

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Informed

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Culture wars over, says Nandy

Mark Thomas / AlamyStock Photo

Lisa Nandy is the new Culture Secretary responsible for media policy following Labour's landslide victory in the 4 July general election.

Chris Bryant was appointed as her minister of state. The former government minister and latterly Parliament's standards watchdog chair **won £30,000 plus costs** from News International after having his phone hacked, together with other politicians, celebrities and sports stars.

Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, said: "The union has written to Lisa Nandy to congratulate her on her new brief, and we're looking forward to meeting her soon to discuss the range of important issues affecting NUJ members in the coming period." Michelle had announced she would be stepping down as general secretary at NEC, but will remain in post until at least the end of the year (page 2).

The NUJ has launched a revamped News Recovery Plan, its manifesto for a media industry rooted in public interest journalism (see page 8). The document which includes practical measures for supporting a news industry starved of investment has been sent to the Culture Minister.

Nandy was comfortably re-elected to her Wigan constituency, unlike Thangam Debbonaire, the shadow culture minister expected to take on the culture brief, who lost her seat to the Green Party. Nandy has held various frontbench opposition roles, including shadow foreign secretary. The union is now recruiting members to join its cross-party Parliamentary Group among the intake of 335 new MPs.

The Labour Party manifesto does not provide a fulsome media



Lisa Nandy told the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport staff that the "culture wars" were over

programme, however it says it will "work constructively with the BBC and our other public service broadcasters".

Nandy is on record as a supporter of the BBC, but has said it should be more directly accountable to licence-fee holders and she was critical of its "backroom negotiations with the government" – views which are in line with the NUJ.

She has described local newspapers as the "lifeflood of democracy" and has spoken out against cuts at her local Wigan newspapers and in favour of the Local Democracy Reporter scheme, voicing support for a tax on social media companies to fund local media and investigative journalism.

Her mother, Luise Nandy, was a producer for Granada's long-running, irreverent show, What The Papers Say, famous for reading out tabloid headlines in "funny" working-class voices.

Hopefully Nandy will last longer than the long list of predecessors during the past decade – and she could rely on a warm welcome from her department merely for not being Nadine Dorries.

Byrant, on record for being critical of the algorithm-driven stories which he says promotes extreme views amplifying hatred, is in favour of greater regulation and curbing the monopoly power of tech giants, including Meta and Google.

The union will monitor the government's promises to repeal the anti-strike laws and, hopefully, to reform procedures required for union recognition; the four-year battle at the Press Association (page 4) provides a compelling case study.

Vows to improve workers' rights, including flexible hours, ending hire and fire, strengthening sick pay and mandatory pay gap reporting are all in Labour's New Deal agenda.

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NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
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JOURNALISTS

Michelle's Message



When I leave the NUJ - likely at the end of this year - it will be with great pride to have been a part of an incredibly special union, says Michelle Stanistreet

The run up to a meeting of the union's National Executive Council is always a busy period, but none more so than its gathering at the end of June. The week previously had seen the NUJ host the IFJ's AGM and meeting of its Executive Committee, with leaders of journalist unions from around the globe. Some had barely dropped their suitcases before they were traversing London's rush hour traffic to mount a solidarity demonstration demanding the release of Julian Assange outside Belmarsh prison, with placards and a banner with a direct call to the US President - Let Him Go, Joe.

Almost as if Biden's ears were hearing that call across the pond, exactly a week later the long-awaited news came that Assange was free and winging his way to Australia - after breaking his journey in the Northern Mariana Islands to

accept a plea deal that saw him admit to the spying charges in return for the five years he'd spent in prison in the UK and his freedom. Whilst this was a deal and thankfully not a legal determination in court, the principle of gathering and publishing information the government deems to be secret has now been successfully treated as a crime so the potential chilling impact on press freedom is self-evident.

The long-running campaign that the NUJ and the IFJ have been a key part of - whatever you think of Assange as an individual - has focused on the impact of an extradition and trial under the Espionage Act on journalists and journalism and has been a testament to the importance of international solidarity and campaigning.

Bringing our IFJ colleagues together also provided the opportunity to collectively consider the challenges and changes being wrought by the deployment of generative AI across the news industry and wider society. Key issues of trust in journalism as well as the impact on jobs and work were the subject of animated discussion, as was a keynote speech and lively Q&A with BBC director general Tim Davie. I was also pleased to be able to give colleagues a sneak preview of my revamped News Recovery Plan - now endorsed by the NEC and a policy platform that we hope will be an important campaigning tool for the union in the coming weeks and months.

