EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 20 January 2010

Session 3

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EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2010, Session 3

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
*Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)
*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Professor Neil Blain (University of Stirling)
David Hutchison (Glasgow Caledonian University)
Alan Stewart (Office of Communications Scotland)
James Thickett (Office of Communications)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Nick Hawthorne

ASSISTANT CLERK

Emma Berry

LOCATION

Committee Room 5

Scottish Parliament

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 20 January 2010

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): Good morning. I open this second meeting in the new year of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee and remind everyone present that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off for the duration of the meeting. I have received apologies from Claire Baker and Margaret Smith, who are both running late.

Agenda item 1 is to agree to take item 3, which is consideration of the committee's work programme, in private. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Local Newspaper Industry

10:00

The Convener: Item 2 is the committee's continuing consideration of the Scottish local newspaper industry. I am pleased to welcome Professor Neil Blain, head of film, media and journalism at the University of Stirling; David Hutchison, visiting professor in media policy at Glasgow Caledonian University; James Thickett, director of market research and market intelligence at the Office of Communications; and Alan Stewart, head of broadcasting and telecoms at Ofcom Scotland. Thank you all for joining us this morning and for your written submissions in advance of the meeting.

I move straight to questions. You will be aware that, last week, the committee heard directly the views of newspaper publishers about the future of the newspaper industry in Scotland. We started off by asking them about circulation. Newspaper circulation in Scotland has been falling for a considerable time; that is not a new phenomenon. It appears that the fall in circulation has been greater for some newspapers than it has been for others. Why is newspaper circulation in Scotland falling?

David Hutchison (Glasgow Caledonian University): Is that a general question?

The Convener: Yes.

David Hutchison: We all probably agree on the various factors that are hurting newspapers—I referred to some of them in my submission. For example, the young, who are not overrepresented here this morning, do not seem very interested in reading newspapers; there is competition from the internet; and there is cyclical pressure from the recession.

As far as local newspapers are concerned, the quality of the product is an issue that needs to be addressed. If you look at the statistics even quickly, as I have done—I noticed that Mr Johnston commented on my statistics at last week's meeting—you will see that there are remarkable variations. It is striking that some local papers have suffered a 20 per cent decline in the past few years whereas some have suffered a much smaller decline. Interesting and serious questions should be asked about the quality of the journalistic product, how well it engages with its community and the investment in journalism as opposed to other ways in which the revenue might be spent. I do not have the answers at the moment. I would love to see someone do serious work looking at different papers in different parts of

Scotland and trying to relate what has been happening to circulation to the kind of papers that they are and the kind of communities that they serve, and how the two interact.

Professor Neil Blain (University of Stirling): It is worth adding that there is a danger of a vicious cycle: where resources are squeezed, quality diminishes further, which impacts on revenue. It is a dynamic situation.

James Thickett (Office of Communications): Newspaper circulation decline is not a new thing, as the convener said. If you look at the statistics, you will see that both local and national newspapers in Scotland have been in decline since the 1970s. The cover price has gone up correspondingly.

What we have seen in the past year is a much steeper rate of decline. For instance, the circulation of *The Scotsman* was down by 6 per cent in 2009 and the circulation of *The Herald* was down by 8 per cent. Those are much steeper declines than before. We might be seeing a cyclical effect, in that people are less inclined to spend money on their local newspaper. We are also seeing an increase in the number of readers per local newspaper.

On why there is a long-term decline, as Professor Hutchison said, younger people are less inclined to see local newspapers as their first source of local news. Our statistics show that, in Scotland, fewer than 30 per cent use local newspapers as their main source of local news—for most people, it is television. The increasing choice of local media, and television channels in particular, has contributed to the long-term decline.

The Convener: Last week, we touched on the issue of how much advertising space is taken up in newspapers. We will come to the issue of advertising revenue. I am particularly interested in how much of a local newspaper is advertising and how much is new information for the people who pick it up. What pressures is the newspaper industry under? Is the drive to obtain advertising potentially threatening the quality and quantity of information in our newspapers?

James Thickett: In our review of local media, we did not find any evidence that advertising was crowding out quality content. In fact, there is a lot of evidence that advertising is one of the reasons why people buy a local newspaper. It accounts for a much bigger proportion of local newspapers' revenues than it does of national newspapers' revenues, which come largely from the cover price. One of the reasons why people buy their local newspaper is that they want to know about local businesses, property, motors and jobs.

On the content, we found that, over the past few years, with the freedom of information legislation, it has been much easier for local newspapers to get information from public bodies, which has perhaps resulted in a decline in the more investigative type of journalism. Public bodies and companies are becoming much more savvy about the way in which they present themselves to the public. For instance, we have seen an increase in the communications resources of local authorities in particular, which has changed the nature of reporting in some local newspapers. We also believe that there has been a move towards more lifestyle and leisure features in local newspapers. However, it is hard to get an across-the-board picture. Our analysis has been done by looking at different time points and different newspapers. It is more about a change in the nature of content than about a trade-off between content and advertising.

David Hutchison: Advertising has always been fundamental to the local paper. As James Thickett said, it has a valuable social function. The figures that we academics tend to work on are that national and regional tabloids, such as the *Daily Record*, get 50 per cent of their revenue from advertising, for broadsheets such as *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*, *The Times* and *The Independent*, the figure is 70 per cent, and for local press it is 70 per cent. The dependence of the local press on advertising is substantial. I hope that nobody loses sight of the fact that, even in these difficult times, if you look at the percentage of revenue that goes to profits, you will see that the chain newspaper companies are doing not too badly. Only a few years ago, 30 per cent of revenue was profit. Marks and Spencer had a very good year three years ago when 9 per cent of its revenue was profit. Even today, the latest figures that I have seen suggest that some of the companies, some of whose representatives you have spoken to, are still making rather good returns.

Although we have a decline, the situation is not yet desperate; it will become desperate if the decline does not stop. However, although the local paper industry in Scotland is not as profitable as it once was, it is still very profitable. It is profitable because there is a certain amount of advertising that, until recently, could go only to local papers. That is what has made them so attractive to chains on the acquisition trail, both here and in other countries such as the United States.

The Convener: Have publishers managed to get right the balance between dividends for shareholders, remuneration for directors and resources for journalism? When the National Union of Journalists spoke to the committee last week, it expressed concern about the increased pressure to which the journalists whom it represents are subject. Journalists are now

expected not only to write and search out stories but to write up advertising features. The NUJ does not believe that the balance is as good as it could be.

David Hutchison: In the past, publishers have not got the balance right and have been far too profitable. More money could have been spent on journalism, and there would still have been excellent returns for shareholders and reasonable remuneration packages for chief executives, some of whom have done extraordinarily well on the local newspaper scene in Scotland and elsewhere.

The NUJ's comments are accurate, but measuring these matters is tricky. We will get to the issue of local government advertising. In my view, if the newspaper industry is asking, in effect, for the continuation of public revenue, there must be a discussion about journalistic resources. All the evidence that one gets—not just from the NUJ but anecdotally from people who have worked in the industry—indicates that, in the past 10 years or so, there has been a drive to cut down on journalism and journalists and to ask people to do a great deal more work. The question is whether that has passed the point of what is reasonable.

Professor Blain: The other question is what we can do about it. We are quite unlikely to get consensus on the matter between the NUJ and the proprietors. There is little doubt that the ideal model of the local, paid-for weekly newspaper that most of us have must be sufficiently well resourced to allow traditional functions such as investigative reporting to be taken seriously. I take the point that people read local newspapers for advertising but, anecdotally, over a long period, a number of people report disappointment at the loss of hard news and investigation in local newspapers.

There is no doubt that the dividends and remuneration to which you refer are at odds with greater journalistic and editorial resourcing at local level. The evidence is quite variable. Clearly, newspapers with adequate investment in journalistic and editorial resource still exist—there is a considerable spectrum. Circulation is one thing—we look at that all the time—but there is also revenue, in which there has been a sharp decline. The two are obviously linked. Proprietors will point to the fact that revenue is down, which makes things much harder. Revenue is down for a number of reasons. One can speculate, but it is difficult to know how to influence a product that comes from public limited companies and so on.

The Convener: In an earlier answer, Mr Thickett mentioned that young people, in particular, are looking to source local news in different ways. Some local newspapers have invested considerably in websites and in sharing web-based information. At the same time, however, publishers have indicated a problem in that they are competing in that web marketplace with the BBC, which, in their view, has limitless resources to put into its website. They believe that there is an unfair balance. What do you think of the local newspapers' move towards using the internet? Have they got that right? Could they have done anything differently?

10:15

Professor Blain: I will draw a comparison with the experience of national and regional newspapers. It is difficult to derive a satisfactory business model for moving from print to the internet; everyone knows that. It is true in other countries, and it has been known in the United States for some time. A lot of advertising is lost to other internet sources. It is probably all the more difficult—at least in theory—for local newspapers to move to the internet, as everyone is finding it quite difficult.

Johnston Press plc is currently experimenting with using pay walls, and we have heard rumours that various larger news organisations are thinking of doing the same. It is still difficult to make predictions. One worries about a growing news gap for a variety of reasons, not only because the newspaper readership does not transfer whole from print to the internet, but because of the way in which people use the internet—they browse and graze.

