



NUJ submission to the Cairncross review

September 2018

Introduction

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. The NUJ is not affiliated to any political party and has a cross-party parliamentary group.

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

The union fights to defend the right of journalists to operate in the public interest, and to do so without interference from government or vested interests of any type. The union is also committed to the principles of media plurality and the public's right to know.

The NUJ welcomed the government's appointment of Dame Frances Cairncross as chair of the review and we have emphasised the importance of ensuring journalists' voices are heard loud and clear as part of this inquiry.

The union believes that the best definition of what constitutes 'high quality journalism' is work that complies with the NUJ's long-established ethical code of conduct.

Local news matters - tackling the crisis

A core NUJ campaign over several years has been Local News Matters - highlighting the vital role that quality local journalism plays in our communities, holding power to account and campaigning on issues that matter to local people. Throughout this campaign, the NUJ called for a short sharp public inquiry into the future of news provision to tackle the crisis that has been playing out in the industry during the last decade.

In March 2017 the union launched a week of action in which NUJ members organised events and activities to demonstrate how Local News Matters. The intention was to celebrate quality local journalism as well as demand fair pay and fair play for local and regional journalists.

The union published a pledge for people to sign, which stated:

“Quality journalism is at the heart of a healthy democracy. It helps to keep people informed, combat fake news, hold those in power to account and promotes community engagement. Yet the local media industry is in crisis today. More than 300 local newspapers have been closed in the past decade and more than half of all parliamentary constituencies do not have a dedicated daily local newspaper. Most local newspapers are owned by big business. Four companies - Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press, Newsquest and Tindle Newspapers - own nearly three-quarters of all local newspapers. This market domination has allowed these companies to generate profits and offer executives bumper pay packets while cutting journalists’ jobs and freezing wages. The BBC has also been slashing budgets, axing jobs and drawing up plans to shut local BBC offices while at the same time using £8million per year of licence-fee payers’ money to prop up private media companies. This situation can’t carry on. Local communities deserve better. We need investment in quality local journalism and sustainable business models. We must reclaim a vital, vigorous local media that is owned and operated in the public interest and located in the communities it serves.”

Press Gazette suggests that there has been a net loss of at least 228 local newspapers in the UK since 2005 and the union estimates thousands of editorial roles have been lost.

As part of the Local News Matters week of action, the NUJ worked with academics from King’s College London, and produced a report showing the general trends of newspaper closures, mergers and the hollowing-out of the titles that remain.

The report entitled *Mapping changes in local news 2015-2017: more bad news for democracy?* highlighted a net loss of nine UK regional newspapers between November 2015 and March 2017, with 22 titles closing and 13 launching. The report also showed the number of UK local authority districts with no daily local newspaper coverage rose to 273 (of 406 in total) and five UK local authority districts were reduced to single-publisher monopolies, increasing the number of local monopolies to 170 out of 380 in England, Wales and Scotland.

There were 30 instances of job cuts announced involving the loss of 418 jobs. Newsquest, with 12 announcements affecting 139 jobs, led the way, followed by Trinity Mirror (at least 102 jobs) and Johnston Press (100 jobs). In addition to the job cuts, there had been a series of reorganisations affecting a further 83 jobs, and six newspaper offices were closed, with journalists often being moved away from the communities they serve.

The report also showed that the BBC deal for 150 new local democracy reporters (LDR) failed to offset the loss of more than 400 journalists from the largest publishers during the same period. Furthermore, the £8million earmarked to be spent annually on the LDR

scheme (and taken out of the publicly-funded BBC licence) represents only a fraction of the combined operating profits of the largest local publishers.

Since then, and since the Cairncross review was announced on 28 June 2018, the crisis in the local media industry has continued unabated.

Impact on journalists and newspapers

On the same day that the Cairncross review was announced, the NUJ was dealing with Newsquest's proposal to dismiss four out of five photographers working for Cumbrian Newspapers (CN Group) - cuts that were implemented on 29 June. These job losses brought the toll to nearly 100 staff removed since Newsquest formally took over CN Group just three months previously - meaning a third of the workforce had been axed. Furthermore, staff have not received a pay rise in nine of the past 12 years, with the last pay rise in 2015.

The local NUJ chapel said:

"When Newsquest bought the company, NUJ members knew and accepted changes lay ahead. Every company wants a sustainable future, and we, of course, support this. We appreciate that Newsquest, and our industry, faces unprecedented change and challenge as we adapt to the rapidly evolving digital age.

"Despite these difficulties, our newspapers and magazines have punched above their weight and been a beacon of quality local journalism. This has been underlined by numerous national and regional accolades that our titles and our staff have won in recent years - against rivals in bigger cities with more resources. We are proud of this culture of journalistic excellence.

