

NUJ GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION 2024

APPLICATION FORM

Confidential

DAVISON, Laura



Photo credit: Mark Thomas

Current NUJ Branch:

London Central

1 Employment history:

NUJ National Organiser, Broadcasting: July 2024 - to date
 Since earlier this summer I have led the union’s broadcasting sector. As our largest workplace – and the one where I started my career as a journalist – the BBC faces further industrial challenges. More job losses and restructures are on the horizon, following the devastating cuts across BBC Local. These resulted in the loss of many talented presenters and journalists, undermining vital local news services and making them less local and relevant. We are fortunate to have such a committed team of NUJ reps and secondees serving members at the BBC. Nonetheless we must strengthen organisation and recruitment to enable members at the BBC to defend their jobs and terms and conditions, as well as building the union’s wider campaign to protect public service broadcasting. The breadth and depth of content delivered by the BBC, as well as the core principle of universality, are critical assets. The BBC’s funding is an urgent political and industrial priority, as is ensuring its future strategic direction has quality news and programming at its heart. The NUJ is also working to improve membership density across ITV newsrooms and to support members across other outlets including Al Jazeera English, Iran International, Red Bee, Channel 4 News and ITN. The challenges faced by members at Iran International and the BBC Persian Service reinforce the importance of the NUJ’s political and campaigning work on safety. We must amplify our demand that journalists must be free to carry out their work without interference or threats – be they from online trolls, so-called paramilitaries, police or state actors.

NUJ National Organiser, Newspapers, News Agencies: July 2014 to August 2024

NUJ National Organiser, Digital: July 2014 to 2021

For a decade I worked with members from across our newspaper, agencies and digital sectors. I have led and been part of negotiations at: The Financial Times, The Guardian, Reach, National World, Newsquest, Thomson Reuters, and many others. We tackled collective issues including pay, progression and wider terms and conditions, as well as broader concerns including

bullying, pay parity and workplace stress and resources. This work involved scores of our reps, chapels, casual and freelance members. Central to this is the NUJ's stance on professional issues: journalistic ethics; our push for a conscience clause in workers' contracts; the need for genuine equality in workplaces, including in recruitment and career progression; and of course pay. This has reinforced my conviction that independence is a key NUJ strength. As one of the few enduring craft unions in the UK or the Republic of Ireland, we make a significant beneficial difference to the working lives of journalists. Across our regions and nations, when we stand up for our members as workers, the collective voice enhances our industry's professional principles and values.

NUJ Assistant Organiser, Broadcasting; NUJ Assistant Organiser, Publishing sector (Newspapers and News Agencies) including cover as National Broadcasting Organiser: April 2007 to July 2014. TUC Organising Academy, 2007-8.

It was a real privilege to join the NUJ's staff. I was inspired to pursue a trades union career during my time as an NUJ rep in BBC local radio. The training, encouragement and solidarity I experienced as an NUJ rep, and seeing the difference the union made in the BBC, inspired me to apply to work for the union. As part of my induction I visited all the union's offices and was given an insight into our work across the UK and Republic of Ireland. That opportunity gave me an insight into the work of branches and chapels outside my range of experience. From there I attended the TUC's Organising Academy, then led by Paul Nowak, now the TUC's General Secretary. The training I received there was excellent and set me on the course that has led me to decide to stand to become the NUJ's next General Secretary.

Deploying my organising training into action in the NUJ's broadcasting sector gave me a brilliant introduction into the wider industrial work of the NUJ, across all of its sectors. During that period I worked closely with the NUJ broadcasting team, including secondees and reps. We dealt with issues across the sector including: cuts at the World Service and Monitoring; the BBC Pension Dispute and strikes; and the work on pay at ITV that laid the ground work for its 2015 strike. The BBC's pensions dispute was a classic illustration of how the NUJ puts legal weight into key industrial issues – even when acting alone. Whilst it did not ultimately reach the conclusion we hoped for, the NUJ's willingness to invest and pursue the legal challenge to the BBC's changes to the pension scheme was the right thing to do. It had the support of our membership at the BBC and across the wider union. It was also a case that continues to hold a significance in the wider pensions legal landscape, and an action of which we can be proud.

