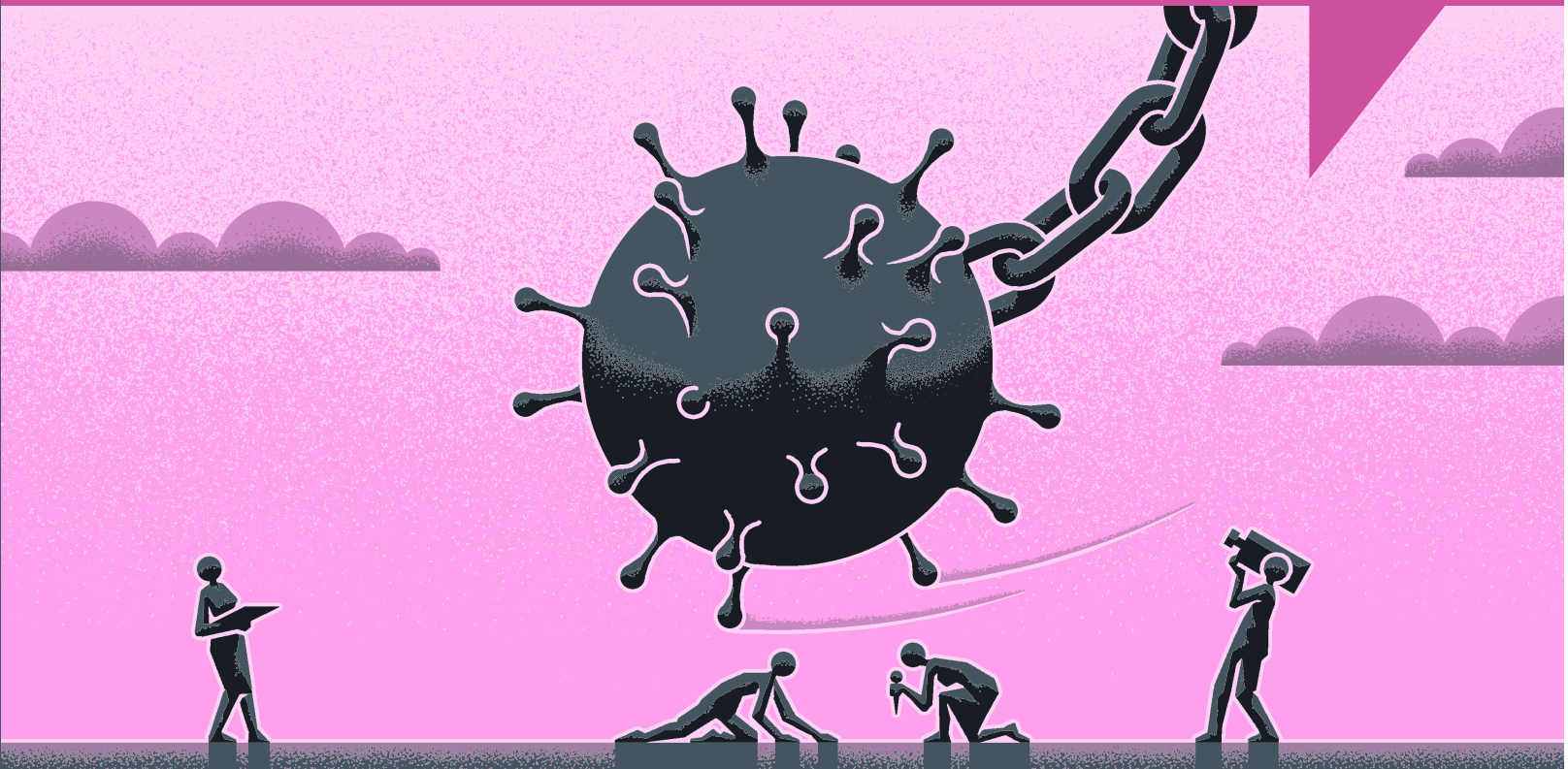


A Future for News

The NUJ's recovery plan for the news industry



NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

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Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, calls for a bold News Media Recovery Plan to revitalise and reconfigure frontline journalism and newsgathering, with a package of economic stimuli to strengthen quality local, regional and national news and the democracy it underpins.