"To Newsquest's credit, we understand there are plans to recruit reporters in Carlisle, bolstering a team that has been drastically reduced over recent years, to around a quarter of the number CN had in Carlisle a decade ago.

"But we believe massively reducing the number of staff photographers to cover an area the size of north Cumbria will ultimately harm the business when we all want it to succeed. Our NUJ chapel is increasingly concerned for the future of quality journalism that has long been the bedrock of Cumbrian Newspapers.

"Illogically, Newsquest appears to regard all CN's Cumbrian centres as identical. So Barrow, with one daily newspaper, will have the same level of photographic cover as Carlisle, which publishes a daily newspaper, a weekly, and a series of magazines. The work of our photographers will instead be replaced by pictures from freelancers, reporters using smart phones, readers, and PR/commercial companies. Such content is no substitute for first-class photography by trained and seasoned staff professionals.

“Clearly, Newsquest wants the business to thrive. The Carlisle NUJ chapel believes the best way to achieve this is to invest in journalism - professionally trained reporters and photographers - not move to a cut-priced, casualised system of freelancers and donated content. We feel that failing to properly invest in our journalism will not allow Cumbrian Newspapers to achieve the sustainable future we all crave.”

Just days later, the union announced it was fighting compulsory redundancies following a merger of journalist roles at the Manchester Evening News (MEN) and Huddersfield Daily Examiner, as part of Trinity Mirror (now Reach) “Live Model” strategy of separating its print and digital operations.

The Huddersfield newsroom faced seven job cuts and at the MEN nine roles were put at risk, including three photographers, two reporters, print managers and a community content curator. The newspaper’s management said new posts would be created, including video and football writers; at the MEN, the company claimed the proposals would result in a “marginal increase” despite the local NUJ pointing out that the proposed changes included existing vacant posts.

Once again NUJ members were in the line of fire with the continued roll out of Reach’s plan to separate digital and print operations. Almost 100 jobs have already been put at risk in Reach’s regional newsrooms from February to July this year.

On 18 July the NUJ called on Newsquest to come clean on its intentions for the Mail at Barrow-in-Furness after the company told staff it wanted to move reporters more than 30 miles away to Kendal. The union managed to convince the company to drop the Kendal proposals but NUJ members voted with their feet. Most have now opted to leave Newsquest, some taking voluntary redundancy while others decided to go without a redundancy package or a new job offer. All the subs based in the office took redundancy, so there is now a smoking ruin at Barrow with a few reporters working from home. The editor and newsdesk are based in Kendal.

In the face of eight more proposed redundancies at Newsquest’s Northern Echo announced on 26 July, the union warned that the situation at the title was now at crisis point. The latest cuts, and failure to fill a vacancy, represented a fifth (21 per cent) of the staff who produce the flagship Northern Echo, Darlington and Stockton Times, Durham Times, and Advertiser series. The company also stopped local freelance cover, adding to already impossible workloads and leading some individuals to start their 9am shift at 5.20am in order to get all the necessary tasks done to deadline. Individual members of staff had clocked up 100 hours in lieu in six months with no prospect of getting the time back.

The Darlington title was already depleted, with these new cuts announced just a matter of months after the last round. The latest cull represents about a fifth of the remaining jobs.

The workplace conditions NUJ members report to the union are simply not sustainable for people to endure.

On 10 August Newsquest announced that a third of Newsquest's sports department in Bradford, serving the daily Telegraph and Argus and four weeklies, would be axed. Staff were told that the weeklies sports editor, a sports writer and the editor's PA would all have to go. The Bradford sports staff put at risk often work overtime and typically work 10-hour days. The proposed new structure would leave a sports editor, sports sub-editor, Bradford Bulls/Bradford City reporter and sports apprentice to serve the Telegraph and Argus daily title, Keighley News, Wharfedale Observer, Ilkley Gazette and Craven Herald.

The cuts in Bradford came the day after Newsquest's US parent group, Gannett, reported its second-quarter results. The company revealed it had benefited from a \$13.2million windfall from changes in the value of the pound in the first six months of this year. It also said it was giving shareholders an \$18.1million dividend payout for the second quarter.

Further redundancies were announced at the Newsquest Stourbridge centre on 12 September where seven weekly titles and associated websites are produced. The cuts - coming a year after the last round of redundancies - affect the Kidderminster Shuttle, Stourbridge News, Halesowen News, Dudley News, Bromsgrove Advertiser, Redditch/Alcester Advertiser, and Droitwich Advertiser. This will mean six editorial roles will be cut, on top of the three senior reporters (out of an eight-strong team) already having given their notice to leave.

NUJ members work hard to produce quality content for websites and newspapers on a daily basis in extremely challenging circumstances - not just in Newsquest, but across the entire sector. Our members at Newsquest have continued to publicly question the strategy of a supposedly "digital first" company, especially when that company looks to delete the role of a digital editor.

