



The virtual SciCon conference series | Transcript

Dame Frances Cairncross | What can governments learn from the media crisis in UK? Recommendations from the Cairncross-Review 'A sustainable Future for Journalism'

(14th October 2020)

Mod.: Christina Sartori

[Christina Sartori] OK, so let's start. I think there are still people coming in or trying to join us, but we'll slowly start so that we have enough time for the report and for the lecture and for the Q&A at the end.

So, hello everybody who managed to join us today. And welcome to today's lecture by Dame Frances Cairncross, the lecture's called "Cairncross and after: Sustaining high quality journalism"; my name is Christina Sartori.

I'm a freelance journalist and I will host this Zoom session today.

And I hope everything will work out fine and you can understand everything.

If you have thoughts or questions during the lecture, you can write them in the chat. But we will have a Q&A session at the end after the lecture of Dame Frances Cairncross. So there you will be able to ask directly, just for your information.

This lecture now today is one of eleven lectures, all held online, all about the future of science journalism, because right now the future doesn't look bright at all.

This is astonishing because the corona pandemic has proven impressively how important high-quality journalism is today. But the pandemic has also intensified the problems for journalists and for media companies. For many of them, their already bad economic situation has been worsened actually by the pandemic in Germany as well as in other countries. So the question is: what to do? To tackle this question, two organizations, the Wissenschafts-Pressekonferenz (WPK), which translates as German Science Journalists' Association, and the Deutsche Akademie der Technikwissenschaften (acatech), that's the National Academy of Science and Engineering. Those two created the European conference SciCon. SciCon is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research – BMBF. And I'd like to thank the BMBF for its support in the name of SciCon. SciCon stands for Science Journalism in the Digital Age. And it is looking for ideas, for models, experiences and so on. Due to Corona, the organization had to change a little bit, and it's now organized in a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, we have eleven international speakers who will give online lectures and answer questions afterwards, like the one today. This started on October the 1st with the first lecture by Tom Rosenstiel. And

today's lecture by Dame Frances Cairncross will be the third lecture. The next two lectures will be held by media economists Professor Julia Cagé on October the 26th and two days later, October the 28th, by media scientist Professor Magda Konieczna. You can find more information regarding all the lectures, the speakers, the dates and so on, on the SciCon website. That's science-journalism.eu. Every lecture, and also the discussion afterwards, will be recorded and transcribed, so that in the end we will have hopefully created a reservoir of knowledge. This is for everyone who missed a lecture. And it is a preparation for the SciCon Working Conference. SciCon Working Conference – that's the second part of SciCon. It will be a working meeting in person – not online, but a real meeting. And this SciCon working conference will take place in Germany, in Freiburg, in 2021. And there we will analyze and discuss how the international experts' assessments that we've been listening to on these eleven lectures, how they can be introduced into the debate on the future of science journalism in general.

So please be aware that by participating in today's lecture, you accept that we will record and transcribe this meeting and eventually also you when you are asking questions afterwards after the lecture. So thank you for agreeing to this. By tomorrow, you will find the first lecture, the one by Tom Rosenstiel, on the SciCon website. The others will follow later on.

But now let me start today's lecture by introducing Dame Frances Cairncross [indistinct].

She's one of the UK's most respected economic commentators. She was management editor of The Economist and she wrote for The Economist for 20 years or something. She has held senior positions at the Times, The Banker, the Observer and The Guardian.

I will name only a few, but not all achievements. I'm looking at the time! Dame Frances was president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. She's a senior fellow at the School of Public Policy at UCLA and an honorary fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

After studying modern history at Oxford and economics in the US, Frances holds eight honorary degrees from colleges and universities. She's also the former rector of Exeter College, Oxford.

She was made a Dame of the British Empire for services to education and in recognition of very successful career as a leading British economist, journalist, and academic. And most important for us:

Dame Frances brought the Cairncross Review that takes stock of the British media system. It was published in 2019. And amongst other things, it recommends government support programmes for the media. The British government had already implemented parts of the Cairncross recommendations by the end of 2019, which sounds like a success to me, actually. We asked therefore Dame Frances to tell us more about the Cairncross Review: how it started? What are its main conclusions? What happened afterwards and what has to happen next? So, Dame Frances, if you would like to start now with your presentation, please.

