

Culture Secretary: Government and public must back our world-renowned news industry

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries writes in support of the news industry's annual [Journalism Matters](#) campaign

Journalism matters. That's the theme of this week's national campaign to celebrate the role a free press plays in British society, and it's a powerful statement of fact. But why?

It's not just so we can have something entertaining to read with our morning bowl of corn flakes.

Our democracy relies on it. Good journalism exposes wrongdoing and injustice, it scrutinises people in power and it champions and celebrates good causes.

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And at the heart of our news industry are local newspapers, powered by the reporters, copy editors, photographers and publishers working 24-7 to bring us trusted local news and information. Their papers – like the Bedford Times and Citizen, in my own constituency – are the pillars of their communities. They keep us in the loop with the stories that impact our day-to-day lives – from council or court decisions

to the rise and fall of local sports teams.

I want to pay tribute to the people who keep those papers in print. They work incredibly hard – and not always in the easiest of circumstances – to keep us informed and entertained.

Their work has become even more important in the internet age. Every day, we all go online and check our Facebook feeds, or scroll through Twitter or Instagram. Each time we do so, we can be exposed to worrying misinformation such as COVID vaccine conspiracy theories.

Now more than ever we need properly sourced, robustly researched journalism. According to Ofcom, around two-thirds of people feel that the news they consume from print newspapers is just that: trustworthy, high-quality, and accurate. Journalists are our first line of defence in the fight against fake news.

We backed news publishers last year with a £35 million public information campaign during the pandemic, pumping vital advertising revenue into publishing.

We issued guidance to local authorities to allow newspaper deliveries to continue, zero-rated VAT on e-newspapers to make it easier for people staying at home to read their daily paper, and have extended business rates relief for local newspaper offices in England for an additional five years so that they can keep more of their hard-earned income.

All of that has helped our papers get through COVID. But we've got to look to the future.

We're living in a digital age, and one of the biggest issues in my in-tray as Culture Secretary is making sure big social media platforms protect their users from danger online, including misinformation. We've introduced a trailblazing Online Safety Bill that will make us one of the first

countries in the world to force tech companies to clean up their sites. But, crucially for journalists, that Bill will also prevent social media firms from arbitrarily taking down content from respected news organisations. And, even better, it includes extremely important protections and exemptions for journalists, so that we can protect their free speech while forcing social media platforms to police their sites properly.

We've also got to make sure news publishers and big tech compete on an even playing field – and we've set up a new competition unit charged with making sure the most powerful tech giants do not abuse their dominance to disadvantage businesses that rely on them.

In government we're doing all we can to help back our brilliant journalists to go about their jobs without fear or favour. This week you can do the same – by picking up a paper or visiting the websites of our world-renowned news industry.

For more information on Journalism Matters, [visit the campaign website](#).

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