OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 1 October 2020

Session 5

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
23rd Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Peter Geoghegan (The Ferret)
Joyce McMillan (National Union of Journalists)
Eamonn O'Neill (Edinburgh Napier University)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 1 October 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:01]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Joan McAlpine): Good morning, and welcome to the 23rd meeting in 2020 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee.

Agenda item 1 is consideration of a decision on whether to take agenda item 4, on draft correspondence, in private. If members do not agree to take the item in private, they should indicate that in the chat bar.

As no member objects, we agree to take item 4 in private.

Impact of Covid-19 on Print Journalism (Sustainability)

09:01

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is evidence on the sustainability of the newspaper industry and the impact of Covid-19 on print journalism. I welcome our witnesses: Joyce McMillan, who is the chair of the Edinburgh freelance branch of the National Union of Journalists; Dr Eamonn O'Neill, who is the associate professor in journalism at Edinburgh Napier University; and Peter Geoghegan, who is the chair of *The Ferret* and the investigations editor at openDemocracy.

I remind members to give broadcasting staff a few seconds to operate your microphones before beginning to ask your question, and the witnesses should do the same before providing an answer. I would be grateful if questions and answers could be kept as succinct as possible.

We will move straight to questions. I will begin, to be followed by Claire Baker. We will each have two questions and, if there is time, I will bring in members at the end for supplementary questions. I am afraid that we have to do it that way, because that is the format for our online meetings.

I thank the witnesses for joining us and for providing detailed written submissions, which are helpful. My first question is for Joyce McMillan. Your submission, which summarises the difficulties that the media is facing in Scotland, says:

> "Many of the economic models which used to support the presence of professional journalism in our society are no longer working; and now, with newsagents closed, print newspaper sales plummeting, and advertising revenue in free-fall, those trends are being dramatically accelerated."

Obviously, that is a global issue, but you go on to talk about the specific impacts on Scotland. Will you outline those for the record?

Joyce McMillan (National Union of Journalists): The committee members, as people who are involved in politics, will be aware of the global pressures on journalism in recent years. The ownership models, which used to deliver big profits that could support a huge range of journalistic activities, no longer do that. You need look only at the dwindling size and range of coverage that *The Herald* and *The Scotsman*, Scotland's two "national" papers, are able to provide on the basis of the traditional model of ownership to realise the huge commercial pressures that they are under because we are part of the United Kingdom and—this would continue with or without independence—we are part of the English-speaking sphere of media.

Scottish newspapers face an intensely competitive situation at national level, where there is a noticeable hollowing out of the business model as our newspapers compete with much larger players in the UK and on a global scale.

At local level, again, as politicians, everyone on the committee will be aware of the changes that have swept through journalism. Most local newspapers and traditional titles are owned by big media players, which have been through round after round of cost cutting in recent decades. Consequently, a lot of those newspapers are not really locally produced at all. The masthead remains, but they are hollowed out titles that are edited and controlled from regional offices that may be quite a long way away, and the intensity of local coverage that might have existed a generation ago is no longer there.

Many studies demonstrate the consequences of that for accountability, knowledge of what is going on in the local area and people's perceptions of their local area. If people get nothing but click-bait and sensational headlines controlled from an office far away, they do not get a full picture of what is going on in their community. Most members of the committee will be aware of that.

On the specifics of the Scottish situation, it is particularly competitive at a national level, which has led us into a situation whereby Scotland could be veering towards the Welsh position of not having all-national media or having only relatively small-scale media such as weekly magazines. The media have been key throughout the modern era in shaping people's perceptions of who they are. Independent of the question of whether Scotland should be an independent country is the fact that, when newspapers were able to generate huge amounts of media coverage, Scotland had a strong media personality and could debate its affairs through the pages of *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*, *The Courier* or *The Press and Journal* with a great sense of there being a community here and a strong tradition of high-quality journalism, which fed into London journalism, where Scots have traditionally played a big role.

The loss, over the past generation, of that momentum and the economic power behind Scottish journalism has affected the quality of life here immensely and people's perception of what Scotland is and could be, and how its debates are conducted and the plurality of that. We still have the BBC, but, obviously, the more voices that there can be, the better, and the BBC has its own issues.

There are big problems facing Scotland. Our National Union of Journalists branch has taken the NUJ's recovery plan for the media in the UK and Ireland, which was published in April, and tried to work out specific ways by which we could, without being overambitious in the context of the financial pressures and so on, tailor a package at Scottish Government level that recognises the importance of the media to life in Scotland and begins to articulate ways in which that can be more strongly supported without the kind of Government intervention of which people are extremely wary.

We have made various proposals on that, which committee members will be able to see in our written submission. We hope that, at a modest level, those could begin to provide a focus for not only some serious assistance to public-interest journalism in Scotland but a national debate on, and awareness of, the importance of good journalism in sustaining a community and how that can be developed through education and other means as well as through direct support for journalism.

The Convener: Thank you. I am sure that we will go into the detail of some of your proposed solutions later. I will turn to Eamonn O'Neill and Peter Geoghegan. Joyce McMillan mentioned the importance of quality journalism, and you have addressed that issue in your written submissions. For the general public out there, how does one distinguish quality journalism from the kind of content that people can access freely on the internet at the moment? Why is it important that we make that distinction?

Eamonn O'Neill (Edinburgh Napier University): The question of what is good-quality journalism is a bit like the situation when the US Supreme Court was famously asked whether it could define pornography. The court went away for months, then came back with a one-sentence definition that said, "We will know it when we see it," which made everyone chuckle. Similarly, with good-quality journalism, if we spend enough time in that world, we can tell the difference between mediated information, on the one hand, and raw, skewed, biased or partial information, on the other. Mediated information is from verifiable sources and reliable places, contextualised in some shape or form and weighed carefully. In addition, some wisdom and dogged experience is brought to bear on that, as well as some editorial distance.

The problem is that the people who work in the industry can tell the difference quite easily but it can sometimes be completely impossible for the younger generation to do that in this day and age, unless they are equipped with the right tools. That also applies to the general public when they are, for example, hopping in and out of taxis, travelling on the underground or just going about their daily business, because they just glance at the news, which makes it difficult for them to tell the difference between what is and is not a good piece of journalism. Even in the pluralistic market in the UK and in Scotland, it is sometimes difficult for

people popping in and out of various media to tell that what looks like a piece of journalism is, in fact, a piece of biased propaganda information.

We want to live in a society in which journalism is free to ask difficult questions, hold the powerful to account and give a voice to those who do not have one. We want a journalism that can go back to those people and say, "Here's what we did" and explain the difference between that and completely unmediated information through, for example, a camera simply being used somewhere and people being left to make up their own minds about what they see and hear—journalism is not as simple as that.

The Convener: Peter Geoghegan? [*Inaudible.*] I cannot hear you. Can you start again?

Peter Geoghegan (The Ferret): Can you hear me now?

The Convener: Yes.

Peter Geoghegan: Sorry. I might have gone ahead too quickly. I have a tendency to do that.

The interesting phrase "public interest" was used earlier by you, convener, and by Joyce McMillan. The public interest is a useful frame for thinking about the quality journalism that we want, which can also be original journalism. Interestingly, at one stage of its recent restructure, the BBC discussed the idea of setting up a little department for original journalism, but it decided not to do it.

It is telling that a lot of journalism is just what is called "churnalism". Nick Davies wrote well about that over 15 years ago in his book "Flat Earth News", so it is not a new phenomenon. It is easy to do it and it is part of journalism that will always exist, because it is important for wire services and so on to put stories out there. However, as we have seen in the Scottish press and the press more generally, media organisations relying on just rewriting wire stories does not add a hell of a lot of value in terms of the public good and the public interest. In addition, those stories do not often serve the public interest, because wire organisations and churnalism tend to tell the stories that the powerful want to tell and tend not to tell the stories of marginalised people and the margins of society, especially in the smaller context of somewhere like Scotland, where not that many stories are told—full stop.

There is therefore a need for what we call public interest journalism or original journalism. Often, the only way to do that, or to start doing it, is through having some mark of quality, such as going out and doing original reporting, talking to news sources and telling stories that have not been told before. That has two important functions, one of which is bringing out and telling stories that we would not know about otherwise. An example of that at the UK level is the recent Windrush scandal, which would not have been known about without the journalism of someone like Amelia Gentleman at *The Guardian* and a newspaper that wanted to highlight something that would not get a huge amount of clicks online to start with. That is not the sort of story, at least at its beginning, that generates large amounts of online traffic.

It is important that people are incentivised to read that kind of important work. Anyone who saw the Windrush scandal unfold and saw the documentaries about it knows that those people were treated terribly, but we would not know about that if it was not for the journalism of Amelia Gentleman and others. We would also not have known about it if it was not for publications that were willing to support that sort of work, knowing that it would not have the same mass-market appeal as a click-bait headline.

Secondly, we need original, quality journalism to knit people together in some kind of quasi-national conversations, at whatever level. Without being too clichéd, journalism is important as a tool to tell stories that bridge divides and let people understand and see common worlds between them. In Scotland, we are getting to a point where we do not have as much of that content as we had 15 or 20 years ago. We have nowhere near enough of it, especially in print and online, which makes it harder and harder for people to see shared, lived experiences. That is really important.