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Thank you very much for that nice introduction. As you rightly said, I have had effectively two careers. One has been as a journalist for nearly 40 years of my life. The second one has been in the world of academics. And I spent ten years running a college at Oxford University.

That's relevant because one of the alumni of that college was a man called Matthew Hancock, who became a Conservative Party politician and who in 2018 – 2017, 2018 – became the Secretary of State for Digital Culture, Media and Sport. And in 2017, when I was on a holiday in Tanzania, I had a phone call from him saying, would I like to chair a review of journalism and its situation?

If I have the next slide now, please. And one of the reasons why he thought this was a big issue, I think, was because British newspapers were in a growing amount of difficulty. The circulation was falling and readership was declining. This is, of course, something which has happened in many other countries. But that was how I came to run this review. I'm going to talk today about three main things, a bit about how the review happened, how it worked, a bit about its conclusions. And then, although I am not a science journalist, I'll try and say a little bit about science journalism. Next slide, please. That's the picture of the review. As you can see, it came out in February last year. It was put together, completed, in just over a year. Which, looking back, seems to me to be an astonishingly small length of time to do something of this degree of detail, it is a very detailed and full examination of the issues.

I commend it to you if you haven't read it. The speed was partly due to the fact that my older daughter was living in our house while she bought somewhere to live and expecting a baby. And the baby was due at the end of January 2019. And I made it quite clear to the civil servants that if the baby came out before the review, the review might have to wait a rather long time before it got published.

So that explained, partly explained, the speed with which we worked. Next slide, please. As I say, the origin of the review was the difficult state that British journalism was in, but more particularly – and this I think was important – was the fact that Members of Parliament had come to worry about the fact that local newspapers had been particularly badly hit. They worried because it meant that the usual channel for them to contact their constituents was either disappearing or merging with another paper. And so it was becoming much harder for them to get their point across. And I think that it's interesting that there was that political drive behind setting up the review. Although I'll tell you later on, not all the conclusions of the review ended up being adopted by the politicians who created it.

I had working for me a small, quite a small team of relatively young civil servants. And I had one very young economist who was a young man in his late 20s. I thought they were terrifically good. I think they were, particularly the young economist was first rate. They were very thorough. They collected the evidence very well. They were very conscious of the areas which we had to look at, the wide range of areas we had to look at, the countries that we had to visit. That work was the more important because I was very determined that it should be a one-woman review that ultimately it should be my name on it and not that of a committee. And the reason I was so keen on that was because I had sat on other committees in the past, which would

find it rather difficult to reach a single opinion. And I didn't want a review that reached two or even three or four different opinions. I wanted one clear set of recommendations at the end. But I did have an advisory panel. Next, the next slide please.

And the advisory panel had partly been chosen by the time I came along, but I was always able to choose some additional journalists to sit on it. And among the people I chose were two science journalists. I didn't choose them particularly because they were science journalists, but because they were both young people whose experience had been entirely in the digital world. One of them was Akshat Rathi, who had created the Race to Zero Emissions, which Quartz produces still. He has now moved to set up Bloomberg Green, which is a very successful new magazine used by Bloomberg. He'd actually been a graduate student at, doing a doctorate, at Exeter College when I was running it, so that was another benefit of my Oxford experience. The other was Azeem Azhar, who I had known when he worked on The Economist. Azeem I think wouldn't think of himself entirely as a science journalist, but he is very interested in the whole technological advance which is taking place in our time so rapidly. Maybe in California, but also across, particularly across the United States. And his Exponential Review is a regular work sheet. So these were two people with strong digital experience showing what can be done with digital science journalism. I'll come back to that later on. Can I have the next slide, please. The background, apart from the anxieties of Members of Parliament, the driving force for having the review, was what was happening to print papers and print advertising. And, of course, not just in Britain. It's happened in every country in the world. The sale of print papers has been declining and advertising revenues have been falling rapidly. And as we know, the sharpest fall in purchasing of print papers has been among the young.