Alongside a busy itinerary of meetings, we made time for some sight-seeing with a whistlestop tour on a vintage Routemaster bus that was appreciated by colleagues. Despite the disruption wrought by the unexpected general election to our plans, we still managed to host an event in the House of Lords thanks to the support of Baroness Bonham-Carter, who spoke alongside Lord Hendy KC, with a particularly moving and important contribution from Nasser Abu Baker, president of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate.

Probably the biggest highlight for our visitors was the chance to visit an NUJ picket line - from initially planning a small delegation to offer solidarity on day one of the Springer Nature strike, we ended up with the entire IFJ Executive Committee out in force where they got to enjoy a particularly lively and upbeat turnout with plenty of chants and even some pavement dancing to a carefully considered strike soundtrack.

Alongside our brilliant outcome at PA, achieving recognition after a four-year slog that has seen plenty of ups and downs, the effort put in by our strike committee and reps at Springer Nature has been enervating and inspiring. They've both made me incredibly proud as general secretary of our chapels and of the wider NUJ team that's helped us deliver as best we can for our collective memberships. From the celebratory tears of a much-deserved recognition win, the sheer delight of our reps and the festival-like spirit of a picket line on a sunny day, the back-office work to make sure our legal submissions are as potent as they can be, the communications work to amplify our campaigns and drawn in support to the lengthy ACAS negotiations intent on securing the best outcome - these are the moments and the hard yards that make the NUJ what it is. This encapsulates the spirit and ethos of a union that I genuinely believe is quite different in culture and make-up than most in the trade union movement.

Aid for Gaza

Journalists in Gaza need your help to do their job in desperate circumstances. The IFJ is supplying vital equipment and aid. Please donate to its safety fund. Branches can email jackiec@nuj.org to transfer funds from their management allowances.

DONATE NOW

This NEC was quite a different one for me, as I announced to colleagues that I had decided to step down as general secretary, a position that I was first elected to in 2011, after being deputy general secretary and coming to work for the NUJ in 2008. Sixteen years after making that move to step out of my life as a journalist, to work and lead a union that had become a significant part of my life through my activism as an MoC and elected NEC member for newspapers and agencies, then vice-president and president, it feels like the right time for a change of direction.

Since making that announcement, first to the NEC and then in my email to all members that morning, I have been very moved and touched by the many messages I have received from NUJ members from around the union. Texts, calls, emails, letters, kind comments on social media – they have all been much appreciated. The external challenges we have faced over the time I've worked for the union have been difficult – our finances, the global credit crunch and swathes of cuts across the industry, the hollowing out of UK public services including the BBC under austerity, a global pandemic... My focus throughout has been in tackling our internal weaknesses and getting our finances on a sure footing, growing and organising where we can, stemming the losses in our weaker areas and ensuring our campaigns and legal interventions punch above our weight when it comes to the issues that matter to journalists and journalism. That's been evident in our work on protection of sources, on equal pay, on journalists' safety, on international solidarity, on freelance rights, on our calls for a recalibrated future for the news industry in our News Recovery Plan. It's work that I am proud of and that so many members have got behind and supported in many different ways.

I continue to firmly believe in the importance of ensuring the NUJ's future is an independent one with a clear focus

REASONS TO JOIN

Press Freedom

The NUJ lobbies for journalists' rights so you can protect your sources, have editorial independence and do your job safely and freely, without censorship from the state. As a member of the International Federation of Journalists we are part of a 600,000-strong community working to ensure the safety of media workers across the globe, fighting for freedom of information, open government and plurality of the media.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at
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on journalists and media workers, and the professional values we embody.

How that work is taken forward will be a matter for my successor and the wider membership. When I leave the NUJ – likely at the end of this year – it will be with great pride to have been able to play

a part in the continuance of an incredibly special union that will always have a big part in my heart. Until then, as you will see from the many industrial updates and work reflected in this edition of NUJ Informed, it is very much business as usual!

Update

Take in PA

Reps Jonathan Brady, Emily Pennink and Sian Harrison were all awarded a huge round of applause when they dropped into the NEC to celebrate their long-fought victory in getting union recognition at the Press Association.

“Our argument was always that gaining union recognition would help to make great jobs even better and help to keep PA at the pinnacle of British journalism where it belongs,” said Jonathan. “We want the company to do well – and for young journalists to see that they have a future and a career path here.”

