

NEWS FUTURES 2035

Executive Summary

May 2024

Over 18 months, the News Futures 2035 initiative brought together more than 300 thought leaders from various backgrounds, including industry, policy, regulation, civil society, and academia. Their goal? To address concerns about the sustainability of trustworthy public-interest news.

The initiative confirmed these concerns are valid, but also highlighted that solutions exist. A key outcome was a clear definition of public-interest news. This definition emphasises the importance of identifiable news producers and distributors working together. This would ensure high-quality information is accessible to everyone. The public must also be literate enough to understand the news, evaluate its credibility, and have practical means to address grievances.

This News Futures 2035 report calls for a united front. It urges all stakeholders to work together in a structured and inclusive manner. This collaboration aims to address these critical issues and pave the way for action through the creation of the News Futures Forum.

The Forum will be a structured, multi-stakeholder process operating under the Chatham House Rule. It will foster mutual understanding among participants and inspire collaborative actions to ensure a reliable supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK for the next decade - and beyond.

Presented by

Dr François Nel

Dr Kamila Rymajdo



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For citations:

Nel, François, and Kamila Rymajdo. *News Futures 2035 Final Report*. Preston, UK: Media Innovation Studio, University of Central Lancashire, 2024.

The Project Team And Partners

News Futures 2035's Principal Investigator was Dr François Nel, Reader in Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Central Lancashire. Dr Kamila Rymajdo was the Post-doctoral Researcher.

Collaborating partners were Bloomberg, Chrysalis Transformations, Digital Editors Network (DEN), HBM Advisory, the Independent Community News Network (ICNN), the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) and Reach Plc.

The Project Advisors were Dr Bruno Tindemans, Chief Foresight Officer for the government Department of Works in Brussels; Alain Wouters, a strategy consultant formerly of the Group Planning department at Shell.

The Steering Board included Jeremy Clifford, Director, Chrysalis Transformations; Alison Gow, Editorial Consultant and Fellow of the Society of Editors; Jonathan Heawood, Executive Director, Public Interest News Foundation; Alan Hunter, Co-founder, HBM Advisory; Lisa MacLeod, Director, Head of EMEA, FT Strategies; Emma Meese, Director, Independent Community News Network; Inga Thordar, Chief External Relations Officer, Ocean Born Foundation; and Laura Zelenko, Senior Executive Editor, Bloomberg News.

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Foreword

The News Futures 2035 foresight initiative responds to concerns about the future of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK, and beyond.

To address this challenge, the News Futures 2035 consortium of news associations, publishers, and individual industry thought leaders embarked on a participatory, action-research project. With the support of the Google News Initiative, more than 300 experts from industry, policy, and civil society have actively engaged in this rigorous facilitated process over more than 18 months.

Two critical uncertainties impacting the future supply of public-interest news were identified and examined in depth: one is the body of policies and regulations that might be either constraining or enabling. The other is the relevance of public-interest news to audiences and the wider society, on the one hand, and the vision, mission and business models of news-producing organisations and individuals, on the other.

In the process, a clear and authoritative definition of public-interest news emerged. It emphasises that the sustainable supply of such news depends on identifiable news producers and distributors ensuring high-quality information is accessible to all. It further underlines that the public must also be literate enough to understand and assess the relevance and benefits of the news - and have practical and timely means to address any grievances about the work of news producers and distributors.

The project clarified that concerns about the sustainability of public-interest news are neither unfounded nor insurmountable. It also identified several potential solutions to these challenges, which build on recent government inquiries and initiatives from the public, private, and third sectors aimed at addressing these concerns.

In doing so, participants recognised the importance, not only of the insights, but also of the participatory process of generating them. We came to recognise that efforts to address the challenges facing public-interest news are more likely to be successful if they are informed by a better understanding of the issues, inclusive of a diversity of voices, timely and, where appropriate, joined-up.



Dr François Nel

*Principal Investigator:
News Futures 2035*

As such, this report is a call to action for all stakeholders who care about the future of public-interest news. If you believe that public-interest news is vital for the health of the information ecosystems on which the well-being of communities, markets, democracies and our planet depend, and if you recognise that it informs citizens, holds power to account and supports knowledgeable decision-making, then you will agree that stakeholders need to work together in a structured, inclusive way to address the critical issues facing this essential service.

