used in accordance with due impartiality rules, in contrast to how such material can be presented direct to consumers online.

### **VALUE TO SOCIETY**

The importance of journalism that can be relied upon to be high quality, accurate and impartial cannot be over-estimated. It forms a key part of any well-functioning society and democracy. There are countless examples of parts of the world in which journalism is suppressed and the detriment to society this poses and plentiful anecdotes about how the UK leads the world in having a diverse and quality news media.

Trustworthy news is seen as the most important purpose of public service broadcasting, according to Ofcom: 73% rate it important and 59% say PSB channels deliver it. Ofcom research into broadcasting consistently shows that trustworthy news is rated highest by the public of the purposes of public service broadcasting. According to Ofcom's PSB Review supporting data on PSB opinions, 77% of people ranked trustworthy news between 7-10, followed closely by 'helping me understand what is going on in the world' at 75%.



Source: Ofcom data from *Small Screen, Big Debate Interactive Data resource (PSB Opinions 2019)*

In respect of broadcast news, there also remain high levels of trust, further reinforcing its importance. Ofcom's PSB Review document reports that while there has been some decline in perceptions of trustworthiness amongst TV viewers, 60% of viewers rate the PSBs highly for trustworthy news in 2019 (compared to 67% in 2014.)

**The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the importance of trust into sharp relief.** An Ofcom conducted in March found that audiences placed the most trust in TV news, above all other sources, with 83% trusting Channel 4 News, on par with BBC News. And recent trust surveys (April 2020) on reliable news sources during the pandemic put TV journalism at the top of all other sources (*IPSOS MORI; REUTERS INSTITUTE; CARDIFF UNIVERSITY*)

Indeed, at this moment TV news viewing figures are seeing very sharp increases as people seek out reliable, trustworthy information about the pandemic. This is clearly an evolving story of unprecedented magnitude and one in which online and social media platforms are more prevalent than ever with exceptional volumes of rumour and misinformation. It is also noteworthy that public service broadcasting was listed in the critical workers definition, with an emphasis on ensuring PSB and, crucially, its journalism can reach the public at crucial moments. That audiences turn to the established, professional sources of journalism at times of crisis serves to underline their enormous value to society.

## 2) ***How have digital technologies changed the consumption of journalism?***

Digital technologies have had a profound and wide-ranging impact on the consumption of journalism. We have moved from a world in which journalism was provided by a small

number of broadcast channels and widespread readership of a daily newspaper, to today's myriad channels and digital news sources. Digital technologies have given rise to digital versions of the established print media and news media, such as the online and social media versions of broadcast news services including C4News' YouTube channel and the ITV News website; digital only professional news services such as Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and Vice, through to the plethora of user generated offerings and services developed and designed to spread false and misleading information.

As a result, audiences have a near overwhelming array of choice – bringing benefits in the form of greater plurality, but also significant detriments in the form of increasing confusion about what is reliable and trustworthy. For established news providers such as ITN, digital technologies also present challenges and opportunities.

On the positive side, more traditional media and digital consumption are not mutually exclusive and ITN has taken the opportunities of digital to innovate and extend the footprint of its services and target harder to reach audiences such as young people. That is not to say TV news is unpopular with that audience, in fact, Channel 4 News has doubled its 16-34 audience year-on-year, as a wide-ranging study by the broadcaster finds almost half of younger viewers are watching more TV.

Channel 4 News' 7pm bulletin, which has regularly been extended beyond its typical 60-minutes to provide comprehensive coronavirus coverage, has informed an overnight average of 1.1m (5.5%) since 23 March, up from 800,000 over the same period last year.

According to the study, conducted by C4's consumer insights team, TV is by far the most-trusted news medium – with 82% naming it as the most reliable source of information, ahead of newspapers (63%) and social media (41%). Young people understand TV is heavily regulated and must adhere to strict reporting guidelines, according to the research.

