

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Informed

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Jess Hurd



Stride of pride: Samir Ahmed and supporters march to her employment tribunal. Read the inside story in Michelle's message p4

Resist RTÉ cuts

"It's your RTÉ, Save It" demands the NUJ's campaign to secure the future of Ireland's public service broadcaster. It is the union's response to plans unveiled in the first week in November to slash 18% from the broadcaster's annual expenditure over three years.

RTÉ management proposal affects around 200 jobs, and plans to reduce some salaries by 15%.

Speaking at the Irish Delegate Conference in Dublin, general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "RTÉ workers and the Irish people have been let down by their public representatives and by their employer. Their future is in the hands of a Government which has shown no willingness to support public service broadcasting and an employer who expects their staff to carry the can for management failure to

present a realistic, strategic plan for the organisation."

The NUJ says the slogan "It's Your RTÉ, Save It" (in Irish, "Leatsa é RTÉ, Sábháil é") will drive home the message that RTÉ belongs to the people of Ireland and must be saved in the public interest. The Irish Congress of Trades Unions and general union Siptu are also pledged to support.

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary said: "There is a financial crisis in RTÉ and both An Taoiseach and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment must give leadership on this issue. We are seeking cross-

party support for RTÉ and Fianna Fáil have a particular responsibility as it is supporting the minority Fine Gael government."

Dooley explained that the NUJ was not looking for a hand out, merely demanding that the Government honour its commitment to public service broadcasting and to the Irish people. "As we enter into negotiations with RTÉ I am conscious that even if every unrealistic cost-reduction plan floated by RTÉ management

were implemented the organisation cannot be saved without State intervention."

RTÉ executives have called this a 'defining moment' in the 93-year-old broadcast service's history and blamed the crisis on the widespread refusal to pay Ireland's tv licence.



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News Update

New fund for public interest news



Up to £100,000 grants for community news initiatives will soon be available from the Future News Fund. The fund, established by Nesta, will be divided into two tracks, one supporting projects that test new ideas for sustainable public interest news, the other providing structured support for start-up businesses generating public interest news.

Nesta, which was established with a

£250m lottery endowment, launched the fund as a response to the Cairncross Review. One of its findings was that already disadvantaged communities had suffered most from the decline of local journalism.

Projects that could be funded include:

- support to build and test a specific idea
- prototype/deployment funding to understand the potential impact of proposed solutions

- bespoke and masterclass support from news, journalism, public engagement and digital experts
- London-based and regional workshops across the country
- Support from sector and business experts.

Valerie Mocker, who leads the Future News Fund, said: "Access to reliable, accurate and high-quality public interest news is a key part of a functioning society [but] at local level [provision of such news], has collapsed. The solution is not to simply put more money into existing journalism, but to completely transform the way that public interest news is created, distributed and sustained for future generations. Any organisation that has an idea to support sustainable public interest news, should visit the Nesta website and get their application in by 8 December."

General secretary, Michelle Stanistreet, is on the advisory board for the project.

Separately, the NEC voted to back another Cairncross recommendation, the creation of an Institute For Public Interest News, 'modelled on the Arts Council'. The paper adopted by the NEC noted that were the Arts Council's annual budget of £947m, deployed supporting news initiatives, it would transform the media, much as Lottery funding has done the arts.

Rates rise in the lowlands

Dutch freelance fees will significantly increase as a result of a court victory. Photographer Ruud Rogier and writer Britt van Uem, supported by their union NVJ, brought the case against DPG Media.

The freelancers argued that the rates they were paid (€42 per photo and €0.13 per word), were not consistent with the Netherlands' Authors Rights Law. Amsterdam's District Court agreed, and ordered that rates should rise to €65 a photo and €0.21 a word.

The judgment will benefit around 5,000 freelancers who work for regional newspapers. They will also be entitled to claim back pay from January 2018. Amsterdam-based NUJ NEC member Tony Sheldon told the council that van Uem's testimony in court had been particularly moving. "She sobbed that she would not work for a newspaper that thought paying journalists €15 an hour was fair."

Mogens Blicher Bjerregård, president of the European Federation

of Journalists said: "We applaud the courage and persistence of the photojournalists and the support of their union. This decision has importance beyond the Dutch borders. Professional photography is key for the quality and trust of the press, but without fair remuneration photojournalists cannot survive."

The rates set by the court represent an absolute minimum rather than a reasonable advisory rate for the entire market, but there has definitely been a breakthrough in the market for regional and local titles in particular.

Raise subs to save the union from going



Six years without a subs increase has left the NUJ dangerously vulnerable, warns a paper adopted by the National Executive. The NEC set a balanced budget at its November meeting, but called on branches to support a motion to April 2020's Delegate Meeting that would increase subscriptions in two stages.

"Most of the NUJ's running costs are met by members' subscriptions," says Honorary General Treasurer John Barsby. "We have reduced staff from a peak of about 55, to 33 today and significantly increased the income we receive by commercially letting unused parts of Headland House. Without a rise in subs, however, the prospect of a forced merger will become very real.

"Our sister union Bectu disappeared into a larger union a couple of years ago," he says.

