

Guardian's Katz to BBC Newsnight: the significance of a small splash in the London media pond

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Katz among the BBC pigeons?

In the general scheme of things the move of the deputy editor of a small circulation quality broadsheet to the post of editor of a niche BBC news programme is not seismic. Even in the relatively small pond of London journalism the [Guardian's Ian Katz's appointment as editor of Newsnight](#) is a small splash. But it does suggest how things are changing.

For the Guardian it is an indication that philosopher king Alan Rusbridger (Aged 60) is not about to bow out. He still has about four years left on his plan to bring the paper back to some kind of financial sustainability. And anyway, Guardian editors are more like monarchs, they chose when they go. This one has the board of the paper (The Scott Trust) firmly on his side, if not in the palm of his hand, so why would he leave a very well paid and most agreeable job? He still has plenty to offer.*

[Katz leaving](#) could be taken as a sign of the weakness of the paper sector compared to public service broadcasting, especially so soon after the BBC's signing of former Times editor James Harding. But then Harding was unemployed at the time, and the Guardian has never been as lucrative a posting as the rest of

'Fleet Street' once was. The Guardian is not about to lose its leader but sometimes it's good to have spaces opened up elsewhere in top management. Who knows, they might even have the imagination to bring in fresh blood. (Cf hiring of Wolfgang Blau). But it is a big blow to lose such a substantial figure at a time of great change.

It does show the new confidence at Tony Hall's BBC. Once again they have gone for talent, regardless of its provenance (or its gender). Purnell from Labour, Harding 'from' News International, Katz from the small circulation left-wing paper that is the most read in the BBC.

Katz has always struck me as very serious, intelligent and full of energy – not a show-off but very effective and astute. Forget his liberal politics for a moment (though I know the [Tories and Tory press will not](#)), he will bring fresh ideas, new perspectives and some much-needed confidence to what used to be the BBC's leading news programme.

Newsnight, as they say, is not what it used to be. This is partly about recent scandals and budget emasculations, but there was a longer trend of listless decline. Newsnight is currently overshadowed by rivals such as Channel 4 News with its recent track record of scoops but also by other BBC shows such as *Daily Politics*, *Marr* and even the regular news shows on radio. Martha Kearney, Andrew Neil and Eddie Mair are as effective (more effective?) these days as Jeremy Paxman. One of the challenges for Katz will be re-energising the legend that is Paxo, but also bringing through the abundant talent around such as Paul Mason and ex Guardianista Allegra Stratton. But Katz should know something about succession planning by now.

Just one after thought. The BBC previously hired a very talented, imaginative, youngish journalist from outside to head up Newsnight. He's now working for Google.

Updates:

At least as significant an appointment today at the BBC is James Angus (Dep Ed Newsnight) to the *Today Programme* editorship. This really needs a safe pair of hands to carry on the outstanding work of Ceri Thomas who has shaped a programme that continues to set the agenda, but in real style with a very accomplished suite of presenters who are all in form. *Newsnight* is where the Establishment is supposed to reflect after a hard day, but it's the *Today* programme (I know, plus the newspapers) that tells them what to think about at the start of the news cycle.

It's also interesting that it is Sky that spotted the outstanding female talent in newspapers, snatching former Observer, most recently Times political/social affairs correspondent Anushka Asthana.

And for those of you thinking of moving from print to screen, remember it's nothing new and not always uncomplicated. As Michael Frayn's hilarious satire, [Towards The End Of Morning](#) about a 'Guardian'-type hack who falls in love with telly in the 60s makes abundantly clear.

[*Declaration of interest: I've been a long-term – unpaid – 'collaborator' with the Guardian on its 'open journalism' strategy – see [this article for example](#)]

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