

A Centre for Media Affairs

Report on a consultation held at
St George's House
Windsor Castle
December 9 and 10, 2002

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The Institute for Global Ethics gratefully acknowledges the generous funding for this consultation by the Comino and Gordon Cook Foundations

Summary of consultation on a *Centre for Media Affairs*

St George's House, Windsor Castle Monday
9th and Tuesday 10th December, 2002

1. Opening plenary by the chair, Lord McNally

The current public disdain for the press is as discouraging as the public disdain for politicians.

How do we make those with a 'hardnosed' attitude realise that they are in as much danger from cynicism as anyone else?

Those working in print media are probably the least likely to make progress on this issue.

We need to maintain the liberty of the press (which many care so passionately about), but also to see some higher standards brought about.

Communications Bill

The Communications Bill is not just an electronic media bill; it is a general *communications* bill – and a window of opportunity for debate about print as well as electronic media.

In order to look at the Communications Bill properly, we need to ask the basic question, 'why do we need one?'

The Communications Bill is philosophically flawed – there is too much emphasis on the industry itself, and not enough on the responsibility of the industry to its public.

When discussing the bill, the press response tends to be that it is the slippery road to the end of press freedom.

What response will the print media have to the doubts that this debate will raise?

2. What might the media centre look like?

Mike Jempson, Press Wise Trust,

This consultation is taking place, almost to the day, on the 10th anniversary of the Special Parliamentary Hearings on Clive Soley's Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill. This bill proposed the creation of an Independent Press Authority charged with campaigning on press freedom issues and adjudicating independently on complaints.

PressWise was set up by victims of the media when that Bill fell. One of our founding principles is that press freedom is a responsibility exercised by journalists on behalf of the public and not a licence to make money out of other people's misfortunes.

Our response to public concerns about journalistic standards in the UK has generated interest and enthusiasm from around the world.

Last year the Press Wise board took a long, hard look at what we have been doing, and tried to map out a future in which the three strands of our work – advocacy, research and training - could be strengthened by working in partnership with others.

We have stripped our board down its core, which means there is room for a fresh majority to take it forward in new directions, with registered aims and objectives comprehensive enough to cover most of the models for a centre for media affairs.

One of our main difficulties has been persuading people here in the UK to support our work.

Few charitable trusts have funding criteria that encompass the media.

The business community is nervous of backing ventures that criticise the media because they do not want to attract negative coverage

Rich and famous celebrities express similar anxieties.

Seeking financial help from the media industry begs questions about independence and motivation.

The PressWise board believes that if like-minded groups can work together, share ideas, identify the similarities and differences between our approaches, and map out a route that will enable us to make best use of the skills, expertise and funding opportunities at our disposal, we are better placed to achieve a

common aim – to improve the standing and standards of journalism.

I believe that most journalists do not relish the low standing in which they are held in by the public.

The public expect more of journalism than just pandering to prejudice and prurience, scouring the laundry baskets of the rich and famous for unsavoury scandals, or masquerading as an arm of the entertainment business.

Even people whose lives had been wrecked by irresponsible or unethical journalism share the belief that it is important to protect the integrity of journalism, if journalists are to be the watchdogs of democracy.

As cross-media ownership becomes more concentrated, fewer people are setting the agenda for what gets published and broadcast, and most media practitioners, let alone the public, know little about the business interests and commercial ambitions of trans-national corporations. Their power is largely untrammelled and has no respect for national boundaries. And what is democratic about the owners running their own policing system and shaping media policy?

These issues become even more complex when press freedom arguments are employed to defend monopolistic activities.

Journalists may only be making the first draft of history, but we are also setting hares running, and in the mad scramble that so often follows, those closest to the story get hurt and the public, and even the authorities, end up with false impressions.

One of our clients took his own life after the PCC rejected his perfectly reasonable complaint - it is an option that has occurred to many when faced with the apparently intractable and unaccountable power of the mass media.

Such tragedies, and the fact that studies show a link between suicide reporting and imitative behaviour, explain why we have been working to improve reporting of suicide.