That the company did not see this and resisted their bid all the way to the end was why it was so frustrating, they said.

It was a huge task made more difficult by the geographical spread of potential members and not even knowing that departments, such as the “amazing Puzzle team”, existed, plus many staff worked from home. WhatsApp became a vital organising tool.

But the greatest problem was the “dreaded churn”. “Although many of us love our job, the poor pay has meant that when people arrive they appreciate the professional experience it provides, but see it as a steppingstone to a better-paid job,” said Emily.

In 2023 they carried out a pay survey



Officials Laura Davison and Mostafa Rajaai and reps Jonathan Brady, Sian Harrison and Emily Pennink at Headland House

which revealed some very poor pay and a wide disparity of remuneration, so the chapel put in a claim that pushed PA to a better deal. With the management continuing to reject the recognition bid, they decided to take the laborious statutory route through the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC).

This meant getting beyond the requisite magic 50 per cent of the bargaining unit, which was always touch and go as people joined up and then left. It took four years in all with the pandemic intervening. Finally, the figures stacked up – just about. Now it was up to the CAC to decide for automatic recognition or force a ballot.

Laura Davison, national newspapers

and agencies organiser, described how her hands were shaking as she opened the CAC's deciding letter. She could hardly believe the decision.

The reps said it had been sheer tenacity – plus a creative, positive campaign, huge support from the NUJ's officers, legal and campaigns team and other chapels, such as the FT's, which offered advice and solidarity – which got them through. A chapel committee was quickly set up and another pay survey is on the way.

Business Insider, which recently won its own case, is now putting in its first pay claim after conducting a detailed survey of members; and recognition efforts continue at New Arab and the New Statesman.

Cyber security

The general secretary has initiated an overview of the union's IT and data security systems following reports of cyber-attacks on many companies, including trade unions such as the CWU and GMB. In line with the TUC's recent cyber security report, a series of measures are in train to ensure the union's systems and data are well protected.

£4m netted for NUJ members

The first half of 2024 has achieved close to £4m in compensation/damages payments for members. The NUJ's legal department said: “We are pleased to have been able to achieve such fantastic results for our members.”

Senedd U-turn

The Senedd pulled back at the

eleventh hour from voting for a clause in Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill which would have deprived newspapers of vital revenue when advertising council tax changes, following a letter from the Welsh Executive Council and lobbying from newspaper editors.

Magazine cuts

A rash of redundancies in

magazines were reported to the NEC, at Cosmopolitan magazine, Hello! magazine, and at the publishing groups Immediate Media, LexisNexis and Bauer. Roles are also risk at Sage Publications. The union is in dispute with LexisNexis over pay and at the company's Risk Solutions for removing roles from the bargaining unit.

Update

Nature Springer pay dispute resolved

Mark Thomas

The Nature Springer chapel members may have been strangers to industrial action, but a hugely successful campaign and a threat of eight days of strike action over two months rattled its management and resulted in an overwhelmingly accepted deal.

The collection of 60-plus journals, which includes the world's leading science publication, Nature, has been owned by international publisher, Springer Nature, since 2015.

The members won the argument that their experience, expertise and talent were not being rewarded by a hugely profitable business. A 5.8 per cent offer was rejected because the members said wage stagnation could not keep up with increases in rent, food bills and general cost of living.

"My monthly mortgage payments are up by 23 per cent - they are now 41 per cent of my take-home pay. My weekly shopping bill is up 15 per cent (despite attempting to cut back). Now I have to spend double on commuting to the office," said a typical member.

A letter to Springer Nature top brass asking for support from the scientific and academic community said: "Springer Nature made over \$500m in operating profit in 2022, a 27 per cent margin. They have recently quietly increased their open-access article processing fees on Nature journals to \$12,290, but they say they can't afford to pay their staff a fair wage." It garnered more than 1,100



The lively picket line won solidarity visits from members of the IFJ and others

signatories, including more Nobel Prize winners than you could shake a stick at.

Professor Ben List, director of the Max Planck Institute for Coal Research, professor of organic chemistry at the University of Cologne and 2021 Nobel Prize winner for chemistry, said: "Science should not be the subject of greed, but rather of openness, freedom, enthusiasm, and fairness."

There were two days of strike action, accompanied by carnival-style picket lines, a strikers' soundtrack which can be downloaded from Spotify and huge solidarity from across the NUJ and union movement, all sustained by home-baked NUJ cookies. A posse from the International Federation of Journalists

joined the strikers on day one, as did Lord Hendry and his dog named Bob.

