

Expert Panel Review - Sustainability of the Press

Summary of Review Scope

Robust high quality journalism is important for public debate, scrutiny, and ultimately for democratic political discourse. Yet the press currently faces an uncertain future. Print circulations have declined, with readerships moving online, and the shift from print to digital advertising has led to a loss in revenue for the press. The Government is determined to ensure that the UK has a vibrant, independent and plural free press, which is able to provide high quality journalism as one of the cornerstones of our public debate. As per our manifesto, we are committed to making sure content creators are appropriately rewarded for the content they make available online, and ensure there is a sustainable business model for high quality media online. The review will help us deliver on these commitments.

We have already commissioned research to look into the current state of the local and national press markets. The review will be led by a Chair, and supported by a panel of experts with experience in some of the core sectors under review, bringing a range of voices and expertise to the process.

The precise Terms of Reference for the review will be published in due course, following appointment of the external panel. Its areas of focus will include: an overall assessment of the overall state of the market at local, regional and national levels; an assessment of the impact on consumers of a reduction in high quality news provision; an analysis of how the industry is responding to current threats to its financial sustainability and the business models being developed in response; a review of the operation and management of content and data flows so crucial to creating a successful online business; and a detailed consideration of both the role of online platforms and the digital advertising supply chain - including whether advertising revenues are being unfairly diverted away from content producers and if the digital advertising market has encouraged the growth of click-bait.

The review into press sustainability will come to a view on whether the problems identified are likely to be resolved as the digital news market evolves and matures, or whether there are underlying and persistent structural market failures which might require intervention. The review will report its findings and make recommendations on what industry and Government action might be taken to ensure a financially sustainable future for high quality journalism. We expect the report to be published later this year.

This review sits alongside other work in the Digital Charter where, as the Prime Minister made clear at the World Economic Forum, we will be looking at the legal liability that social media companies have for content shared on their sites.