"I have spent 50 years fighting for the NUJ, and I won't stand by now and watch that fate befall our union."

Subscriptions last rose in 2014 and today the union's annual income is £4.73million. A paper adopted by the NEC notes that had rates kept pace with inflation over the past decade,

the NUJ's annual income would today be £6.7million. Static rates have been exacerbated by a decline in paying membership of 21.8 % over the last ten years from 28,170 to 22,027.

A further financial challenge comes from the union's historic pension scheme commitments, and a change in approach from the UK Pension Regulator. These are expected to result in the annual cost of this rising from £210,000 to £360,000 next year.

The increase for which the NEC will argue would increase rates to the following monthly rates in 2020: Grade 1 £17 (€20.50), Grade 2 £20.50 (€26.50), and Grade 3 £29 (€35.60) and a further increase in 2021 to Grade 1 £18.70 (€22.50), Grade 2 £22.50 (€31.90), and Grade 3 £32 (€30.20.)

Members earning less than £14,500 (€16,000) per annum would pay £12 (€12.60) a month in 2020. Members earning less than £16,000 (€17,500) per annum would pay £13 (€13.80) a month.

Speaking in support of the subs rise, the chair of the union's finance committee, Professor Chris Frost praised all that the NUJ had achieved in recent years. "Despite uncomfortable belt-tightening, this has been a period of real achievement for the us. We have achieved recognition in major, established publishers such as SpringerNature, as well as digital employers like Vice. We have consistently taken up the equal pay fight, and with some outstanding successes. And as well as defending scores of individual freelances, we have successfully spearheaded statutory change in Ireland so that the organisation of atypical workers is lawful."

Frost went on to say that he could not imagine a union whose focus was not

JPI bid risk

The owner of The Scotsman and The Yorkshire Post should be willing to invest in journalism rather than pursuing aggressive cost cutting, says the NUJ.

Commenting on reports that Newsquest is the lead bidder for the company, general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "In Newsquest takeovers, our members have typically suffered heavy job losses and their pay and conditions have been affected, so we have understandable concerns about the future owner of JPI Media".

"That is why we are calling on all interested bidders as a minimum to declare a moratorium of at least two years on compulsory jobs losses, the honouring of all existing terms and conditions and maintenance of effective collective bargaining arrangements."

Stanistreet offered to sit down and talk to any new owner about their plans to stabilise and grow the papers for the benefit of their communities.



journalism making a priority of such work.

Since the last Delegate Meeting recruitment has been a priority for the NUJ. More than 2,500 journalists have joined during that period as well as around 400 students. New chapels have been a recruitment priority, as have freelances who were the focus of a recruitment film shared on social media.

The numbers leaving the union have also fallen - however the monthly lapsing rate is 18% lower than it was four years ago.

Michelle's Message



Samir Ahmed's tribunal spotlighted managers who have lost the plot, says Michelle Stanistreet

Whatever the outcome of Samira Ahmed's NUJ-backed equal pay claim, the BBC is the loser.

Every day of the hearing Samira met a crowd of supporters beside the flower stall at Holborn tube. Come 9.15 we'd set off to Victory House, the Central London Employment Tribunal. There, camera crews and photographers documented the start of another day in the battle for equal pay for work of equal value.

Among those accompanying Samira were journalists, presenters, actors, friends and admirers from across the arts, Women's Equality Party supporters, the Fawcett Society, trade unionists and of course NUJ members.

It was a boost for the day ahead and reaffirmed what became apparent from the accompanying press and social media splash: Samira was not alone. Support was widespread.

Of course – like most cases before the Employment Tribunal – it signalled a relationship gone badly wrong. Taking your employer to court is not a step taken lightly. In this instance, the

Pay-inequality defence damages the BBC

preceding couple of years were spent trying to find a solution. Resolution would have allowed Samira to focus on her work, confident of no longer being paid less than male counterparts. Avoiding a public battle was our aim.

Sadly the BBC felt differently. Equal pay complaints over Samira's work on Radio 3's Night Waves and on Radio 4's Front Row were resolved and pay rises and back pay agreed. Not so, her role on Newswatch. The case centred on two BBC programmes that reflect viewers' opinions – Newswatch, aired on the News Channel and repeated on BBC One, presented by Samira. BBC One's Points of View was presented by Jeremy Vine until last year when it was reformatted. Fifteen-minute slots that have much in common, except the presenters' pay: £440 - £465 for Samira since 2012; up to £3,000 per episode for her male opposite number until his fee was cut to £1,300 at the beginning of 2018.

For the BBC this became a battle over its internal divisional silos of 'News' and 'Entertainment'. For the NUJ, it was a case of straightforwardly comparable slots, fronted by experienced presenters.

As a witness, I had expected to be at the hearing for a couple of days to be cross-examined and be on hand for Samira during her evidence.

Day one came, however, and the scale of the BBC team shocked me. They filled rows on the respondent's side of the room like disgruntled wedding guests, dismayed that the couple had not sundered before the nuptial ceremony.

The right response was obvious. I cleared my diary and remained at the tribunal until the end.

