

# Senior Reporter

News from the 60+ Council

**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
OF  
JOURNALISTS

February 2023

## Gendered ageism

**Nicoletta Flessati reports on a lunchtime workshop on January 9th about how women in the media face 'sell-by' dates.**

Chaired by Jenny Sims, co-chair of the 60+ Council, it attracted more than 70 participants.

The speaker, Karen Ross from Newcastle University, drew on her recent research into how women in the media experience the double discrimination of sexism and ageism from as early in their careers as their 40s.

The women in her study included journalists, presenters and producers. Experiences included having contracts summarily terminated or not renewed, being manoeuvred out of front-of-camera roles and seeing opportunities evaporate.

The number of women in Karen's study was relatively small and therefore, in her words, "indicative" rather than representative, their experiences revealing a pattern of treatment of women by employers as they approached a perceived "sell-by date".

This date was determined by others and based on appearance not competence.

In order not to be replaced by "fresh blood", women were expected to fix their looks. Grey hair and wrinkles are apparently acceptable for men but not for women. Women often internalise the requirement to look younger. Karen termed this "aesthetic labour".

Yet research suggests that viewers of all ages would like to see diverse older people better represented on screen.

Karen referred to a landmark case brought against the BBC in 2011 by Miriam

O'Reilly - who received compensation, an apology and a pledge that the BBC would give senior executives involved in the selection of presenters additional training.

But winning a case does not compensate for the loss of a career and of the identity and affirmation that came with it.

There are obvious costs to bringing a case so women weigh up the pros and cons, some settling before a case reaches court. Proceedings can turn nasty and can work against a woman in her 40s or 50s, who will probably still need to work. After nearly half a century of equality legislation, women are still having their careers curtailed by prejudiced managers.

Gendered ageism is also about the experience paradox. An older woman may be perceived as a threat, and less easy to manipulate. Or she may be stereotyped as someone who cannot be tech-savvy. So when applying for jobs they might be more successful if they play down their experience, only include recent work on their CVs and do not reveal their age!

More positively, women can use their experience and skills to reinvent themselves and start new media enterprises, developing opportunities for other women. One example is Eleanor Mills, former editorial director of The Sunday Times and founder of Noon, who wants to "change conversation about the later stages of women's lives to one which is more optimistic".

In a lively Q&A session, Karen was asked whether unconscious bias training might make employers more aware of their

support they will need if they fall ill from becoming malnourished."

Age Scotland's chief executive, Mark O'Donnell, said: "Organisations such as Food Train provide services which are often a lifeline to hundreds of older people, offering support to those at risk of malnutrition and loneliness who often have nowhere else to turn. If the council do not consider maintaining older people's access to food enough of a priority to protect, then we are really in trouble."

*Food Train Glasgow supports more than 400 over-65s across the city.*

See: <https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/campaign-launched-save-food-train-26024996>

DEREK FORREST



**Karen Ross is Professor of Gender and Media at Newcastle University. Her website gives details of her background and work: <https://krossings.me/> Photo: Newcastle University**

attitudes towards older women. She suspects the bias is all too conscious.

Natasha Hirst, Vice-President of the NUJ, commented on the devastating impact of these forms of discrimination and stressed that the NUJ would work proactively with employers on policies that support women in their careers. It is in the interests of employers to recognise the value of older workers for their experience and their capacity to mentor younger staff.

*The workshop Gendered Ageism in the Media: disavowal, discrimination and push-back... is available to view on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dx5W\\_G55c10](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dx5W_G55c10)*

*60+ Council will be submitting a Late Motion to DM for a campaign on ageism*

### **FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM, Derek Forrest, Jenny Vaughan, Jenny Sims**

We hope you are enjoying the re-launched Senior Reporter.

We're keen to feature a wide range of articles/items of interest to the NUJ's older membership, particularly any which would support our campaigns on pensions, ageism and digital inclusion.

Contributions (no longer than 250 words, please) should be sent to [dereckforrest@gmail.com](mailto:dereckforrest@gmail.com)

## Saving the 'Food Train'

THE GLASGOW LIVE WEBSITE reports on a campaign to save a charity which organises volunteers to deliver food to older people.

After the city council cut the bulk of the charity's funding, over 2,000 people signed a petition to save Food Train Glasgow, and the Scottish Government has been urged to intervene with Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to stave off the closure. Food Train chief executive Michelle Carruthers told Glasgow Live: "It's a false economy for the health and social care partnership not to support us. Without Food Train, it's they who will be left to pick up the tab for getting food and meals to those who need them - or for the additional NHS and care

About the NUJ 60+ Council: <https://bit.ly/3021u5o>

## Local radio under threat

**Adam Christie urges a rethink from the BBC on its plans for local radio.**

OLDER PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DRAWN INTO THE BATTLE between BBC workers and senior management over the future of local radio, with Tory MPs voicing their concerns about cuts that would replace local programmes with regional output every afternoon and at weekends.

About 130 audio journalists will be deployed to digital output, but nearly 50 jobs, including those of NUJ members, could be lost.

The plan sparked particular outrage in Northern Ireland, where most of Radio Foyle's output would come from Belfast. The NUJ and community leaders have been urging listeners to write to BBC director general Tim Davie to express their opposition and dismay.