Channel 4 News was an early mover into tailoring bespoke news for Facebook, repurposing material and news packaged for the main programme into short-form content suited for viewing on social platforms. As well as on Facebook, Channel 4 News is also on other platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. Channel 4 News on Facebook also pioneered the use of subtitles on its service suited for the ways in which news is accessed on social platforms. With almost 5 million followers on the platform it attracts hundreds of millions of views each year, including overseas, with citizens in the US also a major consumer of C4News online.

In Q1 of this year, digital watch time was **two-thirds of a billion minutes (678m)** reaching over 200 million viewers, thanks to comprehensive Coronavirus virus content. This includes:

- **YouTube:** Minutes viewed (607m) up 170% QoQ and viewers of (127m) up 207%. We gained 300,000 YouTube subscribers, and soared passed 1m subscribers. More than half of viewers are under 35.
- **Facebook:** Minutes viewed were up 95% to 60m and views up 58% to 76m.
- **Twitter** had 31m views and 11m minutes. The popular FactCheck service has increased exponentially in the 6 weeks of March and April with over 1m page views and the Coronavirus FactCheck Explainer videos have had 3 million views on YouTube.

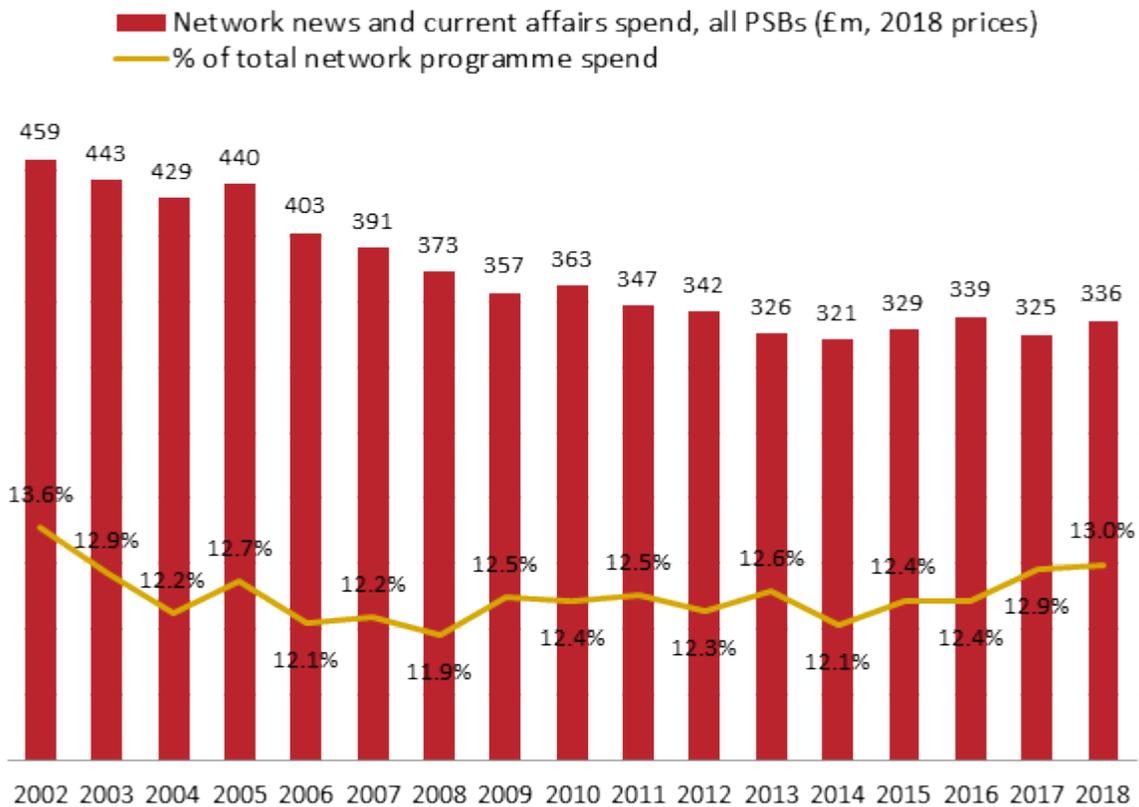
These innovations have proven particularly successful in reaching younger audiences on the platforms where they are increasingly spending time and in a format that reflects their viewing choices.