09:15

I am the chair of *The Ferret*, and we cover a lot of stories on marginalised communities, such as homeless people or asylum seekers. Often, their stories come up only as a big national story when something terrible happens, as it did in Glasgow during the summer, but it is important to have reporters like ours telling those stories, so that people can understand them. It means that, at least, when some of those big stories happen, there is context that people can understand, so that it has not happened in a vacuum. If we and others like us had not been there, the tragedies that happened in Glasgow in the summer could easily have been reported with no context of the history and issues around asylum seeking in Glasgow.

That is just one example. There is a series of reasons why quality journalism needs to be embedded and supported and why it does not always make sense for news organisations with straitened bottom lines and shareholders looking for quick returns—as is always the case—to do that.

The Convener: Thank you. That is interesting.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the panel members, who have set out a picture of the importance of journalism, as well as the fragility of the system at the moment. Would the panel members like to comment on the current situation as we live through the Covid pandemic and whether it has had an impact on an already fragile system? Do you have any concerns about how long the Covid pandemic will last and the impact that it will have on the sector? I ask those questions first to Joyce McMillan.

Joyce McMillan: Our observation has been that the impact has been patchy. We sent our submission to the committee in May and, to be honest, the picture that has emerged since then has been less gloomy than some media anticipated at the time, when the Johnston Press was making across-the-board pay cuts in anticipation of tremendous trouble. Some areas of advertising revenue—particularly the areas that have done well in the pandemic, such as various forms of online and deliveries—have held up better than was anticipated. However, listening to what is being said by our staff at the NUJ office in Glasgow—who have given evidence to the committee before and could probably give you more detail on that—the great fear is that, once the winter sets in and the furlough support that many advertisers have enjoyed begins to fade, there will be another round of mass redundancies among Scottish journalists. Those redundancies are already being planned and discussed, and the union is trying to negotiate their terms.

Given how stripped down and short of staff—compared with a couple of decades ago—most journalistic operations in Scotland are, the prospect of another round of redundancies this winter is particularly alarming. Also, with regard to the situation that we face, the idea of having less journalism and less investment in journalism, rather than more, is frightening. Some areas of advertising revenue have held up better than was hoped, but there is every sign that most of the big players in commercial journalism will use that opportunity to make yet more redundancies, which is a frightening prospect for the quality and range of Scottish journalism.

Claire Baker: Thank you, Joyce. I am interested in Peter Geoghegan's comments, given that *The Ferret* operates a different model. Will all that have an impact on the kind of work that you are able to undertake?

Peter Geoghegan: Yes. Unlike traditional newspapers, *The Ferret* is a member-owned co-operative with more than 1,600 paying members, which means that everyone who joins *The Ferret* gets a stake in *The Ferret*. Our journalism is supported by paying members and philanthropic grants, and some of it is also supported by tie-ins with newspapers. There is an element of our being vulnerable to changes in the newspaper industry in relation to being able to collaborate financially with traditional outlets. Also, if people's incomes are being squeezed generally, that makes it more difficult for organisations such as *The Ferret* and openDemocracy, which I also work for, to bring in revenue from subscribers. There will always be an element of that.

At the same time, *The Ferret* and quite a lot of newspapers and magazines have happily not seen a huge trail-off in the number of people who donate to us, despite the more difficult economic climate. In part, that reflects the mood in relation to some newspapers. For example, one of the Swedish newspapers uses a very interesting model, and its circulation and subscription rate have gone up by about 25 per cent. Quite a lot of paywall newspapers have had an uptick in sales. The problem is that advertising revenue has gone down.

More than ever, in the current climate in which there is still a lot of conspiracy thinking and a lot of falsehoods, misinformation and disinformation being spread, readers want quality journalism and media with sources and information that they can trust. The challenge is that the existing architecture of for-profit journalism based on advertising is not sustainable.

The Ferret and openDemocracy have not grown massively, or as much as would have liked, in this period, but we have not retrenched, because a lot of our funding is already baked in for the longer term. Our concern is how we will be affected as people's incomes become more stretched. We also rely on philanthropic grants to help with our funding. What will happen to philanthropic organisations if we go into a real bear market and if there is the type of global recession that there was in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis? That would make it more difficult.

That is one of the reasons why I talk in my submission about the importance of making public interest journalism a charitable good, which is quite a free thing that Scotland could do to echo what other countries such as America have done. That would make it much easier for new organisations, community-owned newspapers and not-for-profit organisations such as *The Ferret* to be much more sustainable, because charitable status is very important for a lot of funders and has other advantages that we currently cannot access. That would be very helpful.

Claire Baker: I have a follow-on question for Eamonn O'Neill about the importance of advertising revenue. Both previous speakers talked about the decline in advertising revenue during this period, and Peter Geoghegan talked

about a different type of model. If it is to be sustainable in Scotland, where should journalism be heading?

I have submitted some written questions about Government spending. We are obviously in a pandemic, so there is a public health message to get out there. Where do the roles of the private sector and Government sit in relation to advertising?

Eamonn O'Neill: It would be helpful if there was a commitment to advertise in some of the more meaty papers and publishing groups that are trying to innovate and come up with a new way of doing business. Some advertising should be ring fenced and committed to local press, Government adverts and so on. The advertising can sometimes disappear down rabbit holes, so it should be aimed at strategic places.

I want to come back to some of the points that Joyce McMillan and Peter Geoghegan raised. An often overlooked fact is that there are newspapers that are doing really well right now in the most difficult of markets. For example, *The New York Times* has completely turned itself around in the past five to six years. In 2014, it generated internally a report called "Innovation", which was leaked to me before it was made public. The company looked at itself in a hard way and said, "We need to change and turn this battleship round in the ocean fast or we're going down the tubes." It did that very well and has made very good profits through a subscription model. It has a loyal and growing readership. A lot of that is based around the two points that Joyce McMillan and Peter Geoghegan made. In my opening statement, I alluded to the notion of original, investigative and public interest journalism, which is what people want. We are in a very strange position right now, in which the people of Scotland—a nation that has an incredibly engaged, critically thinking and news-consuming audience—are not being given a product that they will buy.

The committee has heard from Peter Geoghegan, of *The Ferret*, and Joyce McMillan, who have said that there are some glimmers of light on the horizon. All of the evidence shows that, in a peculiar way, during periods like this people are crying out for hard-core, verifiable, real information or, in other words, really good journalism.

In Scotland—also in other parts of the UK, but Scotland in particular, ever since the independence debate—there has been a rise in the notion of a critically engaged consumer audience. They will take the journalism, if it is available, and they will pay for it. That is why, although the BBC is going through a continuing difficult period at the moment, people still stay, by and large, fairly loyal, although there are warning signs that the number of households paying the licence fee is going down, particularly in Scotland.

I suggest to the committee members that they stop and think about where the responsibility for that issue lies. Based on my research and experience, I would say that it lies with the publishers. Tell me of one publisher in Scotland that has produced the equivalent of what *The New York Times* did in 2014—there is none. None of them saw this coming. Of course, you could take a more jaded point of view and say that they did in fact see it coming and saw one model to put them back into profit, which was to cut jobs. That is like a restaurant opening and advertising fantastic food, and then changing hands, thinning out the menu and hoping that customers will not notice; of course they will notice. The hard-core audience go to organisations like *The Ferret* or subscribe to the podcast that I do weekly with Talk Media in their hundreds of thousands, globally, and they listen to that because they know quality when they see it.

Publishers did not provide the means for journalists to stop, think and chart their own course. Instead, they tried to chart it for them, and strangely enough it was the front-line staff who were taking it in the neck while publishers seemed to disappear with handsome bonuses and retirement packages. That is where some of the blame lies, and there is no use in looking back. However, if we at least take a genuine, measured view of what happened and copy the models that have been successful we can avoid what is coming.

I am warning right now of what is coming and that is that there will be news deserts. There will be parts of Scotland that are not fed by any local news, and a generation is coming up that does not understand what journalism is compared with what they see on TikTok videos. They are going to vote and act as citizens accordingly, which, I am sorry to say, is uninformed, not engaged and completely unaware of what it means to be a sentient citizen in a democracy.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Eamonn O'Neill's last sentence, in which he said that there was a risk of a generation coming up that does not know what journalism is, has cued my questions nicely. My couple of questions focus on the younger generations' interest, or lack thereof, in traditional journalism and newspapers. I would like to know how our witnesses feel about that, and what they suggest could be done to interest younger generations of readers in their material?

Joyce McMillan: Throughout the whole of the last 30 years, the slogan of the NUJ has been "journalism matters": not "newspapers matter" or "the BBC matters". Journalists do not care about a particular medium; we care about finding a model

that enables professional journalists to do their job and have the time to do it in some depth, properly, and be paid for it.

There is an awful lot of free journalism going on now, particularly at a hyper-local and local level, where people are holding community journalism together by depending on volunteers. Of course, that has an impact on who can afford to do it, who has the time to do it and the kind of perspective that those demographics are likely to have.

Our priority is to find and produce good-quality, paid-for journalism. We do not mind which platform it appears on. Some publications—notoriously *Private Eye*—are successful in maintaining print. A lot of people still enjoy print. Other publications have successfully moved to mostly online operations and now make most of their income from online subscriptions.