The resources deployed by the BBC made me wince. They had two barristers, one a QC, backed up by a

row of instructed external solicitors. There were BBC lawyers, executives and witnesses to boot. It dwarfed anything that a trades union could muster.

On the NUJ's side was our fabulous duo of barrister Claire Darwin, of Matrix Chambers, and Thompson's Equal pay lead Caroline Underhill. Add in Samira, myself and the NUJ's legal and equality officer Natasha Morris and that was the sum-total of Team Ahmed – from a legal perspective that is. All the goodwill and positive vibes in the room radiated from the Claimant's side. The atmosphere in the Claimant's Waiting Room – potentially fine material for a TV sitcom – exuded solidarity and humour sustained by caffeine hits.

Legal processes are necessarily robust and combative. Both sides want to win, and their teams are paid to do what's necessary. The BBC's strategy, however, was bizarre, at best.

It ceaselessly minimised Samira's contributions as well as her skills and experience. Jeremy Vine was lionised. One BBC executive told the tribunal he had never heard of Samira. To this, a panel member asked: "Haven't you seen Channel 4 news? Watched Newswatch? Have you listened to Front Row?"

The same witness later conceded that much of his witness statement, detailing Jeremy Vine's experience and skills, was cut and pasted from Vine's Wikipedia page. Our barrister was quick to ask – "would that not constitute a breach of the BBC's own editorial guidelines"?

Again and again, they tried to belittle Samira, undermine Newswatch and dismiss the News Channel as "niche". Somehow Newswatch running on BBC One didn't count. People switch off when it comes on, claimed the BBC. As a result a BBC executive was re-called to

admit that such “programme junctions” affect all programmes, including Points of View. A farcical explanation of why this was the fault of schedule changes not linked to Jeremy Vine followed. One headline summed it up the approach – “BBC trash talks its own outputs”.

The corporation was content to denigrate its own content and people if that was required to persuade the panel that Jeremy Vine was worth more than six times the fee paid to Samira. The apogee of this tactic came when, in summation, the BBC’s QC likened Samira’s role to playing piano for a children’s ballet class, whilst Vine’s was more akin to a concert pianist. They might be playing the same tune but their performances were incomparable.

Sitting listening to this guff, it was easy to blame the legal team for their low-rent approach. But of course they are merely its personification. These were the BBC’s decisions and the BBC is responsible for their consequences. And these are serious. Burning so much money on a case while losing the moral high ground is a bad look. It is doubly foolhardy when its decision to means test free licences to the over-75s is causing such damage. Failing to consider or care about the internal consequences of this case is crass. In short, the BBC’s top brass have lost the plot.

An expected announcement of further massive cuts – in “BBC speak” restructuring leading to £40million of savings – was due around now. The election means that it is postponed until 2020. Our public service broadcaster is in a fragile, vulnerable position at a critical time in its history. It needs champions and support if it is to sustain its purpose and values. It cannot afford to engage in acts of self-harm by defending the indefensible. Now the hearing is over, this should be a sobering moment of reflection. Whatever the outcome of the tribunal, the BBC should work with the NUJ to resolve all outstanding cases on equal pay and ensure that pay inequity is part of the BBC’s past and not its future.

Diary

Confessional journalism

Father Brian D’Arcy is multiply distinguished. Life membership of the NUJ; first priest to join our union (his Sunday World weekly column has run since 1976); and officiant at the weddings of the children of Terry Wogan – who, despite his atheism, Fr Brian insists will have been welcomed at the pearly gates. The 74-year-old’s greatest claim to fame, however, is surely that he was the inspiration for “Father Trendy”, Dermot Morgan’s forerunner of Father Ted. D’Arcy has also penned many books. His latest, A Different Journey is published by Sliabh Ban Productions. Here’s wishing the Passionate Priest many more travels to come.

White man’s burden
NUJ activists’ dedication

is legendary. Few match that of erstwhile NEC member Barry White, however. Recent removal from Walthamstow, London, to Settle, North Yorkshire, necessitates an 85-mile round trip to attend Leeds branch – but his enthusiasm is undimmed. Surely, though, establishing his own branch in the Dales would save White countless railway miles? Unless, of course the prospect of introducing his every contribution at delegate meetings with the injunction “Settle” is simply too awful to contemplate?

Donating seaman
To Bread & Roses at The Chapel, where our movement’s glitterati gathered to toast TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady’s 60th. The 80s disco paused momentarily for O’Grady’s daughter to recount her delighted realisation that her mother was not only the superhero of childish imagination,

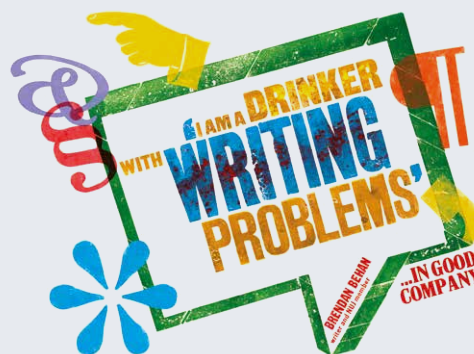
but also a real life crusader for justice. The prize for most imaginative general secretary, incidentally, goes to Mark Dickinson of seafarers’ union Nautilus. He arrived bearing a surprise birthday cake in the shape of a container ship. Perhaps plans for a General Council “bake off” should be tabled?

