

# Murdoch, protest and localism: Jeremy Hunt at the LSE (guest blog)

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protest

Our Jeremy Hunt event was exciting but strange. He is effectively forbidden to speak about the big issue on his desk, the NewsCorp bid for BSkyB, and it was interrupted by a student protest. Perhaps the most interesting theme was Hunt's commitment to using local media to improve local democracy. POLIS intern Trish Audette reports.

Reviewing Jeremy Hunt's POLIS-hosted dialogue at LSE last week, we might break the evening into three parts: the first part, when an intrigued audience hoped to learn more about reports Hunt was having behind-closed-doors meetings with News Corp representatives amid decision-making on the BSkyB takeover bid; the awkward part, when about 30 protesters made it into the auditorium to shout slogans like "Tory Vulture, Minister of Culture;" and the policy part, which took up much of the evening

and touched on a number of topics, from local TV to expanding internet accessibility to rural parts of the country.

Now, on the first part, we learned nothing. You've surely read more in the papers about the proposed takeover than Hunt shared Wednesday night. Simply, he repeatedly called the bid a quasi-judicial process and said, "What I can't do is give a running commentary on who I've spoken to and who I've met."

On the protest... Well, it wrapped up fairly quickly and politely, with at least two students among the group sticking around to politely ask questions as part of the audience. Journalism.co.uk has a more detailed report on that front [here](#).

And so, let's talk about Hunt's interest in spreading media access – specifically intensely local television news production – to centres outside London. He suggests, the "London broadcast intelligentsia" is out of step with the rest of the country on whether local TV could be successful.

As a guest blogger, I should note that I'm from Canada and started my (print) reporting career in 2004, when studies highlighting the importance of delivering "intensely local, people-focused news" were so prevalent our morning newsroom meetings saw each reporter identify what made his or her story local, people-focused and newsy. (The [American Journalism Review](#) has a round-up.)

While my colleagues and I had a bit of fun of the mantra, it's also stuck with me as a working framework for communicating news that matters most to people: what their local government, education, health and police authorities are up to. And so looking at Hunt's idea, I have more questions about why local television hasn't developed in the United Kingdom than why it wouldn't work. And as a reporter I can't help but nod in favour of boosting local accountability by adding media players to the field in smaller cities. But, does it have to be television-based?

In November, POLIS Director Charlie Beckett wrote [a lengthy blog post](#) weighing the potential wins and losses of such an endeavour – and it seems the biggest question mark is ad revenue. Hunt suggests a "national spine" be put in place to host the local franchises, which is essentially what is in place in North America, where major American and Canadian networks sell national ads, program primetime and daytime shows, and then hand over news broadcast hours to the local affiliates.

Can that North American model work here?

Perhaps you will hear more from Hunt on this when he speaks at the [Oxford Media Convention](#) Wednesday.

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