Recruitment and organising projects were a key area of work for me throughout this period, both in improving membership density in chapels where we had recognition as well as new sites. I also worked on many personal cases across the sector, representing and supporting staff and freelance members dealing with a great range of issues.

		<p>BBC Radio Journalist, Solent, BBC Local Radio including Millbank attachment, 2000-2007: Working in Solent, which was split with Dorset, for BBC local radio was an excellent training ground in frontline newsgathering and the vital work done across the BBC. My duties included reporting, producing and working as the breakfast newsreader. During my time there I also completed an attachment in Millbank, which I enjoyed. After a 5-month career break in 2006, travelling around America, Cuba and Canada, I returned to Solent and, inspired by my chapel activism, I decided to apply for a job at the NUJ. My family background is steeped in politics, trade union activism and community causes, and although I had no expectation that I would be successful I was delighted to be offered the job of Assistant Organiser.</p> <p>BBC Trainee, TV Continuity Announcer, 1999-2000: Working for the BBC was a personal ambition. When I applied for the traineeship, I recorded a cassette on a family tape recorder and was thrilled to be offered the trainee role. After a year working as an analogue and digital TV continuity announcer, which wasn't quite me, I made the move into local radio which I loved.</p>
2	Date of commencement and period of continuous membership of the NUJ:	28/06/2002 – 22 years
3	What NUJ offices have you held? <i>(Please provide details):</i>	<p>NUJ representative EFJ Digital Expert Group – core member of the group representing the NUJ's organising work and industrial experience across the growing digital sector to colleagues from unions across Europe.</p> <p>NUJ representative Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom –engaging in work on reform of media ownership, public service broadcasting and ethical journalism whilst representing the union's key values and policy.</p> <p>NUJ representative Federation of Entertainment Unions – providing insight into developments in the broadcasting sector, sharing experiences and engaging with sister unions in the creative industries on joint industrial, campaigning and training initiatives.</p> <p>Servicing officer for the NUJ Newspaper and Agencies Industrial Council; New Media Industrial Council; National World Group Chapel.</p> <p>NUJ chapel rep, BBC Local Radio, Solent.</p>
4	Have you been a member of any other trade union? (Please provide details):	GMB Feb 2009 – present Equity 1999 – 2000
5	What experience have you had as a full-time official and/or lay officer?	<p>I have been a full time official of the NUJ since 2007, during which time I have built up an extensive range of industrial experience, both collective and individual.</p> <p>I joined the NUJ from the BBC, where I was a lay rep, to be an Assistant Organiser in the Broadcasting sector. Chapels are a cornerstone of our union and my experience as a rep proved invaluable. As Assistant Organiser I worked alongside the Broadcasting Organiser, BBC secondees, the Deputy General Secretary and General Secretary.</p>

		<p>In 2014 I became a National Organiser. During the past 17 and half years I have worked with multiple members, reps and full-time colleagues in different sectors. I have held roles in the Broadcasting, Newspapers, Agencies and Digital sectors. I have represented the NUJ at the Federation of Entertainment Unions meetings and the former Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, ensuring that our wider collaborative efforts with sister unions and campaign groups are as effective as possible. I have been the NUJ delegate to the EFJ Digital Expert working group on digital media and organising, reflecting our work and achievements to colleagues across Europe and within the International Federation of Journalists. I have also worked as a Servicing officer of industrial councils, contributing to their strategic work and the successful delivery of resolutions passed by the NUJ's Delegate Meeting.</p> <p>My experience spans work from chapel negotiations to engagement at national and European level. I have worked collaboratively with colleagues and officials within group chapels, notably Reach and National World in furthering the union's industrial agenda. I work with the NUJ Legal and Equality Officer and our legal advisors in strategically developing recognition claims and on a range of complex collective issues and personal cases. I also work with our Campaigns and Communications team to highlight our collective industrial and campaign work across the union and externally.</p> <p>Given the range of my cross-sectoral responsibilities over my time at the NUJ I have in-depth experience of negotiating with many of the major employers in the media sector within the UK and Ireland. I have engaged in negotiations on pay, redundancies, changes in terms and conditions of employment, restructuring and recognition.</p> <p>Covid 19 posed a significant challenge to many workplaces and I was involved in negotiations on remote working in the newspapers, agencies and digital sector as well as supporting work to protect freelancers and casual members whose employers abandoned them instead of furloughing when the pandemic hit. Negotiations in a diverse media environment require an ability to adapt to different management styles. I have experience of negotiating in companies where we have union recognition and those where we don't, both on collective issues and in individual representation.</p>
6	Please state what experience you have in:	
	(a) Trade union organisation and negotiation:	<p>I have over 17 years of professional experience in trade union organisation and negotiations across the NUJ, working within all the major UK employers across broadcasting, local and national newspapers, new agencies and digital outlets.</p> <p>I have led negotiations and been involved in all stages of collective disputes procedure, including many ACAS-brokered negotiations, disputes and resolutions. I have led and supported recruitment initiatives and organising drives – including at sites where we have</p>