Old news

NUJ life membership is not lightly bestowed. Indeed, Tony Mulvey (below) of the Clare Champion had reason to fear having been overlooked after six decades paying his subs. A polite enquiry

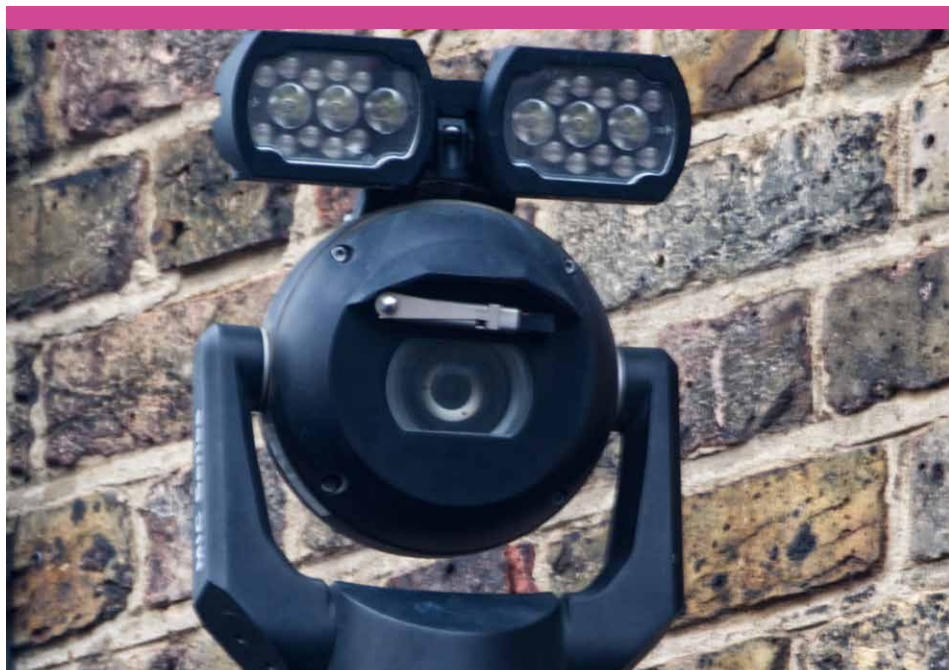


revealed that early records of his membership were missing. “No problem” replied Mulvey who worked at the Champion from 1959 until 2018. He brought his 1961 membership card with him to the ceremony. And to buttress his pedigree, he also brought along his late father’s 1945 NUJ membership card. Like Tony, father George also worked at the Champion – as editor until his death in 1958.



Spotlight

Facial recognition systems compromise our sources



Unregulated police technology is a risk to journalism. Tim Dawson visits Heartbreak Hotel to find out why

Each September, Porthcawl is alive with white jumpsuits, improbable sideburns and gyroscopic hips as 40,000 Elvis impersonators descend on the Welsh resort. "Arrests are very rare, the whole event is like a huge Elvis party," says Peter Phillips organiser of the 20-year-old annual event. Even Cliff Richard fans enjoy a warm welcome, he adds.

For the past three years, however, as the "Elvises" have encouraged the jailhouse to rock, South Wales Police (SWP) officers have discreetly filmed revellers and utilised facial-recognition software to sift the resulting feed for 'undesirables'.

And while combing the tribute acts for terrorists probably risks no more than ridicule, the potential threat to journalism of the unregulated use of such technology is all too real.

"As soon as it became possible to use phone data to identify individuals, police

forces started using them to search for journalists' sources," says NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet. "The cases of Mark Bulstrode, Tom Newton-Dunn and Sally Murrer are but a few of many instances. Today, facial recognition is almost entirely without legal regulation. I would be amazed if journalists have not already been targeted."

Stanistreet is not alone in raising concerns.

Paul Wiles, the government's Biometrics Commissioner says: "We desperately need fresh legislation that regulates use of these second-generation biometric identification, and those rules need to enshrine journalistic rights to protect sources."

His counterpart the Surveillance Camera Commissioner Tony Palmer is similarly worried. "The first court case [relating to the use of facial recognition by the SWP] is now subject to appeal. It will ask is whether there is a legal framework to use that technology in the first place. The court has said that it could be decided on a case-by-case basis, but the common law can be quite fluid."

Whatever the outcome of the current election, the issue may struggle to gain traction. Against this backdrop, a multi-party campaign calls on UK police forces and private security companies to immediately stop using live facial recognition for public surveillance. Supported by MPs (at the time of writing) David Davis, Diane Abbot, Jo Swinson and Caroline Lucas, it is also endorsed by numerous civil liberties groups, academics and lawyers.

The clamour for regulation has been joined by the Information Commissioner, Elizabeth Denham. "The absence of a statutory code that speaks to the specific challenges posed by LFR will increase the

likelihood of legal failures and undermine public confidence in its use," she has written. "[My] key recommendation is [for the] government to introduce a statutory and binding code of practice on the deployment of live facial recognition."

