

Institution: University of Westminster
Unit of Assessment: 36
Title of case study: Media and Communications Policy in Britain
<p>1. Summary of the impact This case study focuses on impact by the Media Policy and Industries Group within the Communications and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), specifically the complementary expertise of Jean Seaton and Steven Barnett. It shows how research on policy and historical issues related to public service broadcasting and journalism in the UK has informed and influenced policy debate and practice in respect of Parliament, the Leveson Inquiry, Ofcom and the BBC. Specifically research-based expert advice has improved the quality of evidence on three House of Lords Select Committee Inquiries (Investigative Journalism; British Film and Television Industries; Ownership of News); evidence and policy-making at the BBC; public and stakeholder understanding of key issues addressed by the Leveson Inquiry; and policy-thinking at Ofcom on local media ownership rules.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research is based on three distinct but related strands of policy inquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Service Broadcasting and Regulation • Journalism • Media Ownership <p>The key research on public service broadcasting comprises work on the BBC, television production issues and broadcast news conducted by Professor Steven Barnett since joining Westminster in 1994; and the archival research of Professor Jean Seaton, the BBC's official historian, who joined Westminster in 1996. The central question guiding this strand is 'Why does public service broadcasting matter and how can it be sustained internally and maintained externally?' Key findings have drawn on empirical and archival enquiry into broadcasting history and policy which demonstrate the substantial cultural and economic contribution of public service broadcasting in Britain, rooted in concepts of citizenship, diversity, universality and innovation. Insights have focused on the vital role of a positive regulatory framework and appropriate governance frameworks for sustaining investment in original, high quality UK content, particularly in key public interest areas such as news, current affairs, drama, comedy and the arts as well as the BBC's institutional and cultural contribution nationally and internationally. Barnett's research has identified both long-term threats to how PSB contributes to Britain's economic and cultural welfare, and policy initiatives to mitigate those risks. Seaton's continuing historical approach (exemplified by her 1981 volume <i>Power Without Responsibility</i>, now in its 7th substantially revised edition, various articles, and continuing with the next volume of the official history of the BBC from 1974 to 1987) establishes the relevance of historical precedents for the BBC's continuing institutional stability in the UK, and in particular for those charged with governance, management and editorial responsibilities during a period of exceptional political and commercial challenge to the BBC. Her work on BBC World Service news values, the background to the Peacock report, and government thinking on the Sinn Fein Broadcasting ban form part of a consistent approach to PSB values.</p> <p>The second strand of underpinning research on journalism can be traced back to longitudinal studies by Barnett of current affairs programming in 2000, television news content in 2001 and 2012, attitudes to trust in media institutions in 2008 and more recent work on the regulatory structures underlying television journalism (2011). Key findings include consistent levels of "broadsheet" and foreign content in TV news bulletins over 35 years, continuing low levels of trust in print journalism, and public support for the principles of impartiality and an effective regulatory framework for journalism. Seaton's work has identified key findings relating to the strains placed on BBC reporting of Northern Ireland, the relationship with the military as well as work on wars, humanitarian disasters and industrial action, bringing together historical evidence of relevance to contemporary policy and governance issues at the BBC.</p> <p>The third strand of underpinning research on media ownership by Barnett goes back to 1998 but has more recently focussed on research funded by the AHRC in 2009/10 (and currently being continued in 2013/14). This involved extensive interviews with policy-makers, regulators and programme-makers, followed by collaboration with Ofcom and the AHRC in 2011-12 in a series of seminars. Key findings included a typology of different editorial impacts which went beyond traditional definitions of owners' influence on journalism and included agenda-setting and the</p>

exclusion of certain voices; the contribution of impartiality rules to mitigating ownership effects; different approaches to measuring plurality; and policy recommendations for a new public interest framework in determining ownership limits.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

PUBLICATIONS

1. S. Barnett (2011) *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism: Just Wires and Lights in a Box?* Bloomsbury Academic. (Listed in REF 2)
2. J. Curran and J. Seaton (2010, 7th Edition) *Power without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* Routledge. The 5th Edition was entered for RAE 2001. New work in the 7th edition includes Chap. 19 & 20 & Chap. 23 (written Jointly with James Curran). (Available on Request)
3. J. Seaton (2005) *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of news about violence* Penguin (Submitted to RAE 2008. Available on Request).
4. S. Barnett and J. Seaton (2010) 'Why the BBC Matters. Memo to the New Parliament about a unique British Institution' *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 327-332. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-923X.2010.02117.x
5. J. Seaton (2013) 'The BBC and the "Hidden Wiring" of the British Constitution: The Imposition of the Broadcasting Ban in 1988', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 24, no. 3, 448-471. doi:10.1093/tcbh/hwt021. Refereed Article.
6. S. Barnett and I. Gaber *Westminster Tales: The 21st Century Crisis in British Political Journalism*. London: Continuum, 2001. (Submitted to RAE 2008. Available on Request)
7. S. Barnett 'What's wrong with media monopolies? A lesson from history and a new approach to media ownership policy'. London School of Economic Electronic Working Paper No 18, January 2010. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/mediaWorkingPapers/pdf/EWP18.pdf>.

