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A stabilising force in a fractured world

The Scott Trust's role as a responsible media owner in 2026

We are living through a fundamental shift in our society. The pace of change is faster, the stakes feel higher, and foundations like democracy, the rule of law, freedom of expression and how we interact with our humanity and the dignity of others, are being tested.

In 2026, the responsibility of the media is not abstract. And neither is the responsibility of those who own and steward it. As chair of the Scott Trust, the sole shareholder of Guardian News & Media, this responsibility feels particularly acute at the moment. We exist to secure the Guardian's financial and editorial independence in perpetuity, so that the journalism can remain free from political or commercial interference.

Our ownership structure is a structural guarantee of independence, not just a claim. It is designed to protect the journalism and, in doing so, protect the trust we have built with our audience. This duty and the values that underpin it mean that we are required to meet this moment.

The tension in today's society is, perhaps, unsurprising. Economic progress has stalled for too many, inequality has widened, and the last few years have been marked by shocks that have shaped the way we see the world. The pandemic, 24-hour access to information on war, disruption from new technologies and dwindling prospects of building a stable life means we are learning in real-time to live in a more complex, more volatile world.

And that is harder to explain. When people feel disoriented, they understandably look for something solid to hold onto. This is where journalism matters. The Guardian's purpose, as articulated by editor-in-chief Katharine Viner, is to provide people with "clarity: facts they can trust, information they need, reported and edited with care and precision... We cannot merely criticise the status quo; we must also explore the new ideas that might displace it. We must build hope."

This is a time when we need hope, where those who seek power exploit discontent. Where 'strong men' peddle the myth that they have the solutions that others are not 'dominant' enough to enforce. They thrive on escalating grievance and division rather than addressing the underlying, often complex, problems.

And, honestly, the temptation toward quick, polarising fixes is not confined to the fringes. Politics can become trapped by the next poll; business by the next quarterly return.

Individual gains are more straightforward to pursue than the more difficult path of collective

responsibility. This short termism is not adequate for a long, difficult era. Our horizons must become broader.

That is why I see the Scott Trust's role as fundamental to the long term – to be calm in a frenzied world, to be a stabilising, consistent force, to protect the editor-in-chief and the journalism from outside interference, and to ensure the organisation has the commercial strength required to remain independent. Editorial independence is not a slogan. It is something you must build and defend, year after year.

And when tested, the owner must be ready to back the editors and journalists, rather than bow and settle for less than the truth. The press must be free to challenge power rather than accommodate it. Trust is strengthened by independence, not traded away in its name.

Technology, including artificial intelligence, sits at the centre of this paradox. Used well, it can help humanity. Used recklessly – or seized for the benefit of a few – it can deepen instability, misinformation, dependency and radicalisation. This is not only a question for journalism. It is a question for everyone who might hold some power: why they have it, and what responsibilities come with it. The same is true of our response to the climate emergency, and of every decision where short-term gain competes with long-term stewardship.

I believe there is hope. Not naive optimism, but the hope that comes from people choosing responsibility over convenience. The Guardian is “open to all, funded by many, beholden to no one”. That model depends on our audience and supporters who understand what is at stake.

Ole Jacob Sunde

Chair, the Scott Trust