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Summer 2024



The first Irish Secretary, Jim Eadie, was celebrated at a reception recently for Life Members in Dublin. See story, page 3. Photo: Maxwell.

RTÉ: Time to move the dial

After a tumultuous period, NUJ members have broadly welcomed two expert reports on RTÉ while continuing to demand reform of the funding of public service broadcasting.

The expert advisory committee on Human Resources has been described as a roadmap for the future by Séamus Dooley, Irish secretary, who said the focus on resetting the role and function of HR was the most significant finding for workers in RTÉ.

The NUJ has repeatedly drawn attention to the setting aside of collective agreements and procedures and the sidelining of human resources as a key contributory factor in many of the scandals which have beset the organisation.

Séamus said: “Our members in RTÉ have been consistent in demanding transparency, in seeking fairness, equality and consistency as well as an end to the culture of entitlement within the higher echelons at Montrose.

“The HR report is a roadmap for the future, and we are especially pleased with the recognition of the fact that change must be collaborative and subject to negotiation. “

The independent review of contractor fees and HR was chaired by Brendan McGinty, former IBEC Director of Industrial Relations and Human Resources Services, working with former ICTU General Secretary Patricia King and Liam Kelly, former Director General of the WRC.

Séamus said: “In the coming weeks NUJ members will consider the implications of the reports for our members and, through the RTÉ Trade Union Group, will engage with management in discussions on the impact of all recommendations on individual employees and on our collective agreements.

“Terms and conditions of employment are subject to collective agreements and are covered by contracts. There will need to be detailed negotiations on the recommended introduction of new pay structures based on civil service schemes and on how these schemes can be adapted to suit a vastly different type of organisation.

“The shadow of bogus self-employment has long lingered over RTÉ and the HR review has provided a road map for how this should be urgently addressed,” he said.

Remembering journalists killed in Gaza, p2; Jim Eadie, ‘servant of the members’, pp4-5; Turning point for RTÉ, pp6-7; Shaping the use of AI, p8; Sinister PSNI surveillance, p9; Local journalism recognised, p10; NEC news, p19.

EDITOR'S NOTE: HELLO AGAIN

Greetings all, with our first issue in too long.

So much has happened since we last spoke – really, in these times, so much has happened since last month.

I'd like to offer my sincere gratitude to Brendan Carroll, who has moved on, for his years of excellent design and layout for The Irish Journalist. I'd also like to thank Gerard Cunningham, who has stepped up to lay out this issue.

I would again encourage you to send us professional news and developments from branches and chapels by contacting irishjournalist@nuj.ie, one of a number of NUJ publications. Keep in touch with union news via www.nuj.org.uk. Branches are also encouraged to share news by contacting Campaigns@nuj.org.uk.
Carolyn Farrar
Editor, The Irish Journalist

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY AND SADNESS

Members of the National Union of Journalists gathered on the steps of the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin's Parnell Square on 29 April to remember the journalists killed in the ongoing war in Gaza.

The gallery steps overlook the capital city's Garden of Remembrance and poignantly had previously been the venue for a vigil held to mark the killing of journalist Lyra McKee.

Union Vice Presidents Gerry Curran and Fran McNulty; Cearbhall Ó Síocháin, chair of the Irish Executive Council; Press Ombudsman Susan McKay; and Ian McGuinness, Irish organiser; were among those who read from the list of the 109 journalists featured on the IFJ list of slain journalists.

A minute's silence was observed following the reading of the list.

In welcoming the attendance, which included a group of visiting Czech journalists and trade unionist colleagues, Séamus Dooley, Irish secretary, renewed calls for a permanent ceasefire and said the NUJ remains gravely concerned at the Israeli government's treatment of journalists.



Cearbhall Ó Síocháin, IEC chair, reads from the list of the dead, flanked by NUJ members and officers including Ian McGuinness, Irish organiser; Emma O'Kelly, Dublin Broadcasting branch chair; and vice presidents Fran McNulty and Gerry Curran. Photo: Gerard Cunningham.

First Lyra McKee Memorial Lecture

Anton McCabe

As we remember Lyra McKee this year on the fifth anniversary of her death, we also remember a new lecture series that was established in her memory.

Belfast and District NUJ held its first Lyra McKee Memorial Lecture in Belfast's Crumlin Road Prison on November 1st. Opening the event, Branch Chair Anne Hailes said the union was proud to have had such colleagues as Lyra, Martin O'Hagan and Veronica Guerin.

Paying tribute to Lyra, Anne said: "She was named after a star and that was what she was. She was a shooting star, designed to shoot higher and higher."

Film-maker Alison Millar, director of the award-winning documentary 'Lyra', told the audience how she made the film.

"Every single person we approached - 'We'd like to use your voice in the film' - agreed, loved Lyra," said Alison. She remembered Lyra's commitment to stories about suicide, inter-generational trauma, and the LGBTQ+ community and said, "She was never going to let those stories go," Alison said.

Alison read Lyra's own words: "Ninety percent of investigative reporting is staying up late to make that last phone call. You will only work that hard on a story if it matters to you." She also showed several clips from the film. Dunja Mijatović, EU Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke by video link. She said that even places previously considered safe for journalists, such as Malta and Slovakia,

"The story of Lyra McKee will not end with a bullet. Her friends will make sure of that."

were no longer safe.

"This toxic atmosphere poisons society," she said.

Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley stressed the importance of not defining Veronica Guerin, Martin O'Hagan or Lyra by the circumstances of their deaths.

"None of them sought the crown of martyrdom, they did not give their lives for press freedom – their lives were stolen from them," Séamus said.

Lyra's sister Nichola McKee Corner said there is nowhere the family would not go in seeking justice for Lyra. "Events

like this keep Lyra in the hearts and minds of people," Nicola said. "We are just so glad that the union has taken this aboard, and the case of other journalists."

NUJ President Natasha Hirst brought greetings from the wider union. Fr Martin Magill, who celebrated Lyra's funeral service, remembered first meeting her. She was investigating the case of two young boys who disappeared in 1973. He hoped

discovering their fate would be a memorial to Lyra.

Towards the end of the evening, Nichola and Alison joined in together reciting one of Lyra's mantras: "Do not listen to bullshitters and naysayers. You go do it."

NEC member Kathryn Johnston spoke from the floor before the lecture closed. "The story of Lyra McKee will not end with a bullet," Kathryn said. "Her friends will make sure of that."

The originally scheduled main speaker, Ireland's Press Ombudsman Susan McKay, was unable to attend due to the death of her mother.

Life Members celebrated in Dublin

As part of Trade Union Week in Ireland, the Irish Executive Council hosted a lively reception for life members, where members with more than 40 years' continuous service received life membership certificates from Vice President Gerry Curran.

Among the recipients at the May 2nd reception were high-profile reporters, photographers and broadcasters, former NUJ president Barry McCall and current Assistant General Secretary Séamus Dooley.

In his remarks, Gerry Curran stressed the importance of recognising and celebrating those who have been consistent and loyal union members.

The theme of the night was "In Good Company", and in welcoming guests, Séamus Dooley paid tribute to the first Irish Secretary, Jim Eadie, at the first presentation evening since his death. A framed portrait of Jim was unveiled and will be presented to Mrs Bridie Eadie, who was unable to attend. (See *Jim Eadie: A personal appreciation*, p4)

Pictured [on the front page] are recipients and guests with the portrait of Jim, a copy of which will hang in the Irish office.



Áine Ni Churráin with Séamus Dooley, Irish secretary; and Gerry Curran, vice president.



Well-known LyricFM broadcaster and one of Ireland's foremost sports commentators George Hamilton pictured with fellow recipients Tommy Clancy, freelance photographer (right); and Cyril Byrne, retired Irish Times photographer. Photo: Maxwell.



Reception recipients and guests with the portrait of Jim Eadie. A copy of the portrait will hang in the Irish office. Standing, from left: Gerry Collison, Pdraig Yeates, Neil Ward, Patrick Kinsella, Eoin Murphy, Conor Keane, Tommy Clancy, Tim Ryan, John Horgan, Brendan Furlong, Evelyn Ring, Helen Taylor, George Hamilton, and Cyril Byrne; Seated, from left: Ian McGuinness, Evelyn Hannigan, Barry McCall, Séamus Dooley, Áine Ni Churráin and Gerry Curran. Photo: Maxwell.