At the heart of our thinking is a recognition that there needs to be a place – which may be one building or several, or a network, virtual or actual – where different experiences and aspirations can be examined and discussed, and from which advice, support and training can flow.

It must be accessible and active.

If we want to improve the quality of the product we offer to our readers, listeners and viewers, we need to acknowledge that their concerns are also part of the equation.

If we agree to work together one of our first tasks must be to convince funders that by supporting a ‘media centre’ they will be assisting all the diverse elements to achieve their objectives.

David Kingsley, Media Society

[Slide presentation available]

3. What we find interesting in the proposal

Respondents:

Nick Perks – Rowntree Charitable Trust

Jocelyn Hay – Voice of the Listener and Viewer

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown – Journalist

Nick Perks, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

The JRCT doesn't have a programme of funding the media per se. They have four programmes that touch upon it:

Democracy.

Racial Justice: for example, the portrayal of asylum seekers and ethnic minorities in the media.

Corporate responsibility: with much of the media being commercial, there is a CSR angle to the debate.

Miscellaneous programme: where most of JRCT's funding for media work has been given.

JRCT has, in the past, been a funder of the Press Wise Trust, and also of the International Broadcasting Trust.

What is/is not of interest to prospective funders?

There is no tradition of interest, as funders do not wish to risk the wrath of the media by funding a group talking about a perceived restriction of press freedom.

If there *is* a media scandal, where can one go? If there is an oil spill, for example, Greenpeace is quickly identifiable by the public at large as the group that can help.

When parties in the media are responsible for any outrages, most people cannot identify the PCC or PressWise Trust etc.

It is important to remember that journalists, by the very nature of their work, are probably making more ethical choices than most of us. Can we make a difference?

A building per se is not a very exciting prospect; what is needed is a clear purpose; people and resources tend to flow when there is a strong vision.

Jocelyn Hay, Voice of the Listener and Viewer

The Voice of the Listener and Viewer is not a complaints handling body. They offer support, rather than handling complaints, and their ambition is to try and support things they think are good; and to try to 'fill a need for a collective voice'

There are places where people can complain, both statutory and non-statutory, and both involve ordinary people making their views known in a negative way. But how does the person on the street know how others feel about possible positive initiatives? There are no formal channels as there are for making complaints and for industry players.

VLW realises that a media centre is needed, and supports the initiative. The word 'centre' is good because it is an inclusive word. But VLW would have a number of concerns about the centre:

Conflict of having a corporate sponsor as it could restrict freedom. If funding from trusts can be secured, this would be far better.

VLW would also be worried about any government interference

But on a more positive note:

Humbled by overseas perception of UK broadcasting media: for example, people come to the UK out of respect for our media regulations and because they wish to emulate them – a centre could only enhance this perception.

The centre would be a 'means' to education, and 'tools to empower'; and would it encourage good practice, and make individuals less vulnerable to abuse.

Communications Bill:

There is only one reference to citizens in the Communications Bill, and then only in relation to Europe. In the draft bill the word 'consumer' was only mentioned once, and the concept seems to have been included as an afterthought. The bill lays a duty on OFCOM to reflect the needs of consumers but it ignores the needs of citizens which are more difficult to quantify. Contradictions in the bill worry VLW.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Journalist, The Independent

The media is a collection of the 'powerful', which makes it difficult to be part of, and to give an accurate sense of, the 'powerless'.

The perception is that you have to be rich, powerful and important. 'It (the media) will only act on your behalf depending on who you are'.

For example, individual asylum seekers do not have the 'where with all' to complain on their own behalf. One used to be able to complain on behalf of marginalized / demonised groups – but that right was taken away. Special treatment is not required however – just *fairness*.

Journalists have a responsibility to explain who refugees are and why they are here.

We need to improve our own self-regulation.

Hard hitting critical journalism is good – we all need to be criticised.

Post Sept 11, something moved editors of papers to do the honourable thing – explaining Islam properly – there was no profit to be gained from it. But they still did it.

Maybe if there was an admirable institution that made a name for itself, editors might succumb to the principles it embodied

Need to make the new entity ‘indispensable’ in the culture of journalism.

