

Could a trust for Sky News actually reduce diversity?

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The [idea of putting Sky News into an independent trust](#) looks the most likely solution for the problem facing Jeremy Hunt as he considers referring NewsCorp's bid for a full merger with BSkyB. But could it actually reduce the diversity of news in the UK?

[Most people fear](#) that a merger would hand Rupert Murdoch a dangerously dominant position in the UK journalism market and, indeed, in the wider media industry. I am fully aware of that risk but I have taken a [more relaxed approach](#) in this particular case because I am not convinced that a) this take-over is critical and b) that there are clear grounds to stop it.

But put that to one side. Say, the deal is that Sky News will be taken over along with BSkyB but will be given an independent board with safeguards of editorial independence and some sort of guarantee of balanced reporting? And NewsCorp underwrite that with a promise to find the equivalent of the £20-30 million a year I believe it needs in subsidy.

I would be delighted because Sky News is a fantastic asset to journalism in this country that pioneers many new techniques and keeps the BBC rolling News relatively honest. You may not like Kay Burley, but some of us feel the





same way about Fiona Bruce

But the [Guardian's Maggie Brown](#) pointed out at an [LSE Media Policy Project](#) seminar that trust status may dilute the very qualities we admire in Sky News. It has an aggressive, story-focused, popular touch. It is desperate to bring you the news as fast as possible, even when the facts are not complete (“never wrong for long”). It is prepared to devote huge efforts to the sort of grimey crime story that other outlets may feel less excited by. At the same time, it will be faster to set up live positions and stay live in dangerous overseas locations, too. Will it lose its edge, Maggie wondered, if the management is at arms length from the Murdoch influence? Will its editorial managers go soft if they have a cozy Trust as their board to protect them from dismissal? If it does, then that means that we may lose a little of the variety that Sky News brings to the British broadcast landscape.

We do have ITV News, which shows signs of keeping its chin up lately with some excellent journalism at home and abroad. And ITN's other product, Channel 4 News, continues to churn out its unique blend of more serious news and analysis. But only Sky does it 24/7.

I have no idea, of course, whether this is a marginal concern. But I do think that it's a shame that a media organisation that was prepared to invest so much money in such a great service has to hand it over. It may make other people less likely to take that risk in the future. And that certainly would reduce diversity.

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