Notwithstanding these concerns, SWP's "facial recognition vans" have become a familiar sight at sporting events, concerts and demonstrations in Cardiff. And the Welsh experience is not unusual. In Leicestershire similar kit was used to check fans at a heavy metal festival against a Europol database. Meanwhile the Metropolitan police surveilled the crowds on Remembrance Sunday to try to weed out stalkers and people with mental health issues.

In London the private landlords of the development behind King's Cross station were given access to the Met Police facial recognition database to scan shoppers' faces. This scheme was abandoned after a public outcry.

Similar technology is also thought to be in use in the Irish Republic. The Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 specifically committed to its use.

SWP makes a robust defence of the use of automated facial recognition, both in public and in court. Chief Inspector Jason Herbert, Operations Manager for Bridgend says: "Facial recognition software helps detect risk more efficiently than standard CCTV. Officers on the ground can also identify early opportunities to prevent crime and reduce anti-social behaviour. We are very aware of concerns about privacy and we have built checks and balances into our methodology to reassure the public."

SWP says that it is searching for individuals on a "watch list" drawn up specifically for each event. At the 2017 Elvisfest, for example, there were 472 names on the list. All were either "suspected of crimes in South Wales, or had outstanding arrest warrants", says Deputy Chief Constable Richard Lewis.

The compiling and sign off for this list is made wherever possible by the most senior officer on the ground at the event

(in police jargon, the Silver Commander). According to SWP's own operational manual, however, there is no systematic process for review or inspection of that list by more senior officers, or anyone else.

The NUJ will campaign for proper regulation, including safeguards for journalism, of facial recognition technology (as well as other second-generation biometrics such as voice and iris recognition). As soon as a new NUJ all-party Parliamentary Group has convened, this will be on its agenda. Members can raise the absence of regulation with candidates in the general election.

In the meantime, however, an academic evaluation of SWP's experience with facial recognition provides some pointers for journalists who wish to avoid their encounters being the subject of CCTV scrutiny and facial recognition.

The researchers found that the system used by British police forces, NeoFace, manufactured by NEC, had some clear shortcomings. Low light forces the camera's sensors to use higher ISO settings (increasing their sensitivity), and produces images too grainy for effective analysis. Hats with brims, scarves and sunglasses also reduced the system's capacity for recognition.



Michael Bryan / Alamy Stock Photo

The efficaciousness of self-adhesive side burns, quiff wigs and rhinestone belts as disguise were not specifically considered by the academics. It is worth noting, however, that in 2019 SWP deployed two facial recognition vans for both days of the Porthcawl Elvisfest, and managed to identify not one person from their watch lists, nor did they make any arrests. Perhaps had the constables concentrated on the music instead of their surveillance screens they could have enjoyed themselves rather more and avoided the very trap warned of by the King himself - suspicious minds.

LDR progress

The NUJ's Local Democracy Reporters Chapel is sufficiently organised that recognition should now be a formality. Joint FoCs Neil McGrory and David Spereall report that the NUJ now has LDR members all over the country and that a formal request for recognition has been submitted. The NEC recorded its thanks for their collective efforts in spearheading this work.

Press cards for community journalists

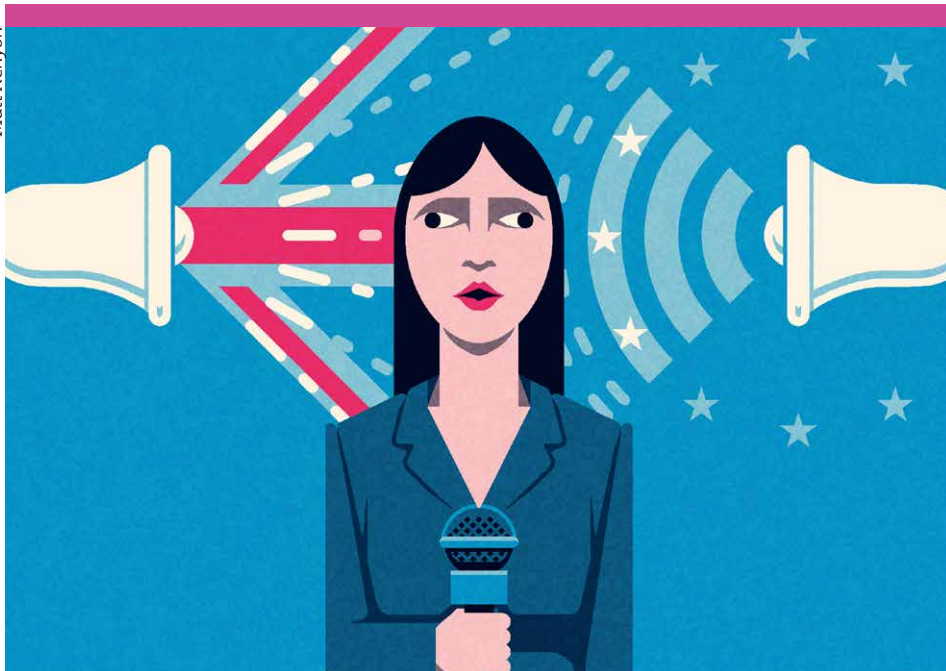
The National Executive will take a motion to April's Delegate Meeting that, if passed would enable the creation of new Community Press cards for Associate Members of the NUJ who report for community publications. The proposal has been welcomed by the board of Cardiff University's Centre For Community Journalism. The initiative

is one response to a motion adopted at the 2018 DM that called for closer working between the union, community journalists and their representatives. The paper adopted by the NEC stipulates that the design of any new cards should be clearly distinct from the design of the United Kingdom Press Card Authority press card to which only professional newsgatherers are entitled.