09:30

We must be aware of all those models and also of how young people tend towards the online models. We must also make sure that, whatever platform they use to access news, they understand that there is a choice. On one hand there is nonsense, clickbait and pictures of skateboarding kittens or the latest celebrity gossip. On the other hand there is thoroughly-researched, well-presented news about the political realities of the communities that they live in at every level: their local community, Scotland, the wider UK and Europe.

It is important to focus on developing people's critical understanding, not of what any particular medium is but of what journalism itself is. Eamonn O'Neill can talk more eloquently about that because he teaches journalism. The worry is that even young people who want to be journalists have a limited experience and perception of the possibilities of journalism. They do not understand the critical difference between thorough journalism that helps and supports the community in making good decisions and journalism that is just about generating clicks—which is the main currency of modern journalism.

We have various proposals on our list that might contribute to that. One is that there should be some focal point for all of those debates in Scotland, which would be a foundation for public interest journalism. However that is funded, which could be from many different sources, it would become a focal point for education, debate and understanding of those issues and for supporting new initiatives that would contribute to the future of journalism in Scotland. That would be bound to focus on the rising generation: if you do not have a new generation of consumers, you do not have a media industry.

Another suggestion, which is specific to young people, is that the Scottish Government, supported by the Parliament, might consider the idea of some kind of media voucher scheme for young people aged 16 to 19, at that age when they are still in or are just leaving school. It could be linked to those elements of the curriculum for excellence that deal with critical understanding of the media. The vouchers would give young people the power to be active consumers of media. That would be linked to an education programme that would make young people more aware of the types of media on which they could spend their vouchers and of the importance of the decisions that they make about that for the future of the communities in which they live.

That is one idea that might work to focus the education of young people in that age group on their role as consumers of media and on how that links to their wider role as citizens and voters.

Annabelle Ewing: Thank you for that interesting suggestion, which we will reflect on.

The key idea that I took from Joyce McMillan's contribution is that journalism matters, irrespective of the platform. Peter Geoghegan, what are your comments on the issue?

Peter Geoghegan: There is a tendency, when we talk about journalism, to look only at established media outlets. We think about newspapers, online and broadcast as being quite separate, but there is real convergence now.

Attempts to help the journalism industry often focus just on newspapers and on legacy media outlets, seeing them as somehow distinct from other outlets. The BBC's local democracy reporters scheme, which was brought in by the Westminster Government about 10 years ago, had the idea of taking a slice off the top of the licence fee and giving it to local media outlets to employ journalists. There was a sense that we were not seeing public interest journalism and that stories that needed to be told were not being told.

Largely what has happened is that newspapers—not unsurprisingly, because a lot of them are publicly listed companies—use that to shore up their bottom line to allow them to continue to make the kind of cuts that Eamonn O'Neill mentioned and to continue the strategy of really squeezing their assets. Unfortunately, especially in Scotland, a lot of the big newspaper-owning organisations have an asset-squeezing strategy; the two big titles, *The Scotsman* and *The Herald*, are owned by organisations that have such a strategy.

That has meant that there have not been the kind of interventions that would have helped the industry and helped to promote the kind of journalism—quality and public interest

journalism—that we are all talking about. Joyce McMillan mentioned a public interest news initiative, and there is a number of things that could be done. Any interventions or ideas around helping the newspaper industry and the wider journalism sector need to take a much more platform-neutral view. They need to move away from the idea that there are newspapers that need to be helped and digital platforms that are somehow distinct, because that is not the case any more; we can all see that.

There is also a real need to talk about and engage the plurality of voices, models and ownership, and to move away from seeing large companies and large newspaper groups as the only people that we want to help. There are more opportunities for local ownership of newspaper organisations; we are seeing that happen across the world. There is also a huge move into not-for-profit journalism.

We are at a juncture. There are people out there who want to pay for journalism, and journalism can be profitable. All the newspapers that we are talking about are losing staff, but they are still profitable; that is why people own them and why they are trying to squeeze them. However, the problem is that they have large legacy costs as well as shareholders who want returns. When you strip away the legacy costs and the shareholder aspect, there is an opportunity to make vibrant news organisations that are not for profit. We have seen that happening a lot in America, in particular, and across Europe, but it has not really happened in Britain and Ireland. There is a need to think about that, as well as about ownership, in particular. There is a need to promote local ownership of media and to bring media down into the local level much more.

It is interesting for Scotland to talk about this now, because there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to carve out a more distinct media policy from that of Westminster. A lot of tools are available, many of which do not cost a huge amount of money, with which to make a broader and more plural media landscape than the one that we have at present.

It is about shifting the way that we all think about the issue. I come from a traditional journalism background: I worked in newspapers and I worked for Channel 4. Now, I work for what might be called the not-for-profit journalism world. I have seen both sides of the coin, and there are a lot of opportunities for growth and development that are not, at the moment, being realised.

Annabelle Ewing: Thank you for that contribution, Peter. It was very interesting, particularly your suggestion that we should be looking at a distinct policy offering in Scotland—subject, obviously, to the constraints that we are under. Nonetheless, you feel that there is scope to do quite a bit.

I take the public interest point—I am a politician, it is my bread and butter. Equally, however, we should make a pitch for columnists and opinion writers. For example, I love reading the work of Fidelma Cook, who is a fantastic journalist. I love reading her pieces in *The Herald* magazine on a Saturday, which are simply fantastic. We do not want to lose that element of journalism either.

Eamonn, will you respond to the general issue, but also, given your position, will you touch briefly on where we are on the other side of this: are young people still seeking to study journalism? What is the experience there?

Eamonn O'Neill: The short answer is absolutely yes. We at Edinburgh Napier University—which is one of the top universities in the United Kingdom for teaching journalism, going back decades—have queues of students applying every spring. We have to reject quite a number of them, including very good candidates. The answer to Annabelle Ewing's question is therefore that yes, there is a definite hunger to go into the business among a new generation.

One of the interesting things that I do every year in the first, first-year class that I teach is to ask how many people bought a newspaper that day. No hands go up—not one. The notion of a trend towards people getting their information online is quite funny, because that trend is about 10 years old; the first children who did that are now heading to high school. Convergence happened a decade ago but, in Scotland, our publishers were far behind. When I meet the publishers, I always find it strange that they have the latest sat nav on their cars and the latest iPhone 11s but the offices where they get the money to pay for them are still acting as if they are in the 1950s. There is a strange difference between what they practise and what they preach.

I tabled the voucher idea in my submission. As Joyce McMillan said, combining it with the curriculum for excellence is an excellent opportunity. My twin 12-year-old boys started high school in Peebles a month ago; notwithstanding who their dad is, it would be a great opportunity for them to be exposed to who their local journalists are, to know what local newspapers are and to understand how they differ from other types of information.

Years ago, politicians had to lead to way with policies such as the smoking ban and compulsory seat belts, both of which issues had been framed as our right to choose. There came a point when politicians, correctly, said, "No; there is a public health problem and we need to sort this out." It is the same with journalism. We live in a complex,

democratic society in which virtual businesses in Dundee and Edinburgh are at the forefront of digital innovation, yet our newspapers are at the other end. They could use that innovation to be at the forefront of saving jobs and building new jobs for the future.

At some point, we need to think about how the Government can support journalism in a way that allows wriggle room. You are all politicians, so I am sure that journalists—apart from Fidelma Cook, who everyone loves—are not at the top of your hit parade of great friends. On the other hand, we recognise that, in a healthy democracy, we need each other.

What we are doing this morning is a great sign, because we are starting to move towards treating journalism as a national asset to be prioritised and valued. I will tell you why that is important by going back to that classroom scene—that bunch of kids who want to go into journalism and be journalists. They see all the problems and cutbacks and, God help them, they still want to do it.

Where are they getting the majority of their information from? They go through Facebook and Twitter and *The Portal*. Who controls Facebook? The algorithms. How do they work? No one knows. The ex-editor of the Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, entered a deal with Facebook so that *The Guardian* could get more hits on its website. Later, he said that it was a black box and they did not know how it worked. At the moment, organisations like Facebook constitute the largest place where people begin their search for information every morning. Later in the day, they go to the *Daily Record*, *The Herald*, *The Scotsman*, *The Guardian* or the *Daily Mail,* but, first thing in the morning, they all go to Twitter and Facebook. How much control or oversight does the Scottish Parliament have over those platforms? Everybody is outraged at the fact that Donald Trump paid only $750 in tax. How much did Amazon pay? How much does Facebook pay?

That is the problem. People are looking in the wrong place. Right now, the influence is with those gigantic digital companies and huge platforms. That is where the current and next generations are getting all their information. The way to act as a bulwark against that is to look at our proposals. If, in some ways, this generation is gone, we need to get the next generation sized up, put seat belts in place, stop smoking and make them realise that journalism is a huge part of being a fully thinking citizen in a democracy. Scotland could lead on that.

Annabelle Ewing: Those were inspiring words; you have given the committee lots to think about.

Another colleague wants to focus on social media platforms in particular. Thank you for that, and thank you, convener.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests; I retain my membership of the NUJ and I am a paying member of *The Ferret*.

As Annabelle Ewing said, I am particularly interested in the role of social media platforms and everything that Eamonn O'Neill has just said. However, before I come on to that, I will stick with the issue of young people and their consumption of the media.