JIM EADIE: A PERSONAL APPRECIATION

Barry McCall

It is difficult to imagine what the NUJ in Ireland would be like without the hard work and dedication of Jim Eadie. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that there might not be an NUJ in Ireland at all if not for him.

On his appointment as the union's first Irish Organiser in 1966 there were less than 800 NUJ members on the island of Ireland, with the great majority of them working for national newspapers in Dublin and Belfast. By the time of his retirement in 1994 the membership stood at almost 3,500.

Impressive though it is, that bare statistic does not even begin to describe the enormous effort that went into its achievement. Like a latter-day missionary, Jim spent years criss-crossing the island recruiting members, forming chapels, establishing new branches, and negotiating

groundbreaking house agreements which delivered transformative improvements in journalists' pay and working conditions. Some of those journeys are still remembered with fondness, especially Jim's near legendary three-day trips to the Raidió na Gaeltachta chapel in Galway. That may sound excessive or even mildly self-indulgent in this era of Zoom and high-

speed motorways. But back in the mid-1970s it could take most of a day to drive from Dublin to Casla, Co Galway, and another day to drive back. To make time for often marathon negotiating sessions with management demanded a three-day trip.

And the social aspect was definitely good for chapel morale! Jim was an organiser in the true sense of the word. He understood that it wasn't enough to form a chapel or branch and expect it to maintain itself through some spontaneous regenerative process. Over the years he attended countless branch and chapel meetings throughout the country giving much needed support, encouragement and advice to activists and officers.

That was difficult and often thankless work. Leaving Dublin in the evening after a full day's work to drive to a branch meeting in Cavan or Carlow or further away, Jim would often find himself returning home in the small hours of the morning and then have to face another full day's work on behalf of the members.

And that's what motivated Jim throughout his time with the union – the interests of the members. He never differentiated between the needs of a chapel of hundreds of members and those of an individual member facing difficulties with an employer. His passion for social justice and fairness meant both were equally important to him.

He was also blessed with deep reserves of emotional intelligence. He was remarkably good at sensing the mood of the employer side during negotiations and adapting his approach to suit. He knew instinctively when stridency or gentle persuasion was the better option. Jim didn't mind, as long as it delivered results for the members.

I still recall his shrewd judgement costing me the not inconsiderable price of a few glasses of Midleton Special Reserve whiskey when one last push secured further concessions from a seemingly unbudgeable employer! Jim had no interest in personal status or titles, he saw himself as the servant of the members. But titles could irritate him. For reasons too complex and arcane to go into here, Jim found himself with the title Assistant Secretary (Ireland) in the early 1980s. He didn't care about the words,

but he was annoyed at having to constantly explain the title's meaning to uncomprehending fellow trade union officials, employer representatives, and Labour Court officers. "Assistant to whom?" and "Who is the Secretary (Ireland)?" were just two of the more frequent queries he had to deal with. He told me the title he would have preferred was the more self-explanatory Irish Secretary. In what I still



Jim Eadie with his successors as Irish Secretary, Eoin Ronayne, left, and Séamus Dooley, at the launch of "Left Lives". The book featured a profile of Jim by Séamus Dooley.

consider to be my proudest moment in many years of NUJ activism, I negotiated a change to that title with the union's Acting General Secretary in 1992 and had the privilege of announcing it when I presented Jim with Membership of Honour at that year's Delegate Meeting in London.

That richly deserved accolade was acknowledgement for Jim's amazing work and achievements over more than three decades as a lay officer and full-time official. During that time, he saw off numerous challenges to the union's very existence in Ireland and ensured the NUJ emerged stronger on each occasion.

Ultimately, it always came back to the members for Jim. One anecdote sums that up. Jim was a committed democrat who followed the wishes of the members regardless of what his own opinion might be. This could lead to some frustration on the part of other unions which had a different approach.

On one occasion, the general secretary of a union (which no longer exists) said to Jim: "Your problem in the NUJ is that your members tell you what to do. We don't have that problem. We do things the other way around."

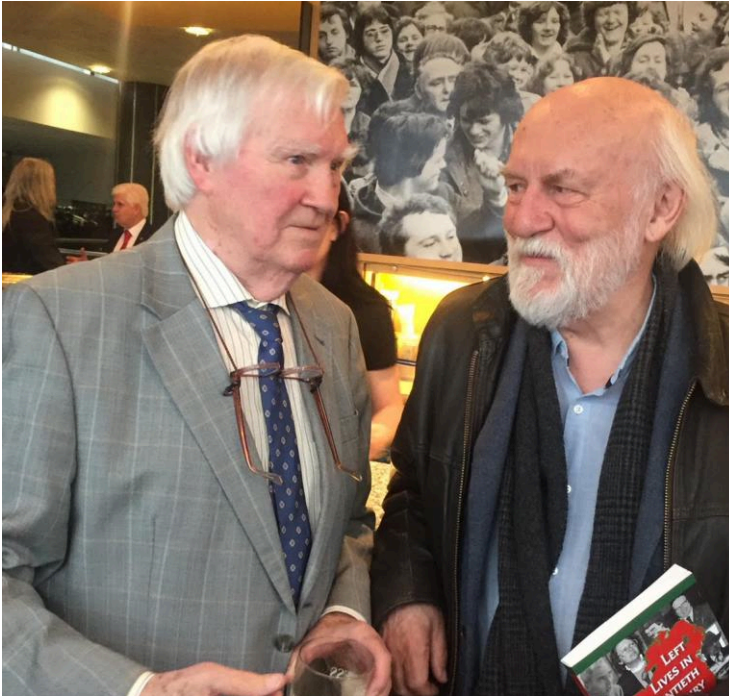
Jim's response said it all: "I don't see that as a problem. I think that makes us stronger."

For myself, I had the privilege of working with and learning from Jim over very many years and I will be forever grateful for his wise counsel and friendship.

Barry McCall is a former NUJ president.



The death last year of Ken Whelan, right, former FOC, Irish Press chapel, broke another link with one of the strongest chapels in the union over many years. Ken is pictured at a function in Liberty Hall to mark Jim Eadie's 90th birthday with Jim, recently deceased ex foC John Kelly, also an NUJ Member of Honour, left, Ronan Quinlan, FoC at time of the Press closure, and, behind, chapel member Pat Chatten. Photo: Kevin Cooper.



Jim Eadie with fellow NUJ Member of Honour, Professor John Horgan.



Jim Eadie



Members of Honor: Jim Eadie with Mary Maher, who died in 2021, pictured at Jim's 90th birthday, celebrated in Liberty Hall, Dublin, in 2019.



Jim and Bridie at the 90th birthday celebration hosted by the NUJ in Ireland.

Emma O'Kelly spells out staff anger

Emma O'Kelly, chair of Dublin Broadcasting branch, had a blunt message for TDs and senators when she addressed the Oireachtas media committee recently.

Commenting that the voice of staff has been missing from discourse on RTÉ in the committee chamber, she spelled out the anger and frustration of NUJ members at the behaviour of management and at the refusal of successive governments to adequately fund public service broadcasting.



Photo: © RollingNews.ie

Emma said: “It is not possible to address the issues before you in isolation from the climate under which RTÉ has been forced to operate under for a long number of years and continues to operate under.

“RTÉ has been starved of necessary funding for decades by successive governments.

“When we spoke out over the summer it was in direct response to the immediate crisis, but the real wellspring was the deep frustration and powerlessness we have felt for years because of severe underfunding.

“We struggled as best we could, striving to deliver quality output as budgets were slashed.

“The NUJ fought around issues such as gender equality, and against excessive salaries and perks at the top, calling in 2019 for a cap on salaries, the abolition of the €25,000 executive car allowance and a review of employment contracts and contracts for service.

“The licence fee model is no longer fit for purpose. Public service media in this country urgently needs to be supported

by a new sustainable and equitable funding model.

“The level of funding needs to be adequate. Most Government and opposition politicians have over the summer months and since then expressed their strong support for public service broadcasting but without adequate funding words are hollow.

“In relation to future for the organisation as outlined in the New Direction Strategic Vision document, staff are concerned the organisation is being in effect held to ransom.

“The deal seems to be that in return for some movement on funding RTE must cut its workforce by one fifth and outsource a significant proportion of the work currently done in house - by people in proper jobs - to the private sector.