In the UK, it's been particularly striking at the level of local and regional papers. I think in Germany you've been more lucky.

Your loyalty to local papers has been greater. And of course, they're also been, it's become harder to raise revenue either from sales or from advertising when news appears online. In both cases, the revenues are less per person, per reader, than they are with a paper product. Next slide please.

This just shows you how unlucky UK local papers have been. They, we have a particularly national and metropolitan, capital-city dominance of our news in the UK, as you probably know. Regional and local news has a much tougher time surviving and is much smaller and weaker than national news, but both have been dwindling. Next slide, please.

Now, what this chart shows you is the extent to which this is in an age-driven transformation. In particular, it shows you that 18 to 24-year-olds are very, very unlikely to use print as a source of their news. They are far more likely to use the smartphone or to use, possibly, to use television. The old still often read print, but they, too, are more likely, increasingly using electronic technologies to reach news. But this generational change which is going on means that there is a whole generation of young people for whom the habit of getting out and buying a piece of paper on which you read the news has just completely disappeared, has never begun. And that tells you the force behind this transformation in consumption habits. Next slide, please.

And one reason, and it seemed to be very important for the review to recognize this, is that there are many advantages to consumers in reading their news online. It's not just that it's usually free, although, of course it often is and people who just look at the news as it comes through on Google can quickly scan the headlines without going to the expense of buying a larger package of news.

Another advantage is that it's more widely available. I read The New York Times every morning. I couldn't have done that ten or 15 years ago, and I occasionally read other papers from other countries. That is an extraordinary benefit for those who are travelling, those who are abroad. Of course, I can read the Scottish papers. One has a wider scope. You can see you could see more stories. You read what interests you, you know, if you buy a typical newspaper, national newspapers, certainly in Britain, you're likely to get pages of football. Those of us who are not terribly interested in football might feel it was nicer not to have to wade through that.

And above all, it was important to ask, why should one support newspaper groups. There are plenty of other industries whose world is being destroyed or turned through 180 degrees simply because of this extraordinary period of changing technology that we're going through. Nobody's campaigning to save department stores and yet department stores are in considerable difficulties. And there are other technologies that are also in industries that are also being damaged. So there is a real question that was essential for the review to think about.

What was special about the news industry that meant it might need saving or supporting in some way? Next slide please.

The disadvantage was those groups, the existing news companies, are pretty well known. It's that, it's very hard once things appear online to get people to pay. It's very hard to get money from advertising. So both the main revenue streams have been drying up. And as they dry up, the cross-subsidies that are a part of the way in which traditional news operations work, those cross-subsidies become harder to maintain. You may buy a newspaper because the front-page story says something about a television star or something about yet another antic by President Trump. But you get with that, in that package you will get some foreign news, which is very expensive to produce. You get some science journalism, which is pretty expensive to produce. You might get some economic and financial journalism and you might get some sports journalism. So you get a pot pourri of news and much of it is cross-subsidized. But the audience now, whatever happens, is going to spend less time looking at your product and more time doing other things. Next slide please.

It's hard, and I think we all know this, it's hard to get people now to pay for news. The news publishers, when the Internet first began to make inroads into their revenues, news publishers thought that they would be able to make money out of advertising, they would get lots more readers, and that would be a way in which they could build a revenue stream. In fact, of course, that didn't work out. But what happened was a lot of news publishers ended up giving away their product free and then began to find it very difficult when they changed tack and started to try to charge subscriptions. Revenue from subscriptions has been growing. As you can see from this list of papers, news groups, they are all pretty up-market in Britain. When the Sun tried to charge for online from readers, it found a complete collapse in readership. So the publications read by the better-off, university-educated, may be able to get money from subscriptions. But those that are read by people who don't

have university degrees are very much less likely to be able to do so. Next slide please.