Eamonn's point about media education seems right. However, if we are talking about disinformation and the spreading of conspiracy theories, from my anecdotal experience and the largely American studies that I have read, it is not people of my age and younger who drive conspiracy theories; it is people who are middle-aged and older, who were regular consumers of traditional print media and, for a variety of reasons, no longer are or still are and are simultaneously helping to spread those conspiracy theories. Therefore, focusing media education solely on young people does not address the issue.

09:45

What do traditional media platforms offer young people? It is not just about hard news, although young people want that. Looking across the Scottish media landscape, I can think of almost no columnist who is under the age of 30. I can think of almost no one who has the generational experiences of my generation of precarious housing and precarious work. Where are the people who look and sound like that generation? I am interested in the witnesses' thoughts on what offering the traditional media—specifically our newspapers—need to make to young people, beyond hard news. That is absolutely the primary role, but what are your thoughts on having a media that looks like the generation that it needs to get buy-in from if it is to survive?

Joyce McMillan: There is a difference between theory and practice, and you are right that, in practice, many of the people who are writing wider coverage for our traditional media are in an older age group—there is absolutely no doubt about that. One thing that is important about traditional media, and which has not been very well captured in online media, is its power to attract people across subject areas. It is the serendipity effect: you flick through a newspaper, thinking that you are looking for a news story, but you find Fidelma Cook's column.

That aspect is interesting to me, particularly as an arts journalist. For the past 40 years, almost by some miracle, I have been a theatre critic in Scotland. Throughout that time, the power of newspapers to finance any kind of critical analysis of what is going on in our cultural scene has been dwindling, and so the number of colleagues that I have has also dwindled. That kind of cultural coverage is one example of an area in which young people can be drawn to media of any kind. If you are actively pursuing and looking for what is going on in the Scottish independent music scene, if it ever recovers from Covid, or in other areas of cultural life that mean a lot to young people, strong reviews and information about that from a Scottish perspective, for young people living in Scotland, will be attractive.

Therefore, one thing that will attract young people to coverage is not only having a younger generation of journalists involved and writing but writing about the wide range of subjects that young people are interested in. Cultural coverage is very important to young people and, in particular, critical coverage of the cultural phenomena that they enjoy is really important. It is an area of debate that often gets to the heart of the world view of each generation of young people as they come through.

Therefore, in the context of a Scottish initiative on the future of journalism, we could really debate how we retain that range of coverage. A generation or two ago, a traditional *The Scotsman*-style newspaper would have had a full-time education correspondent, a full-time agriculture correspondent, several people writing about culture, a full-time arts editor and a full-time books editor. It would have had a huge range of specialist fields that would have attracted a lot of different people, including young people, to begin to read the newspaper. Now that we are dealing with a vastly different, more varied range of platforms, it is interesting to discuss how we can retain that range of coverage, including coverage that really looks at the concerns of young people.

Ross Greer: I am interested in Eamonn O'Neill's or Peter Geoghegan's thoughts on the offering made to young people.

Peter Geoghegan: I will add to that, and will echo some of Ross Greer's points. A couple of years ago, I gave a talk at a college in the south side of Glasgow, and I introduced myself as coming from *The Ferret.* It was a room of 40 or 50 people who were interested in journalism, but most of them had not heard of *The Ferret*. Our profile is also skewed towards older people. Ross makes an important point but, when it comes to monetising journalism, the money side of it is older. Part of that is because older people have more disposable income and they have had asset bubbles and all the rest of it, but there is also a cultural thing about paying for journalism.

Another cultural thing that the Scottish industry in general has not got to grips with is that people want to see themselves reflected in the journalism that they consume. In Scotland, that is particularly difficult, because the older cohort are the subscribers, although that is not so much the case with *The Ferret;* we have small amounts of money available for young journalists, we try to encourage young journalists in and we have young journalists on the board. If you are a traditional publisher, the people who consume your content are older, so you end up constantly trying to keep them, so you have to produce more and more content that skews older. That is not only about columnists. Compared to the kind of stuff that younger people consume, we still have very traditional ways of telling stories in Scotland. Newspaper stories online will have very little video or integrated content, and very little high-quality content. We come back to the question of quality.

The internet has Americanised and flattened difference across the world, particularly in the English-speaking world. One problem that smaller outlets in Britain face is that we all speak English, so we can consume content from America. That is one reason why cultural phenomena, whether it is Black Lives Matter or television shows from America, can become really big thousands of miles away, because we are consuming the same content that is of a high quality and is compelling. Often, the offerings at a local level are not good enough.

The medium is an important part of the issue. We will not get young people to start buying newspapers, so we have to go and meet consumers where they are. At *The Ferret,* we have things such as a Snapchat channel and all that, which is important, but there is a need to go even further. I know from experience that a lot of entry-level jobs for new young journalists in Scottish newsrooms involve churning, as we say. It is churning out four or five stories a day by rewriting copy from the internet, which is not particularly going to appeal to people of their age group and it is not necessarily the content that they would produce. We are not empowering younger journalists with experienced editors to produce the kind of content that they would want. Some outlets do that well—*The Guardian* has been good on that—but we do not really seem to do that. That is part of the issue, too.

As we have all mentioned at some stage, a lot of people are interested in politics and political debate, but the balance between the power of politics and the power of the media, although there has always been a bit of a seesaw, has become incredibly weighted towards politics. For example,

in the wake of the 2014 referendum, a lot of people who were working and doing interesting stuff on the edges of media on the independence referendum ended up working for political parties or for the Government, because the Government and political parties had the money to pay for them when traditional media did not and did not have the foresight to think about how to bring in those new voices.

It is a pretty damning indictment that, six years on from the independence referendum, in which so many people, including me—I even wrote a book about it—talked about those new young voices coming through, there are almost no new or young voices at all in the Scottish media landscape.

Ross Greer: I am conscious of time, but does Eamonn O'Neill want to reflect on any of those points? I will address my second question specifically to him, picking up the issue of social media regulation.

Part of the challenge is that social media platforms are treated as a kind of lawful neutral and as a platform that provides other people's content, rather than being regulated in anything like the same way as media organisations or newspapers. The challenge is that social media platforms are massive international corporations that can bully individual nations into avoiding regulating them, and the nature of their platform makes them impossible to regulate at a nation level. In a Scottish context, how can we take on the incredible power of those massive corporations, given that they are dictating to a huge extent what the media landscape looks like now and what it will look like in 10, 20 or 30 years?

Eamonn O'Neill: The answer is horrifically simple: you just show how rubbish their journalism offerings are. Young Scottish kids are bright and have the potential to lead the world in any field that they go into, so why would they not be able to understand the qualitative difference between a load of old codswallop on Facebook and a piece of good Scottish journalism? It is fairly straightforward. The problem is that, if they spend all day flicking through Facebook and think that that is what the news is, they do not have a choice or an alternative. That is for all the reasons that Peter Geoghegan and Joyce McMillan just alluded to and those that I have been talking about: disinvestment, asset stripping and everything else.

The reason why we do not see any young voices is that, as Joyce alluded to, the jobs are not there. If we do not provide jobs for anyone, that means that we will also struggle with the next generation. I give an honourable mention to the BBC. It often takes a kicking from everybody—sometimes I contribute to that—but its graduate recruitment programme is fairly good. The BBC tracks those graduates and, in a positive discriminating way, goes out of its way to recruit people from different ethnic backgrounds, genders and so on.

In reality, Facebook is a publisher, which is interesting, because it enjoys all the privileges of being a publisher but has none of the responsibilities. Anybody else who is an editor of a newspaper has to hang their reputation on every story that they publish, whether it is a column, a sports report, a cultural review or a hard-hitting piece of public-interest journalism on the front page. If we have somebody running the whole show through an algorithm and delivering stories to people in a bespoke way, we end up with a lot of selfish consumers who think that they should get only the news that suits them, which is dangerous.

The Convener: Thank you. Have you finished your questions, Ross?

Ross Greer: I have more questions, but I am conscious of time. I am happy to come back in later.

The Convener: I will try to bring you back in later.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Before I start, I draw the committee's attention to the fact that members of my family own Shetland's only weekly print newspaper, although I have no interest, financial or otherwise, to declare in that respect.

You will therefore not be surprised to hear that I think that local newspapers make a valuable contribution to the economic and social life of communities. They are a reliable source of information and people have turned to them during the public health pandemic. Given their comprehensive cover of local news, social events, councils and courts, how can local newspapers continue to support a team of journalists to provide such information?

Joyce McMillan: It seems to me that, in the future, the experience of running local newspapers on a purely commercial basis might work in some communities—we certainly need to have a horses for courses approach—but there is a lot of evidence that the model whereby local news is provided through papers that are owned by big publicly quoted companies is beginning to fail. Newspapers being owned by family-owned companies is a different matter, as they have more of a local identity and are not primarily seen as a way of generating stock market-level media profits. There are also all the other models of public interest ownership that have recurred during the discussion.

One thing that the Scottish Government could do—perhaps without spending any money of its own, or spending only a little—is have a thorough reboot of the various mechanisms that there are for supporting local not-for-profit enterprises to ensure that they cover potential media organisations. I am thinking of a situation in which a local title with a long history is all but dead and a community might want to buy it out, in the same way that it might buy out the pub or local shop, if they were being abandoned by bigger owners, or a situation in which a community wants to start up a local newspaper of its own.