It all brought the management to a table with the union and ACAS. The deal agreed was accepted by Springer Nature staff and the two sides have an agreement to establish "increased and regular communications going forward".

At the last NEC meeting, STV was in the middle of strike action, also over pay. However, Nick McGowan-Lowe, national organiser Scotland, reported that, when talks were resumed, Michelle Stanistreet's intervention was crucial to the company making an improved offer and an agreement to negotiate with the NUJ over workload concerns.

Training consultation

Many members have taken up the opportunity for free in-person newsroom leadership training, held in centres across the union's nations and regions, alongside a separate offering of online news verification

skill sessions. Both courses were funded by Google News Lab. The last DM called for a consultation on this external funding, and members and branches are encouraged to send in feedback and responses to campaigns@nuj.org.uk. Log on to the

website and read the **Funding report.**

Reach hub

Chris Morley, senior organiser Northern & Midlands, reported a quiet period on the redundancy front for newspapers, but plenty of

work dealing with structural changes, pay and individual cases. The union supported members moving to Reach's new 300-person hub to produce group-wide content and on joining a new health and safety committee.

Update

BBC braced for cuts

Mark Thomas

BBC members are braced for yet another restructure – meaning cuts – at the corporation.

The director general Tim Davie's plans for creating a "leaner" organisation because of a "black hole" in the funding were put on hold during the run-up to the general election.

In her report to the NEC, Sian Jones, national broadcasting officer, noted more parts of the BBC were expected to be moved to its commercial arm, BBC Studios, taking them out of the public service remit regulated by the watchdog Ofcom. This had prompted the NUJ to identify and strengthen membership there to create an active chapel, as well as stepping up lobbying the BBC for union recognition.

The effects of the cuts and reorganisation at BBC local radio are being monitored by the NUJ. Michelle Stanistreet told the NEC the loss of popular presenters and less bespoke local news appeared to be reflected in listening figures. In May's RAJAR figures, the official body which measures radio audiences reported local radio down 10 per cent year on year and 2 per cent quarter on quarter.

Sian Jones said: "The unique space that BBC local radio provides for truly local



Tim Davie, BBC director general, at the IFJ London conference last month. He said people needed to fight for public service broadcasting, yet has promised a leaner BBC

news, sport and community content is being squeezed, with audiences losing out. While we welcome the growth in audience numbers for local BBC digital content, we continue to argue for local radio programming which meets both Ofcom and community needs."

The increasing use of MoJo kits (mobile journalism), where reporters use apps on their portable devices to record and edit, has also caused concern among members, especially as the general election accelerated their use for TV live

coverage. In some cases it has meant reporters working without back-up at a time when broadcasters have been targets for abuse. The NUJ raised concerns with management and the practice was stopped. Sian said: "Our NUJ reps acted fast to resolve the situation."

The BBC's 3 per cent across-the-board pay increase takes effect in August, with additional uplifts for pay progression, but negotiating freelance rates is ongoing and proving frustrating.

Other TV news ...

ITV has renewed a 10-year public service broadcast licence, providing stability for staff, however, cost controls announced in February and reviewed in June have been extended to the end of the year. These include restrictions such as a freeze on hiring staff

and not renewing short-term contracts. Another major concern for staff is the significant stress caused by problems with a new technology package, with "disaster recovery" training now a regular feature because of failures in the system.

A reorganisation of roles and shifts at **ITN**, paused by the election, will continue. The chapel held two well-attended meetings and the union has had talks with management.

Pay talks at **Red Bee** are drawing to a close as the company continues to struggle financially. Staff at **Al Jazeera** were forced to accept a 1 per cent rise,

although the union did persuade the company to pay for gym membership and commit to exploring other benefits.

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary, criticised **RTÉ's** plans to become a publisher-broadcaster with more outsourced programming, saying it would undermine the nation's cultural landscape.

Update

“It’s been brilliant having you at the helm”

Mark Thomas



Michelle, with the News Recovery Plan at the IFJ London meeting. She has been “moved and touched” since being showered with messages after revealing she is to step down

Members of the NEC queued up to heap praise and thank Michelle Stanistreet when she dropped her bombshell news that she will be stepping down as general secretary.