Spotlight

A simple choice that reset news

Matt Kenyon



Brexit has changed political journalism beyond recognition. Ian Burrell gauges feelings on the front line

Whichever way it plays out now, Brexit has changed the practice of political journalism.

The story has taken over the lives of Westminster and Brussels correspondents for three and a half years, generating division and personal attacks. Lobby conventions are called into question, and tensions are growing, now that a journalist is prime minister.

The relentless demands of covering this story are almost unprecedented. "People have had to shift honeymoons, move wedding dates, and change their family holidays," says Paul Waugh, political editor of HuffPost UK.

Joe Barnes, new Brussels correspondent for the Express, talks of "13-14 hour days", while Amber de Botton, Westminster news editor for ITV News, says her husband "jokes that he is a Brexit widower". Nigel Morris, political editor of the i paper, says: "Brexit is the prism

through which almost every political story is viewed. I went several months without writing a single story that did not have a Brexit implication or angle of one kind or another."

Yet, for all the journalistic resources thrown at Brexit, there are complaints that the news industry has left the public under-served and ill-informed.

Disquiet over the new government's off-record briefing strategy surfaced in October, when a 700-word texted screed, believed to be from Boris Johnson's media chief Dominic Cummings, was published by The Spectator's political editor James Forsyth with attribution to "a contact in Number 10". The protocol of anonymous briefing was being misused to make public threats that could easily be disowned, said some.

In a scathing critique published soon afterwards by Open Democracy, veteran political journalist Peter Osborne denounced a swathe of his peers as "stenographers" for swallowing "dodgy stories and commentary" from Number Ten.

With the prime minister's evident encouragement these Downing Street sources have been spreading lies, misrepresentations, smears and falsehoods around Fleet Street and across the major TV channels. "Political editors lap it all up," Osborne claimed.

A storm erupted. "A wall of hostility from most of the lobby greeted the article - but also supportive messages from journalists outside the charmed Cummings inner circle," Osborne says. "One told me that the situation was 'even worse than you say'."

Among Osborne's targets was ITV News political editor Robert Peston. He retorted that to have not published a complained-of comment by an unnamed Downing Street official "would have been to treat British people with contempt" by assuming their lack of intelligence.

Yet Peston conceded that "conventions that govern political reporting in the UK... may arguably be unfit for purpose". In September, he also argued in a BBC radio documentary that the front pages of

British newspapers had been given over to propaganda.

Professor Chris Frost, chair of the NUJ's ethics council, believes the national press has been pushed by social media into polemic Brexit coverage. Repetitional damage will follow, he says. "It's going to be immeasurably more difficult to regain trust because people have become used to polemic newspapers. Whatever side of the Brexit debate you take, bitterness will continue."

At a seminar on Brexit coverage, Will Moy, chief executive of the fact-checking organisation Full Fact, gave the UK media a grade of 'F' for its efforts. Financially-challenged newsrooms, he argues, have struggled with an immeasurably complicated subject. "The expertise this story requires is vast; constitutional law, parliamentary procedure, trade negotiations, and foreign relations. Nobody is expert in it all," he says. "Explaining Brexit has been an amazingly difficult ask."

Seasoned political journalists concede that lessons have been hard learned. Gary Gibbon, political editor of Channel 4 News, says deep understanding of the "trade issue" at the heart of Brexit requires a specialist background. "[UK media] relied too much on generalists reporting intricate and unfamiliar policy terrain." Brexit's "greatest lesson" was that broadcasters were wrong to apply the equal airtime principles used in UK politics, he says. "The referendum exposed the danger of prioritising 'balance' in terms of soundbite duration and forgetting the need to subject all arguments to equal levels of rigour. If an argument collapses under pressure, that is the fault of the argument not the interviewer."

Covering Ireland has also challenged the UK media as much as it has Brexiteers. Daily Mirror associate editor Kevin Maguire admitted to the BBC that the significance of Brexit for Ireland was "drowned out because of the focus on money and immigration". RTÉ Europe editor Tony Connelly and Belfast website

A journalist in no10

In covering the Prime Minister's attempts at Brexit, political journalists know they are dealing with a former colleague who, as a reporter in Brussels, thought nothing of concocting stories on EU "plans" for a ban on prawn cocktail crisps or a "banana police force" to regulate bendy fruit.

Because he has spent his career among the media he is more vulnerable to revelations of scandal, such as recent allegations in The Sunday Times

The Detail have diligently covered the implications of Brexit for communities north and south of the Irish border: the Sun told Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to "Shut Your Gob and Grow Up".