It would be really useful if the Scottish Government, with the support of members of the Scottish Parliament, were to have a thorough re-examination of all its mechanisms for supporting such community initiatives, so that journalism becomes considered a public community good that can be supported in that way. Perhaps that could be done by amending the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to make the role of supporting local news and information for communities a bit clearer.

10:00

The Scottish Government could act in various ways to support local news without intervening in the ownership or editorial processes. That could be done by providing a stronger legal framework—for example, by setting up an institution that could provide initial grants to such initiatives, with funding partly from the Government and partly from a range of other sources. It could also create a presumption that it is very much interested in supporting public interest news at local as well as national level, and that all its regulations in that area will be framed in such a way as to support such initiatives as much as possible. As well as supporting new initiatives, such an approach could give a brighter future to existing local newspapers, which have strong roots and are operated locally.

Beatrice Wishart: Would Peter Geoghegan like to respond to that?

Peter Geoghegan: Yes—I am happy to speak to that, too. The nub of the situation is that we have a large number of local newspapers, which we all realise are important. I am from a rural area, and I know how important my local newspaper was to the community, because it did a series of key jobs. It not only reflected the community back to itself but held the council to account and provided a forum for accurate information.

We can all see the benefit and value of such newspapers, and we can see what has happened through their loss. We are now seeing what are being called news deserts. Those have been written about very much in the American context, but I think that we could probably write about them in the British or Scottish context, too. In such places, newspapers disappear and people do not have access to reliable local information. In that world, they are simply replaced. That ties in with the earlier points about social media. In the absence of reliable information from local newspapers, social media platforms become not only a place where such information circulates, but a place that is filled with misinformation and disinformation and all the problems that go with those.

In Scotland, we have interesting examples of community ownership of newspapers being achieved, such as the *West Highland Free Press*. It is difficult to do that, and there is a need to facilitate the process. In some places, such as Shetland, local newspapers are family owned, which tends to mean that they are a bit more resilient.

However, the big problem is that in many areas we are seeing local newspapers that could operate quite well, and a case might be made for experimenting with them as not for profits, but they are expected to deliver returns and shareholder value. However, they are not capable of doing that, so they are cut further and further. The difficulty is that there have been cuts for 12 or 15 years now. Before that time, people could see a lot more value in their local newspapers.

Wherever I go, I buy a local newspaper. As I am sure everyone attending the meeting will have experienced, I have found variability in the quality of such newspapers: they range from being very good, interesting and informative to being very thin. That is because of that cutting process, which has also cut away communities and readers from their local newspapers.

There is a real need to consider ways in which newspapers could be supported to make the transition from being for-profit outlets to not-for-profit ones, and from being owned by multinational organisations to being owned locally. There are models for doing that, but they take time and creativity. Nevertheless, we need to consider how we might provide such support.

Beatrice Wishart: I will put my final question to Eamonn O'Neill first. If the Government should provide support for newspapers, how could we ensure that editorial independence remains?

Eamonn O'Neill: As has been done in other parts of the world, a firewall should be built into such plans, which would involve setting up the fund, the initiative and the panel that runs it. It should be ensured that there was absolutely no chance that anyone who received such help could see themselves as being compromised in any

way. At the end of the day, if you make something attractive to people, they will get involved in it.

When getting on a train or going into a lounge somewhere, I am struck to see free copies of *The Scotsman* kicking around. They lie there in bulk for people of a certain demographic to just grab and read on the train or wherever. They are just lying around, being given away. However, if you were to stand outside a high school at lunchtime, you would not see any kids walking out with a paper. They are all looking at their hand-held devices. There is no point in saying to them, "Buy a newspaper." That would be like saying, "Eat your broccoli"—a great idea, but, in reality, they are not going to do it unless it is made attractive and interesting.

I am down in the Borders, near Peebles. We have a thriving local newspaper, the *Peeblesshire News*, which does very well. It has young journalists. It covers all the stuff that one would expect. There are plenty of photographs of such things as the bonny baby competition or an interesting sheep. On the other hand, it has some good, hard-hitting news. Its journalists are engaged; they are out on the street and talking to people.

It also has a fantastic presence online. Not only does it have its own website, but the first place to go to it is on Facebook. If there is bad crash at a local junction or a helicopter doing the rounds, people have only to go on their phones straight away to see that the *Peeblesshire News* reporters are already turning to it on the website or the Facebook page.

That is where the future is. We should go to where the kids already are. In the old days, we had to sit back and wait for everything to come to us. Now, we have to go to the watering holes and the places where they already are.

The really good thing is that we know how to reach them. They already have what traditional legacy publishers sometimes see as the enemy: the digital device. That view is wrong. It is the opportunity, because they are already connected. It is just that, as Peter Geoghegan has said, they are going to the wrong places for their information, because nothing is available for them locally or nationally. None of the newspapers is reaching out. They are reaching out to the people who they think have money but not to the next generation.

Somebody once asked John F Kennedy why they should plant a tree, as it would take 100 years to reach maturity; he said that they had better hurry up and plant it, then. That is what I am saying: we should engage with younger people at primary school, at high school and even in universities, and get in there aggressively with the papers. We should also help them. If that seed is planted—trust me—it will bear fruit.

People will cross the desert on their hands and knees or go across broken glass to get information, but when they get there, the information turns out to be absolute rubbish—dangerous stuff from marginal groups who are technologically way ahead of what we are doing at the moment in Scotland.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I absolutely love my local paper. There are lots of good journalists across the constituency, which I am proud to represent.

The Dumfriesshire Newspaper Group, which produces the *Moffat News*, *Annandale Herald*, *Dumfries Courier* and *Annandale Observer*, is a family-owned group that, in my view, provides an excellent public service, with dedicated local journalists who care about their community. I think that they are doing a great job, and I am pleased that the witnesses recognise the importance of local journalism.

Talk about being online makes me worry. The group offers a very good online subscription model. The paper can be read as a PDF, it has a good website, which picks up on key stories every week, and it is active on social media. However, the problem with that small scale is in making it pay. If publishers are going to have good, original content, which is written every week, and a staff photographer who goes to local events to make sure that we have those nice pictures of sheep and so on, they have to have a way of paying for it; that revenue has to come in. Facebook and Twitter stuff does not pay, and putting adverts on a website—unless they are able to do it at scale, as some of the bigger groups are—just does not bring the revenue back in.

Are the witnesses open to a dual model in which some public money would support family-run newspapers for the public good element of what they do, particularly when it comes to training young journalists or covering announcements by local authorities for that real public interest?

Joyce McMillan: That is a very clear statement of the difficulties. It goes back to two of the points on the list of points that my branch sent in. The first relates to some kind of public interest news foundation. I hesitate to mention the Creative Scotland or Scottish Arts Council model, because that is not without its problems. However, if the Government was ever to put money towards support for family-owned newspapers that do a good job or for a not-for-profit model for local newspapers, as you have said, that support would very much have to be filtered through an institution with strong systems of governance that kept the

Government at arm's length from any kind of intervention or interference in the publications.

That is why we are thinking about a public interest news foundation, which is an idea that originates in "The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism". The report, which is about media across the UK, was written by Frances Cairncross a few years ago. She had a meeting with the cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop, while devising the report and, ever since, the cabinet secretary has expressed an interest in the idea of creating some kind of public interest news foundation or organisation.

We describe it as a "government-funded" news foundation in our submission but, following our discussions with various people over the summer, we have come to think that it would be better for it to have a mixed funding model, if that was possible, with elements of money coming from the Government, profitable major media organisations, and institutions and charitable trusts. That would enable the foundation to have a more balanced range of funding sources.

If we were able to set up such a foundation for Scotland, it could begin to develop an innovative range of policies, ideas and packages for supporting journalism in a national community of Scotland's size and in our local communities. Such a foundation could work in many areas, ranging from support for specific initiatives and for existing initiatives that are providing quality journalism, to supporting debate and educating the next generation.

The sixth point on the list in our submission is about subscription models. A subscription model could really help the local newspaper titles that Oliver Mundell has described, if people are willing to pay online subscriptions to get edited and well-produced news rather than just reading whatever arrives free on their Facebook feed. Giving young people an early experience of spending a bit of money on the news that they want to read, and providing an educational package to make them think about how they want to do that, would be a very important first step in changing the attitude of a generation that, up to now, has expected to get news free and has not been under any pressure to think about how it will use its own resources to commission and receive the news that it wants. A voucher scheme could play an important role in that.

Peter Geoghegan: I know that time is tight, but I want to reiterate that there are interesting international models that provide opportunities for support and do not just involve the state stepping in. In my submission, I mention local community for-profit newspapers, and the local aspect is really important. It is interesting that the local newspapers that have survived are often small family-owned newspapers that have tight connections to the communities that they are in. We need to support such newspapers, because they are important at a local level and because they provide a route by which new journalists and talent can be brought into the industry.

What happens a lot now—this is the supply side of it—is that journalists go from getting their degrees into jobs in the industry for a couple of years. Those jobs are unsatisfactory and they do not learn a hell of a lot, so they move out of the industry because it pays badly and they do not see any potential for progression. In a small place such as Scotland, as well as having a demand side set up, there is a real need for people to have a route into a stable career. Local newspapers can be an important part of that if they are done well and their people are employed in a decent place to work, and not one in which they are being pushed out of the industry.