ITV News responded to the call for PSBs to do more for children and young people by developing a digital news strand, **The Rundown**, a bespoke news service for social media, which runs seven days a week on Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Facebook. It is aimed at 14-17 year olds and follows focus group research which told us they wanted to engage more directly and deeply with the big issues here and internationally. It speaks directly to digitally savvy teenagers, with engaging, accessible news that meets the high standards expected of a PSB news provider. It is viewed about 11m times a month across all platforms.

This is in addition to digital specials, podcasts and Explainers – a series of online guides. However, the challenges from digital are also considerable. Increased competition in the broadcast sector from increased number of linear channels, and particularly the growth of streaming platforms, is putting increased pressure on ITN's PSB partners, which face intensified competition for audiences, and in turn revenues.

### **Impact on investment**

While news occupies an important part of PSB schedules, and is highly valued by audiences, it is hard to monetise. These trends add significant downward pressure on overall content investment and on news, particularly given news' limited commercial returns. As shown in Ofcom's PSB Review document, overall content investment by PSBs has remained relatively stable (albeit bolstered by third party funding sources) and news investment over the 2014-2018 period has increased from £240m to £250m. However, over a longer period in real terms news and current affairs spend has declined significantly: the PSBs spent 27% less in on news in 2018 than they did in 2002 (in real terms).



Source: Ofcom News Consumption report 2019

In addition to this, TV advertising has declined for three straight years and PBB revenues have been declining faster than the market. This trend appears to be structural, not just cyclical and accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

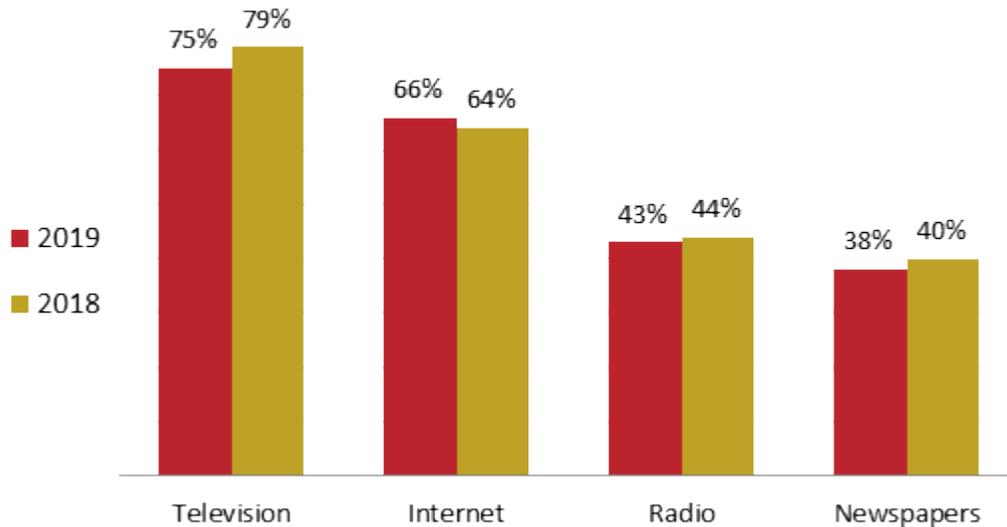
**Impact on viewing**

According to media consultancy group Communication Chambers, national and international news across all providers accounts for 8% of TV network viewing – a proportion that has remained unchanged since 2010 despite rapid growth in social consumption of news. This will reflect overall levels of TV viewing and suggests that TV news viewing is more stable than some other genres.