“Four hundred jobs are to be suppressed: That’s 400 fewer full-time jobs in this wider creative sector for young people coming out of college.

“We are concerned that those jobs will be replaced by mostly precarious short-term contracts in the private sector, where workers move from short-term contract to short-term contract with no rights to things like pensions, or holiday pay, or maternity leave. This is an environment that especially damages women.

“We are fully supportive of a thriving, growing independent sector but we do not believe this should be achieved at the expense of jobs in RTÉ.

“None of the governance failings or disgraceful excesses at RTÉ exposed since the summer had anything to do with the size of RTÉ, or with its ordinary staff,” she said.

Spotlight on HR shortcomings

The review of Review of Contractor Fees, Human Resources and Other Matters undertaken by a three-person Expert Advisory Committee came about as a report of calls from RTÉ trade unions, led by the NUJ.

The review was carried out by an Expert Advisory Committee composed of Brendan McGinty, chair; Patricia King; and Liam Kelly.

Trade unions argued strongly that the sidelining of trade unions and indeed the normal IR process was a significant factor in many of the scandals which had beset RTÉ.

In recommending a resetting of industrial relations in RTÉ and the engagement of external expertise to assist in improving industrial relations, the group effectively accepted the TUG argument.

The key areas which the group said should be reviewed were:

- Employment relations structures, communications, and procedures;
- The roles of management and unions; MORE HERE
- Capability and development needs in the area of employment relations that deliver for RTÉ and its staff;
- Ways of working by management and the trade unions.

The EAC recommended that this be done in an agreed urgent time limit to ensure that such arrangements are effectively and expeditiously addressed.

They also recommend that “an engagement protocol” should be developed, agreed and observed to encourage positive and productive meetings and resolution-focused behaviours as part of all employment relations engagements.

See the full report: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/855cc-review-of-contractor-fees-hr-other-matters-independent-examination-of-rte/>

OPINION A turning point for RTÉ

Seamus Dooley

If 2023 was RTÉ's annus horribilis, summer 2024 has the potential to be a turning point for public service broadcasting, provided there is both the political will and the organisational appetite for profound change.

NUJ members have broadly welcomed the highly significant reports on the governance and culture of RTÉ and, more significantly, the HR Review.

Both expert groups have given valuable insights into the culture which led to the devastating revelations of the corporate governance failures at the heart of the scandals which so badly damaged trust and confidence in RTÉ.

We can be enormously proud of the way our members in RTÉ have continued to work, despite appalling circumstances. Public opprobrium for RTÉ arising from revelations of extravagance, greed, mismanagement, and inequality was directed at the organisation not the workers. As a union we were to the fore in drawing clear distinctions between RTÉ's corporate culture and the work of NUJ.

The response to the stand taken by Dublin broadcasting branch and the RTÉ sub branch reflected a public acknowledgement of the importance of public service broadcasting. With sister unions we have long been challenging the lack of transparency, the sense of entitlement and the upstairs downstairs culture perpetrated from Montrose's corporate HQ, a building often referred to by Gay Byrne as "the Hilton".

An NUJ member, Byrne frequently complained that those at the top felt the organisation would be grand if the lower orders would simply let them do their administrative job without the annoying habit of making programmes and coming forward with troublesome ideas.

Contempt for the lower orders takes many forms. When the government-appointed HR expert group, comprising Brendan McGinty, Patricia King and Liam Kelly, met the RTÉ Group of Unions our key message was that the very role and function of Human Resources was not subservient but had been sidelined over many years.

That's what enabled secret deals, special arrangements in breach of agreements, scandalous breaches of procedures for approving remuneration and exit packages and a range of unacceptable employment practices.

Against that backdrop I welcome the conclusion that the existing relationship between RTÉ and the trade unions and staff associations are "sub-optimal". The report stated:

"They are certainly not functioning at the level needed to meet the imminent strategic and operational challenges that lie ahead."

The suggestion of external assistance in improving relations is welcome but it will require a change in mindset across the organisations. Union reps must be respected, not just tolerated, and the insights of unions valued rather than dismissed as irrelevant or even meddling in the business of management.

Reading the corporate governance report, I was reminded of the contempt with which the then-Director General, supported by the former Managing Director, News and Current Affairs, treated TUG objections to the extravagant junket to Japan for the Rugby World Cup at a time when workers were being asked to make huge sacrifices. Resetting industrial and employee relations, as recommended by the HR Report, means genuine engagement with trade unions, treating workers with respect and full adherence to the terms of collective agreements.

The misuse of editorial prerogative to justify failure to consult must be consigned to the dustbin along with bogus self-employed contracts, flip flops and side deals.

The HR report provides a blueprint for the development of talent, the opportunity for career advance on screen and a transparent pay structure for those employed in on-air positions.

Bogus self-employment has dominated the headlines and political discourse. Trade unions have been to the fore in demanding legislative change and political action to end this systemic undermining of employment rights. The report's suggestion of a high-level process to deal with outstanding issues arising from investigations by the Department of Social Protection must be acted upon without delay.

Ultimately, reform of the funding of public service broadcasting is the key to addressing the long-term future of RTÉ and more broadly, public service broadcasting. The toxic cocktail of political cowardice and maladministration has threatened to sink RTÉ.

Our members and the Irish public deserve better. There is now an opportunity to ensure that this does not happen. See Expert Advisory Committee Review of Governance & Culture of RTÉ here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/Od7f4-expert-advisory-committee-biographies-independent-examination-of-rte/>

Seamus Dooley is Irish secretary and assistant general secretary.



Photo: © RollingNews.ie

RTÉ: Redundancy reform

The mismanagement of redundancy schemes and the inconsistent application of rules caused anger among RTÉ workers, not least those denied access to the scheme.

The expert group has recommended that all future exit/severance/early retirement programme should be formally approved by the RTÉ Board.

Progress reports on the implementation of programme should include regular reporting by the Executive Leadership team on the consistency of application of the

rules of the scheme to the Remuneration and Management Development Committee of the Board. Any future scheme will have a financial cap.

Where there is a proposed exit by an executive leadership team member on the basis of severance or redundancy or early retirement, which has the full support of the Director General, approval will have to be sought from the Remuneration and Management Development Committee of the RTÉ Board.

Artificial Intelligence already present in Irish journalism

The NUJ is encouraging its members – both employees and freelance – to inform the union about the use of AI in their workplaces and among their clients; and to get active on this issue so the union can work to shape how it is being used.

A number of media organisations in Ireland are already using AI to create output, with some companies having AI policies and some appearing to have none.

While AI can have positive implications in wider society, such as aiding accessibility for those with disabilities; there is a genuine fear among journalists that they are using and training the very technology which could replace them, make them redundant, take away their freelance work, and which might undermine the very structures of a diverse, robust and independent media.

NUJ Irish Organiser, Ian McGuinness said: “Some companies appear to be charging ahead with the use of AI, simply because it is available, and all media companies need to ask not if they can, but if or how they should use AI.

“The first thing that is needed is real and meaningful engagement with unions, to ensure AI policies are in place, which guarantee human oversight at every stage and respect copyright. We also need oversight committees, with strong NUJ representation, that meet regularly to assess what should and should not be done.

“Companies also need to look at setting up verification units, to spot deep fake photos and videos and to identify online articles that have been created by AI, otherwise media groups might use these as potential reliable sources of information and for research purposes. Training on this should be given to all journalists, including freelancers who they hire.”

Turning to the practical implications of AI use, Ian said: “We are already seeing problems with journalists being told by their employers that a certain number of AI-generated stories must be created each day. Companies are claiming that churning press releases through AI will actually free up

journalists to do more investigative and meaningful stories.

That’s not the case. AI-generated stories are so littered with errors that they need to be rewritten, taking up even more of journalists’ precious time.”

Ian added that sticking all press releases through AI didn’t

show great judgement of what is newsworthy and can lead to churning out of dross online, undermining the hard-won editorial integrity of media titles. Quantity over quality seems to be the watchword of some employers, who hope that quantity will bring them more online hits, he added.

He continued: “There is also disagreement about whether disclaimers should go on every article that has been created, or partly created, by AI; or whether a single general disclaimer on a web site – stating that some articles are created by AI - would suffice. The NUJ is in favour of the former, for obvious ethical reasons.”

Other problems rearing their heads

include AI changing quotes and using slang in articles, he said, adding that it is only a matter of time before a serious error or libel occurs.

