

Extracts from the keynote address by Lisa Nandy, the UK's Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, at the Society of Editors' annual conference, March 17, 2026

Importance of 'the media' and ruptures in trust

The media is a central part of that civic realm today, and today I'm going to describe how we protect it from such a rupture. How it can anchor our civic life in an age of profound turbulence and provide us with the basis of a cohesive country and a healthy democracy.

For people to trust one another, there has to be shared understanding, shared facts, shared moments, shared experiences. This is the meeting point, the common ground, the ability to understand one another on which our country is built.

Fearless journalism

The same is absolutely true of our media. So whether it's independent news, free and fearless journalism, or great entertainment and storytelling, which helps to shape and define us as a nation - as we shape and define it - it's my belief that the media is an essential part of that civic space, and that we have to nurture it, and we have to support it.

But in recent decades, we've lived through a revolution in media, and we have not risen to the moment. There's been an explosion in the range of sources, of news and entertainment, a great democratization that has removed the power of the gatekeepers and allowed all of us to be heard. I want to be clear that I believe that that is a good thing.

Technology, scraping and the power imbalance

We're navigating a storm, and we will continue to do so until we work out not how to stop change, but how to find order in the chaos and put the technology in our service, not us in its. So I want to talk to you today about two anchors in that storm. The most trusted of places in the media landscape and key parts of the civic realm. If they didn't exist, we would have to invent them.

Hunger for news

And I'm going to start with a part of our civic realm that has been neglected for far too long, and that is local media. We believe that there is a market for local media that is growing. In a world where facts are contested and debate has moved to the extremes, people are seeking out news that they can trust and stories that reflect their lives and communities. But the foundations of this industry have been shaken.

During the riots two summers ago, we saw how much it matters. Those of us who live in the northern towns that were targeted by racist thugs looked on in despair as misinformation spread like wildfire online.

Reporters who braved the rioters

But where I live, it was journalists from the Southport Reporter, the Wigan Observer, the Manchester Evening News, and the Liverpool Echo, who not only braved the mob to report with accuracy, but almost uniquely in the media landscape, told the story of the community response. When local journalism declines, trust declines with it, accountability weakens, and voices across the UK are silenced. This government will not allow that to happen.

Local media action plan

To choose not to act is to choose decline and so today, we're launching the first local media action-plan in a generation to amplify the voices of people across every nation and region to help local media springboard into this digital age and provide a much-needed antidote to the Westminster echo chamber. We're almost tripling the funding for community radio. We're harnessing the power of local and national government and giving more young people access to free high-quality journalism and the opportunity to pursue careers in it.

Breaking into journalism

Because local media was and always has been a ladder of opportunity to help new voices break into journalism. And this is not a nice-to-have. This is essential to a cohesive country. Our debate is too narrow, and it's too small. Too often an echo chamber than a thriving civic space.

'Public assets and responsible custodians'

We'll work closely to ensure that this is fit for purpose, and we will not hesitate to do more if needed. So, make no mistake, today is the start of a new approach to local media, which nurtures it and places it directly at the heart of our government support for our country. And our message to the owners of these public assets is simple: If you're prepared to act as responsible custodians, we will be the active, supportive partners you've been looking for from government for far too long.

But if you're not, let somebody else take these vital institutions forward. Because at the heart of our national malaise is that too many of us have been ignored, our contributions taken for granted and our lives not reflected in the story we tell ourselves about ourselves as a nation for far too long. The fact that our media is one of the most class, geographic, and ethnically concentrated industries is a major problem, and this is why.

BBC – the big anchor

And in this respect, for all of its recent challenges, it is that second anchor in the storm, the BBC, that I want to talk to you about today, because it has been a bright spot on a bleak landscape. It's hard to see another media institution that has created such an important geographic footprint across Salford, Bigfoot Loch, Cardiff, and Glasgow, while building at the same time an apprenticeship scheme in place of the ladder that once existed through local news. ITV was created to ensure a strong voice for our regions that powered our nation, and Channel Four was founded later to ensure our media reflected the stories of a changing nation. But in recent decades, the BBC, which has always adapted and evolved throughout its history, has reinvented itself as an engine for the whole nation. It is the most trusted source of news, the producer of quality children's programming, and the enabler of those shared moments from VE Day to Doctor Who, that are the civic spaces, the benches that connect us and bring us together. And so, while the terms, the structures, and the funding for the BBC will continue to be negotiated every several years, we should seek to end the bizarre situation where if the charter isn't agreed in time, the BBC ceases to exist. We continue to look at the responses to the consultation on the Charter, but the truth is we would not accept this for the NHS, and we should not accept it for the BBC.

BBC leadership

And in return for this, I will demand that the ethos of public service must be at its core at every level. With those at the very top of the organization expected to answer to the people that they are tasked with representing. No institution has inspired such intense views and debate throughout its hundred-year history. And that is why, through the charter review this year, we intend to strengthen the accountability of the leadership of the BBC, not to politicians, but to the people it serves in every nation and region.

Navigating mis-information

But I want to be clear with you that we're not doing enough to empower people in this new era to understand and navigate a much more varied media landscape. For example, I believe it has been nothing short of negligence that the last government not only did nothing to equip young people to navigate this terrain but actively narrowed the curriculum. That is why Bridget Phillipson has broadened our curriculum to ensure that every child leaves school with the media literacy and digital skills they need to thrive in this new landscape. And it is why Liz Kendall has taken unprecedented action to better protect children online, including by clamping down on the creation and sharing of non-consensual intimate images, launching a pilot campaign to help families develop media literacy skills, and launching a national conversation on how to ensure children have enriching lives online.