Where there is particular audience pressure is with younger viewers, and Ofcom reports in the PSB Review on the marked shift in young audiences’ viewing to online: “This trend in younger audiences turning to online news is reflected in audience viewing of news on the PSB channels, where the average number of minutes watched per year has declined by 355 (28%) since 2014 among 16-24s. Among all individuals the decline was less pronounced, at 244 minutes (5%) on average over our review period”.

This is why it is crucial that broadcasters and news organisations continue to develop their online offerings and that news services receive due prominence on digital platforms. Despite the growth of digital technologies, it is also encouraging that TV remains the main platform for news consumption across the population as a whole:

## Use of main platforms for news



However, while this paints a promising picture for TV News, it is also the case that across the population as a whole - and for young people in particular - the use of online for news consumption is growing at a rapid rate. As Ofcom notes in its PSB Review Small Screen, Big Debate report: "Eight in ten (83%) of those aged 16-24 use the internet for news, compared to just six in ten (51%) who use TV".

Taking the various impacts of digital technologies, ITN believes it is important to stress also that the distinction between 'traditional' and 'digital' news is not clear cut. Increasingly, traditional broadcast news services are extending their journalism, and reach, across a range of digital services.

**The key for this inquiry is not the delivery mechanisms per se, but the journalistic quality, integrity and professionalism of the output. This is what requires the very considerable levels of expertise and investment to investigate, report and produce news that can be relied upon as accurate and impartial.**

**And it is this journalism that provides the most powerful antidote against fake news – provided that audiences can find it and discern that it is reliable and accurate. In tackling the more negative impacts of digital technologies, these are the areas on which policy makers must focus attention.**

### **3) *How can public policy improve media literacy, particularly among those who have a low level of digital literacy?***

The issue of media – or digital – literacy is a pressing public policy concern: in the context of increasing amounts of fake news and misinformation, without the necessary awareness and tools to help audiences navigate digital technologies and discern what is true or not, there is a risk to society's understanding of the world around them and to democracy. Beyond news, this also raises serious concerns about how to protect vulnerable audiences, particularly children, from accessing unsuitable content.

ITN urges the Lords Communications and Digital Committee to add its voice to calling for urgent action by Government to take forward its commitments towards media and digital literacy at the earliest opportunity, with action by the platforms central to a new media literacy strategy, and account taken of the extensive work ITN and other news providers have already taken. While Brexit and the implications of Covid 19 are likely to dominate political agendas for some time the importance of these issues should remain a priority – indeed, the volume of fake news pertaining to both Brexit and Covid-19 demands that society needs media literacy to be enhanced all the more.

In relation to journalism, research conducted by Channel 4 revealed how audiences (across all age groups) find it difficult to discriminate true and fake news stories. When those surveyed were shown six individual news stories (three true, three fake) only 4% were able to correctly identify them all. Half thought at least one of the fake stories was true, and, tellingly, half stated that there were either very or fairly confident that they could tell the difference between true and fake. Furthermore, of those who stated Facebook was their primary source of news, 71% thought at least one of the fake stories was true, whereas only 47% of those who primarily get their news from broadcasters thought this.

The same research also found that the public is concerned about fake news and that more needs to be done to tackle it - with a demand for more fact-checking sites, support especially by 16-24s (69%) – and demand for social media companies (66%) and Government to do more (55%).

Since the Channel 4 research was conducted, there have been a number of processes to examine further the issues around digital literacy, including:

The Commons DCMS Select Committee Inquiry into fake news, which included recommendations for:

- Digital literacy to be a 'fourth pillar' of education
- A coordinated, cross-Government initiative to raise awareness about social media content and use of data
- The Cairncross Review and Government response:  
The Review recommends that the government should develop a media literacy strategy, working with Ofcom (which has a statutory duty to promote media literacy), the online platforms, news publishers and broadcasters, voluntary organisations and academics, to identify gaps in provision and opportunities for more collaborative working.