If all stakeholders put the public interest first and come together to address the findings and recommendations that have emerged from this rigorous and inclusive process, we can together outline a roadmap for action through the News Futures Forum.

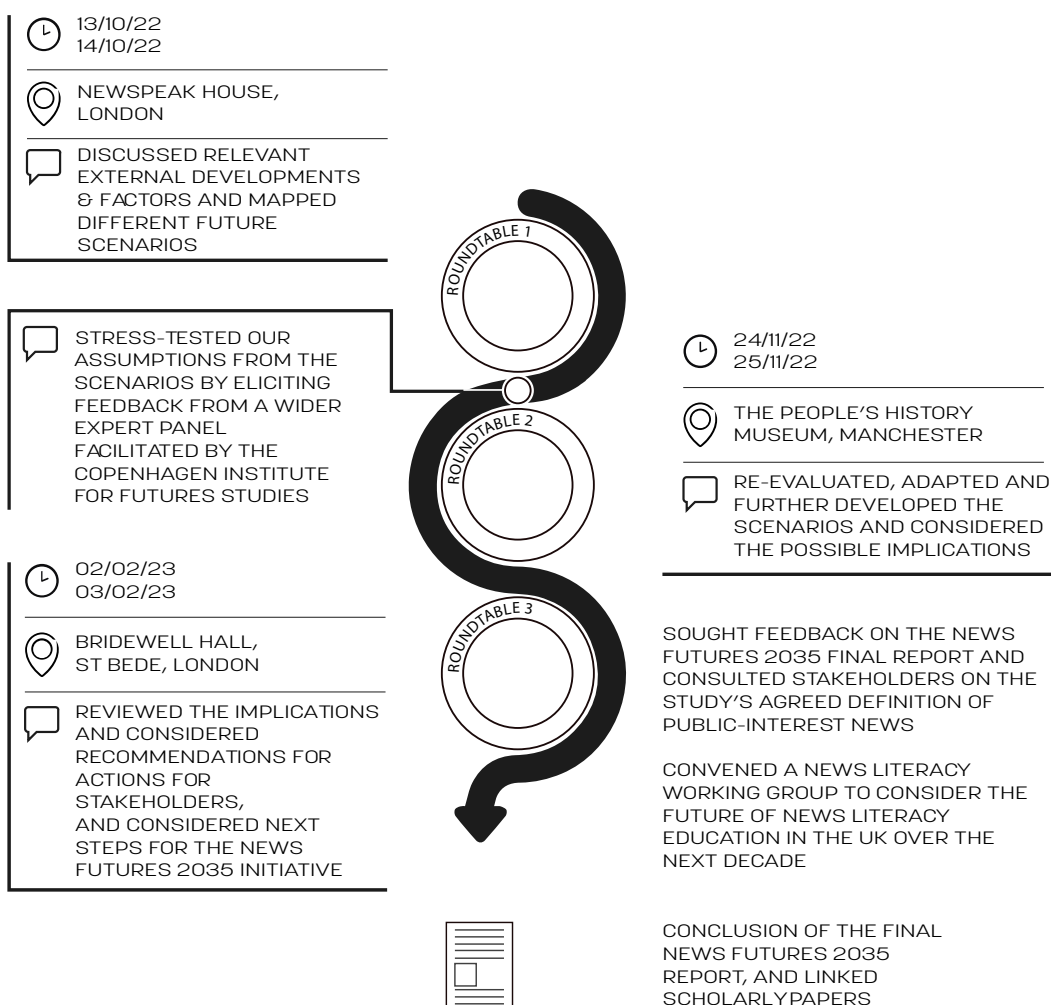
We urge you to join us in making these recommendations a reality.