But no point in just having another place solely to train journalists – there is too much else to talk about.

4. Feedback from small group sessions

Clive Bradley, Confederation of Information Communication Industries

David Kingsley, Media Society

John Owen, Frontline Club

Vicars Hall Group - Clive Bradley:

There was agreement that something needs to be done to raise standards; not just in the press (particularly the tabloid press) but throughout the media, whether currently statutorily regulated, or not. And this includes the role of content providers on the internet (if they can be reached).

What is that something? Many of our group felt there is a demand for, on the one hand, strong statutory regulation across the media to deal with such issues as racism, distortion, just getting it wrong, lies, and other abuses, to, on the other, a federation of existing voluntary organisations to enhance their effectiveness; and with a good range of options of different solutions in between.

The following is not a consensus of what people thought should be done, but an idea of what we thought might reasonably be achieved by these discussions:

First, that something needs to be done, and done quickly.

That it should cover all the media.

If it was to be effective, it had to be convincing and authoritative.

It should produce clear standards of behaviour and performance.

It should not just be a talking shop, but also a researcher, and a campaigner; and that in campaigning, it should be strident.

And it should not try to do everything at once, but should focus on the real needs.

What sort of organisation should it be, in order to implement these sorts of objectives?

Some felt that the situation was so serious, that only a powerful statutory regulator could begin the task of imposing standards on the press and the media

The question - should the media / journalists be subject to licensing – was raised.

Some lamented the lack of a body along the lines of the British Medical Association, to regulate the qualifications that are required to be a journalist.

Others asked, ‘can you put limits on the people who are able to express opinions, and to report on what is actually happening?’

Is a major amendment to the Communications Bill itself needed? Although it would seem that this is not really realistic.

Improved systems of self-regulation would require considerable consensus of opinion within the sector in order to become effective. This in turn would require major research and thought before implementation was possible.

From this came the idea of a ‘Think Tank Plus’ - research followed by implementation.

Qualities a ‘think-tank plus’ should have:

Authoritative governance (capable of determining the priorities of work to be done).

Not a “talk down” authority, but authoritative by virtue of its own quality, with an objective staff and an objective standard of research.

Other comments:

Consultation needs to be undertaken in liaison with consumers - the users, listeners, viewers, readers etc.

It should have effective promulgation techniques and it should be a campaigning organisation, with a strident campaigning voice.

Two functions, that could not easily be assimilated into the 'think-tank plus' type of solution were (i) the case for victim support and (ii) the machinery for the resolution and the mediation of disputes within the press, i.e. between the press and broadcasters *and* the viewers, readers, and those reported on

While there is a demand for the prompt resolution of issues, usually these very issues cannot easily be resolved in a hurry.

Intrusion into privacy – this issue has now gone to the highest statutory regulator in the land – the courts; and the courts have not done very much to resolve it in a way that gives guidance either to editors, or to other people concerned with the evolution of opinion.

Finance

It was felt that there would be finance for a think-tank plus of the type that we were talking about. This was to some extent reinforced by the idea of the strong public demand for the control of such things as pornography and violence – particularly on the internet – but once we start to bring pornography into the equation, all sorts of much more complex issues relating to freedom of expression etc., arise

It would be important to concentrate on the objective professional standards of journalism. The drafting of such standards can be extremely difficult; it is quite simple to say that we must have accuracy, truth, objectivity, and balance etc. to relate to the needs of society, but to spell these out to meet specific situations is much more difficult to achieve.

Plenty of codes of conduct exist. The difficulty is determining how they can be enforced, or be made to operate sensibly in all the different situations that are faced by the press.

Training

Whilst there is a great need for training on standards and ethics, there appears to be a lack of it in broadcasting and in the press, partly because it is very difficult to get journalists away from the job to undertake serious training programmes.

Iveagh Room Group - David Kingsley:

There were some key issues that emerged quite quickly:

The importance of thinking not only of corporate responsibility, but also personal responsibility.

The press are thought of separately, and differently, to other parts of the media spectrum. A definition of the media as 'acquisition and distribution of information' was arrived at.