Local newspapers are a specialised instance of a general newspaper problem, which is the absence of a really good business model in this area. It is not that anyone doubts that transferring to the internet must be done, because print is not really working for people. We should not get carried away, as I do not think that we have yet lost a paid-for weekly Scottish newspaper, but the writing is on the wall, as it were. It sounds paradoxical. There is not a great model for the continuation of print journalism in its present form, but neither is there one for the internet. There is not a happy solution.

James Thickett: Local newspapers came to the internet relatively late in comparison to national newspapers, because the consumer profile of local newspapers tends to consist of older people who are less likely to have internet access. However, it is imperative that the internet now forms part of those newspapers' business models.

We are finding from research that a very small proportion of people use the internet as their main source of local news. In Scotland, that proportion is less than 3 per cent, whereas 28 per cent use local newspapers. People use the internet as a supplement. Around 56 per cent said that they use websites for local news on a weekly basis, largely

to supplement other forms of local news. As internet penetration goes up, that figure is likely to get higher. According to the most recent figures, internet penetration in Scotland stands at around 62 per cent, which is around 8 percentage points behind the rest of the UK. To some extent, the Scottish local newspaper industry has been insulated from the impact of the internet, whereas some other parts of the UK have felt it much more keenly.

In the future, the newspapers will have to cater for people who want to find their local news on the internet. The big challenge, not only for local newspapers in Scotland but for the newspaper industry around the world, is to find the right business model.

The Convener: It strikes me that local newspapers are often very good at campaigning on issues. My local newspaper certainly does so quite regularly. It views itself as a local champion and wants to stand up for its readers. When it believes that there has been an injustice—whether it involves the local council, the Scottish Government or a private company—it is willing to run with that campaign. It has been suggested to me that, if there is a greater reliance on one particular news medium, such as television, it will not be so easy to get into the local issues. The BBC and STV might cover a one-off story about a set of school closures in a certain area or an accident and emergency unit closing, for instance, but there will not be a sustained campaign on television like the campaigns that local newspapers are often able to maintain. The newspapers will have a commitment and will not be willing to let the issue drop. Is that true? Do you agree that we might lose something if local newspapers do not do such work?

David Hutchison: That is a fair point. You could legitimately argue that chain ownership can be helpful. A locally owned local newspaper could find a story that might prove very embarrassing for a local business, for example, and it might hesitate, whereas chain ownership can provide support to a local newspaper editor in such situations. There is a famous example in the north of England involving a wrongful conviction for murder. An editor pursued the matter, which must have made him very unpopular, but his employer supported him.

We return to the issue of having enough journalists to do the job. All kinds of investigation take time and money, and they sometimes lead nowhere.

We must also be clear about the distinction between local and regional. With no offence to my colleague, I think that Ofcom sometimes conflates the local and the regional. In Scotland, *The Herald*, the *Daily Record*, and *The Scotsman* are national papers, and STV is a national not a local broadcaster. It is regional in UK terms but national in Scottish terms. The local press is the papers that do not come out more than once a week. When people are asked about their sources of local information, it is important that they understand that they are being asked about areas with a radius of about 10 miles; they are not being asked about the whole of central Scotland. Sometimes the distinction is lost in discussions about where people get local news.

Professor Blain: Your point can be put even more strongly, convener. We might consider the possibility of areas of invisibility opening up around local matters. There is a spectrum. Discussions are already going on at the regional level within Scotland.

It is a paradox that many people who take an optimistic view of the internet and the digital world in general say that, given the amount of bandwidth, it should create much more space—literally and metaphorically—that can be used for local communities, yet much of the digital world is taken up by the same kind of repetitive products that are often produced in metropolitan centres or with a metropolitan consciousness. It is easy for localities to get lost in that world. One takes the point about campaigning, which is true, but the issue can be broadened out.

The local newspaper has a crucial function. There are some areas that are not covered at all if they are not covered by local papers. David Hutchison has effectively just redefined the different elements of national, regional and local, but this is a Scottish question and a regional question inside Scotland—and it is also a local question.

James Thickett: I agree with everything that has been said. We believe that local newspapers are an essential part of the local media ecology, not only because of their campaigning role but because they act as a training ground for journalists who go on to work in the national press, television or radio. That is an important, core role of local newspapers.

Alan Stewart (Office of Communications Scotland): David Hutchison's point about the distinction between the local and the regional is well made, and Ofcom grapples with it quite a bit. When we do our deliberative research and hold workshops with small samples of people, we try to delve into that to some depth. We try to tease out what the Scottish national, regional and truly local interests are. I accept that it is quite a difficult area because the definitions mean different things to different people, but we do try to tease out the truly local interests.

The Convener: That is a key point. I cannot imagine most of my constituents who want to know what community activity is happening in Airdrie and the surrounding villages ever going to the BBC website to find that information. They would never dream of it. They might just about look at the *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser* website, but they are much more likely to pick up a copy of the paper and read that because they know that it is a reliable source of information and they will get a good picture of what is happening in their community. If that paper is not there to provide that information, I am not sure who would provide it. That would make our communities weaker because we would not know what is happening and would not be able to share such information, good, bad or indifferent as it sometimes is.

Professor Blain: Of course, if the BBC website covered that kind of material, local newspaper proprietors would be upset; we have heard that sort of debate already. Ergo, the BBC will continue not to do that on the assumption that the *East Kilbride News*, the *Hamilton Advertiser* and the *West Highland Free Press* will continue to exist. The problem is that if the existence of local newspapers in an area is threatened and a large national broadcaster does not provide that kind of local coverage, that will leave a very large gap.

James Thickett: As members probably know, a couple of years ago, the BBC applied to set up a local video service across the UK, which would have meant 60 separate online video services. The BBC trust and Ofcom rejected the application on market impact grounds.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I want to ask a bit more about the impact of chain ownership on local newspapers. David Hutchison made some suggestions in his submission. Could you expand on them a wee bit more?

David Hutchison: You have also had a paper from a former journalist—a gentleman from the Borders—who talked about the importance of local ownership. I accept that we can romanticise local ownership, and I argue that, because chains benefit from economies of scale, they can lead to more efficient operations through the more efficient use of journalists, print capacity and so on.

However, the problem with chain ownership is not just that one ends up with a few companies dominating the market—that is never good in any market—but that there is a danger that because the papers have been profitable, shareholders and ultimately pension fund holders and so on see them as an excellent investment, because they provide a relatively high return for a relatively low cost. That is really my point. I am not arguing that chain ownership is a bad thing as such. I read Mr Johnston's comments and I think that he acknowledged that his company overexpanded and became overleveraged, and that it did not invest as much in journalism as it should have done.

The argument is not that chains are bad and should be abolished, because that is not going to happen. There is an argument about competition, and there is an argument about public stewardship. Newspapers are not just businesses. An apocryphal story is told about the chief executive officer of an American company called Gannett, who was asked, "How do you pronounce Gannett, Mr CEO?" "Oh," he said, "you pronounce it money." The rather harsh point of that story is to illustrate that that company, which has a presence in Scotland—owns *The Herald*—is primarily interested in the bottom line. That might be completely unfair, but that kind of accusation has in the past been made against Johnston Press and Trinity Mirror plc, for example. You people are in the best position to address the public stewardship issue, which is about the proper balance between the money that is extracted as legitimate dividends and remuneration and the money that is spent doing the things in local areas that the convener has just talked about. Does that clarify the point?

10:30

Aileen Campbell: Yes, it does.

I want to pick up on the convener's other point about trying to capture a younger audience. Is it simplistic to assume that younger people will always go to the internet? What can people on local newspapers do to make their papers more vibrant to capture that audience?

David Hutchison: If we could answer that, we would not be sitting here this morning—we would be somewhere else drawing rather large consultancy fees. We are in a strange transition period: James Thickett from Ofcom may have more to say on that. Some of my students, who are supposedly studying the media, do not read newspapers. The other day, I heard about a newspaper office in Scotland in which the journalists read only *The Sun*.

One wonders whether there has been a major cultural shift, which has crept up on those of us who are a little bit older. I do not know how we arrest and change that shift. Newspapers cannot assume that young people will grow into papers in the way that Radio 4 has tended to assume that young people will grow up to be Radio 4 listeners; that will not necessarily happen.

In the end, the product and its marketing—both online and offline—are crucial. Offline is just as important as online.

James Thickett: It is a fact that young people are less interested in local news than are older consumers. That has been the case for years, and it applies not only to local newspapers but to local television regional news. Young people tend to get their local news through local radio, which does not offer the breadth and depth that one gets from a local newspaper. A high proportion of young people access local news on the internet, but when they are asked about their first source of local news, only a very small percentage name the internet.

Professor Blain: The slightly pessimistic answer is that there may not be very much that can be done to attract young people to read local newspapers in large numbers. It is difficult to predict the pattern of return from what we might think of as traditional media as we move forward. For many younger people now, the word "media" refers to social networking sites and mobile telephony. It does not refer to the press, television or radio very much at all, which is worrying for a variety of reasons.

Some people think that it is a question of age, and that people will return to those media. They believe that people may move through a phase of using newer media and technology, but will settle back into reading weekly newspapers. I have seen some recent American research on that, but our media do not always follow American patterns. It is interesting that people aged over 30 in American communities that had lost a local newspaper thought that it was important, whereas people under 30 did not think it mattered very much at all. I suspect that we might find similar responses in Scotland.