Once the news was out, social media was full of messages from branches and members across the union and beyond echoing their sentiments and wishing her the best of luck. “Thank you to Michelle for her energy, enthusiasm and hard work! It’s been brilliant having you at the helm,” tweeted NUJ London Freelance branch.

“Thank you and good luck. You’re a brilliant leader,” said NUJMags.

The news came as a number of other departures and changes among the union’s staff have been announced.

Applications, from members of the union, for the post of NUJ general secretary are now open. The closing date is noon, Tuesday 27 August. More information can be found on the [NUJ website](#).

Pamela Morton, will leave at the end of the month after 34 years at the union. The senior organiser for magazines, books & Wales previously worked in the freelance office and started as a finance assistant in 1990. **Sian Jones**, national broadcasting officer, is leaving to become the head of communications at Equity. She is well known to members since she served many years on the NEC in the PR and communications seat and as president during the difficult pandemic period.



Welsh Executive Council chair Nick Powell presents Pamela Morton with a miner’s lamp

Use of Chapel Chair

At the NUJ’s DM, a resolution was passed to replace the term Mother/Father of Chapel with Chapel Chair in the union’s rule book. This rule change has been promulgated in the NUJ rule book.

In the debate, delegates were supportive of the need to encourage the widest range of members to put themselves forward and take up positions within their chapels, and of the central role that equality plays in the NUJ.

It was noted that chapels already use differing descriptions alongside M/FoC – including chapel/NUJ rep – and that the change would not mean these terms could not continue to be used alongside Chapel Chair. In Ireland, Cathaoirleach is frequently used instead of chair.

In making the rule change the NEC noted the importance of inclusivity and recognised that many members and reps have an affection for the longstanding traditions of the union. The terminology arises from our roots in the printmakers’ union, where workers created voluntary associations to challenge and improve working conditions. It forms part of our proud history and demonstrates the power of collective action.

All NUJ reps, officials and staff are encouraged to use “Chapel Chair” in their union communications, including in their correspondence with branches, chapels and members, in order to promote the term among our membership.

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



News Recovery Plan

The NUJ's media roadmap has been revamped to encompass the union's policy on AI and to stem a growing lack of trust in the media, reports Frances Rafferty

The NUJ's News Recovery Plan (NRP) was produced in response to the threat to the media industry during the pandemic - posed by those disseminating disinformation, misinformation, racism and partisan agendas - and to provide a path to a future media landscape rooted in public interest journalism.

Four years later, it is needed more than ever and its mixture of principles and pragmatic proposals has been updated to take in the threat of generative AI, the use of which is now being monitored by the NUJ across workplaces. It also notes how the cost-of-living crisis has added significant additional pressure to an already beleaguered sector and that the news industry's response has been a business-as-usual one of more cuts and redundancies.

The UK has a new government. The

News Recovery Plan is the NUJ's manifesto for the media and will provide the basis for conversations with this new government on shoring up public service broadcasting and a BBC that has been battered by politicians with an agenda to undermine it and starve it of cash. The NRP says: "The BBC's funding model must protect and sustain the principle of universality and its funding settlement must be sufficient to guarantee quality journalism and news programming."

In her speech to the International Federation of Journalists' annual general meeting in London, where the global trade union leaders were given a preview of the plan, Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, quoted a Reuters Institute report which looked at the levels of trust in journalism. She said: "In the UK it's actually weakened - the proportion of those who trust most news most of the time is 35 per cent, down from 51 per cent in 2015. Compare that to Ireland where it's stayed static at 46 per cent over the same period. We all know as journalists that trust is hard to build, but easy to lose."

Four years on since the pandemic began, the levels of disinformation and misinformation swimming around social media platforms have vastly increased, with Russian and Chinese cyber-farms cynically undermining democratic discourse. The political scene is becoming ever more polarised, extreme right parties are in the ascendant and the spectre of a Trump-led United States a growing possibility.

Michelle said: "Right now the pressures on journalism and journalists are at their most grave at a time when we need quality, trusted information and news more than ever."

"Yet levels in public trust are impaired, frontline news resources have been hollowed out in many media outlets after successive cutbacks; the levels of deliberate engagement in mis- and dis-information by a range of actors are unparalleled; a combination that

has been turbo-charged by the rapid deployment of generative AI. On top of this, journalists have also been contending with significant additional pressures in the form of rising rates of harassment, intimidation and threats. It makes quite the perfect storm.”