EVIDENCE OF QUALITY

Item 1 is listed in REF 2. Items 2, 3 and 6 were entered in previous research assessment exercises. Item 7 was awarded the MeCCSA 2010 conference prize for best policy paper. All strands of the research have been supported by a series of research grants, which provide evidence of research quality.

- Jean Seaton was awarded a Leverhulme Trust Fellowship for *The Official History of the BBC 1974-1987* worth £34,978 (21 August 2008 to 21 August 2009). This follows her role as Principal Investigator with Anthony McNicholas as Co-investigator on a three year AHRC grant on 'The BBC Under Siege' from 2002, worth £375,411.
- Steven Barnett was Principal Investigator on a Leverhulme Trust funded study on *Changing Patterns of UK Television News Content 1975-2009* (with Prof Ivor Gaber, University of Bedfordshire). Worth £55,252 this ran from 1 October 2010 to 30 September 2011.
- Steven Barnett was funded by the AHRC Research Leave Scheme for a project on *Media Ownership, Journalism, and Securing Diversity* (£31,518) from October 2009 to May 2010. End of Grant Report Grading: Outstanding.
- Barnett's work on public attitudes to journalism and issues affecting television production has been funded by a number of smaller grants since 1998-9 from organisations including the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Department for International Development and the *British Journalism Review*.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

4.1 IMPACT ON HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS As Specialist Adviser to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications Inquiries on *The Future of Investigative Journalism* (Aug. 2011-Feb. 2012), on *The British Film and Television Industries* (Feb. 2009-Jan. 2010) and *The Ownership of the News* (July 2007-June 2008) Steven Barnett has applied his research expertise on media ethics and journalism, public service broadcasting and regulation, and media ownership respectively to advise on the scope of each inquiry; on the Call for Evidence and suitable witnesses for oral evidence sessions; on the agenda and appropriate questions to be followed at each session; and, crucially, on the final drafting and recommendations contained in the final reports. Through his presence at all oral hearings and closed meetings of the committee, and through his liaison with the respective chairmen and committee clerks, Barnett ensured that the results of his own and others' research informed the

select committee reports and therefore the parliamentary and public debates which followed. More specifically, for the “*Investigative Journalism*” Inquiry chaired by Lord Inglewood, Barnett ensured that his own work on journalism’s contribution to democracy and the need for a positive regulatory framework to sustain broadcast journalism was an integral part of the final report and thus influenced subsequent debates on how to deal with the decline in traditional business models of journalism. For “*The British Film and Television Industries*”, chaired by Lord Fowler, Barnett informed the report’s narrative and recommendations by ensuring that it drew attention to shortfalls in original content investment and potential policy initiatives for renewal. For “*The Ownership of News*” Inquiry, chaired by Lord Fowler, Barnett ensured that the inquiry’s remit was not restricted to an examination of news output when examining the effect of concentrated ownership; and that the inquiry’s recommendations embraced the news obligations of commercial terrestrial broadcasters and the importance of maintaining impartiality requirements.

4.2 IMPACT AT THE BBC Drawing on her publications and expertise as the BBC’s Official Historian since 2003 Jean Seaton has provided advice on many occasions to the BBC Trust, the Director General’s Office and BBC productions as a consultant, primarily on the history of policy issues in order to enhance institutional memory and help guide decision-making: for example on the historical role of women in broadcasting for the recent Dame Janet Smith Review (2012-13) of the Jimmy Savile years. In 2009 Seaton intervened in the controversy about whether the BBC should publicise a DEC (Disasters and Emergencies Committee) appeal for Gaza. Neither the BBC nor the DEC understood the origins of the appeal mechanisms and the accurate historical record provided by Seaton confirmed and gave a basis to the BBC’s final position that the Gaza appeal was essentially political and therefore not permissible. The historical documents to support this position were checked and posted on the BBC website. Drawing on her expertise as a historian, the BBC has asked her for evidence on licence fee and Charter negotiations, ceremonies, BBC structural changes, the closing down of services, appointing a director general, salaries and the history of political relationships with governments. She has provided historical and institutional background for many programmes including the creation of Broadcasting House, the role of women for Radio 4’s *Women’s Hour*, the impact of *Rough Justice*, the role of the female voice in broadcasting and the origins of *Desert Island Discs*. As an expert on the BBC’s past she has sat on working parties for the World Service, BBC Radio, and the BBC’s Northern Ireland History Advisory Board. She has become a trusted ‘interlocutor’ between the BBC in Northern Ireland and the Centre on a range of issues. When the abolition of a central post (The Head of Nations and Regions) exposed the BBC in Northern Ireland, she wrote to the BBC Trust Chair, Chris Patten, alerting him to the problem and he consulted with the region. She contributed to an internal BBC seminar on the issue, and set up a round table (funded by the Centre for British Politics and the Politics Association) on *Fragile Politics in the Age of Austerity* that enhanced public understanding of the issues.