It is more a question of whether local newspapers can be sustained by what might well be an older readership—although I do not wish to sound frivolous about this—long enough for some young people to get older.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To follow on from that point, there is a policy in France to give people a free newspaper subscription for a year when they reach 18. One of my parliamentary colleagues has suggested something similar in Scotland. If such a scheme—which would obviously have cost implications—were seriously considered, would you favour it? Would it work? Should the paper be a local newspaper, a regional paper—such as *The Courier and Advertiser* in Dundee or the *Ayrshire Post*, rather than *The Herald*, which is a national paper—a Scottish newspaper or a UK newspaper? Should it be a weekly or daily subscription? Should the paper be collected by the person or delivered to them? How would such a policy work?

My concern relates to your point about the over-30s and under-30s, which was also raised by some of our witnesses last week. One view is that when people are older, they will get back into reading local newspapers. It is like voting—some people think, "All right, I'll vote." They might not vote when they are younger, but they will when they are older. However, a lot of people just switch off entirely from the political process, and from local newspapers. What is your view on that specific issue?

David Hutchison: President Sarkozy's proposal—I do not know whether it has been fully implemented yet—is part of a rather different approach to the press in mainland Europe. Mainland western Europe has always had interventionist policies, such as press subsidies—Sweden spends more than £40 million subsidising weaker newspapers, in the main to ensure that there is pluralism. Historically in Britain, there has been a sense that we must not do that, because it would interfere with the free press. The fact that the proposal has been taken up by one of the deputy convener's colleagues is interesting, because it marks a change in how we talk about the public purse's involvement in the press—there has always been such involvement in broadcasting.

If we implement such a scheme, we should target the national Scottish press first. There is a case for saying that it would be good if people read the *Daily Record*, *The Herald*, *The Scotsman* or one of the Sunday papers. Getting young people to read a Sunday paper on an annual subscription might be more effective than taking the daily route. However, I am responding off the top of my head.

Kenneth Gibson: Would you want to exclude England-based papers? Many members probably read *The Manchester Guardian*, for example.

David Hutchison: You are dating yourself. I still talk about *The Glasgow Herald*.

Kenneth Gibson: I try not to talk about *The Glasgow Herald* or Glasgow corporation buses. People may prefer UK newspapers. The Scottish Government could not be expected to subsidise those, even if they have pseudo-Scottish editions on occasion.

David Hutchison: That is a tricky issue. Statistics for the number of newspapers that are sold each morning in Scotland show that there has been a remarkable shift to England-based newspapers with Scottish editions. Now, more than half of the newspapers that are bought in Scotland are papers such as *The Scottish Sun* and the Scottish versions of *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and so on. That is an odd development that I do not fully understand. With devolution, I

would have expected movement in the other direction, but that has not happened. It would be difficult to run a scheme that discriminated against English papers. Surely the objective of the scheme would be to get young people reading papers.

Kenneth Gibson: Exactly.

Professor Blain: I wonder whether encouraging people to read newspapers by distributing them to people in their late teens would be doing so early enough. If, as a society, we are collectively concerned about people's engagement with the media and how that impacts on culture and democracy, we must translate that concern into educational policy, as part of a media literacy policy. To get the habit going, we need to get into schools quite early, as that is the stage at which interest in and engagement with the media is acquired. Kids now acquire habits of engagement with various digital media when they are very young. Given that they are pursuing those interests, I am not sure that handing them *The Scotsman* or *The Herald* at a certain point in their teens will work. I do not know whether any society has thought through the issue fully. I suspect that rather more radical action is needed. Short of that, the proposal would be better than nothing, as a proactive way of encouraging newspaper readership.

Alan Stewart: There is a broader media literacy issue. A great deal is happening in the background in the area of digital participation, in recognition of the fact that people may need to learn more about how to use different forms of digital media. Quite a lot is going on in Scotland; I know that the Scottish Government and Ofcom have had discussions in the area.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I am not sure whether public sector advertising is the main focus of what Governments can do, but it has been a major source of concern for the local paper industry.

There are two arguments here. One is a financial argument: that local papers rely on public sector advertising, and its proposed withdrawal is worrying for them. I would welcome your comments on that. The second argument is perhaps slightly stronger. If we need public information or job information, searching online is a proactive way to go about getting it, whereas if the information is simply given to us in a newspaper, it is more likely to come to our attention. What are the panel's thoughts on those two issues?

David Hutchison: The UK and Scottish Governments vary in their approach. I think that the UK Government has more or less told local authorities that they should continue to advertise in local newspapers—and, presumably, in regional newspapers. It just struck me that we must remember the rather successful regional newspapers: *The Press and Journal* and *The Courier* in Dundee have done rather better than other newspapers in Scotland, so there are interesting lessons there.

There are two good arguments for continuing such advertising in local newspapers. One is the financial health of the papers; the other is information access for all citizens, some of whom are not online. I think that James Thickett quoted the figure that 32 per cent of people are not online. Would they go to the library to find out about planning applications in their area? It is highly unlikely.

If the Scottish Government decides not to go with the enthusiasm shown by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for the proposal that has been made and instead to direct councils to continue to advertise in local newspapers to a significant degree, it would not be unreasonable to try to extract some sort of quid pro quo, with a commitment to decent-sized journalistic resources in the papers. However, that is tricky. Do we discuss percentages of income or numbers of journalists given the size of the papers in question? If the Scottish Government decides not to go down the route that COSLA seems enthusiastic about, it will present an historic opportunity to discuss what the papers themselves are prepared to offer by way of commitment to decent-sized journalistic resources.

Professor Blain: I strongly agree with that point. There is no right for any area of the press to have public sector advertising—in a sense, it is a gift. The investment ought to carry obligations.

On who can access the information, there is a danger of us getting carried away with the myth of the digital world. Earlier, James Thickett cited the figure that only about 6 per cent of people in Britain get news from the internet as their main source. There is a danger of gaps opening up. About 40 per cent of people in Scotland are not going on to the internet, particularly in some areas. Breaking it down according to the demographics shows that large proportions of people in some age groups do not have access. Those people could be disenfranchised.

We sometimes get caught up in a sense of a digital society that is in fact still evolving, rather than being entirely here yet. It is easier to see that in the world of entertainment than in the world of information. There is a sound argument for considering very seriously before giving up print distribution and completely relying on the internet for any source of information, because that would cut a large number of people out of the loop.

James Thickett: We considered such matters as part of our review. There are arguments on both sides. There is pressure on local authorities to make savings, and they are doing so in many ways, including by advertising their jobs on the internet. In our interviews, myjobscotland came up spontaneously as a source of internet advertising for the public sector in Scotland.

Scotland is a special case compared with the rest of the UK in that fewer people can access the internet here—62 per cent, versus 70 per cent in the UK. Many people read their local newspapers weekly here: 61 per cent of Scots versus 41 per cent in the rest of the UK. The argument is more finely balanced. If all the advertising were transferred to the internet, a big proportion of the audience would miss out on it.

10:45

Alan Stewart: We have broken down some of the broadband stats for Scotland. They show that uptake is fairly low in some parts of the country—Glasgow, for example—in comparison with the UK average, and that the picture is not uniform across Scotland. We need to factor in the fact that some rural areas have high levels of broadband uptake but other areas do not.

Ken Macintosh: Last week, we heard an interesting account of what happens when the compulsory advertising of local authority licensing notices is made optional. The advertising stops entirely; no such adverts are placed in the papers. When faced with a choice between public advertising and cost saving, the behaviour of local authorities is clear: they make the cost saving.

The situation is perhaps less clear on the number of people who read newspapers for public information notices or job adverts. As you said earlier, Mr Thickett, Ofcom thinks that people do buy local papers for the adverts. How much evidence is there to support that view? We know that local papers have a big reach, but what is the evidence to support the view that people take advantage of that?

James Thickett: It is hard to say which parts people read and which parts they do not read. We know that people buy papers for the adverts—particularly the property, car and job advertisements—but we have no evidence on how many buy a paper to read the notices.

Professor Blain: I assume that it would be problematic to determine that, even if one suspects that people do not read everything. If there were a gradual withdrawal of that kind of information, a number of problems would arise. As with the franchise—generally speaking, the vote—people do not always take up the opportunity, but it has to be offered to them. The issue is difficult. I suppose that we are talking about where you draw the line. To take the example of withdrawing licensing information, at which point would you say, "This information is essential, even if that information is not."

David Hutchison: One has to look at the context in which people look for information. If someone is looking for a job, they are looking for a job. Other information—for example, what a local authority is up to—is in a different category. Tonight, I will buy two local papers—my area overlaps two newspaper areas—which I will read for the news and skim read for anything else that is of interest, including any planning applications that might affect me. It takes a pleasant 20 minutes to read each paper. Although I am interested in knowing the latest planning applications, half the time I would not seek that information if I had to go and find it. The same is true of many people. The local newspaper offers a package of information, entertainment and education—I think someone else used a phrase like that. People pick up more information than they seek out from them.

Ken Macintosh: Another dilemma that is before us, Mr Hutchison, is public subsidy of profitable papers. Committee members have made it clear that we value local papers immensely. Those local papers may be under threat, but the companies that are behind them are making big money. For example, Trinity Mirror paid substantial sums of money to its top executives at the same time as it laid off dozens of journalists. The real dilemma for people in the public sector is this: we want to retain the journalists' jobs and local papers, but should local authorities not be allowed to make savings? Should public policy be skewed in a way that boosts the profits of big companies?