Video-sharing protections

I said that last year we want everyone, including children, who now largely consume media online, to be able to find high-quality content on video-sharing platforms, and I urged you to work together to achieve it. That remains my preference, but if action doesn't accelerate, we will introduce prominence requirements for public service media content on video-sharing platforms, as we've done on television.

Algorithms targeting young men

And I can also confirm today that we are launching a targeted media literacy intervention to help young men better understand how platforms use algorithms to shape what they see and question the online they are presented with. This is part of our effort to tackle the performing misogyny disseminated in the so-called manosphere. Navigating this media landscape has also been complicated by a dangerous blurring of facts and polemic.

Politicians as news presenters

And at a minimum, we believe it cannot be acceptable for politicians to present news without it being made clear to viewers that they are not neutral and as elected politicians are required to have a point of view. I am exploring action in this space because people have a right to know that what they are seeing and whether it should be treated as opinion or fact.

Careful media regulation

Media regulation in the UK has evolved with care and caution over many years, and this is for good reason: to protect that rare and precious independence of the media landscape and its ability to speak truth to power, whilst empowering and supporting viewers, readers and citizens to have and trust the media they need. It's left us with a system where the press is almost

entirely self-regulated. Broadcast media is independently regulated and an online world which has resembled the Wild West, but where all governments across the world are now starting to act. Every government should tread with care when it comes to new regulation. But we as a government are closely following the trends in media consumption. I understand that there is a market for clickbait, something that has informed the development of news for more than ten years.

Growing market for quality news

However, we are also seeing signs of a much bigger and growing market for trusted news and current affairs and for the enablers of a vibrant debate and a larger, richer conversation. Around thirty percent of people who don't follow the news identify trust as the key reason why. Trust in the news through social media is increasing while readership and viewership of traditional news media is falling.

In this context, high-quality journalism, underpinned by robust standards, is more important than ever. From infected blood to the Horizon scandal and MPs expenses at a national level, to the brilliant campaign to power up the North and its northern titles, our press has always been essential to our democracy and the clamour for trusted news is getting louder.

Choosing trust and integrity

I know from discussing this with many of you in this room, you, the custodians of this industry, that you recognize that there are two paths ahead. To follow the very worst excesses of this new age of mis- and disinformation, or to uphold and champion the very best of this industry, high standards, trust and integrity. I think the future of our democracy relies on you choosing the latter.

Selected exchanges during the Question and Answer session

Peter Grant, Digital Content, Social and Audience Manager: 'I'd say that the reports of the death of local news have been greatly exaggerated by many. Newsquest is a healthy business, thriving business.' He asked how the process for local media funding would work across legacy news brands and new independent outlets and whether the support would be one-off or ongoing.

Nandy said both legacy and new outlets would be considered. She also said: 'And I agree with you, by the way, that the idea that local news is dying is not the case. But there are parts of the industry that are really struggling, and we've got to deal with that. So, you know, if you need helping national titles in that digital transition that some have been falling behind with, you need help with that. If you need help with new types of services as well, to extend the reach of existing publications so that it reaches further where, where those news deserts exist, we'll fund that.'

She said the 'strategy has been in co-production with the industry itself, not just with the owners of, of these titles, but with the people who actually run the newsrooms, who are on the ground doing the work, seeing the impact of what some of the cuts.'

Nikki Mead, who had worked at 'X' (formerly Twitter) said that the speed at which misinformation and disinformation and misogyny spreads 'means people cannot cope'. We have the Online Harms Bill, but is the government doing enough to hold social platforms to account?

Nandy said: 'Part of what I'm announcing today is designed to deal with that, including the fact that I referenced in the speech that we're working closely with the CMA to support the work that they've been leading around Google'. As an example she cited the Manchester Evening News and their 'excellent coverage of the awful synagogue attack in Manchester' and how they had 'found themselves way down the search engine rankings'.

Patrícia Figueiredo, a Brazilian journalist in London as the UK Data Privacy and Security Correspondent for MLex, asked about support for the creative sector in terms of AI and copyrights.

Nandy said: 'AI and copyright issue, I've said before, we've very much heard loud and clear the responses to the consultation and the serious challenges that the current situation poses to the publishing industry in particular and the creative industries in general.'

Raymond Snoddy, a finance and media journalist, asked whether the ten-year time limit on the BBC Royal Charter would be scrapped.

Nandy replied that 'whether it comes to the length of the charter or how you sustainably fund the BBC, we can't continue to duck those big and essential questions'.

Ian McGregor, from the Society of Editors and The Telegraph, thanked the Secretary of States for her conference attendance and asked whether she had any particular thoughts on the regulation of the press moving forward.

Nandy said: 'We will tread carefully and cautiously about regulation of the press because any right-minded government should because it is a precious and important thing that fearless journalists can hold government to account. So, I haven't come here today to announce any kind of new regulation on the press. I do, however, have serious concerns that what we're seeing is people voting with their feet. We're seeing more and more people turning off from the news. We've seen traditional forms of media in decline, and we've seen trust cited as the single biggest reason for that.'

Nandy added: 'I am also really concerned that when you look at IPSO, the regulator, that when complaints are made to IPSO, only one percent of them are upheld and nobody's ever been fined. If only one percent of the complaints are upheld and nobody has ever been fined, is that because everything that is produced by the press in this country is a hundred percent true and accurate? Or is that because the system needs to be more robust? And that is a challenge that I put back to you because I do think that a free and fearless press is more important in this country now than ever.'