



Public interest test on the potential merger situation in relation to Telegraph Media Group December 2023

1. The NUJ believes it is right that Ofcom is investigating the proposed acquisition by Redbird IMI Media Joint Venture, LCC of the Telegraph Media Group Limited on whether this transaction could raise public interest concerns in relation to the need for accurate presentation of news and the need for free expression of opinion in newspapers. The union believes there needs to be a reform of media ownership rules, with a strengthened public interest test.
2. The sale must be seen in the context of a UK landscape with very little media plurality. According to the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) 2023 report, [Who owns the UK Media](#) that there are “dangerous levels of concentrated ownership across the UK’s press, broadcasting, streaming services and online platforms”. Just three companies – DMG Media (publisher of the Daily Mail, Metro and i), News UK (The Sun and The Times) and Reach (Daily Mirror, The Express, Daily Star) – dominate 90 per cent of national newspaper circulation. In the UK, the Evening Standard and the Independent are part-owned by a bank controlled by the Saudi state.
3. The NUJ’s longstanding position on the need for far greater plurality and diversity in the UK’s journalistic landscape is a matter of public record. So are the union’s concerns over the stranglehold and disproportionate influence in society a small number of proprietors and media groups have had through their ownership of national newspaper titles. There needs to be meaningful investment to help new media models get off the ground, and measures to boost quality editorial content and resources. We need an environment in which quality ethical reporting is strongly rooted in line with the NUJ’s Code of Conduct.
4. The NUJ would be concerned over risks to jobs if The Telegraph were to fall into the hands of another UK newspaper business with an eye on cutting costs. The contraction in jobs and editorial content across the national newspaper titles and wider publishing sector should concern all who care about quality journalism and the role it plays in a democratic society.
5. The NUJ understands that recent changes in TMG’s ownership structure prior to the paper’s putative sale have preserved the company’s existing terms and conditions, and the status of the NUJ as a recognised union. Any future owner must honour these commitments going forward.
6. In terms of the broader implications of the paper’s possible acquisition by Redbird IMI, specific concerns have been raised by Telegraph staff and other journalists in two areas, both arising from IMI’s large stake in the Redbird IMI consortium:

- The UAE's poor record on some human rights issues, such as the criminalisation of homosexuality, the treatment of migrant workers, the status of women, as a significant and expanding oil producer at a moment of climate crisis; its use of press censorship domestically. There is a worry that honest reporting and robust comment in areas of UK and international interest could be compromised and weakened.
 - There is a fear that a major UK media outlet might be a useful tool for whitewashing Abu Dhabi United Group and other Abu Dhabi-backed business activities in the UK and internationally. ADUG's relationship with Manchester city council in the mid-2010, its use of an offshore ownership vehicle to evade scrutiny and its failure to meet affordable housing targets in its redevelopment programme (as detailed in [this](#) report); and its role in the censorship of criticism (as reported in [this](#) Times article).
7. Domestically the United Arab Emirates has a poor record on media freedom and a reputation for the arrests and surveillance of journalists. Redbird CEO Jeff Zucker has stressed his US-style notion of press freedom, offering reassurance by outlining his intention to create robust governance for The Telegraph, and to restrict IMI's role to that of 'passive investor'. However sincere this sentiment, however, the reality of how that would happen in practice in a way that would be meaningful and sustainable is quite another matter therefore there can be no guarantee that protection from interference could be achieved.
 8. History shows that promises made when newspapers are bought are not always kept. When Rupert Murdoch bought the Times and Sunday Times in 1981, he agreed to the appointment of six independent directors under whose supervision they were required to remain editorially separate and independent. Last year Murdoch applied to ditch these legal undertakings, and former Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries agreed. This meant the six independent directors were no longer legally required and News UK later merged The Times Scotland and Sunday Times Scotland a single seven-day operation.
 9. Anyone with wider experience throughout the industry knows that owners can find a multitude of ways to influence and interfere with editorial matters, whatever ownership or governance structures are in place.
 10. There have been reports of journalists working for The National, an English-language publication based in the UAE, saying they were prevented from writing critical stories about the UAE's ruling family.
 11. The huge amount of interest in the sale of the Telegraph titles and Spectator magazine prove them to be trophy acquisitions, with significant political clout and access to government. Others in the field, if the bid does not go through, could likely be subject to investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority. The Mail's publisher DMGT, which also owns Metro and the i, has shown interest in making a bid, which if successful would push the publisher above 50 per cent of the daily newspaper market.
 12. Staff believe some alternative bidders for The Telegraph would prove more congenial than Redbird to the paper's present editors, and it may be that the success of those bidders rather than Redbird would ensure greater continuity and facilitate the consolidation of a business strategy that has delivered success in a challenging market. However, this is not the same as their bids being more in the public interest

than Redbird's is. Indeed, the fact that some potential bidders already have significant UK media interests is also a serious concern to the NUJ.

13. Zucker has made much of his desire to invest in the paper's future success and effect a plan for growing the paper's readership by building its reputation as a grown-up, intelligent conservative voice in the USA. Any future owner should have to provide much greater clarity about their future plans and commitment to the titles, as well as demonstrating robust procedures to protect against editorial interference.