David Hutchison: That is a fair point. Also, as I am sure you are aware, MPs and MSPs could leave themselves open to the argument that local papers are important to them as a channel of communication with the public. As I said earlier, there has to be a quid pro quo. One cannot say that advertising should continue because local papers are good and we are not particularly interested in profit levels. As elected representatives, you are entitled to talk about the relationship between what is, in effect, a partial subsidy—it also has an information value—and how the newspapers discharge their public responsibilities. That takes us back to the crucial issue of the number of journalists whom they employ.

Aileen Campbell: My question follows on from Ken Macintosh's questions. It has been suggested that less than 2 per cent of people get their information through public information notices.

How do you respond to that figure, which seems quite low?

David Hutchison: Where are the other 98 per cent getting their information? Are they not getting any information?

Aileen Campbell: That is the figure that has been given to us.

David Hutchison: James, do you have figures in this area?

James Thickett: No.

Professor Blain: There may be instances in which percentages are not important. If the information relates to a contentious planning issue, it might be seen by one or two people who become interested and might lead to an important campaign. I would be reluctant to attach too much importance to percentages—the issue is availability. A small number of people can do a lot with such information. I would be worried if the low percentage to which you refer became a reason for not telling people things. I know that you were not suggesting that but, if one followed that argument, it could become tempting to reduce costs by cutting back on information. The numbers argument is not the most important one in this case.

Kenneth Gibson: Last night, I attended a meeting of Saltcoats community council at which the issue was discussed. One member of the council felt strongly about it and was supportive of notices. However, the council as a whole did not support that point of view, because it felt that it disseminated information to people who required it. Not all community councils are as well informed as the one in Saltcoats, which has designated someone to check the local authority website on a frequent basis and to pass information back to it. The community council then lets local people know about what is happening, not only through its website but, where necessary, by other means. Information can be picked up in a number of ways.

Although 62 per cent of people have access to broadband, other people may be able to access it in other ways. I do not know whether the figure includes people who have access through libraries. I do not have broadband in my house; if I did, I would spend every minute that I am in the house on the computer. Members do that anyway, through their BlackBerrys.

James Thickett: The figure is for people who have broadband at home.

Kenneth Gibson: Surely people can also go to libraries, job centres and so on.

Professor Blain: It would be quite difficult to generalise and quality assure the community council process that you have described—we would be very dependent on the process working well everywhere.

The Convener: There are many parts of Scotland that do not have community councils.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Last week, we had an interesting discussion about various threats to the newspaper industry. One threat that was clearly identified was local authority publications and community newspapers. Do you have any way of quantifying the importance of that threat?

David Hutchison: Any sane person knows that a local authority newspaper is not a newspaper in the normal sense of the term. Such newspapers do not include investigations of councils. They have a lot of interesting information about when the bins will be uplifted over Christmas and so on, but the threat that they pose can be exaggerated. Most of the local authority news sheets that I have seen pose no threat to a good, well-run, lively local newspaper, apart from the fact that they may include a little advertising.

Elizabeth Smith: Would you say the same thing about a community-produced newspaper?

David Hutchison: I may be less familiar with the current Scottish community newspaper situation than some of my colleagues are. Community newspapers come and go. In the past, there have been excellent examples of community newspapers going into gaps that professional newspapers do not touch—sometimes the laws of libel and contempt of court are factors.

Community newspapers are not something that one can legislate for. However, they can be helped to exist. I am sure that you know about the proposal in Wales to help community newspapers to come into being to fill gaps that have been left where Trinity Mirror has closed newspapers. That is an interesting idea, although we are not in that situation here at the moment.

It is not just because I come from an institution that trains journalists—we run an undergraduate course and a postgraduate course, and many of our young journalists, if I can declare this interest, go into local newspapers, and some of them stay there—that I think that there is no substitute for proper journalism, where people follow professional codes of practice, know about the laws of libel and contempt of court and know how to find a good story and put it together properly. That does not exclude the community newspaper, but it is not a substitute for a professionally produced, well-run, lively paper.

James Thickett: The Newspaper Society performed a survey last year, which found that an increasing number of local councils are launching their own free newspapers. It is a relatively new

phenomenon, and it comes from guidance from central Government that local authorities need to improve their communications to local residents. That seems like a good thing, but there have been some high-profile cases of supposedly council-run publications competing with local newspapers for advertising revenue. We found that to involve a very small number of publications, and there are certainly no examples in Scotland. The Newspaper Society survey showed that the vast majority of local councils publish such papers either monthly or quarterly—very few of them publish weekly or fortnightly. It seems that they have a relatively low impact. Some newspaper groups, for example Johnston Press, work with local authorities to distribute their freesheets and use that as a source of revenue. The two types of publication can work in tandem.

Our research has found that community newspapers and community websites, which are also a relatively new phenomenon, work alongside local newspapers. There is often a good interaction between community amateur journalists and local newspapers, and people use community publications as another source of local news, rather than a competing source.

Professor Blain: Only in greater London have I heard of instances where it has been asserted that council publications might have helped to push paid-for publications to the wall—and that has been contested. It has certainly not happened in Scotland.

The message from the market supports what David Hutchison said a while ago. By and large, it is freesheets that disappear from the market. One has mixed feelings about that, as it involves the loss of jobs. It is a complex question, as the arrival of the freesheets may well have threatened existing jobs. There is only a certain amount of revenue to go round. The argument about that goes round and round.

The evidence indicates that a well-produced local newspaper that has good journalistic and editorial standards and which engages with its local community will have a good chance—thus far—of survival, albeit that the current trend is undoubtedly not particularly hopeful, with circulations and revenue decreasing.

One does not wish to underplay the significance of the entry of new freesheets, including council publications. Where they take advertising, as many of them do, they are thinning out the resource, which is not necessarily a good thing.

Elizabeth Smith: Professor Hutchison, you made an interesting remark when you answered a question from the convener about identifying the most local community. If somebody is going to be successful in a local newspaper, they should ensure that they have an empathy with and an understanding of that local community, its defined area and the issues that relate to it. Do you feel that community newspapers are better at understanding that than some local newspapers that deal with a bigger region?

11:00

David Hutchison: Yes, although we would need to consider specific examples—if they exist. Because community newspapers have, thus far, tended to be small-scale, shoestring operations, they usually think of a defined locality, such as the east end or west end of a city. It may well be that they have a strong sense of that relatively small area. That is true not only of community newspapers, however. For example, newspapers in Shetland and Orkney cover a big geographical spread and yet they seem to have a strong sense of locality.

Every so often, I look at lots of local papers. Last week, because I knew I was coming before the committee, I bought about 20 Scottish weeklies. That was interesting. I was able to distinguish between those with rather bland, predictable content and those in which I got a sense of a community discussing issues, arguing about them and even getting quite vituperative about them—I think the sort of community newspaper that you are talking about might have that effect. However, we go back to the business of resources and long-term commitment; newspapers come and go.

Elizabeth Smith: I asked the question because of the Beauly to Denny line, which is a burning issue in my area. One community paper persistently picked up on it for quite some time. I think that it has had a much better run of things with local people than the traditional local newspaper of the area has had. The perception is that they identify with the issue because it is such a local one that has captured the imagination over that period. The statistics over the past year are interesting: people stopped buying the traditional local newspaper because its coverage of the issue was not as intensive as the community paper's coverage was.

David Hutchison: Is that because the community paper came into being for that purpose?

Elizabeth Smith: No, but it managed to harness the campaign groups. As you will be aware, straight up the length of the Beauly to Denny development, but particularly in the Stirling and Perthshire area, there has been a focus by some vocal and extremely well-organised groups. That factor gave tremendous credibility to some local community-produced papers.

David Hutchison: Are those papers saying, "Here are the arguments for and against the power line", or are they taking a partisan line?

Elizabeth Smith: I would not say that the coverage was particularly partisan. However, it is striking that the paper I mentioned chose to go on an issue that is very much at the forefront of local politics. The local paper, which in my opinion is pretty good, covers a wider range of issues, but shopkeepers tell me that the community paper is doing very well because of the Beauly to Denny issue.

David Hutchison: That is a most interesting example. The editor of the long-standing paper must now be reflecting on how he positions his paper in the future.

Elizabeth Smith: On the job market for journalists, are journalists moving away from traditional local newspapers into wanting to work with community papers? Is there that drift away?

Professor Blain: I think that the important market for journalism training is still the traditional, weekly, paid-for newspaper, because it can resource training and give trainee journalists not occasional work but more informed training. An important reason why people should be concerned about the local newspaper industry is that, over the years, the weekly paid-for newspaper has been such a vital training ground for journalists, many of whom move on to national newspapers and sometimes into broadcasting. Indeed, local newspapers are also vital for photographers. One does not want to think about what might happen if that vital sector were to become unavailable to them. In terms of journalism training, those papers are more important than community newspapers are.

Alan Stewart: Another sector where some training takes place is the community radio sector. About 20 community radio licences have been awarded. I know that those stations rely a lot on volunteers. The numbers should not be exaggerated, but the sector is growing and it must be producing some good experience for young journalists.