10:15

Oliver Mundell: I definitely see that. Living and working in a community teaches attention to detail; you have to get the detail and the facts right. It is also about having to produce original content, because in an area such as the one I represent, you cannot just copy and paste off the BBC website because it is not in the community covering the stories that people are interested in.

My second question is about advertising. Government organisations at the national and local levels, including ones such as Transport Scotland and local authorities, seem to have pulled back from advertising in local papers, and instead put things on their own websites or try to push them out using other means. Does the panel feel that the public sector has a wider duty to advertise more in local papers, to help to ensure that they continue to be viable?

Joyce McMillan: Public sector advertising of various kinds plays a huge role in funding journalism in Scotland. There is a historical relationship between public advertising and the traditional players, particularly in Scottish local journalism, and there has been a lot of lobbying to maintain that. During the Covid crisis, there was a conversation between the Scottish Newspaper Society and the Scottish Government, which resulted in, I think, £3 million being allocated to maintain Government advertising spending in newspapers at various levels of journalism, including local newspapers. That is a historically strong relationship.

One point that we raised in our submission to the committee is that the Scottish Government should be more systematic in ensuring that, when it spends on advertising—which it is doing—that

public spending goes into all the different media sectors that we would like to see encouraged in a healthy media landscape. It should not be monopolised by certain big groups.

The evidence from the pandemic is that it is absolutely crucial to have a fair and well-balanced policy for the investment of public advertising in the media, and to make sure that that policy does not completely contradict what you are actually trying to do in developing a diverse media landscape. It is obvious that encouraging strong local newspapers that are really doing the job should be part of that.

Once again, there are issues around the policy being carried out at arm's length, transparently and in a way that the public understands, so it does not look like there is some kind of back-room deal between the Government and newspaper owners, which, obviously, is not attractive.

One quite interesting thing that happened under that heading during the pandemic was at the independent community news network at Cardiff University. It is run as part of the academic institution, but it brings together small-scale, hyperlocal community newspapers, which are often run on voluntary effort, from across the whole of the UK. During the pandemic, it did a deal with the UK and the Scottish Governments' advertising buyers to ensure that some of the advertising that is spent comes to very small and hyperlocal publications. The *Edinburgh Reporter*, for instance, which is a quite small, local, monthly publication, received a significant little dollop of Government spending for adverts during the pandemic that helped it to survive the situation it has been in.

It is possible for government at all levels to play an important role in supporting local media through advertising. However, it is important that it is transparent and that people understand the rules under which that is being done and the criteria that are applied.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I start by quoting that most reliable of sources: myself. We had a debate in Parliament on 31 October 2002 on broadcasting and the print media that covered a lot of what we have covered today. I said then:

> "Diversity of ownership is one of the things that underpins the diversity of opinion."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2002; c 11800.]

I want to explore the tension between journalism and proprietorship and editorship of publications, to see where we should redraw lines. Owners rarely operate in the public interest: they operate in their own interests while journalists, mostly, operate in the public interest.

To pick up on what Peter Geoghegan said earlier, I note that people want to see themselves reflected in what they read. I can think of three examples, from my life, of decisive changes. My mother used to buy a liberal newspaper that was taken over by the *Daily Mail* in 1964. The *Daily Mail* appeared in our house twice after that and was then banned sine die. She switched to the *Dundee Courier*. I stopped reading *The Scotsman* in April 1997, when Andrew Neil, who was its editor, inserted a single sentence in a full-page article that had been contributed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies about the Scottish National Party's financial proposals for the election. The IFS was annoyed about that, too. I stopped reading *The Economist* when, in 2012, there was a picture on the front page with the word, "Skintland". It did not relate to what was inside. You can identify lots of reasons to stop reading things. I spend £60 a month on newspaper subscriptions, but I read them all online.

I will go to Eamonn O'Neill first. By the way, it was Napoleon who talked about cheese and about the poplars along the military roads of Europe in the early 1800s. That is another story.

What is the academic view of the tension that is caused by proprietors who own big swathes of the industry and abuse their position? For example, the Competition and Markets Authority required Murdoch to keep *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* as separate publications but, in the recent past, guess what happened? They are now not separate. Their branding is the same as it was, but they are not separate. What role would Government play in ensuring greater diversity of ownership? That would help.

Eamonn O'Neill: I broadly agree that diversity of ownership is welcome. In theory, ownership should not matter. If owners followed ethically framed business practices, they would be hands-off with their newspapers and would leave editors to get on with it.

Papers have tended to succeed when editors have been given their head and been left alone to get on with it. I am thinking of *The Washington Post* in its heyday under Ben Bradlee and of the great Harold Evans, who died last week and was the editor of *The Sunday Times*. They were great journalists. The publishers stood back and backed them to the hilt: in one case it was on Watergate and in the other it was to do with Distillers Biochemicals and the thalidomide scandal, which members will recall. Those editors were left to get on with it.

Life is not always like that. We reflect and give you our tuppenceworth, but it is incumbent on people like you—you are the legislature, you are the politicians and you read—to make sure that, in the future, when somebody wants a publishing

venture up here, it is scrupulous. We cannot have, in essence, a vanity project for a very wealthy owner who can start to manipulate opinion right across the country. It could be done cross-border; a group that is based in England could easily, for its own political and economic purposes, be using its weight up here and pushing things in the direction that it wants to go in, which is not helpful to anybody.

There is a difficult tension, here. On one hand, we have a pluralistic press tradition in the UK, including in Scotland. It is interesting that Stewart Stevenson said that his mother liked a liberal paper—people often buy what reflects their life back to them. That is confirmation bias: we all do it—it is normal and it can be a healthy thing.

On the other hand, the more modern American model was very strict about ethics when it came to being seen to have clear blue water between ownership of the publication and the editorial line. That is why, for example, over here, you will rarely hear the term "ombudsman" referring to someone who works for a paper and whose job it is to examine the paper.

That is all solvable. The nature of Stewart Stevenson's question suggests a will for an ethical framework and keenness to make it happen. However, we have to do it in a very modern way—to go back to what Ross Greer picked up on, about manipulation. The people who are accessing the conspiracy sites most are people of Stewart Stevenson's generation, who are, no less than young people are, looking for simple truths in complex worlds. There are plenty of "simple truths" out there for them to choose from. They are the people who are accessing conspiracy sites.

That is why the Brexit vote and so on have been skewed in the direction of a certain demographic. It was not young people who were doing that, but older people—who should, arguably, know better. That is the problem. Do we get any wiser as we get older? If we are not given the right information and the right tools, what happens? We just end up making the same mistakes over and over again. We can circle back to where we began. Let us go easy on John F Kennedy. I am sure that he was not the first politician to steal a good quote.

Stewart Stevenson: I subscribe to *The Washington Pos*t, incidentally, and it is an excellent use of £7.92 per month.

Eamonn O'Neill: Interestingly, *The Washington Post* is owned by the richest man in the world, Jeff Bezos, who got it for a bargain at $250 million. He has been very hands-off in his approach, and the jobs that he has created are the jobs in public interest journalism that Peter Geoghegan, Joyce McMillan and I are talking about. He has hired people to scrutinise the very model that has made him all his money. It is interesting.

Stewart Stevenson: Indeed—and the columnists cover a wide range of political opinion, even though the editorial line is quite clear.

However, I want to ask Joyce McMillan for the view of the freelance office of the National Union of Journalists on whether ownership is too concentrated to support an effective media in the future.

Joyce McMillan: Given the industrial struggles of the past 30 or 40 years, the National Union of Journalists very much supports the view that there are flaws in the ownership model in the British media—certainly, in traditional newspapers. Many of the companies involved are a fundamental—[*Inaudible*.]—than they are in journalism. That tends to be the distinction between the publicly quoted companies and the privately owned companies—family-owned or Jeff Bezos-owned—that might be run by people who are interested in doing journalism regardless of the model of the organisation.

The difficulty that we are experiencing with local news in Scotland, for instance, is that many of the local newspapers are now owned by one of three or four large newspaper groups, which are run on a very harsh commercial model and are interested in very little beyond the bottom line. It is hard to detect any serious commitment to improving journalism in how those organisations are managed. That is very unfortunate, but we are constrained, and we would be constrained as an independent country within the EU, in how much we can interfere with market processes.

10:30

The NUJ would like Governments to support the people who want to be the change that we want to see. Frankly, I think that that will be much easier to do in Scotland than it would be in other places, because Scotland is a small country where issues tend to stand out more clearly, and there is a very strong tradition of journalism. I know that "be the change that we want to see" is an awful new-age slogan, but the fact is that we will achieve more by demonstrating how new kinds of media can work with more diverse patterns of ownership than we will just by moaning about the old patterns.

People like those who founded *The Ferret,* who are demonstrating a different model—in their case, a subscription and membership model—that can work better, are doing a better job of showing what the future might look like than the people who are simply critiquing the current situation.