But Brexit has given the UK media, and its audiences, a better understanding of Brussels. On The Express, Barnes says, he is known as the "Remainer-in-Chief" for his reporting on the EU. "I have deliberately taken a neutral approach to the Brexit saga because my role is to inform readers about what is happening inside the European Commission and the European Parliament."

Westminster reporters also have an improved grasp of the machinations of their own beats. "The collective knowledge of [parliamentary procedures bible] Erskine May has improved immeasurably," says de Botton.

HuffPost UK's Waugh thinks this process has enhanced faith in parliamentary democracy. He also believes the UK media has done a good job for people interested in Brexit. "There has been a plethora of excellent coverage – if you want to know about it, it's there."

His daily newsletter, The Waugh Zone, analyses Brexit developments. He believes that its format has come into its own in coverage of the story. "Political newsletters, like podcasts and

that he groped journalist Charlotte Edwardes at a lunch at The Spectator, where he was editor. Yet Boris Johnson is at his ease among journalists in a way his predecessor Theresa May was not.

Unlike her, he has an "eye for a story" and has been "on the front foot" in relations with the media since entering Downing Street with the intention of calling a swift election, lobby reporters say.

And, unlike Mrs May, he also has unequivocal backing from the Conservatives' house journal, the Daily Telegraph where he used to work.

expert Twitter threads, have become an accessible way for the public to get the story behind the story."

The BBC's podcast Brexitcast, since turned into a BBC One show, has been a huge success, adding to the workloads of presenters Laura Kuenssberg and Katy Adler. Katy Searle, head of BBC Westminster, says the show works "because you hear personalities in an unfamiliar way, and their language is easier to consume".

At ITV News, de Botton highlights the difficulty in covering a story with "a lot of repetition". To keep audiences engaged "we use a lot of quick interactions, doorsteps, quirky moments, even humour, to keep the story moving", she says.

But for Suzanne Franks, professor of journalism at City University in London, the UK media's Brexit output has been "breathless" and resonant of sports reporting. "There hasn't been enough thoughtful, standing-back coverage," she complains.

Even so, the immensity of Brexit amounts to "a golden era for political journalism," she says. "These are stories that reach into the psyche and resonate. I wonder if we will ever go back to an era where politics is considered boring again?"

News Update

Give freelances the bucket and spade



REASONS TO JOIN

Should You Be Getting Paid Holiday?
Many UK freelances and casuals are entitled to holiday pay in law, but an NUJ survey found that almost nine out of ten did not receive it. Are you losing out? The NUJ has been successful in winning holiday pay and backpay for many of its members. Could that be you? If so, the NUJ can help. Contact freelanceoffice@nuj.org.uk

Are you keeping good company?
Join the NUJ today at nuj.org.uk/join

Thousands of media freelances are legally entitled to holiday pay they are not claiming. A new NUJ campaign aims to encourage more to exercise their rights.

The initiative was inspired by Scotsman casual David Walsh's case. A tribunal awarded him £8,360 based on his right to holiday pay. He had asked for holiday pay on several occasions, but was refused on the grounds that he was self-employed. The company relied on its standard freelance contract, which states that a freelance worker is self-employed and an independent contractor. This did not accurately reflect the nature of the working relationship, ruled the tribunal.

National Freelance organiser Pamela Morton said: "The proportion of freelances in our industry is greater than at any time, and many are denied holiday pay to which they are legally entitled. In court, the NUJ has secured holiday pay for numerous casuals and other regular freelances. We will continue to pursue such cases when they arise. More than

80 years after workers won the right to holiday pay, how much better it would be if media companies accepted their responsibilities and gave those who diligently apply their talents the paid rest they deserve."

Almost nine in 10 of the NUJ's freelance members are not given holiday pay, a union survey has revealed. However, many freelances and casuals are entitled to paid leave in law. In the UK, workers are entitled to paid holiday of 5.6 weeks a year, equivalent to 28 days for someone on a five-day week.

Many media workers are often labelled as "casual" or "self-employed", but work in ways that gives them "worker" status. This can apply if: most of your work is for one organisation (but you could still be eligible if you work for multiple organisations); you work under contract - whether its written or not; you do workplace shifts, or someone else controls when and how you work.

The latest NUJ members' survey shows that 88 per cent of freelance union members did not receive holiday pay.

System's racist DNA

Radical black politics needs to find its own voice, Professor Kehinde Andrews told his audience at the annual Claudia Jones lecture. He reminded an intent crowd at London's Hallam Centre of Jones' words: "people without a voice are like lambs to the slaughter".

"Radical and liberal politics diverge in their analysis of issues like Grenfell", said Andrews. "Liberals see solvable problems, radicals the product of a system that has racism in its DNA."

He recalled Jones' focus on the exploitation of black women. "She was ahead of her time identifying intersectionality.

"Fifty years ago we were on the precipice of a revolution. [Since then] we have all been deluded into thinking there is no alternative while some have been incorporated in to the system," said the professor.

The coming election did not leave the Birmingham City University academic feeling optimistic. "Racial inequality is embedded in Britain," he said. "This election is about how you share the spoils of empire. We are going to see [in this election] from Labour, a really quite racist, anti-immigration stance. Labour has always had a racist, anti-immigration stance."