“If any company thinks it is going to blame our members for the errors that AI created, after senior managers foisted this technology on them, it can think again. Journalists in every media sector have been hammered relentlessly for the past 15 years. They are understaffed, overworked, and largely untrained in the ramifications of this new technology, which is only increasing their workloads and stress levels,” Ian added.

The NUJ is also concerned that AI shouldn’t ever be used in certain types of journalism, like court reporting, Ian said.

He added that the NUJ has also heard of instances of AI eating itself, in the form of AI generated articles using information from other AI generated articles, treating the latter as if they were reliable sources.

The NUJ Irish Organiser said: “With elections due in the Republic of Ireland and the UK this year and next, all eyes will be on AI to see if deep fakes or spurious articles detrimentally impact the democratic process by undermining trust in the media, a central tenet of any healthy democracy.”

"Some companies appear to be charging ahead with the use of AI, simply because it is available, and all media companies need to ask not if they can, but if or how they should use AI."

– Ian McGuinness, Irish Organiser

SINISTER PSNI SURVEILLANCE SPARKS OUTRAGE

The union has welcomed the request by the chair and vice chair of the Northern Ireland Policing Board for an urgent meeting with the Chief Constable of the PSNI, following revelations around use of surveillance powers to spy on journalists.

The board said its chair, Mukesh Sharma, and vice-chair, Brendan Mullan, sought a meeting with PSNI Chief Constable Jon Boutcher after shocking revelations at the Investigatory Powers Tribunal hearing in London on May 8th

about the scale and nature of PSNI surveillance of journalists and lawyers in Northern Ireland led to the demand for an emergency policing board meeting.

In the aftermath of the revelations the NUJ's Policy Committee called for an emergency meeting of the policing board. The union is also committed to supporting members who may have been subject to surveillance.

Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, said: "We believe a full board meeting should be held and that the Chief Constable should publicly clarify what precisely the PSNI has been up to. There can be no further hiding behind procedures or secret investigatory hearings. It is encouraging that the officers of the board are taking the revelations seriously and it is right that they should seek a meeting, but this is a first step."

The names of the journalists were redacted in documents released during a hearing into action taken by NUJ members Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney. The Tribunal accepted an application by the BBC to be joined in the case following confirmation that NUJ member Vincent Kearney had also been under surveillance.

It has now emerged that police accessed phone bills of the unnamed journalists and cross-referenced them with police telephone numbers every six months. The purpose of the surveillance was to discover the reporters' sources. The documents released by Durham Constabulary show that the operation started in 2007/08, after the PSNI suspected officers were leaking information to journalists and was still in place at the end of 2017.

General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "We are seeking an emergency meeting with the Northern Ireland Policing Board so that we can convey the grave concern of our members at these outrageous infringements into the rights of journalists to work free from interference. The Chief Constable must be called before the board and the PSNI needs to come clean on the scale and nature of the surveillance that has been taking place.

"The NUJ will provide appropriate advice and representation to members who may have been subject to surveillance. We strongly believe that journalists and lawyers should not be subject to surveillance, and we share the widespread concern of lawyers, human rights activists and trade unions at these latest revelations. While members have access to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, we also feel strongly that our members should not have to go through a lengthy, costly and secretive process in order to vindicate their right to

exercise their professional rights." Seamus told the committee: "The full extent of the investigation, the chronology and the precise methods used by the PSNI require urgent clarification. "While we were aware of the surveillance against Detail editor Trevor Birney and Barry



(From left) Vincent Kearney, Una Murphy, Michael Fisher, Colin O'Carroll, Joe Mitchell, and Kevin Cooper at Belfast City Hall for last year's May Day celebrations. Photo: Kevin Cooper

McCaffrey we have been shocked at the new information. Last week the surveillance of NUJ member Vincent Kearney, formerly of the BBC and now Northern Editor, RTÉ, was confirmed and now we have confirmation of even more widespread sinister practices.

"Lawyers acting for the BBC have also written to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal about the alleged police surveillance of Vincent Kearney, following disclosures to the tribunal earlier this year," he said.

Ian McGuinness, Irish organiser, who attended the court hearing on behalf of the NUJ, said: "This is shocking and despicable behaviour by the PSNI. It is the type of behaviour we would expect in an authoritarian state and not a modern democracy. Journalists exist to hold power to account and that includes writing stories about the PSNI which that force may not like.

"Writing a story about the PSNI and protecting your confidential sources whilst doing so is not a crime. The NUJ is calling, yet again, for the PSNI to come clean.

"In particular, the force needs to state when it started spying on multiple journalists' phone data, who the journalists were, how many times each journalist was spied upon and must give a commitment that it will desist from doing this ever again."

Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey were arrested in 2018 in connection with their investigation of the 1994 Loughinisland massacre for their acclaimed documentary, No Stone Unturned. They filed a complaint with the IPT after a court in Belfast ruled the 2018 search warrants and arrests were "inappropriate".

Vincent Kearney's surveillance followed the groundbreaking Spotlight 2011 documentary, The Whistleblower and the Watchdog, which looked into allegations that the police ombudsman's independence had been compromised and that complaints of collusion lacked proper investigation.

Local radio work honoured at Mansion House

The important role of local radio in giving a voice to victims of child sex abuse was highlighted at a ceremony in Dublin's Mansion House recently, when Lord Mayor Daithí de Róiste presented veteran LMFM broadcaster Michael Reade with a special award.

The NUJ member was presented with the "Recognition of Excellence" award on behalf of CVSA.

CVSA is an international network of people who have experienced child sex abuse.

The nomination recognised Michael's outstanding coverage of the successful campaign to have Brother Edmund Garvey, Christian Brother congregation leader, removed from the roll of honour as a Freeman of Drogheda because of his role in developing a legal strategy which placed severe impediments in the way of victims of abuse seeking legal redress against the order.

The Lord Mayor also presented civic certificates of appreciation to Michael and to LMFM.



Lord Mayor Daithí de Róiste, Michael Reade, Séamus Dooley, Councillor Damian O'Farrell.

Photo: Tony Murray.

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary, thanked the network and the Lord Mayor for their recognition. He said speaking up for vulnerable people and giving them a voice on air required courage, often in the face of adversity. "Michael Reade has never been afraid to question the consensus and believed the airwaves should be open to everyone with a story to tell," said Seamus. "Giving a voice to the voiceless is a core function of radio at national and local level, and the role can be especially challenging when faced with opposition from powerful figures in the local establishment."

SIOBHAN HOLLIMAN NAMED TUAM HERALD EDITOR

Siobhán Holliman, former cathaoirleach of the Irish Executive Council, has been named editor of the Tuam Herald.

Siobhán had been deputy editor at the paper since 2013 and joined the paper in 2003 as a senior journalist.

An experienced journalist who has worked in regional newspapers and broadcasting for more than 25 years, Siobhán has also given many years of service to the NUJ. She has served as the NUJ nominee on the board of the Press Council of Ireland as well as serving as a regional newspaper representative and cathaoirleach of the Irish Executive Council.

In October of 2020, then-Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, appointed Siobhán to be a member of the Future of Media Commission in Ireland.

Siobhán is the first woman editor in the Tuam Herald's 187-year history.

SAM NOLAN

The NUJ has extended sympathy to former DCU professor Helena Sheehan on the death of veteran trade unionist Sam Nolan.

Sam was a former secretary of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) and one of the best-known trade unionists and left-wing activists over many decades.

In a statement, President Higgins said: "Sam Nolan was to the forefront of the most important struggles of his lifetime, be it highlighting the consequences of the unemployment of the 1950s, to winning the 40-hour week in the 1960s, and for trade-union recognition, the anti-apartheid campaign, and for human and democratic rights for women and men all across the world."

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary and a former member of the DCTU Executive, said: "Sam was tenacious, stubborn, and principled. His service to the labour movement was multi-faceted but it is his for his sheer dedication to the DCTU that he is best remembered by many trade unionists. His painstaking work as secretary was an example of his commitment to grassroots trade unionism."

REMEMBERING CHARLIE BIRD

Fran McNulty

“Charlie Bird was my friend. I know this because he told me so.” Those were the words of the Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces as he spoke at an event to celebrate the life of one of Ireland’s best known and best respected journalists. Lt General Sean Clancy’s comments spread a wave of laughter across the iconic Round Room of Dublin’s Mansion House.