The Covid pandemic demonstrated so clearly the vital role journalists play in the spectrum of essential public services and media workers rose impressively to the challenge of ensuring the public had access to timely, reliable and accurate information. Public service broadcasting proved a lifeline in informing, educating and entertaining us and our families in difficult times, with news outputs reaching record audience figures on every platform, across all demographics. Local newspapers delivered relevant incisive content, their journalists committed to providing insight and scrutiny in challenging circumstances.

Since the day-to-day issues of Covid receded, other challenges have emerged – Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the war in Gaza and wider instability in the Middle East and spiralling energy costs. The cost-of-living crisis has added significant additional pressure to an already beleaguered sector, and the news industry’s response has been a business-as-usual one of more cuts and redundancies.

A “brutal time” for the industry
Press Gazette has been monitoring cuts to journalist jobs, and its recent analysis showed 2023 to be a “brutal year” for the industry, with at least 8,000 job cuts in the UK, US and Canada. This attrition continued in 2024 with around 1,000 people affected by closures and rounds of redundancies in January alone and month-on-month news of cuts at publications and titles closures continues.

The blows dealt to freelancers since Covid hit have been particularly heavy – leaving some to quit journalism altogether whilst others are still struggling to regain the ground they lost during the pandemic, when work dried up overnight and government support schemes failed to provide a sufficient safety net for all self-employed workers.

Following years of underinvestment, broken business models, rising threats from mis and dis-information and now the rapid

development and deployment of generative AI – the media industry is arguably at its most fragile at a time when the need for trusted sources of news is greater than ever.

Democracy in danger

All politicians agree that journalism plays a vital role in our society. However, the political commitments to action that might shore up the news industry are woefully scant. Such is the role of our industry that its fortunes cannot simply be left to the vagaries of the market. Without robust local news our communities are denied the focussed scrutiny and attention that is critical to local democracy. Without well-resourced investigative journalism our public institutions, corporations and politicians are left unaccountable. Without a public service broadcaster that is free from political interference and adequately resourced, the fundamental principle of universality is rendered meaningless and the BBC’s reach and breadth will be irreparably compromised.

The threat of AI

The deployment of technology like generative AI must be subject to safeguards, transparency and meaningful regulation in order that public trust is not further eroded and the rights of creators are respected and protected – now and in the future. Impartial news cannot be supplanted via the deployment of algorithms that serve to reinforce and inflame prejudices and beliefs, and training data for generative AI

must be transparent and subject to scrutiny. AI cannot be used as an opportunity to further cut jobs and frontline newsgathering resources in newsrooms that are already hollowed out. Already it is clear that opportunistic cost-savings are driving decisions on generative AI deployment in media companies – which is why push-back by journalists through their trade union is so important.

It's also clear that public sentiment backs up the NUJ's stance that journalism is a human endeavour and that whilst generative AI affords many positive opportunities, its use must be harnessed with human oversight, with full transparency and deployed squarely in the public good. According to research by YouGov in April 2024, approximately half of Britons think the impact of AI will be more negative than positive, including 12 per cent who think no good will come from AI in journalism at all. Already 79 per cent believe media organisations should be required to display on a news article any way in which that article has been created using the assistance of AI. The research found that 72 per cent said they would distrust an article where AI is fulfilling the roles of both the journalist and the editor.

A practical plan

We need deeds not words when it comes to shoring up the future of quality news and journalism. This is the purpose of the NUJ's

News Recovery Plan. With a detailed package of measures – on local news and democracy, public service broadcasting, journalists' safety, generative AI, media ownership and wider media freedom – the union sets out a route-map to reinvigorate the news industry, support jobs and quality journalism and ensure a diversity of news can flourish from a variety of trusted sources.