Ken Macintosh: Another area of potential public intervention or subsidy is the proposal for independently funded news consortia, which focuses on broadcast media. I am not sure whether the panel members heard our evidence taking last week, during which all the witnesses spoke of their concern about the impact of the proposal on local papers. As they said, it will be good news for the winners and bad news for those who miss out. Do the panel members have a view on whether the new consortia will have an effect on the newspaper industry? I am thinking of the effect not only on newspaper companies but on newspapers themselves.

Alan Stewart: Ofcom came up with the idea of independently funded news consortia, but the process is now being run by the UK Government. Given that the tendering process is under way, it is difficult for me to give a direct answer to the question.

One consortium that is in the running involves The Herald and Times Group, DC Thomson, Johnston Press and an independent production company. That bidder has passed the first stage. The process is now working towards the stage at which all the groups that are still in the running will enter into dialogue with the UK Government. I think that the plan for the Scottish consortium is for the preferred bidder to be announced in March, with the tender awarded at a later stage. Much depends on the outcome of the process.

I can see some positives in the proposal for local news. For example, in the Border TV region, there is scope for viewers in the area to get a service that is focused on Scotland and the devolved set-up. There are opportunities, but we will have to wait for the outcome to see the impact on local press.

Professor Blain: Given that we are at the pilot stage of the IFNCs, we will have to wait and see what happens next.

Distinctions were drawn earlier between the national, the regional and the local. I wonder whether the consortia will ever be able to reach deeply enough into the local in the sense that we are discussing it today. That is what would make a big difference. The answer to the question hinges on that. My guess is that the consortia might offer not local but regional coverage in the sense that Alan Stewart described it in relation to Border TV. I hope that room will be made for what can be called plural regional and local voices.

David Hutchison: The situation is tricky. It is not yet entirely clear how the proposal will be financed in the long term. The argument whether to top slice the BBC licence fee will continue to run. Also, a change of Government could lead to a change in how the argument is put.

It is worth making the point in passing that we are here only because of successive Government policies on broadcasting in Britain, which led to the destruction of ITV as a public service broadcaster that was financed by advertising. That sad development was not divinely ordained; I wish it had never happened. However, we are where we are.

There is a question over who will pay for the development. What is interesting about the discussion—Ofcom hints at this in its

submission—is the assumption that all of this may take us beyond television. Recently, I came across a report on a proposal from the managing director of the Press Association. His suggestion was that a way may have to be found for public or charitable funding to establish some kind of consortium to report on councils and courts, both of which are not reported on in the way in which they used to be. His suggestion was for reports to be made available across all platforms.

We are now in a situation in which the discussion is about failures—not only market failures but the failures of political and regulatory bodies. It is not entirely clear thus far how all of this will develop.

There are also arguments about pluralism and the dangers of the people who run one kind of news provision also running another. There are some difficult areas that have to be discussed. It is tempting to help the newspapers by awarding them the contracts. That would seem to me politically quite a smart thing to do, but is it necessarily the best thing to do?

Ken Macintosh: I do not want to put Ofcom in a difficult position by asking you to comment on an on-going process, but I have a question about the overlap between local newspapers—I mean local as in town-based newspapers—and regional broadcast media, which was touched on earlier.

Last week, we heard the publishers complain that the BBC gives access to stories that were, in effect, taken from their newspapers. I have to say that I was not convinced, in that I am not sure that people who read those stories on the BBC website stop buying local papers. I would be intrigued to hear your thoughts on that. If an independently funded news consortia was up and running, I do not think that it would have any effect on local newspaper circulation. There might be an effect on the finances of the organisations or companies that win—or fail to win—the contract, but I cannot imagine that it would affect readership. There might be some effect on advertising, but I am not even sure about that.

Is there any evidence from Ofcom's researchers to show what the effect would be? Is there any evidence that putting in place broadcast media causes a decline in print media?

James Thickett: No. They perform different roles. A typical regional news programme—or, in Scotland's case, national news programme—focuses on five or six stories. In Scotland they will be from the whole country and in England they will be from a wide region. In any case, the programme will cover five or six stories, whereas a local newspaper may have 15 or 20 stories. Local newspapers always say that their headline stories are nicked by the broadcasters, but there is no evidence that that cannibalises readership. People watch TV. The vast majority of people use their local or regional news programme as their main source of news rather than newspapers, just because more people are watching television at the time and it is easier to access.

On advertising, not many people know this, but channel 3—ITV and STV—does not generally use the news slot for adverts. They take the minutage that they are allowed to use and shift it to later on, into peak time, when they can get more money for it. The question whether the IFNCs will have access to advertising during that slot is open to debate. That has not been resolved yet.

When we came up with the idea of IFNCs, we felt that the problem with regional news was that it was very broadcast focused and tended to be insulated from local news elsewhere. We saw that huge resources were available through local newspapers, local radio and community media that could contribute to television news programmes and to plurality. The original idea was that the consortia would be based on a range of local news organisations that would feed up from the bottom, but that at the same time they would learn new skills. A big issue is that local newspapers have been slow to take up video news skills, which would allow them to have much richer propositions on the internet. We felt that IFNCs would get local newspapers into new areas and contribute to more broadly based journalism.

Professor Blain: In the age of the internet, everyone complains that people take their news. News International is unhappy about the way in which news that they believe they resource is then picked up by internet providers. I would have thought that local newspapers are the least likely to find what they do duplicated in a serious way elsewhere.

11:15

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Members have talked about local newspapers' impact on and contribution to communities. Last week the committee heard clearly that local newspapers do not have party-political bias—quite the opposite. It was reassuring to hear that.

I agree that local newspapers have an important role in developing local democracy. Will you comment on the negative impact of politically biased local news and newspapers?

David Hutchison: There must be many examples of politically biased news. Some people argue that there is no such thing as objectivity. Neil Blain and I are weary of the long debate in media studies about whether we can be objective about anything. However, we can be fair—that is what is always said to young journalists.

In relation to political orientation, the contrast between nationally circulating papers—whether they circulate in Scotland, south of the border or on both sides of the border—and local papers is marked. Historically, Scottish local papers were very partisan. For example, in the 19th century local papers were partisan on the arguments about the extension of the franchise and slavery. Members may believe this or not, but in Glasgow there was a paper that supported slave owners—the *Glasgow Herald*, to its great credit, did not. Perhaps I should have used an example from Dumfries.

In a sense, a local newspaper must be centrist, because if it is not centrist it will alienate its readers. I do not doubt that some local papers irritate particular elected representatives quite a lot as a result of their pursuit of particular issues—members might have experience of that—but in my experience of studying local papers I have been more aware of a willingness to have a go at whoever happens to be in authority than of a long-standing political agenda. Chains such as the ones whose representatives gave evidence to the committee would shrink from running local newspapers that were partisan in the way that, for example, *The Sun*, the *Daily Record* and the *Daily Mail* are partisan, because to do so would alienate a percentage of their readership to such an extent that it would be commercial suicide, particularly in the current climate.

Professor Blain: We should distinguish between such papers and local council newspapers, which are often good at finding much merit in the local council.

Christina McKelvie: They absolutely are.

James Thickett: As part of our review we interviewed most local newspaper proprietors, who told us that political bias is just not good for business. At national level there is considerable competition between papers, so papers can afford to have different political hues, because people will choose the paper that represents their view. At local level, it is increasingly the case that there is only one A4 weekly in the area. A paper that is the only one that serves its community cannot afford to be politically biased one way or the other.

Christina McKelvie: It has become apparent to me that newspapers are quite clever at not being politically biased, in some cases. However, in my role as a local politician I am irked when papers omit one side of a story or even the whole story, because it does not chime with whoever is in control of the local authority or the political views of individuals who are involved. A big concern of mine is that local newspapers damage local democracy by omitting information that people need if they are to be able to make up their minds on an issue.

David Hutchison: That would always be wrong. I would have thought that in such situations an elected representative would have some kind of redress, perhaps by writing a letter to the relevant editor.

Kenneth Gibson: It would not be published.

David Hutchison: Really? I would love to know which newspapers you are talking about—you might not want to talk about that in open session. I do not think that we can make the case that every local newspaper in Scotland behaves in that way.

Kenneth Gibson: You talked about two newspapers that you buy, which come out in my constituency. You live in West Kilbride, which is the battleground of the *Largs & Millport Weekly News* and the *Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald.* Surely you have noticed a significant difference between those papers in the context of what is reported. I am talking about the lack of content in one of those papers.

David Hutchison: I am glad that you raised that example, because I would not have wanted to cite it. The interesting thing about the two papers that you cite is that they are owned by the same company and yet they have different journalistic mixes. That takes us back to the issue of how to run a lively newspaper. One of those newspapers seems more concerned to report lurid crime—although there might be a lot of lurid crime in the area—whereas the other seems to have a somewhat wider agenda. That might come down to the editor, the editorial policy of the company or the area. To me, that contrast raises interesting questions about what makes local newspapers different from one another.

Professor Blain: We all agree that getting consensus on what is objective in the media is pretty much impossible. Nationally, we usually answer the question by saying that there is a plurality of voices. At that level, many newspapers are partisan and therefore we look for a balance, with more than one broadcaster, radio station and newspaper, although we do not always achieve that balance. At the local level, the member's question takes on a different emphasis, because we talk about being grateful for the survival of perhaps one paid-for newspaper. The difficulty is that there is one voice at the local level, and it is difficult to get a variety of voices. I suspect that the answer to the member's question has to do with things such as energetic lobbying, rebuttal and argument, but the situation is not perfectible and it never will be.