Even when Governments are short of resources, they should be setting up structures

and frameworks that make it as easy as possible for people with limited resources to launch new media initiatives or to take over old media titles that are on the point of journalistic death because of the management model under which they have been run. Most of the points that we made in our written submission to the committee are about that. They are about creating a legislative, funding and institutional environment that is openly committed to public-interest journalism, and which sees such journalism as a collective good that Governments have a duty to support, just as they have a duty to support the arts. Governments should work hard at creating legislative and other administrative frameworks that make it as easy as possible for communities or groups of journalists to launch that kind of initiative.

There are so many models of how journalism can work in the world. We all know that *The Guardian* is owned by a trust and not by a commercial owner, as is *The Irish Times,* which is a major national newspaper that operates in a country that has a smaller population than Scotland and is of a kind that we do not currently have. Such models of ownership are available, if there is a legislative and policy environment that supports them.

The Scottish Government has an opportunity—not to intervene directly in journalism in a way that none of us would want, but to create an environment of debate and institutional support. It can do so not only by providing financial support, but by encouraging other bodies to provide financial support in a focused way.

Creating a new kind of journalism that does better than the models that Stewart Stephenson criticised is the way forward, because it will attract readers and a younger generation of consumers of journalism, which is what we want.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you, Joyce. You will be pleased to know that I read *The Irish Times* every day, although I do not pay for it. I also read *The Copenhagen Post,* which is Copenhagen's daily paper. I use Google to translate it into English.

I would now like to go to Peter Geoghegan and pick up on something that happened on Ronald Reagan's watch. When he was President of the United States, he abolished the rule that broadcasters had to be unbiased in their politics, and that built the platform that created the obscenity that is Fox News today. To what extent is ownership and partisanship within it at the root of the disconnect that now exists between people who want to consume serious media and the providers of it?

Peter Geoghegan: I will follow on from a couple of points that Joyce McMillan made.

What is interesting is that Scotland has very hard-nosed, for-profit ownership that I think does not really care about what happens politically in Scotland. That makes Scotland very open to vanity publishing by owners who have particular agendas. It also means that the Scottish media landscape is weak and the potential for a hostile environment exists. However, it has not really been capitalised on at all. The problem that we have with ownership is with the more laissez-faire owners who do not really care how their business works and look only at their bottom line.

A wider problem exists in relation to people such as Rupert Murdoch. It looks as though we might be entering an age in which regulators like Ofcom could come under much more scrutiny and more pressure in order to reduce the level of impartiality. There are reasons to be concerned about that, but it is important to separate out what proprietors want. In the British media landscape, the big players are the group that owns the *Daily Mail*; Reach, which owns the *Daily Record*, the *Daily Mirror* and many others; and Rupert Murdoch. We can see a difference in those owners' politics and interests, so it is important to figure out how all that works.

There is an issue relating to what newspapers and what proprietors want. There is a real danger that that could feed into the broadcasting side, which would be a dangerous way to go. We would end up with some of the historical issues that we have had with print papers, even if—[*Inaudible*.]—into the broadcasting environment. That matters because broadcasters are much more trusted than newspapers, even online. People trust not only the BBC, but broadcasters in general. British people's opinions of broadcast news are much higher than their opinions of print journalism, whereas, in America, there is a much deeper lack of trust in both. We should not water down impartiality in broadcasting, because it is needed now more than ever.

As a journalist who has worked under and not under Ofcom, I know that the Ofcom rules for journalism can be stringent, but they are very good, because they force people to engage to ensure that all—[*Inaudible*.] Ofcom is not like regulators such as the Independent Press Standards Organisation, which allows newspapers to issue a mealy-mouthed apology on page 50 and get away with it. Ofcom has teeth and can damage broadcasters, so they are very aware of it. There is a real danger that reducing such regulation will reduce the quality of journalism, even outside the proprietor question.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I noted with interest that Peter Geoghegan's submission says that the

"UK government initiatives to help journalism have primarily focused on providing stealth public support to traditional publishers."

Eamonn O'Neill's submission says that state intervention solutions could provide

"tax cuts for certain digital news organisations ... Diversity of ownership and editorial voices must be encouraged."

Those points have already been covered, to an extent.

Everyone talks about the need for a windfall tax model, which I have raised in the chamber. How can we square the circle by providing the support that is required for publishers that represent local communities but which have not had significant profits in previous years, without, frankly, getting an enormous backlash from newspapers that feel that they should also get a share of the pie? We would be hugely criticised by what we might call the mainstream media if we were seen to be supporting some publishers and publications but not others.

I ask Peter Geoghegan to kick off, because I am very interested in his comments on "providing stealth public support".

Peter Geoghegan: It is not necessarily a matter of picking winners on such an issue. However, an interesting case can be made for encouraging larger publishers to move into much smaller community ownerships and to divest some of the interests that they do not want and are not profitable for them. Historically, media initiatives have not done that; they have just shored up the bottom line of traditional publishers. In part, that is because traditional publishers are much better at lobbying Government and are able to use their publication as a mouthpiece to make the case that they want. That is perfectly reasonable; people do that. However, such interventions have not worked at all for the kind of ownership models and publications that we end up spending a lot of time talking about and which are really important for democracy—the big D word—which we all feel is under threat. Such publications have pretty much not been able to avail themselves of those interventions—full stop.

There are ways in which Governments can help large newspapers, such as through advertisements. The Government can reasonably decide to spend X amount of money with large media, saying, "We want to reach that audience, so here are advertisements." However, targeted intervention to promote public interest and original journalism and support local communities has not worked, and engagement with the big media organisations and attempts to get that to filter down have not worked.

There is a compelling case for doing something different to promote diversity and plurality, and it is not that hard to imagine creative solutions that would encourage large media organisations to go down that route. That is a matter of drafting more than it is a matter of saying that options are open only to some people. There is a need to separate things out and say, "This has not worked in the past, so what can we do that could work and which would promote that kind of plurality?"

Eamonn O'Neill: As Joyce McMillan mentioned, if there is a way that Government can make it easier for new media entities to begin, build and launch, that would be part of the way forward. I am all for stealth intervention and support; I understand the concept—I get it. The Government has to square that with getting a thumping from the publishers if they do not get a cheque in the post but other people do.

We have to come up with a model that rewards people who have a plan that is different from what is currently on offer. There is no point in supporting something that is in decline, only to find out that most of the support—whether by stealth or otherwise—goes, in some shape or form, into the pockets of the publishers, who are happy to run that model in a cheeky, asset-stripping way, because, hitherto, that is what they have always done.

I am reminded of Henry Ford saying that, if he had asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse, not a car. In some ways, that is where we are. People are looking at a different generation that uses different devices and means to access the news, but then wondering why there is a decline in paper sales. The owners of the publishers are not investing in or coming up with new models fast enough to replace the one that they have. Why is that? It suits them not to, because they are still making profits.

I go back to what your colleague was saying about diversity of ownership. I am all for stealth support and advertising, but we have to have a break with the past as well and support new media organisations, such as *The Ferret*. I am with Talk Media, which is building from the ground up. My students come up with the most innovative ways to tackle portals with no money, and they do it better than a lot of the local newspapers do, because they are being encouraged to do so. As Peter Geoghegan said, many local newspapers are all about churnalism; they are not getting the impetus, vision, enthusiasm and backing from the top down. Why is that? Well, why would they get it, given that, financially, the owners are doing nicely out of the current creaky situation?

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you. I am interested in the fact that the UK Government accepts recommendation 4 of the Cairncross report, on

"developing a media literacy strategy",

which it plans to publish by "the summer of 2020". Obviously, Covid is likely to have kicked that into touch. It also supported recommendation 6, which is that

> "The government should launch a new fund focused on innovations aimed at improving the supply of public-interest news, to be run by an independent body".

The report was published a year ago and those recommendations were accepted, and Covid did not take off until March. What progress has been made to take forward those recommendations and deliver them at a UK level?

Joyce McMillan: Staff in the NUJ's London office, who would be happy to give evidence to the committee about the situation at the UK level, would know more about that than me, but my impression is that that work has been put on pause. I do not know how much enthusiasm there would be for the substance of those proposals at the UK level, given the fact that a strong lobby in the Tory party is somewhat opposed to media education, because they see it as a—[*Inaudible*.]—and think that people should study more traditional subjects. I am not sure that there has been much progress at the UK level.

At the Scottish level, the cabinet secretary had discussions with Frances Cairncross during the writing of her report. The cabinet secretary is setting up a short-term working group on public interest news in Scotland. We in the NUJ had a chat with her yesterday, and she said that she would be happy to see the NUJ represented on that group.

10:45

We would push for two things to support public interest news at the Scottish level. First, as Eamonn O'Neill and Peter Geoghegan both said, we want an environment in which there can be public support for new news initiatives that tend towards the production of quality journalism on a more diverse ownership basis.

Secondly, that support should be provided at arm's length, through an institute or foundation for public interest news. That would take any flak away from the Government when there were funding decisions about which media projects to support. The governance and composition of how such a foundation was run would be a subject of much debate, but you could develop a robust, arm's-length system of governance for such a foundation, which could make decisions about which innovative media projects to support. That would free Government ministers from the charge that they were manipulating the media to suit themselves.

It is worth considering the idea of a public interest news foundation that would do some of that work, and certainly worth considering the idea of re-shaping the legislative and charitable status environments and all the other rules and regulations in order to make life as easy as possible for new media initiatives.