It was suggested that it was important to look at what the media is *not* giving to the public, as well as what it *is* – this is an important consideration in the context of the discussion about what we should be doing in the future.

We are currently living in a 'blame society', which raises a whole set of problems

Agreement that facts are better than hunches, that people feel threatened by the media, and that the media feels threatened by criticism.

In summing up, a poem!

The Iveagh group, I want you to know,
Said of the centre 'let's give it a go'.

The funder amongst us said 'whooh, before
you go ahead,

You must have a cause to serve, and a vision,
or you're dead.

'Define what is a unique contribution the
centre can offer.

What will it do better than is already being done, - with less bother?'

'Facts and research are the key' said others 'so we can promote a water tight case.

Then the centre will show the world a trustworthy face.'

To start it now, we need an advisory board
And a project director – the best we can afford.

They'll call together the views and facts for us all,

And help us to keep our eye on the ball.

The content provider (journalists, to you and me)

Must be part of the centre, and willing to see

What's good for the customer supports our freedom too

For democracy may depend upon the courage of 'the media few'.

We now need funding for six months, it was agreed,

If with the creation of the centre we are to proceed.

And it's got to have a place where we all can meet,

To work out the future, 'separate the chaff from the wheat'.

Catherine Room Group - John Owen:

"Veering towards the pragmatic and away from the idealistic", the Catherine Room Group compared notes about what was presently being done, and how they might be able to cooperate with one another. Was there any common ground among the various proposals that were floating around?

Margaret Scammell spoke about what was being envisaged for the Media Forum at LSE, (a centre being available for the 'spinners and the spun')

Ursula Owen spoke about the pulling together of various free expression groups, including Index, PEN, and Article 19 into 'an amnesty for free expression'

Bernard Margueritte developed some of the arguments he had already been making about the International Communications Forum.

John Owen, spoke on what is also referred to in some of the papers as a 'Frontline' society or club, and explained that it was to be a meeting place for frontline journalists. It was being underwritten by a leading freelance journalist concerned that, since The Freedom Forum had shut down its European centre, there really wasn't a gathering place for frontline journalists, especially aimed at the freelance community.

Rather than dwelling on the rationale for the centre itself, the conversation was more of an inventory about what each of the organisations was doing. In a conversation about what it was that could bring the groups together, the following points were raised:

There is clearly an overlap, but also a recognition that each organisation has its own *raison d'etre* and, in a sense, in order to advance its own goals and objectives, each needs to maintain its own identity.

Some kind of physical place – a centre, where each group could 'put out its own stall' could be beneficial.

If the burden of meeting daily budgeting demands - the difficulties of raising money, the time-consuming staff requirements etc - could be lifted; if there was a facility, a place, where each organisation could comfortably relocate to, free to develop its own agenda, its own programme, its own priorities, without having to devote so much time and energy to all of the things which really do wear down such organisations; then perhaps 'a hundred flowers could bloom' in this new centre.

What about meeting as a virtual forum, perhaps on the internet?

Funding Issues:

If a funder looked at this proposition, wouldn't there be some requirement, some pre-requisite, that the groups work together in some capacity? And that in turn would influence some kind of organisational reforms, or bring the groups together in some way.

Nick Perks said that he thought a solid centre might indeed be attractive to a funder, but again he cautioned that a funder would want to know 'what is to be achieved?' Even if a place could be found – an underwritten facility that would allow each organisation to pursue its own goals and its own objectives – what would be the greater good that would be served? It was agreed that much more time had to be spent thinking about that.

The notion that we should turn to the media itself to underwrite the new venture was not dismissed.

No real understanding was reached in this group about what the overall objective of an organisation devoted to media ethics would be, except that they did steer away from the notion that there should be an amalgamation of the existing groups.

Do we need a Centre for Media Ethics?

Summary of after dinner speech by

Bernard Margueritte, President, International Communications Forum

We have hundreds of centres for media ethics around the world. Are they doing much good? It seems that the number of such centres is in direct proportion to the decay of the media in a particular country. This is after all a sane reaction: when you are ashamed of what you do, you may feel a greater need to talk about media ethics.