Alan Stewart: The broadcasting code does not cover newspapers, but it contains a requirement for due impartiality. There is no scientific formula for impartiality, but broadcasters must be impartial, dependent on issues such as the story and the

programme that it appears in. There are rules covering broadcasting.

Kenneth Gibson: Aye, right.

Christina McKelvie: My question moves on nicely from Professor Blain's comment about one voice. I understand that Ofcom cannot comment, but its proposal recommends a restriction to prevent one person—that one voice—from dominating the news agenda across radio, local newspapers and channel 3 TV. What are your views on the local radio and cross-media ownership rules?

David Hutchison: I have a contrary view to that of Ofcom. It seems to me that the two-out-of-three proposal is a little flawed in the Scottish context. Two out of three might make sense in, say, Canada, where the regulatory body, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, has issued just such a rule, although it is not retrospective. That makes sense because a person in Calgary might own a television station, a radio station and a newspaper, which would be unacceptable. The two-out-of-three rule makes sense there, because all those media are specific to Calgary.

There is a problem in Scotland. Let us take a fictitious town in the middle of Scotland called Midtown, where there is a commercial radio station, a local newspaper and STV. If I own the local newspaper and the local radio station, I have a monopoly because, as we have all agreed, STV does not cover local news. Therefore, the two-out-of-three rule simply does not work in Scotland because if someone has two out of three, they could well have a monopoly. Ofcom needs to address that.

James Thickett: That is our present recommendation to the secretary of state. Professor Hutchison is right that in many parts of the UK newspapers already own radio stations. We had to reach a balance between what consumers felt and what the industry needed, which was less regulation. On the industry side, there are already rules that restrict anti-competitive mergers—basically, the merger regime that is managed by the Office of Fair Trading. The media ownership rules are an extra layer of regulation on top of that, which does not feel as though it serves the appropriate purpose in an environment in which more and more people use the internet.

We asked consumers what they felt and found that they were fairly relaxed about having a newspaper owning the radio station in their area. They were certainly relaxed about all the radio stations in their area having a single owner, because in many cases that is the situation already.

We decided that we would relax the cross-media ownership rules but not abolish them altogether, so we have imposed a two-out-of-three rule. We have abolished the rules altogether for radio, which means that a single owner can own all the radio stations in one area.

Christina McKelvie: Michael Johnston urged a more pragmatic approach, and I know that Professor Hutchison has given specific examples. Does anyone else have any other examples of what that pragmatic approach would be?

David Hutchison: I think that Michael Johnston might mean the opportunity to acquire more properties. Is that an unfair assumption?

Christina McKelvie: He said that the rules were too narrowly defined.

James Thickett: What are the obstacles to effective competition and thriving local newspaper businesses? That is one of the questions that we have to answer. It is very unlikely that we will see big mergers or acquisitions in the next two years because most of the big newspaper groups are heavily in debt in the middle of an economic recession. However, we might see title swaps, in which a particular newspaper group might want to swap titles with another newspaper group, for example, to get better access to printing presses and thereby make economies.

We seem to be moving towards what the industry calls a hub and spokes model, which involves a cluster of local newspapers in an area around a single central head office, with most of the back-office functions being done in the centre and individual newspapers coming out from that, like the spokes on a wheel. At the moment, the industry is quite fragmented. Small groups of papers are owned by different proprietors across the country, so it is possible that relaxation of the rules could lead to some consolidation of titles between different owners. We do not expect that to have an impact on competition or the end user but, if it does, other rules are in place on media mergers that would ensure that the consumer is protected.

Professor Blain: The argument that the proprietors of Johnston Press and Trinity Mirror, which owns Scottish and Universal Newspapers, will make about deregulation has a basis; it is not necessarily a bad argument. There is a tension between different kinds of need. The argument that certain press outlets will not survive without such deregulation is not necessarily a bad economic argument. It is a question of what comes out at the other end in terms of journalism, editorial standards and local commitment; it is a balancing act.

Christina McKelvie: Yes. One of my colleagues will come on to that very topic soon. Thank you.

David Hutchison: Public interest is what matters; it is not just about the commercial interests of the organisations concerned but about the public interest and serving democracy.

Christina McKelvie: I could not agree more.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Similar to last week's meeting, this morning's discussion has identified the importance of properly trained local journalists who can undertake more investigative work and dedicate more time to local stories and campaigns. In last week's evidence, however, there was recognition that there are threats to that, and we have seen job cuts in some parts of the sector. Concern was also expressed that graduates are finding it more difficult to find places at local newspapers. Martin Boyle from Cardonald College spoke of the danger of a democratic deficit being created. In a way, that ties in to Christina McKelvie's comments and concerns about how newspapers are able to report stories.

Some of the evidence that we received also suggested that journalists are having increasingly to rely on more cutting and pasting of news items that they have received, and do not have the time to dedicate to proper reporting. How do the current challenges facing the sector threaten the quality of local journalism? Professor Hutchison said that, in the current financial situation, the reasons for some decisions might not be as clear as they have been presented. How can we overcome those challenges to ensure that we do not get into a situation in which the quality of local journalism begins to fall?

11:30

David Hutchison: That takes us back to our earlier discussion of whether local authority advertising should continue to be in local newspapers. It is and always has been tricky for politicians to get involved in that. However, if the committee were to decide to recommend to the Scottish Government that such advertising should continue to be placed in local papers, there must be some way of talking about commitments on journalistic resources.

Of course, if a paper cuts back on the number of journalists, it does a less effective job. Cutting and pasting of stories has become a lot easier because of the internet, and it would be pretty stupid to say that journalists should tramp the streets when they can get the information from a computer screen, although tramping the streets—or talking to people—remains an important part of any journalist's or editor's job. The evidence that one has and that the anecdotal evidence that one hears from people who have been editors in Scotland is that there have been damaging cut-backs.

Claire Baker also mentioned graduates going into the industry. What I find surprising—I do not know whether it is also still true at the University of Stirling—is the number of young people who still want to be journalists. A disturbingly high proportion of the male ones want to be sports reporters rather than go off to foreign parts, but there still seems to be a terrific desire to be in journalism, although a lot of young people are thinking about broadcasting and multimedia journalism rather more than they are thinking about newspapers.

Professor Blain: That brings us back to new media and new trends. Not only journalism graduates but journalists, and sometimes quite experienced journalists, are going into two areas: some are going into more entertainment-based forms of journalism, such as magazine journalism, for example. There is information in such journalism as well, but it is different from the kind of information that we get in local newspapers. The other area is public relations. It is a question of sustaining the destination in order that a significant number of journalists can get news journalism training and reporting training on local newspapers—that is the difficulty. I am not particularly pessimistic about careers for journalists at the moment although, as in every area of higher education provision, we have constantly to guard against oversupply and so adjust the provision.

The question is not so much about whether journalism graduates are getting jobs but about the number of them who are getting jobs in traditional news and reporting roles. As we have said, local newspapers have always been crucial to that because they are often the first step in a journalism career when journalists are learning skills. One of the implications of the expansion of new media and new forms of entertainment is that there are different kinds of jobs for graduates, so I am not sure that it is necessarily—or not yet—a graduate supply problem; it is a question of what kind of journalism graduates are going to do.

Claire Baker: As you say, there are different options—different paths to pursue—for younger people who go into journalism or media studies. Do they have the same understanding as previous generations of the expectations for local journalism?

Professor Blain: It is self-selecting, but we find that students who come to do media courses and want particularly to study journalism tend to be highly media literate and enthusiastic. Journalists are interesting graduates because they tend to know what they want to do much earlier than others do. We have to pitch higher education

provision in the universities for people who do not necessarily know until they get to the third or fourth year of a university course what they want to do—apart from to graduate, which is usually their foundational aim.

Journalists are often enthusiastic in their teens and tend to be heavily vocational. For that reason, they are particularly interesting to work with, and often motivated to find work in, what we would consider the traditional areas. David Hutchison mentioned sport, which is important, but many people still come in enthusiastic and idealistic about the kind of news reporting that they would like to do, including investigative reporting, which a lot of people would like to do. I am encouraged by the fact that we still get those kinds of undergraduates. There is an ample supply of them—actually, they are knocking the doors down. The real question is about where they will go over time as the employment situation changes. For the time being, I am not particularly worried about that, but the situation changes rapidly all the time.

David Hutchison: We have a responsibility not to allow too many young people to delude themselves into thinking that, if they do these courses, they will soon be presenting "Newsnight". The universities and colleges have not thought enough about that problem. In the media studies course for which I was responsible for many years, we always told people that the course would take them not into the media but into marketing, advertising and public relations. Neil Blain will bear that out, because he was with us at the time.

Professor Blain: Yes.

David Hutchison: Higher education must not give the impression that there are lots of well-paid jobs: starting salaries in the local press are not terrifically high. A person who has done an undergraduate degree in journalism will have debts. If that person has done an undergraduate degree in a different subject, then a postgraduate degree in journalism, he or she will have even bigger debts, so going into journalism can be financially challenging. I have seen it argued quite a lot in the south that the postgraduate course is now open only to wealthy people because of the structure that we have. A remarkably high proportion of the people who are able to do an undergraduate course in history or science and then a postgraduate course that takes them into journalism come from moneyed backgrounds, so we are in danger of narrowing the range of people who end up as journalists. James Thickett may have come across the research to which I refer; it is worth looking at.