had no or limited presence, and within recognised workplaces where our collective density needed improvement.

My experience includes:

Recognition

As a union dealing with a spectrum of employers, I have significant experience of working in hostile environments in circumstances where management have done all they can to stymie our members' attempts to gain a collective voice at work. This experience is vital when mounting a campaign where many employers rely on the limitations within the current UK legal framework to drag processes out, hoping to diminish momentum and enthusiasm or rely on churn in staff numbers (often against backdrops of cuts and restructures) to weaken NUJ members' resolve in their recognition attempts. I've learned that building a strong, connected and resilient team is vital.

Take the example of PA. Over decades the NUJ has prioritised PA as a recognition target. Our latest attempt was a 4-year process from start to the amazing outcome of achieving recognition earlier this summer. Our fantastic reps were supported by our excellent legal department and a wider team across the NUJ's staff, all determined to give our members' the best fighting chance possible. It was a highlight in my time at the NUJ to see that team-work end with a well-deserved victory – with our reps at PA now engaged in their first ever collective pay negotiation, with ambitions for achieving improvements in future to wider terms and conditions.

Their hard work has already inspired other members in other workplaces – something we need to capitalise on in the coming months, particularly given the imminent legislative changes in the UK which will eradicate at least some of the repressive anti-trade union laws that act as a barrier to our work.

I have worked with members to help secure recognition at numerous other workplaces – including the groundbreaking agreement at Vice UK, AP, Agence France-Presse (AFP) and for Local Democracy Reporters at National World. I am currently working with other members who have been inspired by recent successes to begin their own organising and recognition projects.

Collective negotiations

I have been active in workplace negotiations at both a collective and individual level. I have worked to highlight specific issues within workplaces that chapels wish to campaign on including low pay, pay disparities, workload pressures and health and safety; using surveys and other tools to gather evidence. I was involved in two high profile pension disputes at the FT and at the BBC where we won improvements to new defined contribution schemes for members and mitigated the impacts from closure of final salary schemes. I have attended multiple ACAS resolution sessions and have lots of experience of the ACAS process working with collective conciliators. Collectively I have negotiated on pay,

redundancies, and terms and conditions and worked with freelance colleagues to raise the issue of poor rates within recognised workplaces. I have supported members through large scale BBC cuts in the past and been determined to extend job opportunities for those individually impacted - work that is very live at present. In collective redundancy processes I have worked to secure more time for consultation, better redundancy terms and to maximise the chances of redeployment. When our members have faced massive insecurity as a result of their employer going into administration - for example at Johnston Press (now National World) the union has been there to support them. I also have experience of TUPE processes and ensuring employers discharge their legal duties, holding them to account when they fail to do so.

I have been heavily involved in our work at Reach plc over the past decade - working on improvements to terms during harmonisation processes, the impact of large-scale redundancies on our members, scrutinising a new career development framework and pushing for equality assessment as part of that, and taking part in an AI working group. Achievements won through the landmark industrial action in 2022 have laid a base for much improved industrial relations and paved the way for a positive pay settlement this year. In the latter stages of the pandemic I led on the ACAS process that secured our Reach members re-imburement of wages cut during 2020 – a win which was subsequently extended to the whole organisation. I have also secured collective payouts for members by identifying failures when employers have not consulted properly in collective redundancy processes.