The round room has a rich history. It was the room in which the inaugural Dáil met in 1919. And 105 years later it was the place where friends, family and journalists of many generations gathered to say goodbye to an icon of our world, and a proud NUJ member.

For several years I sat opposite Charlie Bird in the RTÉ newsroom. I was a twenty-something radio reporter, Charlie was the station’s Chief News Correspondent. A titan. He had

input. It said so much about him - he knew what he was doing. Sure, he was getting a hungry cub to help him, but it was a huge confidence booster., “Keep going,” he would often say. “Dig, dig, dig.”

His advice has been a guiding light for me, in particular with my investigative work. Charlie would often say not to be worried about being unpopular or losing friends. The story, the public, the right of people to know and expose wrongdoing drove him on, every day.

His trademark determination as a journalist shone when his motor neuron diagnosis hit. Together thousands of us climbed Croke Park in Mayo. It was one of the last times we met. Charlie tried to speak, but knew his words weren’t formed in the usual eloquent manner. We embraced, I told him we loved him, and thanked him for being him. That climb raised €3.6 million, more than three times the initial target of



Charlie Bird with Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary/AGS, at ICTU demonstration outside the Embassy, Dublin on 24th March 2022. In the background, with helmet, is Cearbhaill Ó Siocháin, current IEC cathaoirleach. Although in failing health, Charlie insisted in joining NUJ colleagues. Photo: NUJ Archive

a hotline to the IRA, to the most senior sources in Government, banking, you name it. Charlie had a way of opening doors, a friendly, sometimes cheeky demeanour, which meant he got away with things many of us wouldn’t. When the late Taoiseach Charlie Haughey died his remains lay in state for the public to file past. Myself and Charlie went in together, there was no-one else around. He recalled his run-ins with Haughey, one of the most divisive and controversial figures in recent Irish political history. Charlie had a ringside seat in the downfall of the disgraced politician, whose name became synonymous with corruption in Irish politics. His insights were fascinating. Years after Mr. Haughey died, a tribunal into his conduct, and the conduct of others, laid bare over 700 pages the extent of his wrongdoings. Myself and Charlie sat outdoors in the upper yard of Dublin Castle, and leafed through the weighty tome produced by Judge Michael Moriarty. Charlie, with decades of experience beyond mine, still involved me in the analysis, seeking guidance on dates, facts, asking for my

€1m.

In the front of my mind as I climbed with Charlie, and watched him struggle, was a voice message he left on my phone on 22nd May 2022. He was calling to be kind, and left a very effusive message in which he told me, “You are the best fucking correspondent in RTÉ”. Charlie did things like that, he praised and inspired, he said the kindest things. But in that message, he sounded different. He closed off by saying, “I’m not pissed, by the way.” For me, it was the first sign that something was very wrong. He may not have said it, but at that point Charlie knew he was in trouble. His last years were characteristically Charlie, inspiring, helping, loving. His close circle of friends were by his side, many of them long-standing members of the NUJ. Charlie is survived by his loving wife, Claire, his daughters Orla and Neasa, by his grandchildren, a wide circle of close friends and his beloved and beautiful dog, Tiger, who was always by his side.

Fran McNulty is joint NUJ vice president & an RTÉ Television presenter.

IRISH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 2023-25

Broadcasting (2 vacancies)



Cearbhall O Síochain
IEC Cathaoirleach

Freelance (3)



Carolyn Farrar
IEC Leas Chathaoirleach



Gerard Cunningham
IEC Treasurer

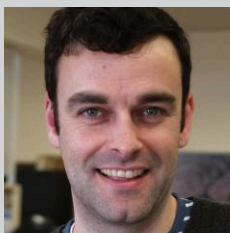


Meraj Abid Mahmood

NEC Republic of Ireland



Fran McNulty
(NEC job share
with Gerry Curran)



Dara Bradley
(job-share)



Damien Tiernan
(job-share)

Books & Magazine



Neil Ward
(Observer)

New Media



Phil MacGiollaBhain
(Observer)

National Newspapers (1 vacancy)



Kitty Holland



Éanna O Caollaí

NEC Northern Ireland



Anton McCabe
(job share with
Kathryn Johnston)

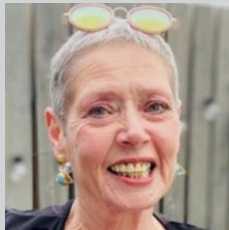
PR & Information



Gerry Curran
(NEC job share
with Fran McNulty)

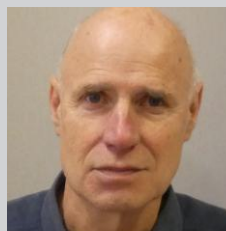
Black Members (1 vacancy)

Reserved Seat for Northern of Ireland



Kathryn Johnston
(NEC-NI job share
with Anton McCabe)

Retired Members



Robert Baxter
(Observer)

Regional Newspapers (1 vacancy)



Stephen Corrigan

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

Conference draws large numbers to consider subs

Gerry Curran

As we all know, the issue of a rise in costs has affected every area of life in the past two years: Union subscription levels have not been unaffected.

The actual costs of living do go up - and affect the union members as much as they affect the union as a whole, as an organisation which also pays costs relating to staffing, utilities, properties, and supplies.

Every time we have a conference the issue of the level of fees comes up. Nobody enthusiastically proposes an increase in fees - who would? But at the same time, the union has to pay its bills and fund staff to support our members in the workplace. The eventual outcomes can be a reduced set of increases, anytime it's discussed.

Sharing of Ideas

Recently, following a widespread flagging across the union, we hosted an afternoon online conference regarding the issues of fees. It was a great session and very encouraging to see so many people coming along with some interesting ideas being raised. One striking suggestion was that existing members should get a discount on their own subs if they recruit someone. More on that later.

The idea of the conference was that each branch will receive a report on its main points, to provide information which might help to inform motions in this area for our next delegate conference. I include some notes below on what was discussed at the group I chaired.

Legacy Grade Structure

There had been a heading for discussion that our legacy subscription grades should be scrapped; that we should be thinking about changing grade bandings to match inflation; that we need to gather data on members' salaries to inform grade changes; that we consider whether higher-paid members should pay more through additional higher grades. There was a general concern that if subs get too high we could end up with about £400,000 more per annum, but only if the 3,000 to 4,000 members who we know are on higher than £50k salaries don't decide to leave if their fees double. We could also have another 3,000 to 4,000 members who haven't told us of their higher than £40k salaries, and these fees would increase as they are moved out of grade 1 and 2. They could also decide to leave if their fees increased. Our group felt there are significant risks about asking higher-paid members to take on large increases.

Issues discussed included replenishing membership and retaining others with a flat rate across the board starting at €10 - rather than simply trying to retain and recruit at €20 - €30 per month.

Enforcing the 1% rule

It was felt that the rule that no-one should pay more than 1% of their income on union fees, can be used to reduce the fees of members who are on low incomes, and this was discussed in depth by other groups.

One suggestion we heard was that the Musicians Union in the UK has 31,000 members (2021). Their monthly subs are £21, and they make an offer of the first 6 months for £1. Our group asked that we ask them about the effect of this on their membership.

It was pointed out that in terms of how the freelance rate is worked out, that earnings in past year aren't always a useful

guide for year ahead.

One suggestion was that the minimum rate be potentially linked to the national minimum wage so that the minimum monthly rate is one hour's earnings at that level. As that rate rises, so would our minimum rate.

On the maximum rate, there was a consensus that there will need to be a limit, but more feedback is needed around where that might be set. For example, £365 per year (£1 per day) is close to existing grade 3 rate, or the rate might be set to match the threshold for starting to pay higher tax rate.

Do we need to consider that higher salaries in some cities like Dublin, London or Edinburgh come with higher living costs?

Our group felt that the bottom line is that we need to have more information about what people are earning and can afford to pay, or we're flying a bit blind.

Recruitment initiatives using fees

We could encourage many more people to join the union by offering a basic cut-price initial membership fee and begin the process of keeping them in for life. So their membership becomes what the union needs it to be, an income stream, and we have a person who is well-represented.

It was also suggested that we could help recruitment by offering a subscription discount to members who recruit new members. That would provide an engine for every member to be on the lookout at their place of work for colleagues who would benefit from being in the union. After three months or so, both parties have a "subscription holiday" or reduced subs for a month or two or three. Phone companies and online banking Apps already use this model to great effect.