The NRC sets out ways to strengthen the democratic function of journalism by: **reforming media ownership rules** with a strengthened public interest test; improving **protection for whistleblowers**; calling for a **conscience clause** in staff and freelance employment contracts to protect journalists and communication workers from being forced to produce unethical content; **safeguarding journalists** against surveillance; and supporting a global framework to protect journalists and press freedom.

The proposals address ways to increase investment in journalism by calling for a **windfall tax** of 6 per cent on the tech giants and an ongoing digital tax to provide sustainable future funding; **Jobs for Journalists tax credits** and interest free loans – a three-year targeted programme to bolster frontline newsgathering roles; **tax perks** for online or print news subscriptions and local advertising; and **funding for new start-ups** and public interest journalism initiatives.

Central to the plan is the establishment of a **journalism foundation** set up by a government grant to champion public interest news and act as a broker for funding initiatives, with a remit including media literacy and fostering plurality and diversity in the industry.

The plan makes clear: “The NUJ and its members are not seeking handouts – we are looking for investment to transform the media industry, make it fit for our collective purpose and truly serve the public good.” Investment would depend upon securing jobs and protecting the terms and conditions of staff and freelances and producing quality news the public can trust.

AI for public good

“The deployment of technology such as generative AI must be subject to safeguards, transparency and meaningful regulation so public trust is not further eroded and the rights of creators are respected and protected – now and in the future,” says the NRP.

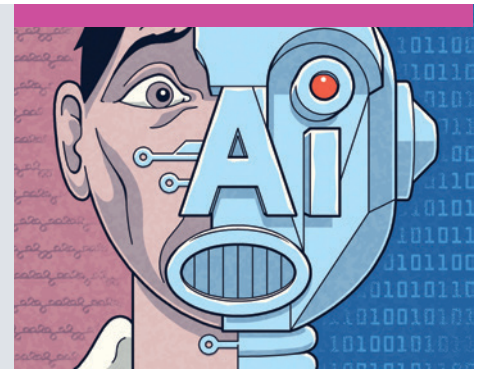
It insists AI cannot be used as an opportunity to further cut jobs and frontline newsgathering resources in newsrooms that are already hollowed out. The union is monitoring the use of AI throughout the industry, seeking to ensure that its use is ethical and does not undermine quality journalism. Michelle Stanistreet told the NEC that Newsquest was now boasting about being able to feed press releases into software which regurgitates it in the publisher’s house style.

She said: “Where once publishers may have felt rather embarrassed to admit to its journalists topping and tailing press releases to fill pages – you now hear media executives proudly share in public meetings or at government roundtables how their AI tool takes in press release content and turns it into house style at the click of a button. So-called churnalism but without the shame factor.”

The NRP says: “Creators’ moral and economic rights must be safeguarded, respected and protected from exploitation – with journalists having full control over their work, how it is used and what they are paid for it.”

Impartial news cannot be supplanted by deploying algorithms that reinforce and inflame prejudices and beliefs, and training data for generative AI must be transparent and subject to scrutiny, it states.

Transparency is paramount, from the labelling of content and images



produced by generative AI to employers having a duty to disclose to staff and freelance creators if any materials in an editorial workflow have been generated in part or whole by AI.

YouGov research in April 2024 found approximately half of Britons have a negative view of AI, including 12 per cent who think no good will come from AI in journalism at all.

Michelle said: “AI, of course, poses opportunities that could prove beneficial and aid investigative reporting – scaling up requests, interrogating large data sets, packaging up stories to speak to different audiences, something that might prove helpful to freelances in particular. One group has developed a Freedom of Information Request generator, completing requests in seconds. But, for the NUJ, human oversight in the editorial process is critical.”

There should be a simple opt in mechanism, either for individuals or as part of collective licencing, revocable by the creator at any time and no blanket agreements for “any and all uses”. The union will be lobbying the Labour government to protect journalists’ rights in legislation.

The NRP says: “In the face of rapid deployment, comprehensive legislation with teeth is vital to enshrine the rights of creators and regulate AI, at the same time as ensuring respect and adherence to existing copyright and intellectual property laws.”

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



Police and the media

‘The relationship between the press and police is broken’ a major new report concludes as new cases emerge of journalists harassed and spied on by officers, Ian Burrell reports

The Police and The Media report, which makes 26 recommendations to help “rebuild” this “vital relationship”, is the result of months of work by the Crime Reporters Association, the Society of Editors and the Media Lawyers Association.

