


# Alastair Campbell: a very nice man

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Alastair [Campbell](#) was in fine form last night as he delivered a lecture at Polis partner the [London College of Communication](#). His [Cudlipp Lecture](#) was a detailed run-through of what is wrong with contemporary media, from coverage of the McCanns to *Heat* Magazine. So far, so predictable,  from someone who has already published a [book](#) justifying his role in the media/politics war and who is keen to blame everyone else for the breakdown in trust and decline in standards. There was little that I or the assembled media types found to disagree with, although many of us felt that Alastair has omitted his part in the proceedings. But when that was put to him in questions after the speech or at dinner later, he was disarmingly open about mistakes that he and New Labour had made: he *had* been a control freak; New Labour *was* too obsessed about setting the agenda. So in the end, the whole event was a pretty rounded portrayal of the problems faced by politicians and journalists in the current media environment with all the pressures of new technology, economic competition and cultural change outlined by people such as Tony Blair in his 'feral beasts' [speech](#) and Jeremy Paxman in his MacTaggart [lecture](#).

My question to them all is 'what are you going to do about it'? There are larger structural issues that mean that this problem is not going to be 'solved' overnight. I would also argue that it doesn't help to be nostalgic about some past golden age. Remember, at one point in the glorious history of Alastair himself he worked for the ghastly Robert Maxwell. Some things are much better now. But Campbell was right to identify a reluctance on the part of much of the news media to talk about its limitations or failings. It is seen as self-indulgent. But Campbell's speech had plenty of real examples of lax standards and it posed enough questions that deserve an answer. Or at least further consideration.

[Here](#) is what the excellent former BBC editor Phil [Harding](#) made of the speech.

And [here](#) is what Kevin Marsh at the BBC's College of Journalism made of it.

Former BBC correspondent [Nick Jones](#) was unimpressed.

Another former Number 10 spinner [David Hill](#) has also been speaking out: read about it at [Martin Moore's](#) blog.

[Polis](#) hopes to continue that dialogue with our events looking at two concerns raised by Alastair. On Wednesday we debate coverage of the [McCanns](#) and then On February 25th we look at the role of [celebrity](#). Email us at [polis@lse.ac.uk](mailto:polis@lse.ac.uk) for details. Today at 5pm, Samira Ahmed from Channel 4 News is talking about coverage of women and crime and on March 3rd Sir John Tusa addresses coverage of the arts.

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