To address concerns about recruiting those just breaking into journalism, it was suggested that we emphasise the two things we offer to members: the consumer benefit element of our services and benefits, and the importance of the union's clout - the NUJ delivers through its size and presence in the workplace.

There was a general agreement that we need to reform the 50% membership earnings from journalism barrier. Many felt it might have been relevant a century or more ago when the profession of journalism was more strictly defined and its structures more easily identifiable, but it has been woefully unhelpful to recruitment now, and in recent years.

One view was, "Journalism's means of output has become increasingly fractured with the development of social media, and some of the output on social media is clearly journalistic even if not commercially so. The union has to find a way to encompass the people engaged in this output and to recognise their work, however occasional, as journalistic when it is so,"

Other ideas discussed

- Need to do more to promote the benefits of membership for both recruitment and retention.
- Quicker processing of membership applications is needed.
- Provide an improved information pack for new members when they join.
- Is our offering clear enough on the NUJ website for people who don't know the union well?

In summary, the group felt we need to capture the dynamic and rapidly changing context in which the NUJ operates, and move to recruit new members to remain sustainable as a representative body, respected by publishers.

West of Ireland celebrates Members of Honour

West of Ireland celebrates Members of Honour
Eight members of the NUJ in the West of Ireland were honoured for their lifelong membership of the union at a ceremony in Galway City last September.

At an event hosted by the NUJ West of Ireland Branch, members from Galway and Mayo came together in Galway City to honour colleagues who have remained committed to the union for 40 years or more.



Ian McGuinness, NUJ Irish organiser; Stephen Corrigan, NUJ West of Ireland branch secretary; and Siobhán Holliman, branch cathaoirleach, with award recipients (back row) John McIntyre, Frank Dolan, (front row) Máirtín Davy Ó Coisdealbha, Bernie Ní Fhlatharta, Francis Farragher and Tom Gilmore at the NUJ West of Ireland Branch awards night in Galway. Photo: Brian Harding.

And in a congratulatory message to recipients, President Michael D. Higgins paid tribute to their dedication to local journalism “as guardians of our democracy at its grassroots”. Among those honoured with Life Membership certificates were four current and former staff members at the Connacht Tribune – journalists Bernie Ní Fhlatharta, Francis Farragher, John McIntyre, and photographer Joe O’Shaughnessy; and Tom Gilmore, known for his work in The Tuam Herald and on Galway Bay FM; Tuam Herald photographer Ray Ryan; Máirtín Davy Ó Coisdealbha from Raidió na Gaeltachta; and Westport-based photographer Frank Dolan.

Bernie Ní Fhlatharta, who was a journalist with the Connacht Tribune for 34 years one of the early stars of Irish-language television on TnaG (later TG4), was presented with an NUJ Gold Badge for extraordinary services to the union.

Paying tribute to Bernie, West of Ireland Branch Secretary Stephen Corrigan said she was, for many years, the face of the NUJ in the West of Ireland, serving on various occasions as MOC, branch chairperson and as a member of the Irish and National Executive Councils. “Nobody deserves recognition more for their life-long commitment to the NUJ than Bernie Ní Fhlatharta. She has sacrificed countless hours

for her union and her colleagues over the years, and so it’s only right that we celebrate her tonight with the Gold Badge Award for her exceptional contribution to the NUJ,” Stephen said.

NUJ Irish Organiser, Ian McGuinness, said the award recipients were a credit to the union and through their long dedication to the NUJ, they had enabled the union to fight for members across the country.

“Paying your subs for forty years is an act of solidarity,” he said. Branch Cathaoirleach Siobhán Holliman said it was a privilege for the West of Ireland branch to celebrate its Members of Honour and praised their ongoing dedication to the NUJ. President Higgins extended his heartfelt congratulations to the NUJ West of Ireland branch members receiving awards. In a message read out on his behalf at the ceremony, he described Life Membership of the NUJ as an “acclaimed accolade” recognising members’ dedicated service and commitment to local journalism.

“In particular, may I

commend Bernie Ní Fhlatharta on receiving the National Union of Journalists’ Gold Badge. Bernie’s years of extraordinary service to the union, and exceptional work for the Connacht Tribune have made a profound impact on the Irish Journalism landscape,” President Higgins said.

“May I also extend my congratulations to Joe O’Shaughnessy, Francis Farragher, John McIntyre, Ray Ryan, Tom Gilmore, Frank Dolan and Máirtín Davy Ó Coisdealbha. “Your decades of hard work and commitment in Galway, Mayo and beyond have played a vital role in shaping the provincial journalism scene,” he continued.



Ian McGuinness, NUJ Irish organiser, joins Stephen Corrigan, Judy Murphy, Dara Bradley and their former Connacht Tribune colleague, Gold Badge and Life Membership recipient Bernie Ní Fhlatharta, at the NUJ West of Ireland Branch awards night. Photo: Brian Harding..

IEC establishes recruitment sub-committee

A new sub-committee has been established by the Irish Executive Council (IEC), focusing on recruitment.

The sub-committee meets once a month to look at the latest trends in those joining and leaving the union on the island of Ireland, as it considers what can be done to recruit and retain members.

Members are IEC Cathaoirleach, Cearbhall Ó Síocháin; NEC member Republic of Ireland, Dara Bradley; IEC Northern Ireland representative, Kathryn Johnston; Stephen Corrigan, IEC representative for the regional newspaper sector, and Ian McGuinness, Irish Organiser.

The committee is investigating areas of potential recruit-

ment opportunities, both at workplace and sectoral levels, and will also be looking at how the union recruits and retains freelance members. Practical work by the committee's members is then undertaken each month, after the body has decided what areas to concentrate on.

The group plans to hold a student seminar this autumn, in line with a motion passed at last year's Biennial Delegate Conference (BDC) instructing the IEC to hold a student seminar in the years in which the BDC is not held.

Branch recruitment officers or chapel reps can ask for assistance or advice, or make suggestions by emailing the Irish Organiser via info@nuj.ie.

Reach recognises union in Republic of Ireland

The owners of the Irish Daily Star and Irish Daily Mirror have signed a recognition agreement with the NUJ that covers union members working for the company in the 26 counties. The agreement was signed in late January with the media company, Reach PLC.

As a result, the NUJ is now involved in negotiations and consultations centrally and at local chapel level on collective matters, on behalf of editorial employees.

The other titles covered by the agreement include the Irish Sunday Mirror/mirror.ie; Dublin Live; Galway Beo; Cork Beo; Buzz; and RSVP magazine.

On the issue of pay, hours of work, and holidays and leave, the NUJ Irish Office (via Ian McGuinness, Irish Organiser) collectively takes part in negotiations that are conducted centrally by our colleagues in Britain, where the majority of Reach publications and journalists are located.

The agreement also commits the employer to meaningfully engage with the NUJ on substantive issues (outside of the three areas mentioned above), which affect our members in the Republic. The Irish Organiser and local NUJ reps are involved in separate strands of local consultations, which will

happen every two months.

The disputes procedure in the agreement applies to these local consultations, as well as to any Ireland-specific issues that arise during the central negotiations that are deemed to fall outside the remit of centrally held discussions.

The first step in the disputes procedure involves an internal process. However, if the issue is not resolved either side can refer the matter to the WRC conciliation service and ultimately on to the Labour Court for a recommendation.

While that process is ongoing the employer won't implement any changes that are the subject of the dispute and/or the union won't engage in industrial activity on the matter.

Ian McGuinness said: "This recognition agreement is a welcome development, which should improve the communications between our reps and management, and facilitate the union in more effectively negotiating and advocating on behalf of our members in the Republic.

"While there is no recognition agreement covering Reach titles north of the border, the NUJ will continue to advise and represent our members there, while pushing for a similar recognition agreement for our northern colleagues."

NUJ battles against Mediahuis redundancies

Journalists in Mediahuis, north and south of the border, have been hit with another set of voluntary and compulsory redundancies.

The company notified the union that it was seeking to make up to 30 posts voluntarily redundant earlier this year and entered into a 30-day collective consultation with the NUJ. Mediahuis owns a range of titles, including the Irish Independent, Sunday Independent, Belfast Telegraph, Sunday World, Sunday Life, Ireland's Own, and 11 local newspapers in the Republic of Ireland.