The News Futures 2035 Process

1

- **Q2 2022**
SECURED FUNDING AND ESTABLISHED THE NEWS FUTURES 2035 STEERING BOARD
- **Q2 2022**
FORMED THE NF2035 CONSORTIUM
- **Q3 2022**
DEVELOPED THE DISCUSSION PAPER, BASED ON EXPERT INTERVIEWS

2



3

NEWS FUTURES *Forum*

THE PROJECT'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT OFFER A POTENTIAL ROADMAP FOR MOVING FROM A FIXED-TERM PROJECT TO A NEWS FUTURES FORUM

Executive Summary

There is a crisis affecting public-interest news. Audiences are disengaging, business models are challenged, and policymakers are struggling to respond to the worsening situation.

Across the UK, many people are working hard to address this crisis: news industry leaders, journalists, academics, activists, policymakers, regulators, technology companies, and others. Despite their best efforts, the situation remains critical.

Stakeholders who share underlying values find themselves isolated or even at odds with each other because they sit in different parts of the news media landscape. As a result, initiatives are duplicated, energies are wasted, and opportunities are missed.

In this report, we set out a simple but far-reaching remedy for this situation. We recommend that everyone who has a stake in the crisis affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of public-interest news should come together to create a News Futures Forum – a long-term initiative, modelled on track two diplomacy,¹ where participants with very different perspectives are able to meet in a high-trust environment to talk about shared challenges and find solutions.

A News Futures Forum would have many benefits:

- The Forum would **get people out of their bunkers** and create new relationships across the news industry and beyond.
- The Forum would **remove unnecessary duplication** between stakeholders, so that they don't waste time reinventing the wheel.
- The Forum would **build a shared understanding** between policymakers and experts on the ground, making policy interventions more likely to succeed.



"Our best chance to identify a sustainable future for the provision of trustworthy public interest news is for all stakeholders in the media industry, including publishers, tech platforms, academia, industry and regulatory bodies and those with a vested interest to find a way to come together in an environment where they are able to collaborate and work constructively, putting their differences to one side."

Jeremy Clifford

Co-author of the News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper and member of the project steering board

¹Louise Diamond and John W. McDonald, *Multi-track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace* (Kumarian Press, 1996).

- The Forum would **shape an ongoing conversation between news providers and their audiences**, so that public-interest news genuinely meets the public's needs.
- The Forum would **remove the walls** that divide news industry leaders from activists, journalists from academics, and technologists from regulators, building a community that is committed to securing the supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK.

The vision of a News Futures Forum was inspired by the News Futures 2035 project, which was the first-ever opportunity in the UK for news industry stakeholders to come together and discuss public-interest news, using foresight methodology to imagine different versions of the future.

News Futures 2035 was a strategic foresight study which aimed to cultivate shared visions concerning the future supply of trustworthy public-interest news in the UK. Stemming from concerns raised in the 2019 Cairncross Review², which advocated for urgent public intervention, the study noted ongoing efforts but recognised the consensus for further action.

More than 300 participants engaged in the process between Summer 2022 and Spring 2024, contributing through expert interviews, two surveys, four workshops, and multiple consultations. A core group of approximately 30 participants utilised a multi-stakeholder methodology to discern issues affecting the provision of public-interest news, culminating in the development of four scenarios during three in-person plenary roundtables, further refined through online consultations with diverse stakeholders.

We hope that this report is of value to anyone who cares about the future of public-interest news. We would be delighted to work with you to create the News Futures Forum.

²Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism* (House of Commons, 2019), accessed May 15, 2024, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779882/021919_DCMS_Cairncross_Review_.pdf.

Additional Project Insights

For further understanding and detailed information about the News Futures 2035 project, refer to the resources listed below.

News Futures 2035 Website: The News Futures 2035 website summarises the project and contains information about the core research group.

News Futures 2035 Discussion Paper: The scene-setting discussion paper set out the main issues affecting the news industry at the start of the project in Q3 2022. An Executive Summary is also available.

News Futures 2035 Interim Report: The Interim Report summarises the project's initial findings following the three in-person plenaries which took place between October 2022 and February 2023.

Plenary Recap Videos: Two short videos were made during plenaries 2 and 3 of the News Futures 2035 study. They summarise the methodology employed and include interviews with some participants reflecting on the process.

Download the News Futures 2035 reports and register your interest in the News Futures Forum by visiting our website mediainnovationstudio.org or scan the QR code below.





If you would like to stay updated on the News Futures Forum please scan the QR code to fill out a short expression of interest form.