On the same day as the Newsquest Stourbridge announcement, the NUJ's Swindon chapel faced job cuts proposals in Wiltshire and Oxford. In Wiltshire, Newsquest wants to axe two members of the features department and the sports editor. In Oxford, Newsquest plans to cut staff from features and sport, as well as axe the assistant editor (to be replaced by a new audience and content editor). The company wants the changes to take effect by Friday 28 September 2018.

The Swindon Advertiser NUJ chapel said:

"The proposed cuts are being made to an editorial department that is already slashed to the bone following the loss of three subs, a news editor and the web editor to redundancy just before Christmas last year. Since then the newsroom has lost the assistant news editor and the deputy editor to more lucrative and probably less stressful employment in PR.

“It was the four members of the features department who were asked to step up and share a large amount of the work previously done by the deputy editor on top of their existing jobs. We are at a loss to know how we are going to cope. It is clear the people behind the decision have no idea just how much the staff in features contribute to the paper. It is also clear the decision-makers are not interested. Rather than pinpointing individual roles, they have focused on numbers. Our sports editor is responsible not just for the Advertiser, but also for the Wiltshire Gazette and Herald and Wiltshire Times sports pages.

“The affected staff, who were described as ‘resources’ in their consultation letters from the company, now face having to justify their existence in interviews. It is a horrific situation. They are being asked to fight among themselves for their survival. To add insult to injury, a matter of a few hours after the shock announcement, an email was circulated around Newsquest from editorial development director Toby Granville advertising the vacancy at the paper for the early shift audience and content editor. It was also just four days after the editor sent round an email congratulating us on being the second-best performing title in Newsquest when the ABC figures were released. He, rightly, considered it ‘a great achievement, especially considering the staffing issues we have faced.’

“Colleagues on the news side are extremely concerned at the loss of decades of experience and local knowledge. Almost all the reporters are young trainees and only one grew up in the town. We also feel this is extremely disrespectful to loyal readers. People still buy the paper for stories about local people. The Rewind nostalgia feature is also hugely popular and the town is hugely proud of its heritage, of which the Advertiser is an integral part. The fear is this local content will be replaced by generic features that will interest almost nobody. Years of constant staff cuts have already left their mark on the Advertiser and hurt the brand. Further cuts will only inflict more damage.”

Newsquest newsrooms are now staggering from one set of redundancies to the next and urgent questions arise about the company’s strategy of heaping ever-increasing workloads and stress on the remaining staff. The NUJ is pressing Newsquest to release formal risk assessments to accompany their cuts programme. Instead of engaging on these important issues that impact on individuals’ health and wellbeing, the company refuses to respond.

Although Newsquest stands out as the worst company, there have been similar patterns in terms of failing business models, extensive job cuts and derisory working conditions across all of the largest publishing groups.

As part of the union’s consultation and engagement with NUJ members to feed into the Cairncross review, one long-standing journalist got in touch to provide some background information about Johnston Press:

“In 1972 I joined the staff of the Yorkshire Evening Post in Leeds. Its sister paper is the morning paper, the Yorkshire Post. The papers had a succession of owners and are now owned by Edinburgh-based Johnston Press.

“Together the two Leeds-based papers had an editorial staff of 200. The daily circulation of the Yorkshire Evening Post was around 180,000. Today the paper’s circulation is less than 12,000. Staffing levels have been slashed to around 50 for the two papers. This did not happen as a single blow but was a slow process of attrition.

“The owners, particularly the most recent, Johnston Press, were greedy for profits and fat bonuses. Profit margins were regularly 30 per cent of turnover, but it was never enough. More was demanded and staff paid the price. This was at a time when major supermarket chains would be delighted to make a profit of 10 per cent. Editorial job cuts meant lower standards of coverage - courts were dropped, councils not covered, investigative reporting, in which I was involved for many years, became a thing of the past.

“Back on the editorial side, the Yorkshire Evening Post published eight editions a day, some targeting geographical areas - Bradford, Castleford, Wakefield, Harrogate, York, Dewsbury, where there were editorial district offices. Deadlines were tight. The last was around 4pm. Within an hour the ‘late-night final’ was on sale in Leeds city centre as office staff began to make their way home. All that has been destroyed, partly by computerisation and the development of online news and social media but also by the greed of newspaper proprietors and their lack of concern for quality journalism.

“Today one edition of the Yorkshire Evening Post appears, and it is printed the night before - so much for up-to-date news. This pattern has been replicated across Britain and still the sackings and demand for profits continue. Journalists have fought back heroically with repeated strike action, but they face employers who care not a jot for journalistic professionalism and quality, for democratic accountability of corporations, councils and other bodies through local newspaper coverage. Where journalists do fight back, through their union, the National Union of Journalists, they deserve the widest possible support.”