So we just have... Paying readers have diminished and advertising has also, revenue, has also diminished. Google Search is just a much easier way for people to find what they want than looking down the advertisements in the paper. They are better targeted. And the reason lies in the amount of data that these large platforms have accumulated. And because of that, both channels of revenue have evaporated, have greatly diminished. Next slide please.

But along with the availability of news online, the availability of advertising online, there is simply the question of how people use their time. And I don't think we should underestimate this. The review was very conscious of the extent to which it was the multiplying demands that the smartphone put on people's time, the other things, other forms of entertainment, which were readily available, which was ultimately perhaps the biggest competitor of all – bigger than anything else. Next slide please.

So. The review, as I say, spent some time looking at what the issues were that were damaging news groups and creating the crisis that we were set up to deal with. But it also spent some time just looking at what the justification was for taking action of any kind. And so we decided that there were ways in which, there were aspects of news which fell into the department store category, which were things that it was hard to justify any recommendation that they should be subsidized in any way. But there were some aspects of the job that news organizations did which were a public good. They were in the public interest. And in particular there was evidence that we found, particularly from academic work in the United States, that if there was not a professional reporter reporting on the main machinery of democracy, particularly local democracy, if that didn't, if those reporters disappeared, if that news no longer was available to people, that analysis of what was decided in the democratic institutions of a country, then a country was likely to be worse run, more vulnerable to bad management, than it would otherwise be. The problem was that once you could, once people read the news online, it was possible to see what they read and how long they've spent reading it. People spend lots of time online reading about footballers. They spend lots of time online reading about television. They spend much less time reading about what's happening in local or national democracy. And yet these are the aspects of journalism which are most important for a healthy democracy. Next slide, please.

So the review said it was important not to do anything to stifle innovation. And that we had to accept that the established news groups might not adapt, that many publishers were making money, but still cutting staff, and that while there was really no case for protecting department stores, there was no case, also no case for doing anything to protect all aspects of journalism. Next slide, please.

But there were two areas where we thought it was particularly important to make recommendations. One was the question of competition. Google and Facebook between them take a very, very large share of advertising. And they are also the main routes by which many people now get their news. You may have seen that the House of Representatives, Democrat, that is largely run by Democrats, has within the past week said that there are antitrust issues in the way in which Google and Facebook and other technological giants work. They're not just interested in news, but that they are interested in the antitrust element. And the review urged a tough look at what was going on in the advertising market. The Competition and Markets

Authority in Britain has conducted that review. It's a very good one, well worth reading. And it did say that there was a need for measures to allow news groups to negotiate with publishers without running into antitrust issues. And news groups had to be able to negotiate as a group. And that was important.

The second. Next slide, please. Second area, main area of recommendations, was to support public interest news. This news, which underpins a healthy democracy and because it was news that on the whole attracted fewer readers than most other kinds of news, it would be especially important to have some means of funding it. And the report had things to say about finding ways to give charitable status to publications, providing that kind of news and to have some system of support. It also called for better media literacy. But I advocated in particular the creation of a new institution, the Public Interest News Fund, set up at arm's length, very carefully, from government, from any political institution, to channel public money into this area of news reporting – public interest news. On a par it would operate like the way in which the arts are supported at arm's length by government. Unfortunately, that particular recommendation, which I think was central to the recommendations of the review, that particular recommendation was turned down almost at once by the government without any very clear reasons why. But I suspect because some of the big news groups felt this might siphon off public money into supporting rival news organizations, and it might have done. I think it's not an idea that's gone forever. I think it will come back again. It seems to me that this is one of the ways in which we can keep this kind of news going. Next slide, please.