In principle ITN endorses these steps and the commitment for further action to take in particular:

1. Any platform that plays a significant role for UK audiences in providing access to news has a part to play in ensuring the discoverability and sustainability of public service news, including social media, news aggregators, TV/VOD platforms, device manufacturers.
2. Give further consideration to kite-marking to help audiences clearly identify reliable sources.
3. More onus on the tech platforms to take down content found to be fake or deliberately misleading with more stringent sanctions on internet companies, akin to those faced by broadcasters.

4. Tech companies giving prominence to reliable news sources, through algorithms and curation to counter-balance fake information i.e. smart TV and mobile device manufacturers and operating system providers could preload PSB apps. Voice assistants could include PSBs as 'default providers' of generic news services.
5. Ofcom to convene time-limited negotiations between platforms and news organisations about the contribution each can make to sustaining quality journalism, enhance media literacy, ensuring the delivery of the public service purposes of news, and consider what regulation may be needed.
6. Discussions should aim towards an outcomes-based voluntary agreement, but ITN supports a mandatory code of conduct if necessary.
7. Other areas to consider with platforms could include:
  - a. **Payments for content**, for example via contracts to provide news for dedicated sections (e.g. Facebook News, Apple News+)
  - b. **Advertising premium**. PSBs and other quality news providers could receive preferential rates for their inventory (at the expense of the platform rather than the advertiser)
  - c. Other **beneficial commitments** such as to provide consumption data, onward links, branded spaces in interfaces and technical support.
8. These contributions could be available to other quality news providers that meet appropriate editorial and governance standards, as well as the PSBs.
9. Given the diversity of platforms, regulation should not prescribe a single general solution, but provide oversight to ensure that whichever approach platforms take, their commitment is long-term and robustly monitored.
10. Broadcasters should work together to agree a common position in those negotiations.

**4) *How have digital technologies changed the production of journalism? Do journalists have access to the training necessary to adapt to the digital world?***

Digital technology has had a significant impact on the production of journalism, from newsgathering to editing, presenting and distribution.

Being a smaller, agile news organisation means we were able to respond rapidly to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of employing digital technology which benefited all three separate news services. ITN technology have achieved a generational jump forward in working from home, editing off base, transferring picture in and out of the building and also the ability to broadcast from peoples' front rooms. This is when the concept of ITN as a 'team of teams' came to the fore, with different parts of the business sharing best practice and how they overcame key challenges whether involving people or infrastructure. This ability to learn from each other, whilst supplying news to rival news organisations is unique in the market. We expect this revolutionary way of working to continue well beyond the current situation, not least because it has required significant financial investment and training of journalists to be multi-skilled in terms of newsgathering and production.

Many new entrants are joining with a range of digital and technical expertise and ITN works hard to upskill staff in newsrooms to ensure we remain at the cutting edge.

**5) *What qualifications do professional journalists need? How could public policy better support non-degree routes into journalism?***

The ideal newsroom would combine professionally-trained journalists who have degrees or have completed accredited courses, with those from non-university backgrounds, as well as those with specialist knowledge.

ITN is keen to open up routes into the profession from a wide range of backgrounds, including those from less academic and lower socio-economic backgrounds. One way to do this is through apprenticeships, which ITN is keen to support. However, the apprenticeship system is flawed and needs urgent policy review to make it work for all parts of the economy. For many in the creative industries, as in journalism, we are not able to make optimal use of the apprentice system to deliver apprenticeships in the volume we would like.

Our different news services at ITN target different demographic groups and recruitment needs to reflect these target audiences. All our news operations seek to reach people from different backgrounds. C4 News has a remit to appeal to people whatever their culture, nationality, religious persuasion, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, gender, race or age and its diverse team and editorial policy ensure it fulfils that remit.

The opening of a Channel 4 News hub in Leeds will also enable us to work with those who see the high costs of London-living as a significant barrier to entry when it comes to a career in journalism and alongside bases in Cardiff and Glasgow, will ensure we are reflecting the voice of communities all around the UK.