The situation facing journalists at Johnston Press remains grave, with huge uncertainty surrounding the future of this major newspaper group - whose revenues slumped 10 per cent in the first half of 2018, yet profits stayed up at 19.9 per cent. With more than 200 titles, the group has implemented regular redundancy rounds, losing around 350 journalists and commercial staff in 2017, and the axe has been continually wielded through 2018.

The union is currently advising members over the potential impact on company pensions, since news emerged of the company’s plans to potentially offload its pension scheme to the

Pension Protection Fund via a Regulated Apportionment Arrangement (RAA) deal with the Pensions Regulator. The scheme has a funding shortfall of £41m, and such a move would pave the way for one of its bondholder debtors to take control of the group. The deadline for the company's debt to be repayable - in June 2019 - hovers over the organisation.

The direct working experience of NUJ members highlights the frequency and severity of changes faced in the local and regional newspaper industry. The backdrop for these relentless cuts lies in the business model of the large newspaper groups running the industry - demanding lavishly high profits, that proved ultimately unsustainable, which were not invested back into the titles or journalism. As they've dipped, profits and executive pay have been maintained by relentless cost-cutting despite the adverse impact on quality and resources.

Since the Cairncross review into sustainable journalism was announced, this is what the union has been up against - constantly fire-fighting for our members' livelihoods, and working to minimise the impact of waves of job losses on the ability of NUJ members in local newspapers to continue to do their work.

Newsroom terms and conditions

Poverty pay in the industry is a real problem. Journalists struggle to produce quality journalism while they are also struggling to live precariously. As a result, the union continues to call for the implementation of the Living Wage in UK newsrooms, as defined by the Living Wage Foundation as £8.75 an hour and £10.20 in London. We would also argue that the use of unpaid or low-paid apprentices, not-paid-for interns and journalists working for free should be entirely eradicated from the news media industry.

Journalists' personal testimony shows the impact of these practices. One reporter working for Newsquest in South London (where journalists went on strike in 2015 to secure the London Living Wage) said:

"No one goes into local journalism thinking it will be lucrative or easy and, as a trainee at Newsquest, I was fully prepared for a hard slog, being flexible with my hours to break news stories and having doors slammed in my face. What I wasn't expecting was that the buzzing newsroom I joined would become full of empty chairs and dejected, burnt-out staff. The constant battle - between the editorial staff who are pushing to produce quality journalism even though everyone is overstretched, and the management who have openly said we will need to cut corners and sacrifice investigating local stories and holding local government to account - is emotionally exhausting. Most of the reporters are living from pay cheque to pay cheque in one of the most expensive cities in the world and are willing to do so to contribute to local news that serves the community it reports to. What I'm not willing to do is work for a company that says it values its staff and communicates with them when in reality

there is so little communication that I wouldn't recognise the MD at Newsquest south London or Henry Faure Walker if I saw them walking down the street. It's one thing to not respect your staff, but it's another to not respect the tenets of the industry you're operating in - and Newsquest's management have shown that they don't care about local journalism."

Another reporter said:

"I was under no illusions about the company when I joined Newsquest; when I started last year, I was filling a junior reporter vacancy created in the flames of cost-cutting, redundancies, and industrial action. But I never thought I would work for a company that treated its employees with such disrespect. To hear Newsquest top brass shamelessly crowing about the company's commitment to 'sustainable local journalism' in public, while attempting to impose completely unsustainable and unworkable cuts on our newsroom, has been infuriating and depressing. The company categorically does not care about journalism - the 'news' in its name has become a sick joke. The quest, it seems, is simply one of asset stripping - degrading newspapers, newsrooms, journalists, until there is no more ad revenue to be sucked out of local communities abandoned by a company that claims to tell truth to power, but actually just tries to bully its hard-working employees into submission. It is only my colleagues (more accurately, my friends) that have made working here bearable. Newsquest is toxic; there was no way I could stay any longer."

An editor said:

"Being a journalist at Newsquest has felt like tackling an endless obstacle course designed by the company and its management. Highly respected editors with decades of experience have been made redundant and not replaced, the number of reporters has been slashed annually, professional photographic coverage has been all but abolished and sub-editors have been laid off and replaced with a barely functional computer programme. Year after year, changes are implemented which make simply publishing our papers - let alone quality journalism - harder to do. In the past few months, though, things have reached a nadir. A steady stream of editorial staff have left and without exception their positions have remained unfilled, leaving some papers without any reporters and others with no editor. The entire newsroom is at breaking point; stressed, overworked, underpaid and completely demoralised. Newsquest's response to this is to cut staffing levels further."