One thing I did not do was to call for something along the lines of the copyright tax. As you'll know, the European Union has discussed this for a long time. It has adopted, after much discussion and disagreement, finally adopted a copyright directive aimed basically at getting Google to pay publishers for the news it carries. And Australia has gone further, France and Australia, the two countries that have probably gone furthest in trying to persuade the platforms to pay for the news that they carry. And I think this is a battle that these countries will not win and that their news groups may lose. I didn't advocate this. I advocated instead that the news groups should, as a body, be able to negotiate with Google and Facebook, but not that they should have [indistinct] should be handled by government because these are very powerful monopolies. And they have very few physical assets in the countries that are negotiating with them. They could very easily, if they felt under too much pressure from regulators, very easily just say: "Fine, right, we're going to switch your country off." And I think to try to imagine how countries respond if they felt that their government had driven Google or Facebook away. I suspect that would not be very successful. Next slide, please.

Google, as you can see, is certainly aware that there is a problem. And it's come up with a very large fund to support news groups. I think it's interesting that they have made that gesture. But I think that ultimately the power to do anything about this, if it exists, exists in the United States and not in Europe or Australia. Next slide please.

Now, I want to say a little bit about science journalism. Here is what I believe is the first professional science journalist, James Crowther and The Manchester Guardian. Let's have the next slide. That was just to show you something interesting.

As you heard from Dr Sartori, science journalism is doing badly, the number of science journalists is down, the number of American newspapers and I suspect of European newspapers with a science section has fallen, perhaps not as dramatically

as in the United States, but it's still come down. And relatively few of the people who are writing science were staff news reporters then and now, too, I suspect relatively few are. Next slide, please.

But there were some ways in which science journalism is actually doing quite well. There have been, there are now many more science blogs easily reachable, particularly to young scientists. Most of the major science publications are online. Some of them entirely online. And there've been lots of start-ups. Some of the start-ups, like Bloomberg Green, have come out in physical forms. Some of them like Quartz, like The Conversation, are entirely online. So there seems to me to have been a flowering of scientific journalism over the last 20 years, which is impressive. Next slide, please.

And here is, here is one in Germany. And this brings me to one more point. Next slide, which is that I think that the appetite for science journalism has grown, is growing and will continue to grow. And here are two good reasons for wanting to read more science journalism. Climate change is now an enormously important issue for many individuals. It may not be important for President Trump, but I think for just about everyone else on the planet, it's increasingly something that people want to read about. And of course, COVID-19 has created an interest in epidemiology, in vaccines and a whole host of medical issues that didn't exist before. Next slide, please.

So that brings me to the end. Thank you very much for listening. And I look forward to your questions.

[Christina Sartori] Thank you. Thank you, Frances. Thank you very much. That was very interesting and I was wondering, are there any questions otherwise I would start?

OK, I do read questions in the chat group, so maybe I will just read it aloud to you. The one is concerning the one that didn't work out, the recommendation, until now.

You recommended, you recommended, in the report an institution to channel money from the government to finance innovations in public interest news.

And the question is, you said that you wanted this to work in a way to make sure that it's organized at arm's length. What did you mean by arm's length? What kind of structure did you recommend?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Well, this is a particularly delicate and difficult thing. I think one would have to have the selection of a person who would have to have several layers and different selection committees that were created especially to select the next stage so that you could move it as far away as possible from government. And you might have to have something that lasted for a considerable period. Something I would guess a bit like the Supreme Court in the United States. But of course, that's not necessarily at the moment the best example to give. But I think that you could have a body where people were selected for quite a long period of time so that as governments changed and that body could be the body that then selected the next stage in the chain. It is very difficult to find ways of creating a gap, but I can't believe that it is impossible. And certainly if we don't try to find a way to do that, then there is really, I think, no hope for supporting this kind of journalism,

apart possibly from the charitable sector. And once charities can support news groups, then there is one other source of revenue. But it's going to be hard.

[Christina Sartori] Is one charity group in England and Great Britain.... Nesta N-E-S-T-A, and you mentioned this in your report as one of the players who could manage something like this as well.

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Nesta is reliant on government finance. It's a public-private body of a strange kind that we have in Britain, and it specializes in putting money into innovation. And Nesta would have been a possible model for this. But, you know, if the person who chairs, who runs, Nesta ultimately is appointed, is not a straight political appointment, but that would be somebody who would be approved by the government. So it's very hard to produce a real distance between politicians and appointments. But if we don't... but I don't believe that it can't be done. I can say that.