Central to funding the measures the NUJ calls for is an urgent windfall tax on the tech giants whose platforms have sucked up editorial content without making any contribution to its production. TaxWatch analysis from October 2023 estimates that seven large US based tech companies amassed almost £15 billion in profits from UK customers in 2021, but paid taxes of only £743 million, meaning around £2 billion in tax was avoided.

The inevitable move from print to digital was thwarted early on as the tech platforms hoovered up the lion's share of the digital advertising revenue. Publishers that hitched themselves to these platforms have become further undone as Meta pivots away from news, and the rollout of AI Overviews on news-related Google queries has resulted in a loss of links to publishers' original stories.

A windfall tax would ensure the tech platforms play a meaningful role in the preservation of a sector that is vital to our democracy.

Cash with conditions

Our plan also calls for conditionality – it is not and cannot be about the preservation of the status quo. Investment would come in exchange for guarantees on securing jobs and protecting the terms and conditions of staff and freelancers, the editorial teams producing quality news that the public is reliant upon. Any investment would of course be given without any connection to decision-making on editorial content.

With a public desperate for accurate, trustworthy content, this is the time to make it more accessible than ever, at the same time as battling the scourge of disinformation. That's why the NUJ is calling for free vouchers for online or print subscriptions for all 18 and 19 year-olds and tax credits to all households with subscriptions to news outlets.

In supporting existing parts of the press, we also need to create greater diversity, including meaningful investment to help new outlets get off the ground, and measures to boost quality editorial content and resources.

A plurality of voices

Much greater plurality is needed in the sector with tighter stipulations on cross-media ownership. The NUJ believes that media plurality is vital for a healthy, functioning democracy. Citizens need to hear a range of arguments and have

equal access to information and opinions to participate in local and national democracy. The legislative imperative for far too long has been to open up media markets and to promote light touch regulation and competition. The result is a media landscape typified as one of merger and consolidation of major media groups. Changing technology has blurred the lines between newspapers, broadcasters and online content – giving media organisations far greater reach over a range of platforms. The Media Reform Coalition's 2023 report showed that just three companies – DMG Media, News UK and Reach – dominated 90 per cent of the UK's national newspaper market. These same three companies accounted for more than 40 per cent of the total audience reach of the UK's top 50 online news brands, while Bauer Radio and Global Radio owned 65 per cent of the UK's local commercial analogue radio stations. Media ownership rules require reform, with a strengthened public interest test.

The NUJ wants to see a maximum market share for UK provision set at 25 per cent across all platforms and on each of radio, television, newspapers and online. Any market share that reaches or is liable to reach 15 per cent should be subject to a public interest test. Private firms would be required to divest so that their share does not exceed 25 per cent, or they could choose to set up public trusts or other

publicly governed and accountable structures, following a public interest review and agreement.

The need for trust

Trust in journalism must be enhanced, and an environment created where quality reporting is strongly rooted in line with the ethical framework of the NUJ's Code of Conduct. The Reuters Digital 2024 report found overall trust in the news (40%) had remained stable over the past year but is still four points lower than it was at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. In the UK, a third of respondents (35%) said they trusted most news most of the time. That's why we want governmental commitments to a range of actions that will create a news industry firmly rooted in the public good.

We need a government that values the role of our public service broadcaster but also one which grants it more independence, allowing the BBC board and its chair to be chosen by an arms-length body so it can champion public interest journalism without political interference.

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. Successive cuts have led to management decisions that have undermined and weakened the BBC's core news output – across its regions,

national news and World Service. There should be greater public engagement and meaningful consultation about what we as licence fee payers want from our public service broadcaster.

A plural and thriving PSB ecosystem, with varying remits and models to serve the different national and community interests of its viewers and listeners, will properly support the wider creative industry and ensure it can meet its full potential as an important economic powerhouse.

Journalists' safety

Around the globe there has been a crackdown on journalistic reporting and investigations and independent media – a trend also on the rise in western nations. The things that we value, we cannot take for granted. By ensuring that quality journalism is something that is supported, properly resourced and helped to thrive we help to preserve those important values.