Future of News

My experience as a national official has given me up-front experience of the impact of short-sighted decisions by companies who are motivated by profit and short-term returns. There are too many employers who care little about standards and quality, sometimes even less about the impact on their staff whose professionalism all too often impels them to go the extra mile – even when resources are inadequate and their dedication is not properly rewarded. The local, regional and national news landscape has suffered greatly since the global credit crunch. Casualisation and precarity of work has increased. Freelance opportunities and rates have diminished and stagnated. Headcount has been slashed and our members face greater pressures on their time and ability to do their jobs properly. The covid pandemic gave the opportunity for cost cutting - with freelancers and casuals taking a disproportionate hit - afforded by a crisis. The updated News Recovery Plan is an important practical tool to inform our campaigning on how the industry could be rebooted – something that our members are enthusiastic about and which can help inform our collective organisation and workplace activity alongside the union’s wider lobbying and campaigning.

Hybrid and Remote Working

Working through the period of changed union organising caused by Covid, with the closure of workplaces and the switch to home and hybrid working, we had to quickly adapt our organising and communication techniques. It has propelled our use of digital tools such as WhatsApp, Teams and Zoom meetings. Being able to bring members from disparate geographic places together swiftly has improved our responsiveness and given a new boost to our organising efforts – including crucially in our PA campaign. Industrially it's also helped widen access, opening up new employment opportunities to journalists, including disabled members and those with caring responsibilities, and helped demonstrate that flexible working can operate effectively. It's also clear, however, that new patterns of working can have a downside which I have sought to reflect in our organising and industrial work. Members can find themselves working in isolation, in inadequate accommodation and without the right kit – expected to work in bedrooms or cafes, without support and without financial recompense for increased bills. This is particularly so for members in the early part of their careers, for whom remote working can be challenging. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and it is important the union's work acknowledges that. We need to continue to press on the work we do around home working allowances to mitigate the savings many media companies have made by cutting office space and transferring costs of workers doing their jobs to individuals themselves.

Generative AI

As part of the union's current work on the deployment of generative AI across our industry, I have engaged in collective discussions and meetings in our workplaces. As an evolving technology it's vital that we remain a key stakeholder in the impact of generative AI on the media industry – working to ensure its impact on workplaces prioritises the vital human role in journalism, protects jobs and doesn't further weaken trust in journalism.

Individual Representation

The NUJ delivers individual representation to members in a way that is unusual across the trade union movement. Members have simple access to officials and our legal team. Personal representation – delivered by workplace and lay reps and officials – is accessible and prioritised. This approach is intrinsic to the NUJ and something to be nurtured and made sustainable through developing new reps and our trade union training.

Representing members, often at a time of considerable stress and difficulty, is a privilege and something that gives me great satisfaction in my work for the union. I have represented hundreds of members, including in disciplinary, grievance, flexible working and redundancy situations and striven to secure the best outcomes with them. I have also supported members through onward legal advice processes on issues ranging from unfair dismissal, sex, disability and race discrimination cases, bullying and harassment and equal pay claims. I have successfully negotiated positive outcomes for multiple members over the years.

Delivering equality in the workplace

I am proud that the industrial work we do as officials focuses on delivering equality in the workplace. Be that work on equal pay, the gender pay gap or wider pay parity – seeking transparency and fairness is vital. Working with chapels, I've challenged flawed approaches to pay and sought changes to processes that act as barriers to progression among under-represented groups. Access to the industry is impacted by this – making it hard if not impossible for those without media contacts or financial support from their families to get a foothold. The union's practical work on delivering equality, including the brilliant George Viner Memorial Fund bursaries, is so important. As is making these issues key parts of our industrial collective bargaining – not just buzzwords that companies roll out.

