



NUJ submission: The Times and The Sunday Times proposal to vary the 1981 undertakings

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The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 30,000 members including people working for The Times and Sunday Times.

The union also represents journalists working across the rest of the media - as staff, casuals and freelancers - both at home and abroad. NUJ members work in broadcasting, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and digital media.

The union welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and we have a strong track record of standing up to defend jobs and conditions and for the right of journalists to operate in the public interest without interference from government or vested interests of any type.

News UK has requested the Secretary of State accept changes to replace the undertakings agreed in 1981. The company has claimed it wants the changes to facilitate the sharing of resources across the two newspapers.

The NUJ is concerned that the proposals will lead to job cuts, a decline in the quality of journalism in both papers and a subsequent decline in sales.

During an all-staff question and answer session about the proposals, John Witherow, editor of The Times, was asked whether there were plans to pool production journalists between the two titles should the legal undertakings be revised. He replied: "That is certainly something we would look into."

Production journalists are responsible for crafting the distinctive voice of any newspaper, through headline writing, refining copy and deciding how stories are presented. On The Times, journalists take great care to protect the unique character of the paper. Look at the letters page, weekly feedback column or the regular correspondence received about the language and style - this shows the extent to which readers cherish the newspaper's unique character.

A change to the undertakings puts both newspapers in jeopardy. To share staff would dilute the differences between the newspapers and have an adverse impact on media plurality.

Both papers have a distinctive voice which would be irrevocably lost if cost-cutting is prioritised at the expense of quality journalism.

NUJ members working at the titles are extremely concerned about the proposals and staff want to ensure there are clear commitments about resourcing the titles so they can continue to sustain standards and quality.

Furthermore, there should be a commitment not to use the merger as an opportunity to adversely change terms and conditions, including rota patterns such as the Times news subs' nine-day fortnight.

Despite claims to the contrary, it is not the industry norm for other media companies to share their daily and Sunday titles resources and staff. The Independent National Directors of Times Newspapers' letter published as part of the consultation makes this claim however The Express, Mirror, The Guardian and Observer and the Mail all have separate teams for their weekly and Sunday titles.

NUJ members are also concerned that the proposals will have implications in the Irish Republic. Both newspapers have Irish editions and the company should also approach the Irish regulatory authorities in addition to its request to the UK Secretary of State and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).