

# Response to Call for Evidence and Consultation on Media Ownership Review

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In case it is helpful, I share here the [global report on the sustainability of journalism](#) for which I was Lead Rapporteur, released in June this year, which touches on issues of media plurality, including the role of the government and regulators in securing a plural media landscape, and on media ownership questions - and which I refer to below.

## 1. Online intermediaries:

- researchers' access to data (and that of others working in the public interest) is uneven, arbitrary and insufficient, and this limits severely what we can know and analyse about news usage and the place it occupies within wider platform usage. Access to this data would give a much finer-grained picture of where there might be inequalities and imbalances in access to plural, varied news sources among certain demographics, or in particular regions of the UK. (Zuckerman and Hansen Shapiro wrote a [recent report](#) on platform data research from a mainly US perspective, but it maps across to the UK quite compellingly.)

- online intermediaries - Facebook and Google specifically - have corporate grant-giving programmes to journalism and media, which they are beginning to describe as 'philanthropy'. Although these are staffed by experienced journalism professionals, often include independent application reviewers, and are open to applications from wide swathes of the industry, these are not regulated or governed in the way that philanthropic entities are, their grants data are not yet released in an open data standard (like [this](#)), and they are not predictable, long-term sources of risk or innovation capital for the sector. More transparency and independent evaluation is needed in order to assess the impact of these schemes on media plurality, sustainability and viability, especially as these schemes become more integrated with tech solutions and products within particular ecosystems potentially further entrenching market dominance (e.g. Google Showcase, Subscribe with Google, Google Pinpoint, Google Trends and other [products in the Google ecosystem](#) that are useful to journalists; or a [similar programme](#) for news organisations registered with Facebook.)

## 2. Algorithms

N/A

## 3. Market changes + 4. Other areas to consider

- as the report for which I was Lead Rapporteur, *A New Deal for Journalism*, argues, the changes in the market are so profound, and have so eroded the capacity for a sufficient diversity of journalism and news media to sustain themselves, that government needs to intervene, both through direct and indirect measures, in a coordinated and strategic way in how public interest media are funded for a decade - we suggest that this combined should reach 0.1% of GDP. This could involve, as in Denmark, annual direct cash grants to qualifying media, as well as indirect measures such as tax credits for editorial roles, or media vouchers for citizens to purchase subscriptions, or incentivising investors to engage in the sector. This

should also include, as the report outlines, measures to ease the creation and registration of non-profit and charitably funded newsrooms, which would help to diversify the market, and provide access to untapped sources of financing such as philanthropy. Taken as a package of measures, this could both reduce the barriers to entry and barriers to survival that are causing premature and avoidable closures of media of all stripes, and damaging media plurality and diversity, at the local level particularly. The government itself led the [Global Pledge on Media Freedom](#), whose signatory states (including the UK) "commit to supporting the development of diverse, independent, public interest media".

- The Ofcom consultation document praises the Cairncross Review for its analysis of the market, and how this impacts the sustainability of journalism in the UK. One of the few measures advocated by Dame Frances that actually received government support - outside the establishing of the DMU - was the innovation fund, although this received only £2m rather than the £10m suggested by the Review, covered England only rather than the four nations, and was axed by DCMS after just one six-month round of grants and investments, rather than after 4 years. This fund, the Future News Fund, was independently designed and managed by Nesta, and was focused specifically on diversity and on sustainability. The Fund drew particularly on a) a more holistic and data-led view on media diversity in the current market context (which the Nesta Data Science team worked towards in [this report](#)), and b) a mixed funding approach, providing both [philanthropic and investment funding and expertise](#) and [supporting diverse organisations](#) (not just commercial start-ups or legacy/incumbent news providers) involved in different parts of the journalism ecosystem. It was apparent through this work that there are parts of the country where motivated news entrepreneurs (for-profit and non-profit) face barriers to raising funds, to recruiting staff, to building or accessing the right tech, and to the right advice and expertise to help them develop and evolve their businesses in response to what audiences and communities need. Any consideration of the future of media plurality needs to consider some sort of independent long-term structure akin to (but much larger than) the Future News Fund, that can help to mobilise funds both at the national level, and in these emerging news deserts across all four nations of the UK.

### **Media ownership**

A number of those interviewed for *A New Deal for Journalism* stated how much other countries pay attention to the UK's laws and regulations pertaining to the media sector. As Ofcom knows well through its long-standing international work, the UK's practices can have a ripple or cascade effect - not only through networks like EPRA, but more broadly. It would be advisable to seek consultation with groups such as Article 19, the Media Legal Defence Initiative, Index on Censorship, and their peers on such potential effects.