[Christina Sartori] There's one question regarding this, this fund and Nesta. And I'll just read it through. The government did accept your recommendation to launch a new fund focused on innovations. Right. That's the one where you recommended a fund for innovations in order to improve supply of public interest news. The question is, are you satisfied with the Pilot Innovation Fund's efforts so far? And would you recommend this kind of innovation fund for Germany as well?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Well, first of all, I would say I think it's very useful to have an innovation fund. And I think it's exactly the sort of thing that Google and Facebook are longing to put money into, particularly Google. So one can... there are ways in which one could have these sort of funds. The Nesta scheme, I thought the outcome, I was quite involved with it and I didn't feel the outcome was as satisfactory as I would have liked. I think that they chose some fairly eccentric schemes. There was a more interesting selection. It was another exercise that took place more or less at the same time by a body called the Public Interest News Foundation, which has been set up by a group of individuals, not by government, but by individuals with money from charitable sources. And they created a competition, they got some money from the Rowntree Trust and offered twenty gifts of £3,000 each to news groups who came up with interesting ideas, local news, local independent news groups. And they got, I think, a hundred applications, some of them very interesting. So there's lots of creativity amongst some of these local news groups, independent news groups. And if money can be found, that's great. But in Britain at present, the law makes it very difficult for charities, for news groups to have charitable status. And so to get tax relief when they're, when gifts are made to them.

[Christina Sartori] So this new fund, which already chose some examples to sponsor them. Is this going on or was this a one-time thing?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Well, for the moment, it's been a one-time thing. I don't know, I suspect the government isn't going to give more money to Nesta. And my understanding is that the people [indistinct] running Nesta isn't very interested in this particular aspect of Nesta's work. As for the competition run by the Public Interest News Fund, all the money that they had received from the charity was used

up in the scheme. I think that they will try to raise more money and they have recently looked for ways to, in which they can draw on charitable funds, in the courts trying to establish that. So that may be a future example.

[Christina Sartori] So what was the reaction in general to the Cairncross Review in the public and the society and also by politicians? Was it, were people astonished? Was it well regarded? Criticized?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] I think it was, very little criticism to my surprise and, of course, pleasure and a great deal of interest. And that interest continues. I was rung up yesterday by a young journalist on The Economist magazine who's writing a piece about the news industry, which will appear in the magazine the day after tomorrow. So I can publicize my former employer on what's happening in the world of news. And every country is asking themselves the same questions. What do we do? This was probably, the review was probably the most thorough attempt yet to set out the problems and to think of possible solutions.

[Christina Sartori] You said that it all started with, well, a hint or a question or an observation by politicians. So it came from politics itself. How did, how does politics, do politicians feel in the UK about the media crisis? Do they feel responsible? Do they take it seriously or what do you think?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Oh, I think they take it seriously. I mean, they should. They need, they need the news organizations. They like the news organizations to be friendly. But they, you know, they get cross if they're not. And the current government is extremely political in its approach and has been very critical of the BBC for its failure to espouse the government's own views. Critical of The Guardian. Good stories to the Mail and to the Telegraph. But they do need the news, news business.

[Christina Sartori] So do you have any idea how it's discussed in the society? I mean, what do you think people feel about the idea that the government will support financially, for example, journalism? Is this well accepted?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] I don't think most people have thought very hard about this because at the moment, you know, the idea of the government supporting journalism, put as bluntly as that, I think would be viewed with immense suspicion. You know, people never liked the idea of the news, their news publications just parroting the views of the government, especially if they happen to disagree with the government.