Aileen Campbell: I return to the broader impact of local newspapers on culture and local identity. Last week we heard about the role of local correspondents. What contribution do local newspapers make to communities' identity and culture?

Professor Blain: Their contribution is enormous. Continuity and stability are important. A community newspaper—even a recently arrived one—can campaign effectively on a single issue, but that is not quite the same thing as a newspaper that has been around in the community for a long time, which has a local and cultural memory. An editor who has been in post for a long time can often become a significant member of the local community. Local newspapers may have photographic and all sorts of other archives, so they are part of local history.

We have talked about their importance for campaigning on local issues and their political stance, but local newspapers that have managed to save enough resource to employ good journalists, and have editors who have enjoyed the job and interacted with the community enough to stay in one place for a long time, are a unique resource. I cannot think of any way in which that could be replaced, because it is not just an archival or historical resource—it is a human resource. There are key editors up and down Scotland who are irreplaceable people. They are a particular kind of person. When you want to know about certain things, such as current trends in a community, things that are happening in a community or a community's history—what happened 20 or 30 years ago—they are sometimes the only people who can give a good account of that. The newspapers' archives are important, but so are people with a long memory of the community. "Invaluable" is not a strong enough word: local newspapers are unique resources.

David Hutchison: I was struck by how many of the around 20 papers that I read over the weekend are doing historical work and using their archives to talk about what happened in the past. They are doing genuine archival work; they are not just reporting that 100 years ago someone was arrested for something, but are telling the story of the community. Wherever I go in Britain, one of the first things I do is buy the local paper. I do not suppose that I am atypical in that. If you want quickly to get a sense of what is happening somewhere—what people are concerned about or what is on at the pictures or the theatre—you go to the local paper.

I do not disagree with anything that Neil Blain has just said, but in a sense he is describing the ideal. One issue that we may need to discuss is the extent to which all newspapers are trying to reach that ideal through their personnel and what they do.

Professor Blain: That is right. Many journalistic commentators have refused to shed tears over the

disappearance of, for example, certain free sheets that do not operate in that area—although it is a bit harsh when people have lost their jobs. On the other hand, there are such newspapers and the market likes them. Some of them may have lost some circulation and revenue, but they are, happily, the ones that are more likely to survive.

Aileen Campbell: The point about historic documentation and the stories that local newspapers can tell was interesting. Is that an avenue that local papers could perhaps consider in order to broaden their audience—making people more aware of how valuable an historic resource they are?

Professor Blain: Local newspapers are working quite hard at that. If circulation is falling and the paper is losing revenue, that is exactly the sort of outreach activity in which they engage. There are signs of that happening and I think that you will see more of it. Only a very particular kind of newspaper is equipped to do it, but, as David Hutchison said, those are the ones that we admire and which probably have the highest value.

Aileen Campbell: Is there evidence that it is the papers that are chain-owned that can do that or is it more likely to be the independent papers that do it?

Professor Blain: That question is a bit difficult. I will use as an example the *Hamilton Advertiser* and some of the others that used to be George Outram newspapers in Lanarkshire and elsewhere, and which became owned by Scottish and Universal Newspapers Limited and by Trinity Mirror plc. If you saw any change in the newspapers over time—in 1970 the *Hamilton Advertiser* had a circulation of 48,000, which I think was the highest paid-for circulation at that time in Scotland—it would be difficult to know to what you would attribute that. I would, given that there are so many other factors, be reluctant to say that a newspaper's changing over 20 or 30 years would be the result of its being owned by a large chain. We could point to newspapers that have become part of fairly large chains that live up in good part to the values that we have been talking about as well as papers that are independent or are owned by a smaller group. The short answer is that it is not inimical to these kinds of values that the paper be owned by a large chain. The situation varies.

David Hutchison: Academics say, for example, that there is scope for further research—perhaps one of us should get a PhD student to do it—to examine variations in circulation, content and ownership. That would be an interesting project.

Aileen Campbell: In your academic research, have you noticed any negative impacts on communities that have lost newspapers? We have been told that that is perhaps not such an issue in Scotland, but you might know of places elsewhere where such a loss has been a devastating blow to the community.

Professor Blain: In the UK, it is relatively hard to find examples—James Thickett may know of some—where there has not been an alternative of some kind in the community.

James Thickett: There are one or two isolated examples. One that comes to mind is Donnington, which lost its local newspaper; it had a circulation of 1,200. We are not finding that newspapers are closing down. The ones that are closing down tend to be free sheets, of which there was a huge explosion during the 1990s. Very few paid-for weekly papers have closed down in the past year, but there has been more consolidation; it is less likely that there will be two or three competing paid-for papers in one area. As I said, the market tends to be moving towards a single local paper being the only paper available in an area. That is driven by the economics of the industry—demand does not exist for two or three papers with different owners.

Professor Blain: On the other hand—and in case we sound over-optimistic about the situation—the loss of a newspaper is an experience that we could imagine having in the relatively near future. If we look at the trends for press consumption generally and slot local newspaper consumption into that, we would probably be entitled to have a fairly pessimistic view of how the situation might develop. It would be useful to start imagining such a scenario and to work out ways to forestall it, because when you lose such a resource it is all but impossible to get it back.

11:45

David Hutchison: It may be worth looking at what the committee's colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales are exploring. Trinity Mirror has closed papers in Wales, but there is talk about making public funds available there to start so-called community papers. The committee may find itself discussing that possibility a few years from now.

Kenneth Gibson: I am interested in something that we discussed at last week's meeting, much of which was based on David Hutchison's written submission. It is about how newspapers that cover niche markets seem to have done particularly well in the recession. That is maybe not just because they can often be very lively even in geographically isolated areas, but because they are specific to such areas. David Hutchison talked about the two newspapers that he buys in West Kilbride, one of which covers an area that has

maybe 50,000 or 60,000 people, while the other covers an area with only about 15,000 people. The level of saturation and penetration of one is clearly a lot higher than that of the other. Arran, which has the same population as West Kilbride and Seamill, has a very health local newspaper.

Is there an issue about the uneven newspaper coverage? For example, the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* clearly has an Ardrossan and Saltcoats core, although it covers other areas, such as West Kilbride, which do not have local newspapers. Is there an argument for establishing newspapers in areas that do not have them, perhaps using the hub and spokes method that was discussed earlier? Is that economically possible? I am sure that West Kilbride and Seamill are lively enough to support a local newspaper, which could be called the "West Kilbride Weekly News", or something like that. Such a paper could be owned by a chain, but it would cover specifically that area. Would such a paper be better for local identity, democracy and news coverage, and would it be more likely to be read? Would chain ownership make more economic sense, perhaps from a proprietor's point of view? If everything were to operate from one set of offices, as Clyde and Forth Press Limited does, there would be greater penetration. Does that idea have a future? I am concerned about the uneven spread of local newspapers in Scotland, because some areas do not get the coverage that others get.

David Hutchison: It is relatively easy to editionise a paper's coverage. One of the papers that Kenneth Gibson cited covers a very big area that goes right into central Ayrshire to the Garnet valley and so on. The other has a much more distinct area that has quite a strong sense of being a discrete area. I do not think that we are in a situation in which any local newspapers are likely to be established in the near future. I do not have the figures, but there must be a figure below which a paper must not drop if it is to be viable and do all the things that we all agree ought to be done by a local paper.

To return to my limited analysis, which referred to some papers doing reasonably well, the indefinable sense of community is crucial. We have talked about how newspapers can create a sense of community, but there can already be a sense of community in a place, and a paper might have a head start in an area in which there is a strong sense of community. The convener referred to papers in her area, in which Trinity Mirror is quite strong. Such papers seem to me to overlap geographically. I just wonder whether that is a problem for running half a dozen papers in South Lanarkshire. How are the distinct communities of Airdrie, Hamilton and East Kilbride defined? Communities perhaps do not define themselves quite as clearly as the Isle of Arran or Shetland.

I honestly do not think that we are in a situation in which we can start new newspapers, unless a lot of public subsidy is available—although we may reach that stage. However, there is an interesting discussion to be had about the nature of community and its relationship to the success or otherwise of a particular paper.

Professor Blain: I would imagine that community and identity in Lanarkshire continue quite strongly.

The Convener: I point out that there are huge differences between North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire.

Professor Blain: What we can predict is that existing newspapers that are mapped on to communities, particularly those away from the central belt, will have a better chance of survival. It is no accident that as far as the big regionals and nationals are concerned *The Press and Journal* in Aberdeen has a considerably larger circulation than *The Scotsman* and *The Herald*; indeed, as a ballpark figure, the P and J sells roughly the same as those two papers put together. That is partly because parts of Scotland people feel a bit marginalised when it comes to news and information coverage—doubly so, in fact, in that they feel not only that they are not getting any attention from the Scottish media in the central belt but that they are simply off the planet as far as the London media are concerned.