It was prompted by the debacle of last year’s Nicola Bulley investigation when a police information vacuum was filled by conspiracy theorists and social media “detectives”, some of whom posed as journalists and gatecrashed press conferences.

The report finds many police press officers are unwilling to discuss cases by phone with reporters and no longer provide press office phone numbers on force websites. Interviews with victims or investigating officers are sometimes being conducted and filmed by police press officers, rather than independent

journalists. Police officers viewed journalists with deep suspicion, the report found. It noted that Baroness Casey’s review of the Met Police last year found 93 per cent of officers blamed “negative media coverage” for the force’s deteriorating public reputation rather than murder, rape and other crimes committed by their colleagues. The study cited comments by Steve Hartshorn, chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales, who last year told rank and file officers: “I genuinely believe the public see through the negativity of the British media, whose obsession appears to be to reflect the bad and worst in society at the expense of the good.”

Rebecca Camber, chair of the Crime Reporters Association, told Informed: “Somewhere along the line they have lost sight that the media can be, not a hindrance but, an actual help and that it is a vital relationship for the sake of our democracy.”

The report calls for urgent revision of College of Policing counter-corruption guidelines which identify journalists as a threat, alongside terrorists, other criminals and suspects. “An entire generation of police officers – from PC right up to Chief Constable – have come through the ranks thinking that if you speak to the media they are a corruption risk,” said Camber.

This fractured relationship, in part an over-reaction by police forces to the Leveson report of 2012, is being played out at the scenes of crimes, accidents and protests across the UK.

Xander Elliards, a reporter on Scottish daily The National, was grabbed by a police officer as the journalist was filming on a public street in Glasgow during a pro-Palestinian protest in May. The police officer told Elliards that he had no right to film “just because you are a press officer (sic)”.

Nick McGowan-Lowe, national organiser of NUJ Scotland, said it was not an isolated incident. “Our research shows there are still police officers who

fundamentally do not understand the rights of journalists and their freedoms to report, suggesting there is insufficient training on dealing with the media.”

Northern Ireland’s Chief Constable, John Boutcher, has appointed Angus McCullough KC to independently review allegations of unlawful police surveillance of journalists, lawyers and non-governmental organisations. McCullough will be advised by a group of experts who include NUJ assistant general secretary, Séamus Dooley, as well as representatives of Amnesty International, the Law Society, the Committee on the Administration of Justice Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. “The group will not be responsible for the findings, but we are shaping the scope and scale of the review,” said Dooley. “It is a genuinely independent process which should lay the foundations for solid action by the Policing Board of Northern Ireland, which has very specific statutory powers.”

McCullough’s appointment follows concerns emerging from the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) in London which is considering allegations that investigative reporters, Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney, were subject to unlawful covert surveillance by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. McCaffrey and Birney were arrested in 2018 after making a documentary on the Loughinisland massacre carried out by the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1994. The reporters took the police to court with the assistance of the NUJ and were paid £875,000 in damages. Documents submitted to the IPT suggest that unlawful surveillance of journalists may have been widespread (see box).

Welsh photographer, Dimitris Legakis, found himself arrested and charged with assaulting an emergency worker and obstructing a police officer after he responded to a tip-off from a friend and covered a blazing car incident in Swansea last September. Helen Clarke

died from her injuries in the fire and her husband, David, was subsequently convicted of her murder.

Legakis, owner of Athena Picture Agency, the official photographer to Swansea City, was held in police custody for 15 hours after his arrest. South Wales Police confiscated £6,000-worth of his equipment, including his two DSLR cameras and phone, inhibiting his ability to work. The charges against him were dropped in April, one day before a jury trial was due to start.

Judge Geraint Walters said the “disturbing” prosecution case appeared to stem from the fact that a police officer “took offence” at a professional photographer taking pictures at the scene. The case has prompted the NUJ to call on South Wales Police Chief Constable, Jeremy Vaughan, “to start a dialogue to help clarify to police officers the role and rights of journalists”.

Natasha Hirst, NUJ President and chair of the Photographers’ Council, said: “I find incredibly frustrating that anybody can be taking photos with their phones for social media and there is no regulation, but journalists must meet

our code of conduct, our editorial and industry standards, and that is not being recognised by the police,” she said.

After Leveson, many police forces sought to bypass the media by using social platforms. Police accounts proliferated on X (Twitter). But public trust has been undermined by a succession of scandals involving serving officers – notably the killer Wayne Couzens and serial rapist David Carrick – and some police chiefs now realise they need to work more closely with the media.