The company only offered two weeks per year of service, in addition to statutory redundancy entitlements, and refused to increase this offer, despite NUJ requests that it do so.

The union wanted the company to raise this ex-gratia element of the offer, in order to attract sufficient volunteers for redundancy and avoid compulsories.

The company also invited employees to apply for job shares or reduced hours. A total of 10 whole time equivalent posts were eradicated via voluntary redundancy and reduced hours.

The company then moved to placing dozens of journalists at risk of compulsory redundancy, with up to eight posts to be

made compulsorily redundant.

While the company refused to go to the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Relations Agency for conciliation on this issue, it continued to meet with the NUJ collectively while the union's Irish Organiser, Ian McGuinness, represented members in individual redundancy consultation meetings.

Redundancy matrices were used to decide which members of staff would be chosen for compulsory redundancy.

The union successfully pressed for closing dates for vacant posts in Mediahuis to be pushed back so that those chosen for compulsory redundancy might apply for them as suitable alternative employment. This was another attempt to avoid compulsory redundancies.

The redundancy process has now been completed with the vast majority of those leaving taking voluntary redundancy.

The entire redundancy process put a temporary halt to a new house agreement, which has been in the process of negotiating since the middle of last year.

The Irish Organiser thanked the reps in Mediahuis for attending so many meetings and assisting the NUJ Irish Office since January.

Leadership in the Newsroom

NUJ members from the West of Ireland branch and farther afield took part in the union's Leadership in the Newsroom training programme last month.

The training session took place in person, providing members with useful tips on management, both in a personal and collective capacity.

The well-attended one-day course drew members from Galway, Clare and Dublin, and was hosted by the West of Ireland branch, which has long called for additional professional training to be provided for members in Ireland.

The Galway session was one of three Leadership in the Newsroom workshops the NUJ held recently, with sessions also held in Dublin and Belfast.

Developed with the support of the Google News Initiative, the course was delivered in Galway by BBC journalist and NUJ member Tory Blair. The training included an examination of management techniques, while calling on attendees to examine their own successes and failures in leadership.

Organised with the support of the NUJ's Laura Fagan and West of Ireland branch Cathaoirleach, Siobhán Holliman, the course also provided a useful opportunity for members from across the region to meet up in Galway. Siobhán said the West of Ireland branch was delighted to help with the delivery of the training day and members looked forward to any additional training that may become available in the future.

"The West of Ireland branch was delighted to be able to help with some of the logistics of the seminar and that many of the attendees were our members," she said. The course was held in the Galway Chamber.

"The Branch has continuously campaigned for in-person



Siobhán Holliman, cathaoirleach of the NUJ West of Ireland branch.

training events to be held in Ireland and it was particularly welcome that Galway was chosen as the location for this event. We look forward to welcoming further worthwhile training courses in the future," Siobhán said.

Curran, McNulty, elected NUJ joint vice presidents

Gerry Curran, former IEC Cathaoirleach, and Fran McNulty, IEC and NEC member, were elected joint vice presidents of the NUJ at last year's DM. Natasha Hirst, a freelance photographer based in Cardiff and chair of the Equality Council, the Photographers' Council and development councils, was elected NUJ president.



NUJ joint vice president Gerry Curran

Former president John Barsby, a former BBC journalist, was re-elected unopposed as NUJ honorary treasurer. Gerry has served as an advisor and media liaison for the Courts Service and to five Chief Justices. In the past 25 years, he has served in a variety of capacities on local, branch, Irish and NUJ-wide

committees.

Gerry said: "I will try to use my time as a vice president of our great union to further the collective goal of bettering people's working lives in many ways. I feel energised at the possibilities of change, in the world, in my work, and in our union.

"This is where I think the 'in it together' approach of the NUJ can best use my talents and efforts, to harness various sources of energy in the union towards our common goals," he said.

Fran, a presenter for RTÉ's Prime Time, has reported for RTÉ from around the world and also presented, on radio, Morning Ireland, the News at One and This Week.

As well as serving on the IEC and NEC, Fran has served as chair of the RTÉ branch and sits on the Industrial Relations Tribunal at RTÉ.

"As vice president, I aim to build on the work of the union in promoting the importance of press freedom, especially in a rapidly changing media landscape," Fran said.



NUJ joint vice president Fran McNulty

FREELANCE FORUM : JOURNALISM IN TROUBLED TIMES

Gerard Cunningham

If there was a theme to the Spring 2024 Freelance Forum held recently in the Ireland Institute's Pearse Centre, then it was this: staying safe.

From IFJ deputy secretary Tim Dawson's keynote on the dangers faced by journalists reporting from regions as far apart as Ukraine and Gaza, to barrister Fergal Crehan on online safety and personal privacy safeguards, to members of the Garda national crime prevention unit, the topic of safety was front and centre.

Three serving garda officers, along with civilian head of communications Andrew McLindon, spoke about the newly formed Media Engagement Group, an initiative of the NUJ, news publishers, and An Garda Síochána to streamline responses to threats to journalists.

Another session covered newsletters, and how they can be used both to distribute news reporting as social media networks continue to fragment and downplay news coverage, and as a way for freelancers to promote their own work both to readers and editors. Marketing consultant Drew Shiel and Dublin Inquirer co-founder Sam Trantum joined freelancer Stephanie Costello in a lively discussion on the uses of oft-neglected email tools to drive subscriptions and audience engagement.

The perennial event at every Freelance Forum is the editors' panel. This time, Charlie Taylor (Business Post, Connected magazine) and Jo Linehan (Sunday Times Ireland, Climate magazine) laid out their advice and requirements, and took questions from the floor, in an opening session chaired by Kathryn Johnson.

The final panel of the day saw speakers from LGBT Ireland (Paula Fagan), Independent Living Movement (James Casey) and UNHCR (Aoife Kavanagh) join Priyanka Borpujari in a wide-ranging discussion on diversity, equality and inclusion, both in how representative Irish newsrooms are, and how they perform in their reportage of those issues and include diverse viewpoints.

As one of the organisers of the Freelance Forum, I tend to experience it in short bursts. On the day, I rarely have time to sit still for more than five minutes, as once any session

begins, my focus is usually on the next item on the agenda, meeting speakers as they arrive, dealing with caterers and venue hosts, and questions from those attending. (And if I spoke with you on the day, and you haven't heard back from me since, drop me a line).

Because I often missed the sessions on the day, I adopted the habit several years ago of leaving an audio recorder running, and later began publishing some of those tapes online.

When the Spring 2020 Forum was cancelled at the last minute due to Covid lockdowns, we formalised that process. People due to appear were contacted and agreed to take part in a virtual forum, and those webinars were recorded for podcasts. At the same time, I reorganised the archive of earlier recordings, and eventually, began recording original interviews.

All this means that I experience the liveliness of the forum after the event, listening back to each session in turn as I convert the raw recording into a form more suitable for podcast. I am always struck during those editing sessions by the acuity of the speakers and liveliness the audience contributions. (I should add that sometimes sessions are not podcast, given that some topics may be sensitive and not suitable for broadcast).

With the support of Coimisiún an Meán (formerly the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland), the Forum now also includes an original podcast series, with new episodes dropping monthly. This allows more flexibility in covering new developments and provides more useful information for freelancers between live events.

If you missed the most recent Freelance Forum, you can listen back on Soundcloud or podcatcher app of your choice, although some sessions (the Garda presentation in this case) are not available online.

The next Freelance Forum will take place in October, but so far only the date and venue have been decided. Is there a topic you'd like to learn more about? Or a speaker you would like to hear at Freelance Forum? Do you want to contribute your own expertise to a panel or podcast? Get in touch with me: tribunalreporter@gmail.com



Top (L to R): Tim Dawson, Fergal Crehan, Andrew McLindon. Bottom (L to R): Sam Trantum, Stephanie Costello, Drew Shiel.

Images courtesy of Gerard Cunningham, Tim Dawson and Brian Pelan.

Tim Dawson writes about Freelance Forum:

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/articles-blogs/article/ifjblog-dont-let-your-blower-make-you-a-sucker>

Séamus Dooley highlights importance of local press at awards ceremony

The vital role of regional media in the life of local communities was emphasised by Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley, as he accepted the Offaly Person of the Year Award recently.

Séamus is the first union trade official to be honoured in the 36-year history of the award, whose previous winners include former Taoiseach, Brian Cowen and international golfer Shane Lowry.