5 News in particular, and ITV News have stronger appeal than the BBC for example to viewers from a C2, D and E socio economic backgrounds. All our newsrooms are trying harder to recruit people from more diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds and run a variety of initiatives, from newsroom tours and training days to dedicated focus groups. Every ITV region as well as national news has an external diversity panel made up of community group leaders and representatives of different cultural groups. They critically review our programmes, offer up ideas and advice on how to cover stories more positively, inclusively or relevantly and provide excellent contacts for future coverage and contributors. In the longer term, they help us provide more on-screen role models, encouraging young people to consider careers they would not have thought possible, including journalism. Many people started at a very young age in local newspapers and worked their way up through apprenticeships and gained vast experience doing court reporting, covering local government issues and crime. With the collapse in local papers has come the closing down of one of the most vital routes into journalism. We would therefore like to do more to support new entrants who do not have degrees or official training and a range of measures could be introduced across the industry to open up the profession more effectively. These could include tax-relief on apprenticeships or government-supported bursaries for example.

**6) *What are the main challenges for freelance journalists? How could public policy better support them?***

As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, freelancers are often hardest hit at times of national crisis or an economic downturn. According to industry trade magazine Broadcast, a recent survey of 1000 freelancers in TV shows that 50% are seeking work in an industry that offers 'more job stability'. The industry is heavily reliant on a freelance workforce, but their work is precarious and unpredictable and often is not highly-paid.

Channel 4 News has a specific remit to support freelancers and independent journalists through its Independent Film Fund and has gone to great lengths to support them through the coronavirus crisis.

Public policy could help ensure there is parity between support for self-employed workers and full-time staff, allowing people who earn multiple sources/types of income to gain access to support and schemes such as the Job Retention Scheme during times of need. In the current affairs sector, there is a significant reliance on freelancers due to the intensive nature of current affairs production and the absence of a viable financial model to support it. There have been suggestions of independent funds to support investigative or analytical current affairs programming on TV and this might allow and encourage producers and broadcasters to offer more job security to freelance TV specialist journalists – predominantly through longer contracts of employment.

**7) *Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population? How could this be addressed? How can journalists better understand and convey the concerns and priorities of people who do not live in London or other metropolitan hubs?***

There is a symbiotic relationship between who makes content and the connection it has with audiences, particularly with harder to reach audiences. This is a preoccupation for all of broadcasting with all ITN's broadcast partners making strides to become more inclusive and diverse and these are ambitions shared by ITN. Just under half of all staff come from regions outside London and the South East.

Less than one fifth of our staff attended independent or fee-paying schools, according to a confidential census completed by 85% of our employees. ITN has a comprehensive diversity and inclusion strategy with a number of key targets including recruitment and retention of individuals with a BAME background; a continued drive for gender parity and an increase in staff from different socio-economic backgrounds. We have set ambitious targets and are on-track to meet them.

Within each newsroom there are a number of diversity initiatives in place, including:

**Channel 4 and Leeds**

As part of Channel 4's 4 All the UK strategy to diversify outside London, Channel 4 News will be opening a new bureau in Leeds, alongside existing bureau in Cardiff and Glasgow, and a studio to allow the programme to be co-anchored between London and Leeds. This will support much more regional representation in guests on the programme. This follows the appointment of a number of key correspondents from across the UK, including Liz Bates appointed as Political Correspondent from the Yorkshire Post.

**Paralympics and disability**

News formed a key part of Channel 4's overall ambitions to improve the inclusion of disabled people on and off screen when it took over coverage of the Paralympic Games in 2012. Alongside the development of talent to work on its sports coverage, Channel 4 News also trained a large number of journalists to provide specialist Paralympic coverage.

**ITV regional engagement**

ITV News has always had a strong regional dimension, with dedicated regional news programmes, and newsrooms in each of the regions. There is a regular scheme placing ITV regional staff in the national network newsroom in ITN.