The law is never as protective of workers' rights as we would wish – so collective industrial organising is vital. We must also find creative ways to use the law as well as pressing home cases that have a wider industrial significance for our members. Samira Ahmed's principled stand and landmark legal victory taken by the NUJ was testament to her tenacity. It gave members I was working with in my sectors the confidence to challenge unequal pay in their own workplaces. That investment of time and resources showed our collective commitment to tackling these crucial issues and unlocked successes and settlements for many other members across the union. Delivering equality at work is an ongoing task, requiring experience, work and an ability to work collaboratively with reps in developing our industrial agenda.

Maximising collective organisation

The union's structures serve a crucial function in their focus on how best to improve the working lives of our members. Group chapels play a vital role in this regard. They are brilliant vehicles for coordinating activity and maximising impact, and I've worked closely with all the union's group chapels, at Reach, the BBC, ITV, National World and Newsquest during my time working as an NUJ official.

I have learned during my time as an official for the NUJ the value of bringing our reps together – whether that's in group chapel meetings or wider gatherings such as training sessions, webinars on specific industrial issues, via WhatsApp groups, or summits of reps across the sectors which I have co-ordinated with colleagues in my position servicing the Newspapers and Agencies Industrial Council.

As servicing officer for the National World group chapel I have supported our members for many years, including in their unprecedented 2023 strike for fair pay across the group. This fight is ongoing and I salute the incredible work and time that reps and members committed to highlighting unfair and low pay across the group and the wider industry despite the employer's approach.

	<p>Industrial action is never taken lightly, but it can be both energising and inspirational. When young members at Newsquest in South London took strike action over job cuts and working hours, I was with them on their lively picket lines. Their subsequent work to rule reset the working day and secured improved resources at one of the most challenging employers we deal with. I know how important it is to have support from the wider union when you're on strike, and I have supported members on strike in other disputes – including visits to recent BBC picket lines in Brighton and Tunbridge Wells and encouraging wider solidarity across chapels including in the recent dispute and strikes at Springer Nature.</p> <p>International cooperation Maintaining international links in our collective industrial work is also important. Several of the workplaces I support have employers with an international presence. Improving connections between our chapels and overseas workplaces, working with the General Secretary and sister unions and linking up our respective reps and activists, boosts our mutual industrial impact. That's been particularly important at the Guardian and FT in recent years, with links to sister unions in Australia and the US, as well as in Japan during the FT pensions dispute.</p> <p>Team player A collegiate team approach is critical for effective organising and collective industrial work. A win is always collective and a set-back is never on the shoulders of one person. I have always sought to work collegiately with colleagues, reps and members to achieve the best outcomes as a team. My direct experience in group chapels in print, digital and broadcasting has reinforced my belief in the pivotal role of teamwork. The General Secretary of the NUJ is required to take a central role in major negotiations and to work with chapels and officials, as well as providing informed leadership.</p> <p>Wider labour movement We are a special and distinctive union, but the NUJ also benefits from its close links with sister unions in the UK and Ireland, and internationally through its close work within the International Federation of Journalists. Our own organising efforts are amplified when we work closely with sister unions, and I have encouraged chapels and reps to build links with trade councils, other unions and branches during workplace disputes and campaigns.</p> <p>As a trade unionist I know the value of practical and purposeful solidarity. Outside of my NUJ role I have been a trade union liaison delegate to the South-East Kent trades council and supported and attended picket lines, rallies and protests in multiple other disputes including P&O, RMT, CWU postal strikes and the ASLEF dispute. I have supported trades council initiatives and helped connect members with wider trade union movements in their communities to help highlight campaigns and disputes.</p>
(b) Administration:	I have serviced the National World group chapel, New Media Industrial Council and the Newspapers and Agencies Industrial

