

## **Keynote speech by The Sun editor Victoria Newton at the News Media Association's Journalism Matters parliamentary reception (31 October 2023)**

Simply put, trust in our news brands has never been more important.

The UK has a world-leading, rigorous and fearless press with 900 local and national news media titles in the UK, reaching 85 percent of the population every month.

At the Kings' Coronation this year Princess Anne -jokingly I'm sure - asked me why I would ever volunteer for such a role as editor of The Sun.... It was a little bit rude.

Well, I genuinely believe I am working in the best industry there is, at a critical time for journalism.

Since becoming editor in 2020 I have had a front row seat at some of the most important and seismic events of our times.

I started my editorship just weeks before the global pandemic hit, and along with my new team, we immediately found ourselves thrown into a full scale lockdown.

The then Prime Minister was in intensive care and our readers were turning to us, because of our access to the government and its scientists, to help them understand and digest what was happening.

Our coverage included the first interview with Boris after he almost died in hospital, which really brought home the danger the virus posed to everyone.

The pandemic also reconfirmed how the press can be an amazing, powerful force for good.

To help with the vaccine rollout, we recruited 50,000 Sun readers - our Jobs Army - who gave up their time to volunteer at vaccination centres.

It was a campaign praised by the Prime Minister as well as the opposition, and made a real difference.

Since then I've seen three different Prime Ministers walk through the door of No10 - potentially might see my 4th by the end of next year.

We've witnessed a war on European soil and a barbaric terror attack in Israel, along with the death of our much-loved Queen and the coronation of a new King.

Shortly before Queen Elizabeth's death, I had a meeting about our Who Cares Wins awards with the then Prince Charles at Dumfries House in Scotland.

His face was etched with strain and it was obvious that the Queen was gravely ill, yet he soldiered on with his commitment to present an award to one of our nominees.

Little did he or I know when we spoke, the next day he would be King.

Covering war means our reporters taking risks so that they can bear witness and verify what is happening on the ground.

We are in a world of misinformation and propaganda and verification and trusted reporting has never been more important.

I'm grateful to have some incredible expert foreign reporters who have brought harrowing first hand accounts from the frontline in Ukraine to our readers

And we have many difficult days ahead as events in the Middle East unfold with the humanitarian tragedy that goes alongside it.

It is to have this bird's eye view of history that makes journalism - and this job - so incredible.

Looking forward to next year, it promises to be an eventful one with a UK election likely in October, and an important US election the following month.

Nobody chronicles these history-making moments, or holds to account the rich and powerful, better than the British press - and I feel very lucky to be a part of that club.

Who can forget the Mirror's award-winning Partygate investigation, local BBC radio's dismantling of Liz Truss in the wake of her disastrous mini-Budget, or our own revelations about Matt Hancock breaking Covid rules or the tax affairs of the ex-Chancellor and Conservative party chairman Nadim Zahawi.

The industry has also again turned its eye towards the culture of TV, and the abuse of power by those who have enormous followings and influence.

The Sunday Times and Dispatches conducted a devastating investigation into Russell Brand.

The Sun's Ellie Henman, Clemmie Moodie and the Mail's Katie Hind have led the way on the scandal backstage at ITV's This Morning. It led to ITV bosses being hauled in front of MPs to answer questions about staff safeguarding.

Without doubt it is the story I have been grilled on most this year from friends and anyone I have met, "what's going on with Holly and Phil"!

More recently, following a Sun investigation, BBC DG Tim Davie has had to launch an inquiry into how it failed to properly investigate a complaint made about Huw Edwards. That inquiry is ongoing.

Press freedom and the ability to hold to account those in positions of power is vital for ensuring our audiences keep their trust in us.

However, for all of the brilliant work I've just described, we all know that our free press is increasingly under threat.

Whether that be from unchecked, far reaching misinformation on the internet and unregulated social media channels; to the insidious creep of privacy laws, used and abused by wealthy individuals.

That's why The Sun has been so vociferous in standing up for the Press as a cornerstone of democracy and free speech.

We campaigned against the threat of an ICO investigation into our scoop about Matt Hancock's Covid rule-busting affair with an aide, which would have had a terrible effect on whistleblowing.

And we helped to secure concessions to the draconian National Security Bill, which could have led to journalists being treated like foreign spies, and imprisoned for revealing secrets which were embarrassing to the Government of the day.

We as an industry have united to try to curtail the use of SLAPPs, a tool used by wealthy individuals and corporations to intimidate and silence journalists.

SLAPPs are a serious misuse of public resources and an abuse of our legal system.

We welcome the government's continuing commitment to tackling SLAPPs by setting up a taskforce to deal with the problem.

We at The Sun will always fight hard for our right to publish, and have run stories in the face of the most heavy handed legal threats - such as reporting on the domestic abuse carried out by Johnny Depp, which we saw all the way through an extremely expensive litigation case.

But the spiralling costs of such litigation means that stories and journalism in the public interest is under threat.

Which is why it is vital that the Government - which speaks regularly of the importance of our free Press - turns its fine words into action.

Ministers must uphold their commitment to repealing Section 40 - a commitment made in the Conservative manifestos in 2017 and 2019.

If S40 was ever enacted, it would have a truly chilling impact on journalism, and the work of smaller publications and local newspapers in particular.

The NMA has welcomed provisions in the Media Bill to repeal this pernicious piece of legislation. We expect and hope it will feature in the King's Speech next week.

Section 40 needs banishing from the Statute books.... for good.

It's also important that the Government holds to its position on the introduction of the Digital Markets Unit (DMU).

We are told that, after intensive lobbying from the big tech firms, ministers may allow them to launch expensive and time-consuming appeals against the decisions of the new body.

This risks seriously undermining the impact of DMU, which is being given legal powers by the Digital Markets Bill.

Ministers MUST stick to the existing plans to allow only quick but robust – and relatively cheap – challenges to the DMU rulings.

This week, PM Rishi Sunak will host a summit at Bletchley Park on AI.

The expansion of AI creates both threats and opportunities for every company, but also front-line journalism.

Innovation in the industry is vital - it's how we'll all grow our audiences and future proof our newsrooms in a challenging market.

Large Language Models currently derive content from news publishers, taking all the benefits from sharing trusted regulated journalism, without any payment or crucially, our permission.

The protection of copyright is paramount for content creators such as news publishers.

When you have unsourced, unregulated media of any kind, you will see the effects, sometimes pernicious, of the bias of the input-er.

These AI engines are a combination of the input... but also who is inputting the data.

We welcome Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer's promise of support for our press as the use of AI develops.

Original journalism everywhere should be protected, as should the publishers that spend and invest in journalism.

I make a special mention for our vital local newspapers, without whom court cases and local democracy would go unreported. These outlets should also be protected from the BBC's expansionist activities, which risk driving them out of the market

Finally, I wish to say a few words about campaigns, which are a crucial part of our work.

The Number 1 issue affecting Sun readers this past year has without a doubt been the cost of living crisis which has disproportionately affected them.

In response we have successfully lobbied to keep the price of fuel down, much to the Prime Minister's upset..

...We have mitigated against the more unaffordable aspects of the drive to net zero, via our agenda-setting Give Us a Brake campaign...

....secured vital resources for baby banks, through the Baby, Bank On Us campaign...

....and worked with big businesses such as Tesco and Pampers to provide funds and products to struggling families across the UK.

I have no doubt that many of you in this room have launched - and won - similarly important campaigns of your own.

So, let's all keep working TOGETHER to keep our industry strong....

Thank you for listening.