Séamus's father, the late Eddie Joe Dooley, received the award in 1990.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Séamus said he regarded the honour as recognition of the way the local press can strengthen and affirm communities.

Séamus said: "Journalism is worth defending. In a world of misinformation and conspiracy theories, we need to promote public-interest journalism. You can help by paying your TV license and by buying a newspaper. Here in the Midlands, you have some really dedicated local journalists. Please support them." His appeal was greeted by sustained applause.

Recalling his career in journalism and the NUJ, Séamus said:



NUJ Vice President Fran McNulty with Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley, at the presentation of the Offaly Person of the Year award in Tullamore on April 13th.

"I have been lucky enough to take the road less travelled and have had many adventures along the way with the most wonderful travel companions." He said his role in the NUJ

had allowed him to work for change and to defend press freedom. He also paid tribute to his former Tribune colleagues and NUJ members in the Midlands.

Séamus said: "Whether it's standing up for equality in Oman – where I could have been jailed for speaking up for human rights; campaigning for marriage equality; representing workers on dodgy contracts; defending journalism in the Ukraine and Gaza; or seeking to protect the values of public-service journalism in the face of greed, incompetence and arrogance in Donnybrook; my approach has always been rooted in the belief that we are all called to be, in Seamus Heaney's phrase, 'ambassadors of conscience'."

NUJ Joint Vice President Fran McNulty was among the large number of union members present at the event in Tullamore and Ger Scully, editor of the Tullamore Tribune, served as compere for the evening.

The winner of the Offaly Person of the Year award, hosted by the Offaly Association Dublin, is chosen by a selection panel from a list of nominations made by readers of the local press in Offaly. Séamus is from Ferbane, a rural village in Offaly, and began his career in the Tullamore Tribune.

New report identifies challenges for local media in Ireland

A new report found limited evidence of "news deserts" in Ireland, identifying a number of challenges for local media, including declining salaries for journalists, a decrease in news coverage and a high cost of accommodation and living.

Renate Schroeder, European Federation of Journalists, said: "Independent local media is the backbone of professional and independent journalism. This study, the first of its kind in Europe, detailing the state of news deserts, shows that we can no longer ignore this alarming situation facing local media and democracy at large. No country is immune from 'news desertification' unless urgent and innovative actions are taken to support local journalists and media."

The study, "Uncovering news deserts in Europe: Risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU", by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF), is part of the Local Media for Democracy project, run in collaboration with the European Federation of Journalists, Journalism fund Europe and International Media Support. The report found limited evidence of news deserts in Ireland, with the most immediate risk in rapidly growing Dublin suburbs. "These suburbs lack a media presence commensurate with their size. Many were served by 'free newspapers' that often prioritised entertainment and local

events rather than news. In the suburbs of north County Dublin, these and related outlets have closed, which make the area a news desert," the report said.

The study found a deep connection between local media in Ireland and the communities they serve: Local media were among the top five most trusted news outlets, with 70 per cent of respondents trusting local radio and 69 per cent trusting local newspapers.

At the same time, the report cited a 2022 survey that showed 60 per cent of people under the age of 35 cannot afford to live in the community they would like to live in, saying this has major implications for local journalism.

The report also raised concerns about media ownership concentration, noting that according to the Irish Media Ownership database, 26 of 61 local print and online titles represented by the Press Council are owned by just two companies: UK-based Iconic Newspapers and Dutch-based Mediahuis. The report also found relatively few independently owned radio stations, noting that of 31 stations listed in the database Wireless Ireland owns six stations, Bauer Media five, and the Radio Kerry Group three.

https://cmpf.eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CMPF_Uncovering-news-deserts-in-Europe_LM4D-final-report.pdf

Reps reflect Irish concerns and issues at the NEC

As members know, the union looks after the issues affecting Irish journalists through its officials in Dublin and through its Irish Executive Council. Further to this we elect three members to the National Executive Council every two years to address issues affecting the union across Ireland, the nations of the UK, and in our branches based in some areas of continental Europe.

Your current NEC reps are Dara Bradley and Damien Tierney, who job share as one of the Republic of Ireland reps on the NEC and who are also on the union's Finance Committee; Gerry Curran and Fran McNulty, who make up the other Republic of Ireland representation, as well as being joint vice presidents of the union, and chairing the Development Committee; and Anton McCabe and Kathryn Johnston, who job share as the Northern Ireland rep on the NEC and sit on the Policy Committee.

The Irish voice at all NEC meetings is well made and well heard, with detailed reports from Séamus Dooley and Ian McGuinness as our officials, and backed up with inputs from the elected reps. These efforts inform the general union about what is happening in Ireland and the work of the IEC and local branches. It is fair to say there is a general appreciation of the work of the union in Ireland amongst our wider international membership.

In the first year or so of this NEC, your Irish reps have spoken often and with great success in honing the union's efforts to extend training provided by the union to areas and venues in Ireland.

Some of these are happening at the moment and concentrate on developing leadership in newsrooms. In other areas, online training is available to Irish members, although organised in the UK.

On page 13 of this issue of *The Irish Journalist*, I have reported on the recent Finance Committee consultation on subscription costs. The NEC reps from Ireland have been to the forefront in keeping this a live issue on the NEC.

Likewise, the question of how we organise conferences in the future forms part of another review of involving members constructively, through meaningful delegate meetings. Vice Chair Gerry Curran is spearheading this review, which will include discussions on another organisational restructuring of the Industrial Councils model used by the union. Gerry hopes to bring an NEC-sanctioned set of proposals on these issues to the next Delegate Conference in Spring 2025, following planned widespread engagement with members across the various regions of the UK and Ireland.

Following the last Delegate Meeting in 2023, the incoming executive had been tasked with changing and consulting on the three aforementioned areas. That some of us are leading some of the consultation processes ensures the non-centralisation of views.

In areas such as workers safety, this union has always taken a strong stance in trying to ensure journalists can go about their work in safety, and that they are not singled out and targeted for punishment or attack by regimes across the world. Through the International Federation of Journalists (IFC) and its safety fund, we have always worked to contribute ideas, support and money to help journalists caught in conflicts. It has never been more important than now, when throughout the Israel / Palestine conflict journalists have paid a high price for doing their jobs.

The voice of our union in condemning the targeting of journalists in the Israel/ Palestine conflict has been loud, fair, and constant. It is, of course, difficult to avoid being accused of being partisan if we condemn one side for targeting journalists, but it is essential we did and do so when it becomes clear that reporters and camera people are being singled out for attack.

The work of the NEC can seem remote because it is based in London, and it represents the efforts of the union across several nations and regions. But your reps from Ireland are ensuring a regional, local and Irish voice is heard in this busy mix of industrial relations workloads (which are beyond belief at times), in ongoing efforts at reforming how the union is financed and organised, and in the ever-increasing demands on the union to support journalists on international assignment.

Bringing our Irish perspective to all of this is important, but so is bringing it all back home. Your reps on the NEC also attend or are elected reps on the Irish Executive Council of the union, and all are assiduous attendees and contributors to IEC meetings, and active in their branches. That some of us do so in a job-share capacity is vital and fruitful as it allows more people have a voice and input, and it allows those who have busy work-lives to pace their involvement in the union, as they share responsibility in their voluntary posts.

In coming issues of *The Irish Journalist*, each rep on the NEC will write to update you on all of the reps work. We are always available to hear any concerns you might have for us to raise.

Gerry Curran is joint vice president of the NEC.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to author and former head of journalism in Rathmines School of Journalism, David Rice, on the publication of his latest book, "The Sundered Children," which addresses the crucial need for integrated education in Northern Ireland.

David wrote the foreword and afterword and edited the volume, which includes 30 chapters by such well-known contributors as President Michael D Higgins, Diarmaid Ferriter and Linda Ervine.

The book was launched on May 18th at The Lakeside Hotel, Killaoe, Co Limerick.

BEST WISHES

Best wishes to former Irish Times FoC Paul Cullen, who is taking early retirement from the company. Paul has stepped down having served as health editor and, previously, education correspondent.

Bryan Dobson's retirement is opportunity to thank him for his long-time support for the NUJ. His nomination for life membership will come before the next meeting of the NEC 's finance committee for approval.

Recently RTÉ Northwest correspondent Eileen Magnier was granted life membership. She has retired from that post after decades of dedicated service.