Again, if, as we have been discussing, independently funded news consortiums started to address local issues, we might expect their coverage to concentrate more on the central belt. Being optimistic, I think that it is probable that newspapers in Shetland and Orkney, the *West Highland Free Press* and so on are slightly more secure than some of their equivalents in better-served central belt areas.

James Thickett: *The Press and Journal* in Aberdeen has the biggest circulation of any local newspaper in Britain, and Dundee's *The Courier* is not far behind. Members might not know that the two papers, even although they are 70 or 80 miles apart, share the same printing press. Where single owners are able to create an economic situation in which several newspapers share the same press—and, in many cases, the same head office—and where journalists work from home or remotely instead of working out of a local office in their own small town, the running of smaller-circulation newspapers becomes more cost effective than ever. Such moves have been shown to work in practice, and I am quite optimistic about them.

David Hutchison: Someone should point out, however, that if we described *The Press and*

Journal and *The Courier* as local papers, we would get our heads in our hands.

Kenneth Gibson: I did see you wince at that comment.

James Thickett: We should also highlight the fact that both papers have been very successful and have managed to weather the recession probably better than any other newspaper, partly because they share the same printing press.

Kenneth Gibson: We have not talked about the web in a wee while. Are you concerned about the way in which news is displayed on the web? People tell me that they would rather look at newspapers on the web than buy them, because they get not only the content but other unique stories that proprietors have clearly put on to attract them. Are such moves self-destructive to the industry? Do they undermine the value of news as a commodity for which people should pay? I know, of course, that Johnston Press is seeing how it might be able to push a rock back up the hill by asking people to begin to pay for accessing its papers on the internet. What can newspapers do about their websites to ensure that they do not undermine their printed circulation?

Professor Blain: This is a very difficult issue to resolve. Kenneth Gibson is right to suggest that, at one level, it appears that it is self-destructive to put a lot of information on the internet. However, because of the change in media use, newspapers have no choice, and no one has really found an answer to the problem that, by doing so, they appear to contribute to their own decline.

However, the case for the ability of paid-for content to drive the newspaper industry at local, regional or national level has not yet been proved. Large organisations such as News International seem to be formulating plans to restrict news content; indeed, some websites have already done so and put up pay walls.

I hate to say it, but I do not think that we can be optimistic about any of the industry's existing business models. Certainly, if I had such a model I would be a very popular person. It appears to be paradoxical to put on the web content that might stop people reading your newspaper but, as I have said, it is a direction that newspapers have to go in. If one is fairly pessimistic about the whole industry in those terms, I am not sure that that would be the way to go for local newspapers.

There is also an aesthetic side to newspaper consumption. If someone goes into a shop and picks up a hard copy, or if a hard copy is delivered to their door once a week, that is a more plausible model than having national daily newspapers survive in the way that I have described.

In business and economic terms, the problem has not yet been resolved. Newspapers in the United States have found themselves in the same position for a while and the situation is not getting resolved—many newspapers are in trouble there.

There is a further issue to do with consumption and readership. The difficulty is the news gap. The person reading a hard copy of a newspaper might read an article all the way through, but someone who is web browsing might read the first third of an article and then go on to something else. News is being consumed in a different way now. That has many implications for an informed electorate and for democracy. The general feeling is that people do not consume news off the net in the same way that they do from print. Then again, various demographic factors come in, too. It is difficult to say anything happy or optimistic about it. The general trends are a bit negative.

David Hutchison: It is easy to say, "This should never have been allowed to happen." In a competitive market situation, however, it was bound to happen. *The New York Times* tried to hold the line, but I can now read it every morning for nothing. That is nonsense—I should be paying something. I personally hope that Mr Murdoch's company succeeds in imposing or building pay walls, and that the Johnston Press experiment is successful. People should not get the impression that journalism can be provided for nothing, or just on the back of advertising. That is not an acceptable position—although people have now been given to understand that it is. We might even argue that having a paper such as *Metro* is not a very bright idea for the development of newspapers. We are where we are, however.

Some local newspapers might best use their websites as teasers, to use an unfortunate term, which are indicative of interesting content. Some do so. For local newspapers to provide too much of their content online is simply nuts.

Kenneth Gibson: That is the point that I was making. I have spoken to some editors in Johnston Press about this. Surely you want the web to encourage people to buy the newspaper to find out what else is happening in their area, rather than do the exact opposite.

David Hutchison: Absolutely.

Kenneth Gibson: If people can get some of the content on the web, it is a complete discouragement to purchase.

This has been a long meeting and I do not want to keep folk any longer than necessary—the convener will glower at me if I do—but I want to ask an important question. What opportunities exist for the local newspaper industry in the future? What can the Scottish Government or Scottish Parliament do? David Hutchison has

made an important point about the continuation of subsidies, if we wish to call them that, through PINs. The newspaper proprietors have tried to argue, albeit not particularly well, that the BBC is subsidised, so—with a nudge and a wink—they should be subsidised, too. What can the Parliament do to help newspapers, and what can they do to help themselves to move optimistically forward in the 21st century?

It was pointed out that people can choose national newspapers that are sympathetic to their political points of view. I am keen to find out what such a newspaper might be.

Professor Blain: The suggestion might have been that, by casting about between and among newspapers, radio programmes and some television programmes, people might have a better chance.

Kenneth Gibson: Of finding one that is less hostile than others.

Professor Blain: I am not suggesting that finding one is inevitable.

There will be a smaller newspaper industry—but one might like it to be a good newspaper industry, supported by a market. One can answer the question in more than one way. I feel that there will be a strong link in the longer term between media literacy, education and the survival of newspapers. That is by no means a quick fix; that is the slow-fix approach.

12:00

There are some types of smaller-scale support or encouragement that might be given. We have already spoken about the idea of public sector advertising having strings attached. If local newspapers, which are the main focus of our discussion, are to survive in the longer term, I suspect that it will not be enough to take action that affects just the industry, because there is a longer-term trend of people moving away from engaging with the print medium. There is no point in just being nostalgic about that; it is not fogeyish to suggest that something is being lost—we could show what was being lost if we had the time to demonstrate that at length. If we are to encourage the long-term survival of local newspapers, there must be intervention at a number of points in the system.

David Hutchison: Mr Gibson wanted to know which newspaper we could recommend. Neil Blain and I edited a book a couple of years ago, in which there is an interesting essay by a chap called Michael Russell about the way in which political parties and newspapers have interacted in Scotland of late. That is by the by.

The struggle ahead will be hard—there is no question about that. Sometimes one looks at newspaper circulation in Britain and despairs. Managing directors must be asking, "Where is the plateau?" Nobody knows where the plateau is. If the rate of decline is 2 or 3 per cent a year, sooner or later there will be nothing left. We could well find ourselves in a serious situation, and that applies to not just local papers but national Scottish papers, with the possible exception of D C Thomson & Company's highly successful dailies.

There are things that we can do. We have talked about quid pro quos and return for public sector advertising. Sooner or later, we might have to look to the Scandinavian model. Although this is anathema to certain people in Britain, for historical reasons, we might have to consider what Scandinavian and other European countries do to keep a range of newspapers in business, because they are too valuable to democracy to be allowed to fail.

James Thickett: In our review we looked not just at local newspapers but at the local media as a whole. We found that all the predictors are that in the future the availability of local media will be greater than it has ever been, because it will be far cheaper to produce content—particularly news—at local level, and to distribute it to people who want it, whether that is done through the internet, community newspapers or community radio. There is much evidence that ultra-local content is thriving in the United Kingdom. That is certainly what is happening in the US.

The problem is that there is no business model. In the future, a greater proportion of such activity might be voluntary and very small scale. What will that mean for the local press? As I said, there might be a certain amount of further consolidation, particularly in areas such as title swaps. Local newspaper groups will need to develop their capacity to provide professional internet sites that they can monetise and to get into broadcast media. There will be a much more holistic local media, which will not be divided into newspapers and television and radio but will contain elements of each. The prognosis for local media in the future is quite optimistic, from the public's point of view.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I apologise for missing the beginning of the discussion—I apologise even more if I am about to ask a question that has already been asked.

Professor Blain talked about the essence of community. I think that Professor Hutchison said that there seems to be no difficulty in attracting young people into sports journalism. Have local newspapers done research into which categories of their content attract and keep readers? If there

is such research, does it tie in with work on the demographics of the readership? I can only cite as evidence members of my family who would probably not read the first five or six pages of the Edinburgh *Evening News* and would never go beyond the last five or six pages. Do we know which parts of newspapers are retaining the readership for local newspapers?

Professor Blain: No, apart from crime and sport. Those are the two that I would mention.

David Hutchison: Companies have done some research on that, I think, but I know of no recent academic study that looks specifically at local papers. Ofcom might have done some work on that. It would be well worth doing.

Margaret Smith: It sounds like a PhD.

James Thickett: We did some work on why people buy their local paper. When we asked people about that, news, weather and local information came out as the three big factors.

David Hutchison: Did that work distinguish between different kinds of news?

James Thickett: We just had a category called local news.

Margaret Smith: I just wondered, because most of us would agree that sport is an important part of the sense of community and, obviously, impartiality is as important in sport as it is in politics.

David Hutchison: There is less of it, though, interestingly.

Margaret Smith: I can only speak about the *Evening News,* but there is a lot less of it there.

The Convener: That concludes our questions to witnesses. Thank you for your attendance at committee.

12:06

Meeting continued in private until 13:10.

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