We have hundreds of codes of ethics, dating back to the Declaration of the Duties and Rights of the Journalists from 1971. Has it improved the situation? Nowadays almost every media institution has its own code of ethics. Is it followed by deeds? Are codified ethics useful?

Is it more complicated for a journalist than for anybody else, to be ethical? Surely it comes

down to personal 'codes of ethics', as in any profession.

Hubert Beuve-Mery, founder of "Le Monde", used to say to young journalists: "I don't ask you to be objective; objectivity is a dull notion, a lukewarm reality; you have to be passionate; you have to care about the people, their dreams, their feelings, their dramas; so you have to be much more than 'objective', you have to show intellectual honesty, compassion and a deep feeling of service."

To be an ethical journalist you have to be professional on the job, you have to love people, to want to give them all they need to be 'citizens' in their country, to do everything to allow people, sometimes in far away countries, to respect and understand each other. You are a bridge builder, a 'media-tor'.

Part of being a journalist is also to promote the continuity of the community, the pride of a country, putting forward not only the bad and ugly, but also all that allows people to feel good about themselves.

We do need a UK Media Centre. We badly need comparative research on the situation of the media in various parts of the world, and research on the relationship between media and society.

If we don't know what is happening and we don't understand why, it will become almost impossible to work for the renewal of the media. The ICF is embarked in this great effort.

Practical suggestions/outcomes:

ICF's research coordinator, Ingrid Volkmer, a German lady currently working at Harvard, is cooperating already with 12 research centres in the world and I would hope that she will play an important role together with the UK Centre.

5. Governance session – Raising the Issues

Robert Beckett, Institute of Communication Ethics

[Slide presentation available]

Ursula Owen, Index on Censorship

We (a group of free expression organisations) have started to build up a centre for freedom of expression. It will include everything on freedom of expression; daily mentoring, litigation, literacy, regional affiliates, showcasing, etc. The centre is at conception stage – It even has funding (just under £100,000). Our centre will happen – we are currently trying to create a flexible structure, a board, working executive, and joint project management, and are about to hire a development person.

On the think-tank plus:

If you don't know what the centre is for, then what is the point? Funders like success. Your mission has to be clear (are you clear at the moment?)

If you choose the model of an umbrella organisation, then the most difficult part will be the first stages of discussion, i.e. agreement between all the parties. OR we could *all* start again and thrash out a notion of a centre that may be something new.

You have to be clear about leadership if thinking in terms of an umbrella organisation – you can't just use a media centre to reduce your individual administrative overheads. Some funders don't like an umbrella organisation because it involves shared overheads and isn't coordinated. Others prefer a corporate structure with strong leadership/ a leader with vision.

I agree that if people are willing to let go of something [of their own organisation], no one has got far enough yet – we could start afresh. Doing the talking at Index took two years.

A building itself is not enough to bring groups together. We have three main partners, and lots of affiliates, with the condition that all organisations renting space in the building do something to build up the greater project. We

[The Index on Censorship] have seven groups in the same building but it hasn't made much difference, without will and conditions.

6. Respondents

Jeremy Hardie – Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

Simon Webley – Institute of Business Ethics

Linda Christmas – Journalist

Jeremy Hardie, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

Background:

Recently spent a great deal of time trying to obtain new premises for the IPPR, which has just come to a climax, so knows what it is like trying to get hold of buildings, with no funds available.

Has had a great deal recently to do with idea of open democracy that has successfully raised money from Ford.

Has observed the operation of the ICS in Bethnal Green, which is a certain kind of Federation.

On the idea of a centre for media affairs:

There is plainly something in all this.

There needs to be a mechanism whereby clear conclusions emerge.

Usually a change of one kind or another does take place, which sparks off something of this magnitude (the physics 'golden event').

Use whatever tools you can get your hands on.

What is the centre for? That is the central question.

Simon Webley, Institute of Business Ethics

In making the case for an independent clearing house to deal with ethical issues arising from the relationship between mass media and the public in the UK,

SW said it should be independent, and authoritative. He then gave an illustration of the model that was set up when the Institute of Business Ethics started out as an independent body (though its origins go back to 1986):

A body was needed to be a focus for business behaviour – a ‘clearing house for best practice’.