Within newsrooms, the increase in the number of female managers is particularly noteworthy and all our diversity initiatives have contributed to improvements in onscreen representation as well as the range and treatment of stories.

As the Committee identifies and discussed in response to question 5, there are particularly acute issues around socio-economic representation in journalism. This is due to a number of factors, including long established tendencies to recruit graduates, behaviours that have led to work experience being a commonplace route of entry into the profession (as the Committee notes, 87% of journalists having done this; of which 74% unpaid); and the London centric nature of the profession across all media, with national titles heavily concentrated in the capital and the once strong entry routes to the media in the regions now drastically reduced, especially in print.

### **8) *Why has trust in journalism declined? How could it be improved?***

#### **Impact of fake news and misinformation**

Much has been written on fake news and misinformation in recent years, and this response will not re-rehearse these complex arguments in detail. However, the work conducted by the DCMS Select Committee raised a number of important issues and potential remedies – in part prompted and informed by the investigation conducted by Channel 4 News/The Guardian and The Observer into Cambridge Analytica.

In recent years it has become increasingly evident that the proliferation of fake and misleading information online poses a threat to high quality journalism in a number of ways.

It ‘poisons the well’ of all news. In disaggregated environments, trustworthy brands are often presented alongside the fake and the flaky and consumers are not equipped with the necessary tools to be able to differentiate. The platforms have to date been doing too little to help.

According to the Reuters Institute, Digital News Report 2019, 70% of UK adults are concerned about what is real and fake on the internet. It also states that only one in four Facebook users trusts Facebook to protect users from misleading information.

This may be contributing to a rebound in trust in traditional media; Edelman Trust Barometer found media trust increased from 48% of adults in 2017 to 61% in 2018, stabilising at 60% in 2019. In its research prior to the pandemic, Reuters found that trust in news in general has fallen since 2015, with the professional media still seen as largely to blame, with consumers expressing concern about bias, spin and hidden agendas.

The tech companies have sought to remove fake news sites from their ad networks, block fraudulent and ‘inauthentic’ activity, and crack down on the transmission of disinformation or clickbait. Most recently, Google has updated its ranking algorithm and search guidelines to “better recognize original reporting, surface it more prominently in Search and ensure it stays there longer.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Google, Search, September 2019

But warm words, heavily promoted voluntary undertakings and commitments to transparency have not assuaged news organisations' or policy-makers' concerns. In truth, it is hard to tell what effect platform initiatives have had on the quality of the online news environment. There is no accountability; objectives and measures of success are rarely specified; transparency reports provide headline data but little real insight; and platforms consistently oppose fully independent oversight or regulation.

Platforms' funding partnerships – Google News Initiative, Facebook Community News Project – are similarly problematic. Funds are allocated at platforms' discretion, posing potential conflicts of interest, and it is unclear whether they are targeted at real priorities.

Finally, some platforms have increasingly moved to paying (some) publishers to supply their content for aggregated and curated news services, such as Apple News+ and Facebook News. However, precedents such as Facebook Live have caused concern: Facebook encouraged news organisations to use and promote its live video products, including paying for dedicated video journalists, but initial deals were often not renewed, with significant financial impact on publishers, according to the New York Times. Providing content for Facebook Watch is a significant area of growth for news organisations and it is to be hoped that this production-fee initiative is sustainable.

To date, policy recommendations have tended to overlook or underplay the critical role of broadcast news in fulfilling the public purposes of quality journalism. Of course fake news and misinformation are hardly new phenomena, but at an extraordinary time like the Coronavirus pandemic – when being aware of the facts has never been more crucial, especially as Ofcom research found 44% of people in the UK have come across false or misleading information about Covid-19 - the threat they pose is all the more potent.

One of the most notable quotes to have come out of the coronavirus outbreak came from Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organisation. Speaking at Munich Security Conference in February, he claimed that we weren't just fighting an epidemic, but also an "infodemic" referring to the vast swathes of misinformation which spread rapidly on social media.