I think people have more interest... The really interesting question here is how commercially can news products be made to work? And that's not a question of subsidy. That's a question of what will the market want? How can, what can you put together that the market will want. And there are some very interesting and fruitful ideas coming along in Britain. For example, one company has created a sort of electronic wallet which allows you to buy very cheaply an article from one particular paper or an article from another paper. Newspapers are sort of shortened digitally so that you don't just have to read one publication or one other publication. And another, I think, another very big question is whether in the passage of time news,

which has been a sort of department store, a news newspaper is a department store, as you know, because it has foreign news, sport, it has television reviews, foreign news, whatever. Most people only want to read some parts of that. I never want to read the sports section. I wouldn't care if I never saw a sports section again in all my life. But other people only want to read the sports section. And there is, for example, in the United States, a start-up called The Athletic, which only carries sports writing, carries no advertisements and is sold on subscription. And I think it's been quite successful.

[Christina Sartori] Well, we do have magazines only for science articles, but I don't know whether it reaches really a broad public, so.

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Well, you know, I think that, I think that a fairly broad public probably looks at The Conversation, maybe looks at New Scientist online, maybe looks at Wired, quite a lot of people read Wired online. So I think that there are science publications that have a general readership and there are people who have, you know, a strong interest in reading this sort of thing. Azeem Azhar, one of the people on the committee, started up his own news sheet and has stories which are mainly about digital technology, but also have a lot of science stories in this new issue, which comes out early on a Sunday morning, and says he has a very wide readership. A lot of it are businesspeople in tech industries who are interested, obviously, in tech stories, but are always interested in border scientific stories and academic writing stories, too.

[Christina Sartori] I have a question here in the chat. I will read it aloud, it's easier. You talked about the influence of technology on the media. How do you think the pandemic is going to change the landscape? For example, the support mechanisms you examine in the report or the role of science journalism in the mainstream media? That's Anita [indistinct].

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Well, I think that this extraordinary period we've all lived through has taught a lot of people to use their iPad or their technology to do new things. And I think one of the interesting things that's happened is that lots of organizations have done public lectures of some kind or public presentations, for example, in the course of this week, I'm hoping to, or next week, I'm hoping to hear a presentation from the University of Birmingham, where I have an honorary degree, on the treatment of cancer in a time of COVID. And tonight, I'm going to hear from the, watch the Natural History Museum doing a presentation of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Having, I listened to a very interesting piece on botany at the Natural History Museum last month.

So, you know, these are ways of getting science across to people in a digestible form. And I think a lot of organizations that haven't started to think, how can we communicate with the ordinary people who have an interest in what we're doing, who might be doing this one day or might be employees one day? How do we communicate with them in a way that they will find just as interesting, as exciting, as sitting or watching television? I think that's a really important innovation and I hope it will go on. And it's also a global, a way of communicating globally.

And that's a huge advantage. All sorts of things have turned out to have global audiences which nobody expected to have a global audience. And if they're well done and well put together and they catch people's imagination, then that's tremendously important.

[Christina Sartori] This fits fine for another question. I will read it aloud again. That's: would you say that digital science journalism can find business models. Or is it – beside investigative reporting – a profession in urgent need of public support?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Everyone thinks they're in urgent need of public support. That's the difficulty.

I mean, science journalism in one sense has public support because there's public support for science and universities and quite a lot of the scientific writing that reaches the general public is a product of universities. And I think a lot of academics have learnt over the last 20 years how to write English. How to put together a good sentence. And universities, which want to show the public that they are giving value for money, have an interest in teaching the scientist right or editing their copy if it's incomprehensible and producing something that is widely readable. Now, that is a form of public support for science journalism. And it's not to be underrated. I know that professional science journalists think it's a rival...

[Christina Sartori interjecting indistinctly]

[Dame Frances Cairncross] Yeah. It's a different product. But it's not... I think one of the things we're going to see is a form of journalism, science journalism, which is sort of based in universities or assisting universities. And some of it is already. But as universities seek, you know, become increasingly digital themselves.

I've spent enough time in universities and think that they are the last places to welcome change. There's a famous joke in Oxford about how many Oxford professors does it take to change, to change a light bulb? The answer is change? Change? Why should we change [indistinct]? But, you know, I think that there will be a rapprochement between journalists, the kind of journalists who have been writing news and the kind of people who are trying to write science in science departments.