Structure:

IBE has a Director – knowledgeable, and the face of the Institute to the outside – to let the message out as far as possible. Responsible for the budget and the running of the place.

Research Director – ‘thinker’ – whose role is to see what is out there that needs to be researched. Most research is commissioned out, with a small in-house research capacity.

A project manager.

A very good office manager.

Income – around a quarter of a million.

Linda Christmas, Journalist

I ask myself, are we all on the side of the media? Do we all have a real affection for the industry? Will we work within it, or will we work from the outside, looking in?

The important thing is where our heart lies - I find it is possible to exert influence because it is known where my heart lies and, as a result, the industry listens.

Are we looking back to a non-existent golden age? The world of media has been truly democratised – no more ‘top down’ approaches.

No one wants the top to be dictating anymore - it is the rule of majority in the media now.

We need to go for a research base, to work from ‘inside’. City University wants to promote itself as the place to go for a Masters into how the media interacts with society (better term than ethics).

I am defending the press in one sense – but also agree that something has to be done. The media has been wagging the finger at everyone else, and not applying criticism to ourselves - but criticism has to be done in a gentle, thoughtful, reflective way (because working in the media ISNT reflective – working to 24 hour news clock)

Resistance to the ‘golden moment’ theory. Gradualism is better than waiting for a golden moment.

We ought to look at circulation figures – if we can develop a technique that will help stabilize (let alone increase) circulation, it would be enough to persuade editors and proprietors.

7. General Discussion:

Think Tank Plus

Mission/Remit:

Agreement that something must be done, but no agreement as to what form it might take. Without a purpose, or mission, nothing can be successfully launched. There is much going on within the organisations represented here, but before we get to the stage of an umbrella organisation, we will need to carry on a multi-faceted dialogue and a mapping exercise in order to arrive at agreement on at least a single objective that should be pursued.

Any centre should be a commissioning body, capable of commissioning research from the university bodies etc. It would therefore be quite important that it should be kept at arms length because of the need to establish credibility, and to be able to judge objectively what actually is to be commissioned. In addition, it would perhaps be unlikely that the institution itself could undertake all the research necessary but, as in other sectors, would commission other authentic and reliable bodies to do research for it.

Could include the role of an ‘agony aunt’ – i.e. journalists unburdening their own consciences to somebody at the centre on dilemmas such as personal conscience versus what the editor has asked for etc.

Should it be positioned as a think tank that would also act as a campaigning organisation?

It was also suggested that the sort of real energy for the creation of successful new voluntary organisations invariably comes from people under 50 and usually under 40!

Although there was much wisdom and experience present at Windsor, we would need to get together a group of younger journalists to drive this on. [Not everybody agreed entirely with this point!]

At this point in time, we need to shift away from thinking in terms of a vast donation that might, or might not be secured. The first need would be to concentrate on a model for the centre.

Practical aspects of setting up a not-for-profit organisation of this kind:

An experienced individual, with diplomatic and probing skills, to act as a go-between for the main organisations. This individual could explore over the next months/year plus, what the common strand might be, and another meeting could then be reconvened to develop this process until there was a solid starting point that could be enthusiastically endorsed by the majority of organisations in the field.

A very visible and high profile spokesperson/project leader, who would be present from the beginning to stand up and speak for the centre. The name of the person – who they are and what they represent in the media - will be very important. He/she would need to be an early player.

What about awards for the best/most positive coverage? [A similar model in Brazil showed that over a period of time (every broadcast having been monitored monthly through the internet) the amount and type of coverage has switched so that positive stories on education top the list now, instead of crime. In this instance, money is put up to award the individual journalist, who then gets access to prisons; and the airline provides them with free travel for a year, to go round and look at the state of children, and provide a voice for children, etc.]

The whole international impact of a potential centre would have to be kept in perspective throughout this development. The media is very globalised, and most of our own national papers are not British-owned. We should not try to be only a British activity, but the activity should have international repercussions, and perhaps be a model for other countries.

Funding:

There is no substantial funding on offer yet – apart from a bit of seed corn money that is not very much in relative terms.