He also criticised British socialist shibboleths. "The NHS is a properly colonial institution. It was born out of colonialism and it is deeply racist in how it functions."

And while promoting a global view, Andrews saw little hope in the Caribbean. "Jamaica is a failed project sustained by diaspora remittances."

Keep alive the memory of Jones' actions as a radical activist, he urged.

Watch a video of the lecture here: <https://tinyurl.com/tpqn98u>

End information descrimination against Scotlands' journalists

Journalists in Scotland are systematically denied equal access to information requests made under that country's Freedom Of Information laws. A NUJ submission to Scotland's government calls for an end to such discrimination.

Research by the Scottish Information Commissioner revealed the practice. It showed that requests for information

to the Scottish Government lodged by journalists are subject to additional clearances to those made by members of the public. In 2015/16 the survey showed that journalists were significantly less likely to receive the information requested. In the following year, such requests took longer than others.

Scottish organiser John Toner said:

"In seeking freedom of information requests journalists are acting on behalf of the pubic and should not be treated like second-class citizens".

The Scottish submission comes at a time of mounting calls for the extension of FoI in England, both to enforce rights more robustly and to extend FoI's scope to the contractors who deliver public services. A motion adopted by London Freelance Branch will bring this issue to the 2020 Delegate Meeting. It was proposed by member Michelle Edwards, whose doggedness on the FoI battlefield shows just how vital are these rights.

Bureaucratic attrition threatens FoI

I write a column in the Waltham Forest Echo about the redevelopment of the estate where I live, writes Michelle Edwards (pictured). As a result, I put in a lot of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests to the council.

Here is just one example of why these are so important. In 2016, the High Court ruled that Southwark Council had overcharged residents for their water bills in an arrangement it had with Thames Water. Southwark was ordered to repay 41,000 tenants an average of more than £400 each. The ruling set a legal precedent that meant that other local authorities and housing associations using similar arrangements with Thames Water might need to make payouts as well. These other councils include Waltham Forest.

After a two-day search of Waltham Forest Council's committee meetings for the last four years, I found two entries referencing the Thames Water rebate. From these, it appeared that they had no intention of refunding residents. A spokesperson later confirmed to me that:

"Waltham Forest Council considers that the water charges have been correctly applied as it collects these on behalf of the water providers and therefore is not a water reseller...the council has no plans to issue refunds in relation to this."

The response came despite my finding, from an FoI request, that a "provision" of £4.9 million had been made for the possible refund of charges in the council's 2017/18 accounts.

From another FoI request, I discovered that the council had sought legal advice on the matter via the Local Government Association (LGA) to the tune of £1,697. In addition, advice from its in-house legal team cost £787. The council appears to be waiting for a brave resident and their lawyer to step forward.

It is just one of many instances where information that could make a real difference to people's lives is accessible only because of FoI. But it is also clear that many public authorities do everything

in their power to thwart our right to know. I have now escalated 23 cases for investigation to the Information Commissioner where Waltham Forest Council has refused to provide what I requested.

The ICO has already issued three decision notices against the council for non-compliance with the 20 working days' time limit. Another four have been accepted as either "eligible for further consideration" or "accepted for investigation".

I have also done my best to keep up the pressure. That is why I took a motion to my branch calling for the NUJ to do more. I have also sought out ICO's Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham at public events to let her know that more work is required if enforcement is to be effective.

The FoI Act (2000) for which the NUJ had campaigned for years, gives reporters an amazing tool to help our readers understand the decisions made on their behalf.

Unless journalists campaign for our rights to be properly enforced, however, we risk its usefulness being eroded through bureaucratic attrition. Now is the time to take a stand and say that is not acceptable.



News Update

All Photos: Maxwell



Noose talk: Jim Aughney learns why reporters increasingly eschew neckware



Suitable candidates: life members put on a polished performance



Storm of disapproval: Michelle Stanistreet condemns RTÉ's proposed cuts



Oral sextet: Carol Coulter conducts an approving chorus

Irish gather to defend journalism

In October on Achill Island, Co Mayo, a Fianna Fáil councillor forced a freelance video journalist to leave a meeting about the proposed opening of a centre that would provide asylum seekers with emergency accommodation. Some of the audience at that meeting chanted 'Out, out' at the camera operator.

It was a sharp reminder of need to defend free journalism on this island, warned Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley, opening the union's biannual Irish

delegate meeting in Dublin.

Around 100 attendees gathered at the Gresham Hotel to consider motions, participate in panel discussions and celebrate the award of 32 life membership certificates.

Delegates supported motions calling for the reversal of proposed cuts at RTÉ, the creation of a Lyra McKee charitable fund, and applauding Northern Ireland's Lord Chief Justice for supporting journalistic freedom in the case brought by Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey.

General secretary Michelle Stanistreet called on journalists to remember the example of Lyra McKee.

"If her death prompts us to do one thing, it should be to consider what circumstances are necessary for more like her to thrive. Journalism and the NUJ needs more Lyras," Stanistreet told the delegates.

The conference thanked outgoing joint Cathaoirleachs Bernie Mullan and Gerry Carson and welcomed their successors, Siobhan Holliman and Dara Bradley.