4.3 IMPACT AT THE LEVESON INQUIRY Barnett’s expertise in journalism, regulation and media ethics led to a call to appear twice before the Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press in November 2011 and July 2012. In addition, on 12 October 2011 he was one of only two academics invited to speak at one of the opening Leveson seminars on ‘*Supporting a free press and high standards – approaches to regulation*’. Through his oral evidence, and through four separate written submissions, he provided evidence of his research on attitudes towards the public interest, on the benefits of positive regulatory structures, of the impact of media ownership on editorial content, and of the policy implications of his research. At Barnett’s second appearance, he was asked by Lord Justice Leveson to draft some high level principles and a draft statute on plurality. Leveson’s final proposals for independent self-regulation drew heavily on the model put forward by the Media Standards Trust Report *A Free and Accountable Media: Reform of Press Self-regulation* (July 2012). Barnett was a key and active member of the Review Group, advising the MST on the report, helping to develop its recommendations, drawing on his research on journalism and regulation.

4.4 IMPACT AT OFCOM Through a commissioned research paper (published by the Reuters Institute) and through a series of seminars (referenced above), Barnett has informed the policy thinking and recommendations of Ofcom, ensuring both that their approach to amending local media ownership rules includes appropriate understanding of the democratic and cultural role of local media, and that they take into account new ideas and approaches to measuring plurality in their advice to the Secretary of State.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 HOUSE OF LORDS WORK – REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Professor Barnett is credited as a Specialist Adviser to three House of Lords Select Committee on Communications Inquiries:

- ‘The Ownership of the News’ (2008): (Barnett’s expert advice is acknowledged on p.10): <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldcomuni/122/122i.pdf>
- ‘The British Film and Television Industries’ (2010): (Barnett’s expert advice is acknowledged on p.10): <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldcomuni/37/37i.pdf>
- ‘The Future of Investigative Journalism’ (2012): (Barnett’s expert advice is acknowledged on p.12): <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201012/ldselect/ldcomuni/256/256.pdf>

CORROBORATION: Details of Barnett’s role as a Specialist Adviser are outlined in a letter from the Clerk of the Select Committee available from the HEI on request.

5.2 BBC WORK – REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Seaton’s involvement with the controversy about DEC resulted in an article in the *British Journalism Review* (‘Is Saving the world journalism’s job?’ with Suzanne Franks, 2009, 20: 13-20 DOI: 10.1177/0956474809106679). Her historical work on BBC governance is reflected in a specially commissioned piece on ‘Why the BBC Matters?’ (co-written with Barnett) and distributed as a Special Issue of *Political Quarterly* to incoming MPs in 2010 (Vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 327-332. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-923X.2010.02117.x).

CORROBORATION: Details of the nature and significance of Seaton’s contribution to the BBC as the Corporation’s Official Historian are outlined in a letter from the Director of the BBC Trust, and also in a letter from the Head of BBC History based in the Director-General’s Office (both available from the HEI on request).

5.3 LEVESON INQUIRY WORK – WEB LINKS/REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Professor Barnett’s Witness Statement and subsequent submissions to the Leveson Inquiry on journalism, ethics and regulation (module 1, 8 December 2011), media ownership (module 3, 9 July 2012), policy implications and proposals (module 4, 18 July 2012 (afternoon) and responding to Leveson’s request for a new plurality framework (24 July 2012) can be read at <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/evidence/?witness=professor-steven-barnett>.

Video footage of his oral evidence (18 July 2012 afternoon and 8 December 2011 morning) can be viewed at <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/hearings/>. Transcripts and video footage from seminar on 12 October 2011 are at <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/news-and-events/events/supporting-a-free-press-and-high-standards-%E2%80%93-approaches-to-regulation/>

CORROBORATION: Details of the nature and significance of Barnett’s contribution are outlined in a letter from the Director of the Media Standards Trust (available from the HEI on request).

5.4 OFCOM WORK- REPORTS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Measuring media plurality: Ofcom’s advice to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, 19 June 2012 (Barnett’s workshops are acknowledged in paragraph 2.7):

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/measuring-plurality/statement/statement.pdf>

Barnett’s research is also referenced several times in the annex to Ofcom’s report on Media Plurality, which summarises academic research in this area:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/measuring-plurality/statement/Annex7.pdf>

Barnett’s Reuters Institute report commissioned by Ofcom is referenced in their report *Local and Regional Media in the UK*, 22 September 2009, p.73.

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/tv-research/lrmuk.pdf>

The research report itself is *Journalism, Democracy and the Public Interest: rethinking the media pluralism for the Digital Age*, Reuters Institute, September 2009.

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/Journalism_Democracy___Public_Interest_for_website.pdf