To add to the more robust point that Eamonn O'Neill made, if old news media that have failed to adapt to the changing landscape do not like that, that is to too bad. We need a new and more diverse media landscape that finds the money to pay journalists to do serious journalism. If Government can intervene creatively in that—and in arm's-length ways that do not open it up to the accusation that it is funding media bodies to support itself—Government should do that. There is the potential in Scotland to do it in interesting and creative ways that would make a genuine difference to our media landscape.

Kenneth Gibson: Eamonn O'Neill used an excellent analogy: don't buy a car—just get a horse to try running faster. That is an interesting way to look at it.

I will pursue the issue of a possible foundation. There could be controversy about who funded that, how much funding it got and what its geographic spread might be. I represent Ayrshire. Would each area of Scotland have equal access such resources? That does not happen with arts funding. How big a resource would realistically be needed to establish such a foundation? It would need significant funding, and that funding would have to be long term and not a one-off. What kind of annual resourcing are we talking about? Has that been considered?

Joyce McMillan: I do not want to give the impression that we have done any detailed research into that. Our submission comes from one NUJ branch that has no research or administrative resources.

There are international examples of ways in which Governments have supported journalism. In the Nordic countries and in France, there is traditionally strong Government support for local journalism. We could look at the scale of those operations and at how they work if we were seriously going towards that kind of model. The cabinet secretary's working group on public interest journalism might be able to look more closely at those international analogies.

Let me use the Creative Scotland analogy. Overall, through both lottery and direct Government funding, Creative Scotland spends about £60 million a year. A new initiative probably would not spend anywhere near that initially. However, if a similar sum were to be considered a long-term aspiration for such an intervention, it could be quite transformative in the current Scottish media scene, although it would have to

be administered carefully. As you have said, there would be 101 controversial decisions to make about the governance of any body that would actually disburse that money. I really do not think that it should be disbursed directly by the Government; having some kind of body to spend it would be almost essential.

However, even if there were no direct funding to invest—if we were talking about only a couple of million quid raised from a range of different sources initially—I still think that establishing such a foundation would be an important gesture. It could provide a key focal point for a discussion about the future of the media in Scotland and the aspiration that we all have for there to be the kind of media that support active and well-informed citizenship. It could also be a focus for educational activity on the subject, whether that would be aimed at young people or, as has been suggested, older age groups, who might need it just as much.

There is therefore a lot to be said for founding such an institution even if, initially, it did not have much in the way of funding. I hope that it could also have a mixed funding model that could take some of the burden off the Government.

Kenneth Gibson: I agree that we should take that forward. Thank you.

Peter Geoghegan: I add that some cost-neutral things could be done. As I mentioned in my submission, those include making public interest journalism a charitable good, which would require a change of rules as far as the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator is concerned. That is not the only suggestion; other options could form part of that package. We think that there are ways that could really help the sector and which do not have to cost the earth.

Kenneth Gibson: I see that that aspect is mentioned in section 3 of your submission, which is very helpful.

The Convener: We move to our final questioner, who is Dean Lockhart.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Good morning, panel. This has been a fascinating discussion. We are against the clock slightly, so I will put only one question to the panel. We have heard a lot about financing structures, ownership models, subscription models, a new approach to advertising and the creation of a new body to oversee the sector. However, I want to come back to the subject of local newspapers.

From a democratic perspective, what should be the role of local newspapers? Should they be platforms for local campaigns and champions for their communities and aim to hold various levels of government to account? For example, in the area that I represent, the *Stirling Observer* is a great local champion and runs a number of campaigns in the area. Does the panel see those as still being the fundamental purposes of local newspapers, or should they be doing more than displaying those core competences? Perhaps Joyce McMillan could answer first, then we could move to Peter Geoghegan and Eamonn O'Neill.

Joyce McMillan: Far be it from me to tell the editors of local newspapers how to run them. In the context of a viable economic model—one that can afford a journalistic team—running a good local newspaper is probably one of the most rewarding jobs in the world, because you get immediate feedback, have a close relationship with the community and are really doing the business that journalism exists to do.

Of course, news is important. It is interesting that, in the currently fragile state of British journalism, a small intervention such as the BBC local democracy reporting service can still have a big impact. Few groups of local newspapers in Scotland will not have benefited from that, and from once again having a journalist—usually a youngish one—whose job it is to report on the local council, put in the time on covering its meetings and follow up on the news stories that result from the good ones, which members will know are tremendously rich sources of news.

We are politicians and journalists who are interested in politics, so we tend to talk a lot about political news, hard news and events news, but as I said before, one of the key roles of local media, and all good media, is to try to cover the whole range of life that goes on in an area. Coverage of arts and cultural activities, such as reviewing the local operatic society doing its thing, is terribly important, as is coverage of non-political events such as local festivals and bonny baby competitions, as Eamonn O'Neill said. The richness of community life, which is not just about politics but is about culture, sport, local sporting achievements and the local environment—which is an ever more salient issue as people begin to concern themselves with preserving biodiversity in their local area—can and should all be covered by a good local newspaper.

It obviously costs money to have a professional journalist cover those areas. The effort at the moment, at this turning point in the history of journalism, is to try to unleash resources that can pay people to do those jobs. It is an area—like the arts—in which people tend to love their work, so they do not want huge salaries. Only the people in the head office get huge salaries; journalists on the ground are quite happy if they can make a decent living and get their job done. Unleashing money from the new media landscape is the task that is in front of us; we have to think of inventive and genuinely 21st century ways of doing that.

Dean Lockhart: That is fantastic. Thank you. I ask the same question of Peter Geoghegan and Eamonn O'Neill.

Peter Geoghegan: I will follow up on some of Joyce McMillan's points. We have talked today about the decline of the press, and we have talked about young people's access to news. Young people, and people in general, consume far more journalism than ever before. We all consume more content, so there are huge opportunities to engage people and not just to keep doing the things that we did before. We can and should continue to do those things, because we want to keep the roles of a committed local press and public-interest journalism, which are really important. We have an opportunity to teach people about democracy, active citizenship and engagement. Lots of opportunities come from the current journalistic model—especially once you lose the idea that it is something that happens once a week or once a day, as it does in a printed edition.

There are community development aspects. At *The Ferret*, we do a lot of training. It is, increasingly, in the virtual world, but we also do it in the real world.

There are opportunities for journalists to become much more embedded in their communities, which is what many journalists want to do. That speaks to the point that Joyce McMillan made about finances. A lot of journalists want to be beat journalists who are embedded in the communities in which they operate, and they want to be part of those communities. That has benefits for communities, because it allows people to engage with the skills that journalists have, and it allows skills to transfer between journalists and their communities.

There is an interesting initiative in Bristol called *The Bristol Cable*, which is run by another co-operative in not-for-profit journalism. It does a huge amount of local engagement. I think that it has more than 2,000 paying members and it holds regular annual general meetings and other meetings. It has people going into the community to teach skills—there is a skills transfer. For journalists who are trying to do original news, that is where great stories and good-quality journalism come from. It is about moving away from being stuck behind a desk, and instead getting out into communities to engage with people—although some of that can be done virtually. Community engagement drives a lot of strong journalism.

There is the opportunity not to consider that all that we are seeing is terrible, because people are consuming content. We must consider how to meet and engage them where they are, and we must, as journalists and people who want to support journalism, think about whether we have the skills to improve citizenship and to create the outcome of people being more engaged in the democracy in which they live.

Dean Lockhart: Great stuff. Thank you, Peter.

Eamonn O'Neill: At a time when, in relation to the pandemic, the Government is encouraging people to download an app, we find ourselves trying to work out why a newspaper business model that was invented nearly 200 years ago is failing.

If you had £10 million right now, what kind of newspaper would you build? The answer is that you would not do that. You would put it online and have a print edition once or twice a week, if you were lucky. You would offer something that was relevant and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Peter mentioned being embedded in the community, which is about the community coming to you with news as well as going out and looking for it.

The reality is that most citizens in Scotland know their Amazon delivery person better than they know their local journalist. Stop and think about that. Why is that? Are the publishers delivering something that is fit for purpose in the 21st century? I would say no; the models that we have are completely outdated, so trying to plug the holes in them will not help anybody in the long term—or, even, in the medium term.

We need radical intervention and we need to come up with a new way of skinning the cat, to put it bluntly. That will involve everything from engaging with the publishers and encouraging them, maybe with—[*Inaudible*.]—to come up with new ways of doing things and innovating. That is the way forward.

There is no use subsidising something that has already been proved not to work. I would be open to asset stripping very easily and quickly in a constant and continuous way. I am all in favour of making a brand new model, and of encouraging younger people and engaging with them at their level, using the tools that they already have. It has been proved to work—Peter mentioned it. It is already happening in places in the United States, which is always the bellwether for this stuff, and it can be done here. We are in the position right now to help—[*Inaudible*.]—you are the guys with the tools and the money.

Dean Lockhart: That is fascinating stuff. I thank Eamonn O'Neill and the rest of the panel for their answers.

The Convener: I have questions that I would like to ask, but we have run over time, which is perhaps inevitable when you put nine politicians and three journalists in a virtual room together. It has been a fascinating discussion.

I thank the witnesses for their written and oral contributions. The committee will consider the evidence in private shortly. That concludes the public part of the meeting.

11:02

Meeting continued in private until 11:34.

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