"I am appalled by the company's complete disregard for the health and wellbeing of its employees, indifference towards quality or public-interest journalism, and lack of respect for readers and advertisers, who Newsquest simply hopes will not realise the dwindling amount of relevant local content that is published in its papers. I can no longer work for a so-called news organisation that sees its journalism as nothing"

more than, in the words of one senior manager, 'information to sell adverts'. I am fortunate that I am able to leave, but I fear for my hard-working colleagues and friends who have no choice but to remain behind. Some of them moved the length of the country to begin first jobs as trainee reporters, have dedicated many unpaid hours to covering patches they genuinely care about, and are being treated shamefully by managers with utter apathy - if not contempt - for their efforts."

These quotes were collected and published by the union at the time of a dispute with the company in which Newsquest expected 12 reporters and four editors to produce 11 newspapers and eight associated websites covering South London. The company had also announced that none of its South London newspapers would continue to employ professional photographers.

Digital strategies and the impact on quality content

Media companies continue to place demands on journalists to build a digital audience and hit ever-increasing digital targets while they are also cutting journalistic staff. The clickbait business model that has been utilised by some of the major publishers has enabled media companies to further cut costs by running generic material on multiple websites at the expense of distinctive local stories.

Strategies for real digital growth that is supplanting losses from print sales are proving elusive. There are examples of alternative strategies such as the Guardian (donations), the Financial Times (subscriptions) and the Times (paywall) - elsewhere there has been less diversity in approach. User-generated content and a clickbait approach to editorial selection have been more common.

This presents real risks when it comes to the blurring of traditional editorial and commercial boundaries. Journalists have been encouraged to produce work promoting corporate brands and when NUJ members stand up for public interest journalism in their newsrooms they are often marginalised and in some cases they have been silenced by bullying and redundancy.

One NUJ member told the union:

"The current received wisdom is that to have any hope of success in publishing web news, you need to create volume, be first or - failing that - fast. It is all about putting out as many stories as possible and getting as many clicks as possible and that often means there is no time to check the facts."

Such an approach is also dangerous in the context of the ongoing debate over fake news and the recognition of how journalism needs to be more strongly delineated from the vast amounts of content that exists and often purports to be news accessible via social media and online.

Local democracy reporters

The Local Democracy Reporters (LDR) scheme is a public subsidy in which part of the BBC's licence fee income is used to fund new jobs and produce journalism for existing local newspapers. The scheme provides 150 local news reporters but it does little to offset more than 400 jobs that have already been lost.

The union contends that public funds should only be used for public services and it was wrong for the government to establish the scheme by taking funding from the BBC licence fee.

The scheme was originally called the BBC Local Journalism Partnership, and was launched in 2017 as a result of an agreement between the BBC and the News Media Association. Hold the Front Page has reported that most of the contracts have been won by the largest publishers - Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Johnston Press, while just four of the scheme's journalists will work for hyperlocal websites. By region, Scotland has the largest number of reporters employed (22), followed by the North West (19) and Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (16).

The NUJ does not question the valuable role of these new jobs but the largest companies have been able to exploit their position and influence to secure these contracts. Many NUJ members are disappointed that the scheme has not been used to support innovative projects, hyperlocals, and non-profit news operations, or prioritise outlets which are not part of the existing monopoly in local newspaper ownership.

NUJ representatives have also raised concerns that in some areas the scheme has been paying its reporters £6,000 less than their colleagues sitting next to them in the same newsroom.

The NUJ has consistently argued that the BBC, as the body responsible for oversight of the scheme, should ensure the contractors must not continue to cut their own staff when they are in receipt of licence fee funded additional resources.

NUJ members have also called for the scheme to be more open and transparent in terms of the contracts awarded in Northern Ireland.

Many of the new local democracy reporters are members of the NUJ and earlier this year the union surveyed all of these members. The results of the survey showed that the majority of the respondents are enjoying the scheme and believe it is worthwhile and needed. There was a general enthusiasm among the reporters about covering local democracy. However, many respondents expressed concerns over pay discrepancies and the daily targets and quotas for producing stories that seemed to focus on quantity rather than quality. The reporters also called for the BBC to seek out more feedback from the

workforce and offer more clarity about the relationship between the corporation and the contracted publishers.

In February 2018 Trinity Mirror announced 49 redundancies across the South West, the East Midlands, West Midlands and the North West of England. The restructuring proposals were a result of the Birmingham Live project launched in December 2017. The company claimed the move would help create a “long-term sustainable and profitable business model”.

The union argued that achieving ‘efficiency’ savings by using more of the same content, rebranding a series of websites, and cutting print journalism jobs would not achieve the company’s goals.

This announcement came just days after the chief executive’s assertion that Trinity Mirror was a “very profitable” company, and shareholders had been rewarded with a 6.4 per cent dividend pay-out. The company had also paid out millions of pounds in an attempt to deal with its own hacking scandal. In contrast, NUJ members working for Local World who were made redundant by Trinity Mirror received only the statutory minimum payment.