The NUJ is trying to help. Bea Bennett, NUJ senior communications officer, and David Ayrton, NUJ senior organiser, are working with the College of Policing to create a new training video for police officers.

The NUJ does liaise where it can with the police, Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, recently met counter-terrorism officers and special operations staff at the London Met to discuss the safety of journalists, especially Iranians working for the BBC and Iran International who are under attack from the Iranian authorities.

Journalists spied on

The NUJ is applying to involve itself in Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) proceedings examining alleged unlawful covert surveillance of journalists by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The IPT is looking into the cases of investigative reporters, Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney, but there are claims that other journalists were also the subject of covert surveillance and had their phone data searched for evidence of police sources. The NUJ represents members across a wide range of journalistic issues, including protection of sources and the right of the media to

report independently and exercise its right to freedom of expression in the public interest, free from government interference. The independence of the media is one of the cornerstones of any democratic society.

“The allegations are extremely disturbing and we are seeking the opportunity to assist the IPT including providing evidence about the impact of surveillance,” said Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary. “Even when the people under surveillance are not journalists, if they are in regular contact with journalists [and are being indirectly monitored] that is equally troubling.” The NUJ has engaged Belfast lawyer, Olivia O’Kane, to review claims by journalists who believe they were put under surveillance.

International

Plea for a safer world for journalists

The UN is told about the threats to BBC Persian staff, Tim Dawson reports on a heartfelt speech

Hundreds of diplomats packed the concentric horseshoe desks that accommodate the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Some pressed translation earpieces to their heads, others scribbled furiously. Colour from the kaleidoscopic ceiling sculpture infused the room. BBC Persian Service journalist Parizad Nobakht took the floor. If she felt nervous, it didn't show.

"Our experience shows that Iran is not content with targeting and silencing our colleagues inside of Iran," she told the diplomats. "Iran has been engaging in transnational repression to target and harass Iranian journalists in exile, including at the BBC, to seek to censor independent reporting on Iran. For the people of Iran, it is the work of Iranian journalists in exile – supposedly beyond the reach of Iran's censorship and harassment – that provides them the news they need. But for those of us working in exile, we are not immune."

Death threats

She said that the Iranian government had labelled her and her colleagues 'terrorists', issued death threats, persecuted their families in Iran and elsewhere in Europe, and mounted campaigns of online harassment.

Nobakht concluded: "We urge this council to condemn Iran's actions in the strongest terms. Iran must stop targeting journalists. Journalism is not a crime." Her personal motto is "Be the change you want to see in the world" – and it was inspiring to see her doing just that on such a stage.

The issue she highlighted, however, is one that appears to be worsening by the day – transnational repression, or the state

harassment of journalists beyond their own borders.

Jamal Khashoggi and Pouria Zeraati

The murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul in 2018 has lost none of its grotesque potency. Nor has the stabbing of Iran International's journalist, Pouria Zeraati, in London earlier this year.

But dramatic headlines easily obscure the daily harassment felt by hundreds of international reporters, and not all of them emanate from Iran. Getting the granular detail of this under the noses of diplomats can make a profound difference. It is their dispatches to government ministers that fill the famous "red boxes" (and their equivalents elsewhere in the world).

Nobakht's testimony should now be put before the new teams at the UK's Home and Foreign Offices and is why the UK's National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists must include robust action.

Assange freed

By chance, as Nobakht boarded her flight to Geneva, seemingly unrelated events in south London would significantly impact the likely effectiveness of western governments intervening in support of journalistic freedom. Julian Assange left HMP Belmarsh and started his long journey to accept a plea deal, and a new life in Australia.

During the five years that the Wikileaks founder spent in a British jail, among his most surprising cheerleaders has been Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov. Whenever Lavrov was questioned about Russia's actions – the death of Alexi Navalny, or the imprisonment of Evan Gershkovich, for example, he had a stock reply – to accuse his questioners of double standards and raise the case of Assange.

The plea deal is not perfect, but it removes a running sore that has critically undermined US and UK efforts to present themselves as defenders of media freedom.

Hopefully Assange's release will diminish the risk of arbitrary prosecution for handling classified documents, with the UK and USA regaining their reputations as defenders of the press. Maybe Nobakht and her colleagues will be among the first beneficiaries.

Tim Dawson



BBC Persian Service journalist Parizad Nobakht tells the UN Human Rights Council about the harassment and threats her colleagues have been subjected to by the Iranian authorities