General points:

Concern that the notion of a really -well established ‘all-quarters, all-corners’ institution to maintain journalistic standards in an age of global reach, could inadvertently become a ‘handmaid of conformism’

We should not be talking about what is *wrong* with the media all the time, but rather remind people of the force for good that it is. That it *is* about free expression.

Should we be starting from the position of saying that the media is under threat? There are things wrong with the media – but perhaps the better way forward is to note what the media is doing well, and publicly to praise it.

Need to show that the centre is on the side of the journalist, by giving praise when it is deserved. Then the media is more likely to listen when the centre is being constructively critical. Without this balance, people in the media will just look at initiatives of this kind, and see them as another piece of kicking that the sector has got to put up with – and in that way, any centre will not win over the support of the industry that it is trying to influence.

There was a debate as to whether the media world is a visual world or a verbal one, and that photographers, cartoonists, anyone who is producing visual effects on television, plays as much of an important role as any other. It is perhaps a mistake to think that the main influence of television is visual. It probably does exert influence through words at least as much, and probably more so, than through pictures.

How do we involve young people in this process? Recent research published by the ITC, showed a frightening disengagement of young people from both the political process and interest in newspapers, or television news, or indeed almost any other kind of engagement

in civil society. This has very worrying implications.

Another concern expressed was that young people are getting most of their news and opinions from the internet. Are the media being complacent in assuming that we still have a newspaper buying or a news-watching public? Is there a generation that is going to bypass those mediums of opinion, news and information, and go straight to the internet, where there are some very strange forces at work, and where we are a very long way from knowing how we could, or should, deal with them?

An alternative view is that there are a great deal of very interesting things on the web, as well as odd things, including very good news. And a lot of the young are very impatient about mainstream media and are finding their news - and also very wide-ranging international news - on the web instead.

We should make sure that we look at what young people are doing *outside* of the mainstream media – because that is where they want to be.

One opinion expressed was that free expression is much hated in this country – most people think censorship is rather a good thing. But the people who really care about free expression are the young.

8. Next Steps

Robin Williamson – International Communications Forum

[Slide presentation available]

John Lloyd, London School of Economics

The key questions which underlie all of our ideas in thinking about any centre that we might set up, are;

What are the media doing to society?

What effect are we having?

How are we constructing the debate?

And how might it be done otherwise?

We need to be seen within the media to stimulate those questions.

We all believe that power has to be challenged, or it becomes corrupt. We need to aerate ourselves, as it were, because a power as great as ours that doesn't do that *will* become corrupt, become cruel, as the media can be, and ultimately ossifies.

The media doesn't always do its job well; it doesn't do what it *believes* itself to be doing, by reference to the grand old texts - that we are needed to uphold liberty. *We are* still needed for liberty – but are we increasing liberty, or do we sometimes actually foreclose it? And that seems to me the key question, from which research, publication, debate flows – including the very important question of ethical and journalistic standards - but standards against what?

The standard expected of many reporters, in television and in newspapers, is to get the story *come what may*. The talk about ethics, in the end, doesn't count for much, because what is rewarded – literally rewarded, by promotion, by money, by title – is the story. What is this doing to society?

Journalistic standards come within a certain kind of framework. The standards are, as most of us believe them to be, to report and analyse honestly, fully, in a balanced way. But these have been true for a century or more. The question is, why are they becoming a minority pursuit? What are the demands that mean that people, journalists often with good will (at least at the beginning of their careers) flout them so blatantly?

We view ourselves as watchdogs – watching over politics, public, the state.

The media's self-image has changed over time, going through stages of evolution - post war media, challenging, informed criticism, etc.

Entertainment criteria jumps/leaks into the news criteria

Drama of image is often the first step in getting news across

Journalist often [mistakenly] seen as respected 'politician'

Ideas for the Centre:

Publish various pamphlets, books, on the issues of the day

We should steer away from the academic though – that has already been covered by others

Should be concerned with NOW issues - ‘of the day’, ‘of the week’

Should create forums

Campaigns

We must confront power with power

General discussion:

Do those involved in the work already going on in the universities see this new initiative as being in conflict, or complimentary, to what is being envisaged?