While Trinity Mirror was orchestrating cuts to its own workforce, the company was also receiving public money, paid out via the BBC and the LDR scheme. The union has consistently expressed concerns that Trinity Mirror may be using a public subsidy to plug the gaps it has created by getting rid of its own employees.

The union wants the LDR scheme to include court coverage, in response to the failure of local titles to cover what happens in the criminal and civil courts. Traditionally local newspapers always covered their local magistrate, sheriff and crown court trials and national newspapers covered major trials, with some newspapers - such as the Daily Telegraph and the Independent - even employing reporters who only covered the courts. In addition, the Press Association and a number of agencies covered major trials and appeals.

Now hardly any local papers cover trials or courts in detail - if people don’t know what goes on in the courts, are not aware of what offences are prosecuted or what punishments are meted out, then they remain uninformed and justice is not seen to be done. One of the best barometers of what is happening locally is a magistrate’s or sheriff’s court and if people are not presented with comprehensive news coverage of both the defence and prosecution cases in major trials, they are given a distorted view.

As things stand, courts are not properly reported, and incorporating this reporting into the remit of the existing LDR scheme would help to address this significant and ongoing problem that is linked to the provision of public interest journalism.

Local TV

The LDR scheme is not the first time the government has organised initiatives to support the local media, and it is important to highlight examples where public funding and policy

interventions have been entirely unsuccessful - if only to ensure that similar mistakes are not replicated.

In 2011 the government announced a local TV scheme, intended to increase the provision of quality local news and other content and which could lead to the creation of new jobs. At the time the union had major concerns about using the BBC licence fee to fund commercial organisations.

An NUJ member involved has highlighted how local TV became a disaster project:

“(The) station airs its news content on daily bulletins and that same footage is sent to the BBC in exchange for licence fee-payers’ money: £150,000 was paid out in the first year in return for providing 1,020 stories. Funding is paid regardless of whether the BBC airs the items or not. I counted the number of stories during year one from 10 November 2014 to the end of November 2015. We sent 1,207 stories and the BBC used only 114. That is 9.4 per cent of stories over one year, equating to a cost of £1,315.79 per story. Many of the stories were unusable because (the owner) relied on overworked staff in poorly resourced newsrooms. We were under pressure to pull in a certain number of stories every day to hit BBC quotas for funding.

“During my time at the station I was expected to self-shoot, edit and script at least two stories a day, plan future stories, field calls and emails, look after unpaid interns and work experience students, assist with directing the daily one-hour talk show, help to direct the three-hour evening news show, book guests for all of the shows, send footage to the BBC and cut content for overnight broadcast. All on the minimum wage. It was impossible to tick all of those boxes, yet I worked between 10 and 12-hour shifts trying my hardest. I usually worked through my lunch breaks. We were always told there was no money for a pay rise, yet new stations were being rolled out all of the time.”

The dangers of subsidising newspaper groups

The closure of the Newsquest subbing hub in Newport, with the loss of 14 jobs, was described as a total disaster by the union in March 2017. The announcement was a huge blow for staff; this announcement came just two months after the company cut more than half of the workforce.

The Welsh government gave Newsquest £245,000 in 2015 to expand the sub-editing hub and in 2013-14 the company received more than £95,000 from the Skills Growth Fund. The grant money was returned to the Welsh government from Newsquest, after it shut the hub and got rid of staff.

The subbing hub opened in 2013 and at its peak employed more than 70 people. It edited copy for Newsquest newspapers as far away as Scotland after production staff on local titles

were sacked. The hub was closed in March, with the loss of 14 jobs, and the work was moved to a hub in Weymouth, which has since been closed.

The takeaway from this example is that the Welsh government should have used the grant to support local newspapers and fund media start-ups.

In the NUJ submission to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communication Committee inquiry, the union gave the example of the Port Talbot Magnet, a not-for-profit community co-operative, set up seven years ago with a £10,000 grant from the Carnegie Trust to fill a news blackspot. Despite breaking many stories and being popular with readers, the economic pressures on all businesses in Port Talbot following the steel crisis made it impossible to support a local news service through advertising alone. In September 2016 the paper was closed and this is the sort of enterprise that should have been supported.

Local council publications – not the enemy

The union has consistently defended its members working in local council publications. The demise of local and regional newspapers has nothing to do with the rise of council publications despite what others have claimed.

One NUJ member sheds light on working for a local authority publication:

“Most of us came here because it represented a better offer than the publications we were working on. Our wages and conditions were much improved; it allowed us to provide a better standard of living for our families and helped us achieve a decent work/life balance.

“It seems odd at a time when journalists’ jobs are being culled all over the country that some call for more to be lost - if our newspaper ceased to exist tomorrow, would the rest of the industry up their game, increase pagination, raise wages and create more jobs in the newsroom? We think not.