		<p>Council over many years. That work involves convening meetings, organising minutes, co-ordinating annual budget submissions and ensuring the work of the council stays within those financial parameters. The core practical work of the councils is progressing resolutions passed at the NUJ’s policy-setting Delegate Meetings. This requires a wide-range of work – including organising tailored material, webinars and events. As part of this I have helped facilitate a series of very worthwhile reps’ summits. I have extensive experience of working with other industrial officials and colleagues in our campaigns and communications team. I provide necessary information for briefings to the NUJ’s cross-party Parliamentary Group and help facilitate engagement and attendance at lobbies of parliament designed to deepen the impact of our industrial work. I have attended shareholder meetings for our group chapels as part of the NUJ delegation.</p> <p>Outside of work I have been a branch secretary, women’s officer, vice chair and chair of a constituency Labour party. This involved leadership, planning and organising meetings and events, agreeing budgets, producing materials, working with a team and supporting individuals. As a local councillor I have experience of chairing committee meetings and scrutinising and adhering to budgets.</p> <p>As someone whose personal activism is also rooted in my local community, I know first-hand the vital work journalists do on the ground and what a difference local journalism makes in the communities it serves. Our recently revamped News Recovery Plan is a brilliant tool to take forward that work and revitalise local news provision with a clear focus on the public good – something that, with increasing prevalence of news deserts and the hollowing out of existing newsrooms, is desperately needed.</p>
7	<p>Why are you interested in this post? <i>Section 7 is the candidate’s opportunity to prepare an election address that will be circulated to members with ballot forms, together with a photograph and details of union membership. The election address should not exceed 400 words.</i></p>	<p>I am hugely proud of the NUJ and believe I have the industrial experience, negotiating expertise, practical knowledge and commitment to undertake the role of General Secretary at a critical time in the union’s history.</p> <p>Twenty years ago I was a BBC local journalist. I was inspired to join the NUJ and became an active workplace rep – working with members and organising towards national industrial action.</p> <p>During my 17 years’ experience since joining the union’s staff as an organiser I have led our work in newspapers, agencies, digital and broadcasting. I have a strong track record in collective negotiations that have saved jobs, delivered recognition agreements and improved pay. Since Michelle Stanistreet announced her departure, colleagues and workplace activists have said I can step up. I have decided to accept that challenge.</p> <p>I was proud to secure union recognition at PA with our brilliant reps, a four-year campaign we can use to inspire other chapels to organise – and win! With a new UK government, we have a unique chance to boost our work on journalists’ safety and gain traction on NUJ policies set out in the News Recovery Plan. Using our</p>

	<p>collective voice we can ensure the grassroots experience of our members informs future legislation.</p> <p>The NUJ is unique – dedicated to advancing members’ interests and defending media freedoms. We are proudly democratic and independent. Our work across the Republic of Ireland and the UK has created case law and shaped national media policies.</p> <p>We face significant challenges. Traditional newsrooms continue to contract, freelance rates have stagnated, low pay is endemic and privilege remains a predictor of career success. Generative AI and declining trust in journalism require our critical attention.</p> <p>There is much to do. Our collective work and our industrial wins bring us new members in established news platforms and emerging areas. We must support our members to participate, reinvigorate our own democracy and ensure a sustainable future.</p> <p>Critical to my plans is the involvement of every corner of our activist base and members throughout the union. I would not be standing if I was not confident of this support – over 120 reps, activists and officials across all sectors, nations and regions are backing me.</p> <p><i>Samira Ahmed: “I’ve seen up close Laura’s dedication to supporting members and fighting for the best outcome”</i></p> <p><i>Michelle Stanistreet: “Laura brings a wealth of industrial experience and the passion to deliver for members”</i></p> <p>www.laura4gs.co.uk</p>						
<p>Please provide your preferred contact details so that members are able to contact you during the election period. Please note that these contact details will be published.</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="547 1236 683 1272">Email:</td> <td data-bbox="683 1236 1524 1272">info@laura4gs.co.uk</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="547 1272 683 1308">Phone:</td> <td data-bbox="683 1272 1524 1308">07764 290996</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="547 1308 683 1505">Address:</td> <td data-bbox="683 1308 1524 1505">C/O National Union of Journalists Headland House 72 Acton Street London WC1X 9NB</td> </tr> </table>	Email:	info@laura4gs.co.uk	Phone:	07764 290996	Address:	C/O National Union of Journalists Headland House 72 Acton Street London WC1X 9NB
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