

The public service future in an online world

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Tonight (Thursday November 8th) we host a major public debate about the future of public service journalism so it was good to have the BBC's [Richard Sambrook](#) as a warm-up act earlier this week. In a talk to students the Director of the BBC's Global News Division gave some very thoughtful and frank answers to some tough questions. There's no doubt that he believes that new media technologies offer more opportunities than threats.

Did he agree with BBC Foreign Editor [John Simpson](#) that programmes such as [Newsnight](#) who consult the viewers on their running order are like doctors who ask the patient what treatment they want? Well, no actually. Sambrook points out that it is actually good medical practice to involve the patient in their treatment and he wants journalists to do the same, he says:

I recognise that it is uncomfortable for journalists like John Simpson but the days when journalists are gatekeepers are ended. We don't own the news, we must show more respect for the public. I always tell my journalists that on any given subject there are members of the public out there who will know more about it than we do.

Sambrook is optimistic about journalism's power to make the world a better place. he believes the growth in international news services both at the BBC and from new competitors such as Aljazeera is a good thing. But he recognises that the journalism they provide depends on investment. He said:

New technology means it is cheaper and easier to cover stories such as Burma. But there is a danger of over-dependence on agencies such as Reuters and AP... In the past we have seen how accurate revelatory journalism like we saw in Ethipoia a few decades ago and recently in Darfur can mobilise public opinion... But we need to make sure that we allow the resources for what [David Leigh](#) has called 'slow journalism' or what we used to call current affairs journalism for that to happen.

More from Richard Sambrook at his excellent [blog](#) and more of that kind of debate when we gather Roger Bolton, Evan Davies (BBC Economics editor), Emily Bell (The Guardian) and Richard D [North](#) (author "Scrap The BBC") to discuss The Future of Impartiality – is The Public Service Ethos Doomed? on Thursday November 8th at 6.30pm in the New Theatre, Houghton Street, London School of Economics. It's free and you don't need a ticket.

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