“We ‘jumped ship’ because the papers we worked on did not pay ‘grown-up’ wages – try paying a mortgage and bringing up kids on less than £20k for a 45-hour week, especially in London. It might be feasible if you’ve just left university or have benefactors who can help you pay the rent while you struggle through on poverty wages. But those options are just not open to the majority, especially those from working class backgrounds where spare cash is hard to come by.

“Many of us are women and have children, qualifications for low status, low paid jobs in a lot of industries. Working for a local authority allows us access to flexi-time, decent maternity leave and pay, better holiday entitlement - advantages not given by profligate council bosses but won after long years of struggle by public sector trade unions.

“We should all strive not to play the newspaper owners’ game - it’s classic divide and rule. If we all blame each other for the crisis in British newspapers, we’ll be too busy to see who the real culprits are - those who have profited for years off our labours, slashed jobs and driven down wages, only to complain about how editorial quality is plummeting.”

Tackling the problem - funding, support and legislative solutions

The problems and the impact on journalists struggling to maintain their professional standards and their commitment to local communities is clear. So is the vital role that local journalism plays in our democracy. Finding solutions is less clear-cut and the NUJ believes that a range of measures are necessary.

The NUJ has been campaigning for a number of years for an economic stimulus plan for the media. The union supports the need for arms-length government subsidies for a range of organisations and tax advantages for local media. The NUJ has called for the strategic use of central and local government advertising, tax credits and tax breaks that meet clearly defined public purposes.

The union has campaigned for this funding to be attached to specific objectives and criteria. The money should be used as an opportunity to offer work to journalists made redundant, it should also be used to train community journalists so they can produce high-quality and ethical journalism, and there should be safeguards in place to ensure media independence regardless of the nature of the funding.

A commitment to quality and ethical standards is vital if a news outlet is to qualify for support. Organisations that systematically cut corners and rely upon free content and user-generated pictures (that replaces the work of professional photographers and journalists) should not be entitled to receive any public subsidy, funding or support.

Policy interventions and any new resources available should be targeted and used to bolster the proliferation of independent, pluralistic, diverse, sustainable, quality journalism. Any new funding should also have mechanisms in place to ensure it is independent of the government and free from political interference.

The existing scheme that gives the local press discounts on business rates has no mechanisms in place to ensure the benefits of the discount are not just transferred to shareholders rather than invested in sustainable journalism.

Any new scheme(s) should not divert public money from the BBC licence fee. The NUJ wants to protect and bolster public service broadcasting - the ceaseless political attacks during the past decade have led to licence fee settlements that have cut resources and threatened the BBC’s ability to deliver quality journalism and programming. As a union we want to see an end to the raiding of the licence fee - which has put the BBC in the unenviable position of

having to fund free licences for the over-75s or be the organisation that is forced to wield the axe on what had always been a government-funded welfare benefit. Any new scheme to support journalism must not be to the detriment of the BBC.

The NUJ supports calls to raise money via a levy or tax on UK digital advertising revenue, and the revenues of major search and social media companies. This money should be used as an investment to support sustainable public interest journalism.

In the UK there is a growing political appetite to ensure that digital platforms pay their fair share of tax and help fund public interest journalism via a levy. It has become abundantly clear that the sustainability of the UK media industry has been dramatically affected by such companies, especially Google and Facebook. Due to the size and market dominance of these platforms, media organisations have little choice about how to distribute their own content online and monetise their work. The NUJ has supported the voluntary partnership projects that have already been organised in the UK but we would now like to see a more formal, structured and sustainable approach.

Digital platforms have already been able to generate immense profits from leveraging content made by journalists and now they should give something back - companies that have financially benefited by reproducing news content but not creating it should now be compelled to contribute to society by funding journalism. This could help to offset the cost to government of any subsidy and any new resources should not be used to prop up the (failing) business models of the existing monopoly publishers.

In addition to the introduction of a new levy or tax, digital platforms should also be encouraged to extend their existing provision of training and support to journalists and media organisations - these initiatives should be particularly focused on assisting community journalists, hyperlocals, and other small outlets that are dedicated to providing a service that fills a gap in existing provision.

The NUJ believes proactive approaches to supporting new models of media ownership would help new entrants set up local news operations and take over newspapers that the larger groups have retreated from. This could be achieved using a combination of funding that could include grants, loans and community-share schemes. These measures have provided effective solutions in other sectors. For example, in supporting and facilitating community shops (there are over 350 now) or the work initiated under the programme *More than a Pub*, funded by lottery money under a government scheme to support community and social businesses. Co-operative and Community Finance managed the loan element with another social investor and used funds from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The NUJ believes such initiatives could spark a similarly innovative programme to support local news, using mixed ownership models that allow for the involvement of multi-stakeholders, including both communities and staff. Employee-owned co-operatives or community benefit societies are both options that are available and can be invested in.