Journalists working at the BBC's Persian Service and Iran International in the UK have been subjected to escalating levels of threats and attack in clear instances of state-sponsored persecution by Iran. The polarisation in public discourse has created spiralling levels of toxicity, particularly online, and journalists are on the frontline of that space – regularly targeted and attacked as being part of the problem, with women and black

and minority ethnic journalists disproportionately targeted with abuse, harassment and threats of sexual violence. Increased harassment and online targeting have led to increases in journalists self-censoring, behaviour which has a chilling effect on media freedom.

That's why the NUJ's campaigning to improve levels of safety for journalists and ensure they can do their jobs free from fear, intimidation or interference is vital. It's why initiatives to combat SLAPPs and all forms of so-called lawfare are important - we need tougher action against the rich and thin-skinned who persist in their attempts to stymie legitimate journalistic reporting and evade scrutiny.

We hope the NUJ's planned Press Safety Tracker will help address the lack of data and monitoring of the unacceptable personal and legal intimidation taking place across journalism.

Collective union action

To tackle these ubiquitous challenges facing journalists and journalism, we need global solutions. Which is why the collective efforts of journalists' trade unions and our work with the International Federation of Journalists is so important.

Trade unions are a critical and unique component in the creation of a robust and diverse journalistic landscape equipped to meet the

challenges of our times head on. As practitioners, journalists want to do their job as well as possible, to the highest possible standards, and in line with our ethical values. Trade union organisation and representation gives journalists a collective voice at work that enables them to stand up in defence of journalism and ethical practice as well as their terms and conditions. That's why the NUJ has long campaigned for a Conscience Clause in contracts of employment and freelance engagement, so that journalists cannot be dismissed or

refused work simply for adhering to the terms of the NUJ's Code of Conduct.

The 2019 Cairncross review concluded that the market failure in the supply of public-interest news meant that public or government intervention "may be the only remedy". 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.

How would we be better served by a renewed media?

All citizens should have access to easily-understood reporting of important decisions taken on our behalf - about defence, health, education and social care services, as well as the administration of justice, provision of transport, and economic planning. This should be sufficiently granular that the impact on our families and communities is evident and can be understood without any specialist background.

The importance of dependable news and the ability to recognise such reporting should be hard-wired into the national curriculum. Innovation in news provision should be a matter of national

encouragement and funding to create a beneficial mosaic of news services among which invention is intrinsic.

Trust in journalism will deepen and public engagement in our democratic structures will increase with improved ethical standards of reporting rooted in the NUJ's Code of Conduct.

News should be provided by a combination of public interest broadcasting, commercial news platforms and community media. The provision itself would be transparent and porous, encouraging all concerned citizens to understand and participate in reporting where they are interested to do so.

The NUJ's plan to get from here to there



Economic boost for news:

- Windfall tax of 6 per cent on the tech giants, to provide immediate funding to reinvigorate the news sector – with an ongoing digital tax to provide sustainable future funding
- Jobs for Journalists tax credits and interest free loans – a 3-year targeted programme to bolster frontline newsgathering roles that protects trusted journalism as generative AI is deployed
- Strategic investment in government advertising, including the hyperlocal sector, involving central and local governments and the NHS / HSE
- Tax breaks, rate relief and other financial support for innovative public interest journalism, with targeted help for local social enterprises and journalistic cooperatives taking over titles from major regional operators, running them as not-for-profit enterprises, with particular regard to areas at risk of becoming news deserts, with no newspapers operating at all
- Extension of business rates relief for local titles beyond 2025
- The establishment of a Journalism Foundation, set up by a government grant, to invest and innovate public interest journalistic projects, to encourage new funding models and start-ups, encourage philanthropic donations, and promote diversity and media literacy
- Free vouchers for online or print subscriptions to all 18 and 19 year-olds and tax credits for households with subscriptions to news outlets to boost engagement and fight back against disinformation

Support with conditionality:

- Confer “asset of community value” status on local newspapers – like community pubs – ensuring that titles cannot be closed overnight without proper scrutiny; enabling newspapers to be taken over locally, based and located in the communities they serve and accessible to the public. Also allow the establishment of charitable status to media outlets that want it
- No public money for firms making redundancies, cutting pay, curtailing frontline journalistic roles, taking executive bonuses or blocking trade union organisation and recognition. Obligations to have equality action plans, including on tackling gender pay gap and securing wider pay parity
- Companies receiving public funds are prohibited for five years from engaging in mergers and acquisition activity or leveraged buyouts that result in job losses or pay reductions
- Employee representation on executive boards in receipt of public funding, from non-management roles, for minimum of 25 per cent of seats

Bolster public service broadcasting:

- Protect and invest in public service broadcasting, acknowledging its role in creating diverse original content and its economic importance in the wider creative industry
- Establish sustainable funding of the BBC that enshrines its universality, in a model that protects against government interference, ends salami-slicing cuts that are compromising quality and diminishing breadth of content, and prioritises quality local, regional, national and international news provision
- Increase investment in linear and digital news, reversing damaging cuts and ensuring that BBC local radio is genuinely local and relevant, with dedicated live news bulletins
- Raise OFCOM’s minimum level local news output provisions
- Re-establish government funding for BBC World Service and Monitoring, acknowledging their role as a source of significant soft power and global influence

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AI for public good:

- Rights of journalists and all creators are human rights – generative AI should only be used as an assistive tool, always overseen by human journalists
- 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
- 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
- Control and consent is vital – permission must be sought and granted, whether for AI training purposes or future uses
- Introduce a simple opt in mechanism, either for individuals or as part of collective licencing, revocable by the creator at any time
- No blanket agreements for “any and all uses” in future
- Fair and reasonable terms of compensation must be secured for all journalists and creators whose work has been stolen and used without consent
- Transparent labelling is key – content and images produced by generative AI should be clearly badged as such so the public can know whether news and information is based on trustworthy sources
- Employers have a duty to be transparent and disclose to staff and freelance creators if any materials in an editorial work-flow have been generated in part or whole by AI
- Tech companies should be obligated to being fully open about their training data, the design of their algorithms and their output
- Safeguards should be developed to prevent large language models (LLMs) enshrining bias, social inequities and reinforcing discrimination

Strengthen media freedom and protect democracy:

- Action to tackle surveillance of journalists and create safeguards to protect journalistic sources in the increasing deployment of facial recognition software and biometric data
- Rollout of nationwide media literacy initiative as part of efforts to tackle mis and disinformation and deep fakes, with stronger regulation that clamps down on tech companies that facilitate the dissemination of untrue and misleading content, and seeks their co-operation in prioritising accurate journalistic content
- Reform media ownership rules with a strengthened public interest test
- New market share rules – set at 25 per cent across all platforms and on each of; radio, television, newspapers and online. Market share that reaches or is liable to reach 15 per cent should be subject to a public interest test. Private firms would be required to divest or set up public trusts or accountable structures, following a public interest review and agreement
- Open-up access to journalism, with targeted training programmes including apprenticeships for school-leavers
- Conscience Clause introduced in contracts of employment and freelance terms
- Improve protection for whistleblowers
- Ensure full and free access to public and political events, including equality of access for disabled journalists, and ensuring a plurality of news outlets and freelances can be accommodated
- Support global framework to protect journalists and promote journalism and improve press freedom

“Trust in journalism must be enhanced where quality reporting is strongly rooted in the NUJ’s Code of Conduct’s ethical framework.”

HOW YOU CAN PLAY YOUR PART

This overarching plan will inform the ongoing and detailed work taking place across all parts of the NUJ – in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where significant engagement is taking place to put the future of news and the important role journalism plays in our societies at the centre of political priorities.