The unease about older listeners surfaced when BBC executives Rhodri Talfan Davies and Jason Horton appeared before the Westminster parliament's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee.

Wolverhampton NE Conservative MP Jane Stevenson challenged their claim that local radio budgets were being "prioritised" for online services "to keep pace with the way audiences are changing", saying: "You are throwing older people under a bus here, because on-line is disproportionately not going to benefit older people. These are not people who have grown up online, and may not be able to access the services that you're now investing a lot more money in."

Since then, the NUJ has expressed alarm at how fast the BBC wants to make the changes while a House of Commons debate let more MPs have their say.

Former DCMS secretary of state John Whittingdale said: "Many of our elderly constituents rely on radio and are less familiar with online. They enjoy the fact that they can listen to local news content from people they know well."

Asked by Cotswolds Conservative MP Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown about people who have "old televisions, no smartphone and don't even want a computer", BBC chief operating officer Leigh Tavazia said this was part of the planning for a digital Britain and an internet-only future, adding: "I suspect the BBC will be one of the last to turn off broadcast provision."

Over its 50-year history, local radio's greatest strength has been its crisis coverage, usually related to extreme weather. Now, it's extreme economics as coverage of the hyper-local impact of the cost of living crisis has become a lifeline for many, with NUJ members showing great professional pride in explaining why desperation has increased industrial action or announcing warm bank open times.

The NUJ has called on members to ask MPs to put pressure on the BBC to reverse its decision.

Meanwhile, the NUJ, an affiliate of the National Pensioners Convention, has agreed to support its campaign for an Older People's Commissioner for England. In turn, the NPC has agreed to support the NUJ's campaign to retain BBC local radio programmes.

**Adam Christie, Leeds and West Yorkshire Branch, is a member of the National Executive and former member of the 60+ Council.**

## Software doesn't have to be expensive

Once you've left the office and no longer have access to a former employer's software, you might panic when you see the cost of providing it yourself - see the letter from Ursula Huws in our August edition.

But some quick research for Senior Reporter has discovered cheaper alternatives if you don't need to use high-profile brands.

A wide range of free programmes is available. Put "free DTP/design/photo software" into your favourite search engine and links to reviews published by computer publications and websites will appear. They're a good start.

Open Office or Office Libre are just two of many free substitutes for Microsoft Office, using the same file formats. (One UK major regional news group wiped most of Office from its newsroom computers a few years ago to save the cost of licences, replacing it with a free alternative.)

Another option is to scour eBay for legitimate, but often second-hand, software. It might not be the very latest version but

as most people only utilise a fraction of the potential of any programme, that shouldn't be an issue.

Those producing audio or video material, as well as designing simple websites, can also find perfectly adequate software free online. One freelance, who produces material for several platforms, told SR that his most used software is at least 20 years old and meets all his needs.

**ADAM CHRISTIE**

### WASPI women on Sky News video

A short film from Sky News illustrates the human cost suffered by women who discovered late the effect of losing out on the possibility of their planned retirement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QhO1oCO4Kk>

### Battersea MP speaks up for pensioners

How much is the state pension really worth? Government figures usually give the best possible picture, but a more realistic one was painted in Westminster Hall by Battersea MP Marsha De Cordova on on December 12 2022.

Quoting Department for Work and

## Letter

**Going freelance after you retire? Well ...**

*As a journalist of almost 43 years (now aged almost 63) I am well used to people in my trade being considered at the "lower end" of the food chain when it comes to public respectability.*

*But there can be no excuse for freelance journalists, myself included, being treated with such utter disdain when it comes to late and sometimes non-payment of fees for "paid work".*

*I have been forced to enlist the support of the NUJ, of which I am a member, in the case of a magazine publisher who, while being very keen, of course, to ensure copy was delivered on time, pays (at best) mere lip service to payment for said service.*

*This has resulted, finally, in the union having to intervene in taking possible legal action on behalf of a colleague.*

*But, even worse, is that this individual is not alone. In my experience, there is a growing band of unscrupulous people who (having commissioned paid work) will, it seems, do just about everything possible to avoid paying up. It is utterly dispiriting.*

*I work in Brussels where, increasingly, the lines between bone fide journalism and others trying to pass off what they do as "journalism" is becoming more and more blurred.*

*Having worked for many years as a staffer, but now independent and experiencing such issues, I cannot say I would particularly recommend the freelance life.*

*I wonder if journos in the UK are having the same problems?*

**Martin Banks, Brussels Branch**

Pensions statistics for the 2020 financial year she said fewer than 10 per cent of all pensioners received the full new top rate of pension - £185.15 - and less than a third of those on the old pension receive the full rate. She also mentioned the WASPI campaign. See: <https://www.ukpol.co.uk/marsha-de-cordova-2022-speech-on-the-state-pension/>.

### Is the Scottish Government age-unfriendly?

The percentage of over 60s among Scotland's working age population is double that of Scottish Government employees.

The latest workforce diversity and inclusion information statistics published by the Holyrood administration reveal that 6.1 per cent of those on the government payroll have celebrated their 60th birthday compared to 12 per cent when it comes to the nation as a whole.

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