Outlets like the West Highland Free Press, the New Internationalist, Camden New Journal, and hyperlocals like the Bristol Cable and the Ferret in Scotland demonstrate that sustainable models for journalism, putting quality, diverse content and the public interest at the heart of their work, can sustain and flourish when situated within and accountable to local communities. Long-term structured finance options would particularly help new entrants who often struggle to survive and are currently often forced to rely on volunteers and sporadic financial support.

The NUJ has consistently argued for newspapers to be assigned as community assets by the government to prevent newspapers being closed overnight. Designating newspapers as assets in law would give local communities the opportunity to buy the titles or find new owners. In 2012 the NUJ backed calls for an amendment to the Localism Act that would grant local papers protected status as community assets. This would prevent newspaper titles closing overnight, allowing potential new owners, including local co-operatives, the time to put together a bid for the paper. The sale of a paper should also include the handover of its name to the new owner, so companies cannot retain a heritage title and subsequently re-enter a market and capitalise on a legacy brand.

In the past the commercial press has been determined to put out of business anyone daring to challenge its local monopoly of news and advertising revenue.

The government should also consider granting charitable status for public interest journalism. This status would help pioneering not-for-profit organisations, such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, to fund their work through tax exemptions, grants and donations. The government should amend the law so that charity regulators can permit support for public interest journalism as a charitable object.

There are a range of other legislative changes that could be proposed by the review that would go some way to bolster high quality journalism - including extending the freedom of information legislation and reforming defamation law in Scotland. In addition, the laws that criminalise whistleblowers and hamper journalists' ability to protect their sources should be repealed.

The NUJ welcomed the Welsh government's proposals to fund public interest journalism, because the commercial model is failing. The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's report *Read All About It – Inquiry into News Journalism* recognised that supporting public interest journalism should be a priority. The NUJ endorsed many of the report's recommendations, including the proposal for the Welsh government to use £200,000 of funding over two years for a contestable scheme that is available to new entrants and to support innovation and sustainability among current operators.

The London Assembly's Economy Committee has also published a report entitled *The fate of local news – read all about it*. It recommended the London Mayor should ensure that news

outlets in London pay all staff at least the London Living Wage. It also proposed the Mayor, alongside the NUJ, establish a digital journalism apprenticeship, and work with organisations to fund bursaries for journalists to tackle the lack of diversity in local news. The report also recommended Transport for London (TfL) should establish a trial offering local newspapers on specific London bus routes, to ensure that groups who are digitally and news-excluded have access to local news provision. The union supports many of these recommendations and believes that national government, with its additional powers, functions and responsibilities could go much further than both London and Wales.

The situation in the capital has worsened since the committee launched its inquiry and published its report. There has been the closure of three titles in North London including the Barnet Press, Enfield Advertiser and Haringey Advertiser. These Tindle closures came hard on the heels of Capital Media Newspapers, owner of the South London Press (SLP), Greenwich Mercury and weekly titles in West London, going into administration. A buyer for the SLP and Mercury was found, but the Kensington and Chelsea News, Fulham Chronicle, Hammersmith Chronicle and Shepherd's Bush Chronicle have all shut.

In February 2018 the Australian Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism made a series of recommendations that are applicable to the UK. The committee recommended that the government should adequately fund public broadcasters, guarantee funding for community broadcasting, embed digital media literacy in the national curriculum, extend deductible gift recipient status to not-for-profit news media organisations who engage in public interest journalism (this could work in the UK by providing charitable status), task the Treasury to do modelling on tax deductibility for citizens who subscribe to public interest news, and ask the Law Commission to conduct an audit of current laws that hinder journalists. The NUJ believes that the lessons from this review, and the important input from our Australian sister union the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, can be learned by the Cairncross review.

Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the current media crisis in the UK and more often than not it has been journalists and the communities they serve who have been the hardest hit.

There are a range of measures available that could be used to bolster ethical, diverse, high-quality journalism that is in the public interest.

The NUJ wants to see the news media industry thrive and the best way to achieve this is to invest in journalism, including professionally trained reporters and photographers.

The union constantly faces employers who do not care for quality, ethical journalism or journalists, or for our democracy.

Any further development of the existing schemes or the establishment of new schemes of public subsidy must be attached to specific objectives and criteria that include commitments to quality, resources and ethical standards. The funding must not come out of the BBC's existing budget.

Organisations that systematically cut corners and rely upon free content and user-generated pictures should not be entitled to receive any public subsidy, funding or support.

The NUJ supports calls to raise money via a levy or tax on digital platforms, and for new and innovative models of media ownership that aim to plug gaps in existing news provision to be enabled to flourish.