[Christina Sartori] Yeah, well, journalists do see a difference between science academics who write about their own work and also have to give reasons to the public why they are funded by the public. And a science journalist, can write more deliberately, more.

You can write about recycling. Yeah, so.

And this seems well, like you see in this pandemic now, which seems more and more important. We have in Germany, for example, several, well, scientists who talk about the coronavirus and the one is saying it's dangerous and the other one says, no, it's not. And so it's really important to have as well a scientific journalist who can explain why the one is correct and the other one is not.

So this wouldn't be enough in our view, if they are only scientists writing about their own work.

[Dame Frances Cairncross] I think that's quite fair. But I still don't think that it's an area, I think it's going to, I think it was an area where it's harder to make the case for putting funding directly into it. But I think we'll, it's an area where charitable support is probably more likely than government support.

[Christina Sartori] You have one recommendation where you talk about media literacy. You write that the government should develop a media literacy strategy. Could you explain a little bit more what you mean by this? Is this educating?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] I didn't really want to put that recommendation in, but the civil servants were very, it's the only one where I said, "Do we really need to say this?" And they said, "Yes, we really need to say it because our other departments want to hear it." And I'm afraid that's, you know, that's the way things are. So, in the end I agreed to it. My view of media literacy is that most people think it's something you teach at school and then everybody has it. But actually, that's not the case at all. You need media literacy at every stage in life. And you need to have some understanding of why has the journalist written this particular article? What's the interest behind it? Where are the comments? Where are the disagreements? Have they attempted to find another viewpoint or have they simply written one viewpoint? It's a very difficult thing to teach people, train people in. And I am not sure that I can think of any particularly good way of teaching adults media literacy. Apart from hoping that their common sense sometimes makes them ask those sort of questions.

[Christina Sartori] So I don't know what you really know exactly about the situation in Germany. I do know you know a little bit, but then what do you think? Should, would you have any recommendations for us how to pursue, well, to fight for the state and for the support for science journalism? I mean, you have this report which worked in a way, in some ways you are successful, one or the other not really. What would you recommend? Is it important to include politicians? Is it important to start a discussion in society?

[Dame Frances Cairncross] I think it's important to watch how people in their 20s, in their late teens and their 20s want to absorb scientific information. I mean, almost everyone learns some science at school. When they leave school: what? How do they want? Who wants to go on learning? How do they want to go on learning? What do they want to be told? How do they want to, how are they able to absorb it? That's the first question. What does the market want? And if you can get people into the habit of viewing something or reading something or listening to something before they're 30, then there's a good chance that habit may stick. I think one of the things we're learning is that the young are less likely than their elders to read, more likely to listen to podcasts, more likely to view, to be willing to view films, eager to have, be told, to be directed to things through Twitter, through Instagram, you know, through those sorts of online ways to direct to each other. But I think perhaps, if it, I'm thinking in marketing terms as opposed to government policy terms, I would say that the more a story can be told as a podcast in language or as a YouTube video or something like that, the more likely it is that young people will

read, will follow it. And that is the audience of the future. It's terribly difficult. You can say far less, far less sophisticated things that way, unless your film is very good, but I think that's how people will be. People are not. People get to read less and watch more.

[Christina Sartori] Thanks to Dame Frances, we are already a little bit late. I'm sorry, but you did answer a lot of questions. You gave a magnificent talk. Thank you very much. And there's one, not question, but one answer here, which is expressing what I was going to say. It's saying Dame Frances, it's been an honor to have you with us. Many thanks for this terrific talk and these inspiring insights. So thank you very much. Thank you, everybody, for listening and asking. I'm sorry we have to close now. And, well, best regards to England.

[Dame Frances Cairncross] And, um, thank you, Germans, for continuing to be our friends in spite of all the bad things.

[Christina Sartori] We will, we will. Yes, we know Brexit.

[Frances Cairncross] OK. Bye bye.

[Christina Sartori] Goodbye. Thank you very much.

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