This encapsulates why we need public service broadcasters and it is notable that those working in public service journalism are amongst those listed as key workers by the government. We're not mouthpieces for the government, but we do have a vital role to play in making sure that government messaging is heard.

While there is a case for myth-busting services from established news providers in some instances, it is important to avoid giving fake news stories too much credence. Therefore, we focus on being consistent and see our primary role as putting out the facts.

The evolution of the PSB regulatory settlement for an online world must be a key part of any comprehensive strategy to address the challenges facing the news market.

If trust is to be rebuilt, it is vital that broadcasters have an appropriately updated legal and regulatory framework that allows them to play a full role in the online transition.

**9) How can innovation and collaboration help news providers of all types to maintain sustainable business models and adapt what they produce to audience demand? What lessons can be learnt from successful innovations, including in other countries?**

Technical innovation such as smaller and cheaper high-quality cameras is lowering the barriers to photojournalism and TV reporters can now produce and even broadcast content with a smart phone as we have seen in the current COVID-19 crisis, discussed above. Collaboration is at the heart of ITN's current status as the network news supplier for three rival commercial broadcasters, ITV, C4 and C5. They all punch significantly above their commercial weight because ITN effectively allows them to collaborate on backroom functions such as legal, administrative and central technology support which would otherwise be replicated at great cost. Our three services also collaborate by sharing non-competitive news gathering video which would otherwise be prohibitively costly to reproduce.

The UK is not the only country exploring solutions to the challenges facing quality journalism. In many jurisdictions there is growing public and political interest in finding new ways of securing the future and some are worth considering:

**Most notably, Australia has become the first country to create a mandatory code,** to ensure that Google and Facebook pay news organisations for content. It comes after a voluntary code failed to be agreed after lengthy negotiations, and with the COVID pandemic exacerbating the decline of online and newspaper journalism. The number of journalists has fallen by 20% since 2014, after social media giants began to dominate the ad market.

It follows the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) carrying out an 18-month [investigation](#) into the impact of digital platforms on competition in the media and advertising markets, and in particular the choice and quality of news.

Other international initiatives:

- the European Commission [announced](#) a series of actions to tackle online disinformation in April 2018 and subsequently agreed a voluntary [Code of Practice](#) with technology firms, including commitments to "invest in technological means to prioritise relevant, authentic and accurate and authoritative information where appropriate" and improve "findability" of trustworthy content. It will review the Code's effectiveness and may introduce regulation in 2020 if insufficient progress has been made;<sup>2</sup>
- the Council of Europe [reviewed](#) the financial sustainability of quality journalism and asserted that states are obliged by human rights law to support "quality journalism in the public interest, recognising that such journalism is a public good and has substantial benefits for democracy";
- in 2018, the Canadian government [committed](#) CAN\$595m (£350m) over five years to support Canadian journalism;
- the US Congress is considering a [Journalism Competition & Preservation Act](#), which would provide an antitrust 'safe harbour' enabling publishers to negotiate collectively with platforms for distribution of their content.

Independent studies have also concluded there is a vital need for action, for example the LSE's Truth, Trust and Technology Commission, whose 2018 [report](#) proposed an Independent Platform Agency to monitor the protection of quality journalism and the effectiveness of platform self-regulation.

While each report's specific focus and proposals differ, they all tell a broadly similar story. Credible, trustworthy journalism plays a vital, enduring role in modern democracies. It holds public authorities to account, acts as watchdog and 'scarecrow', enables citizens to form their views and participate in social and political life, promotes civic debate and provides a journal of record. This role is at risk, for reasons of economics, technology and shifting consumer behavior. However, the current policy and regulatory framework is not capable of addressing that risk; creative new policy responses are needed.

***10) Are there any other ways in which public policy could better support journalists and news organisations, now and in the future?***

See summary above.

April 2020