Rod Allen, City University:

Involved in research on some of these issues for some years now, and moving towards the establishment of a centre for *international* journalism in society, which will be a centre for study of worldwide journalistic ethics.

None of this is in conflict with anything that’s been said here. As universities, each will bring university values to the study of these questions, rather than taking a particular view before doing the research. We are very happy to be part of, and to work for a centre that is established, as indeed will no doubt LSE and Goldsmiths – and indeed John Moores University and Sheffield University, and the other great institutions that are carrying out research in these areas already.

Tom McNally, on behalf of Hugo de Burgh, Goldsmiths College:

Goldsmiths are trying to build a unit that will have the capabilities to do a lot of the kind of academic study that a think-tank plus would also aspire to do.

John Lloyd, LSE:

Based on an idea of JL, that began with Ian Hargreaves, Barry Cox and John Lloyd talking

about journalism. One of the original ideas was to set up a regular journal something like the TLS or the London Review of Books - something that is a journal about the media, in the same way that the TLS is about book reviews - a regular periodical about the media. Then came the idea to try to produce something rather like our phrase, a ‘think-tank plus’ - something which would combine campaigning, activism, as well as pamphlets, research and so on.

Consumer

How does the consumer fit into this whole idea of the centre? They are not included on the steering committee.

One of the most important partners in this is the public. We not only owe it to them, because we owe our livings to them, but also in terms of the role that they play in the changing society that has and is continuing to take place.

9. Chair’s summary, Lord McNally

There is something in all of this, and I hope that we will carry it forward. We are all dealing with a less reverential, a less deferential, a less ‘talked down to’ society – a freer society – and I think that is to be welcomed.

I have never seen myself as hostile to the media. We are doing different jobs within the democratic process, (referring to the House of Lords and the media) and therefore we shouldn’t have too cosy a relationship. The media should not react in such a negative way when it is criticised – there needs to be a more constructive response.

The final few sessions complemented each other, in that there was a practical programme of activity, and John Lloyd took us a long way towards a mission statement. There are still clearly a variety of views between the minimalists and those at the other end of the spectrum.

We are left with these questions:

Is the centre going to focus on the print media or a broader agenda?

Should it be particularly focused, or 'a hundred flowers blooming', as somebody said.

Will it be academically based, campaigning-based, or should we get to the sharp end and give priority to space and funding?

The 'think tank plus' idea has a lot of merit. But others have suggested that an umbrella, or a loose networking federation, is the way ahead.

Looking ahead, there is the need for flexibility and momentum – and money.

If we are talking about power, it is absolutely essential in a free society that we have a free press that is willing to challenge power and authority.

It is equally important that those who have control of that free press are made to justify their stewardship as well. It is no use hiding behind the 'fig leaf' that 'we are the free press' – and not engaging in a proper rational debate about the condition of the media in our broader democratic society.

Somebody should be looking after the public interest.

The role of a free press in a free society needs to be opened up.

The agenda is ambitious, and those on the steering committee should feel encouraged by the response. There have been many practical ideas put forward, and some fair indication of where we go next. If this succeeds, I really do believe that it could provide a framework, within an organisation, to promote a free press *and* engage all those involved in the proper dialogue about its role in our society. Both are needed, if all the other elements of a working democracy are going to function and benefit from that press freedom.

Frances Caluori and Sheila Bloom
February 2003

Websites/recommended further reading and research¹

www.unicef.org/magic

All over the world, children and young people are contributing to a range of TV programmes, radio shows, newspapers, websites and other media projects, getting their voices heard and putting their hopes and concerns into the public arena.

The [MAGIC](http://www.unicef.org/magic) website is UNICEF's (United Nations Children's Fund) response to the [Oslo Challenge](#) of 1999, which called on media professionals, educators, governments, organizations, parents, children and young people themselves to recognize the enormous potential of media to make the world a better place for children.

This website showcases media projects by, with and for children, and provides information for those wishing to take up the Oslo Challenge.

¹ Note to participants: other suggestions for this section welcome.

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