Discuss the NUJ's plan in your workplaces and networks. Get your voice heard by lobbying your MP or TD and other elected representatives, seeking their support and asking them to speak with the NUJ about how they can help. Use social media to raise awareness about the #NUJNewsRecoveryPlan and help amplify the union's calls for action to ensure strengthened and sustainable journalism.

We want to hear from you with your ideas and thoughts about our campaign for a media reimagined – get in touch at campaigns@nuj.org.uk and stay in touch with the union's work at www.nuj.org.uk.

CODE OF CONDUCT

A JOURNALIST

Members of the National Union of Journalists are expected to abide by the following professional principles

1 At all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.

2 Strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.

3 Does her/his utmost to correct harmful inaccuracies.

4 Differentiates between fact and opinion.

5 Obtains material by honest, straightforward and open means, with the exception of investigations that are both overwhelmingly in the public interest and which involve evidence that cannot be obtained by straightforward means.

6 Does nothing to intrude into anybody's private life, grief or distress unless justified by overriding consideration of the public interest.

7 Protects the identity of sources who supply information in confidence and material gathered in the course of her/his work

8 Resists threats or any other inducements to influence, distort or suppress information, and takes no unfair personal advantage of information gained in the course of her/his duties before the information is public knowledge.

9 Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.

10 Does not by way of statement, voice or appearance endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of her/his own work or of the medium by which she/he is employed.

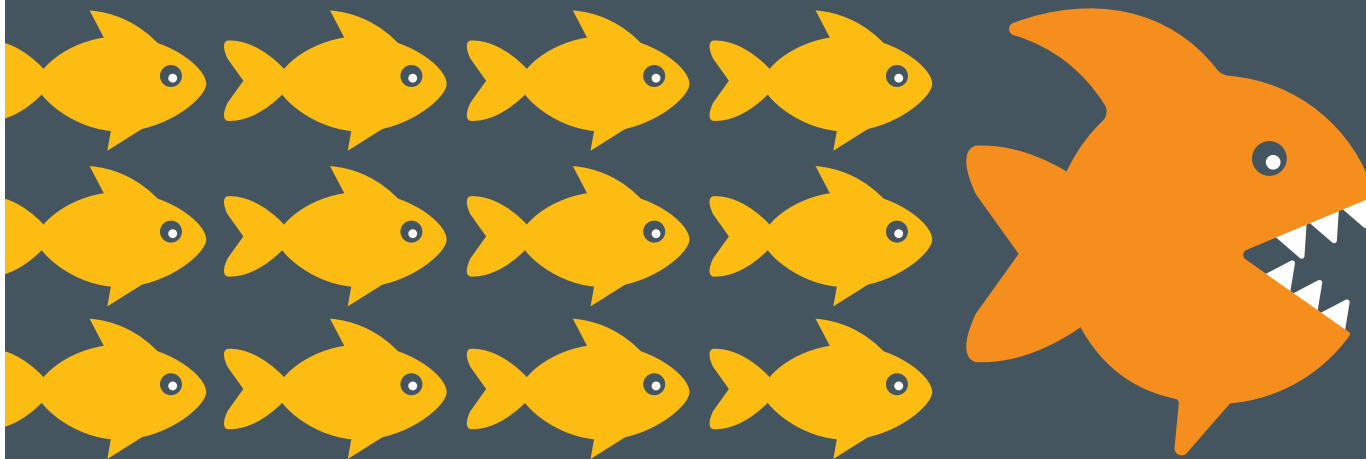
11 A journalist shall normally seek the consent of an appropriate adult when interviewing or photographing a child for a story about her/his welfare.

12 Avoids plagiarism.



The NUJ believes a journalist has the right to refuse an assignment or be identified as the author of editorial that would break the letter or spirit of the code. The NUJ will fully support any journalist disciplined for asserting her/his right to act according to the code.

REASONS TO JOIN



Be Part of a Collective Voice

As a member of the NUJ you are part of a united force championing the rights of media workers and defending attacks on press freedom. Successful workplaces are those where the management and workers share the same aims and talk to each other. Being a member of the NUJ means giving yourself and colleagues a real voice at work.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join