



Welcome to NUJ Branch, the second of a special newsletter for branches to provide information and swap experiences during the present crisis. Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, provides an update on the work she is doing in support of members, her meeting with ministers and branches and carrying out the union's international work – all from her kitchen table.



It continues to be a crazy, busy time for the union, as the Covid-19 situation unfolds, with clarifications and new advice from the government and the situation ever changing.

Thanks all of you who completed the union's Covid-19 survey – it made for sober reading, with members suffering real hardship and anxiety as a result of cancelled work, furloughs and pay cuts, with many fearing that this is the eye of the storm and ahead lies looming redundancies, more cuts and a slow return to freelance work and commissions.

Our efforts are squarely focussed on trying to avoid any such scenario, and building support for meaningful intervention in our industry, to reboot the sector and enable it to emerge stronger than before.

That's why we've worked hard to increase our offering of online courses to help members cope during the crisis, brush up on training and learn new professional skills. Through the Federation of Entertainment Unions, we have secured a great deal with the BBC's Journalism Academy for our freelance members – opening up an exciting suite of online courses.

I continue to take part in fortnightly

meetings alongside a range of representatives from the employers' side of the industry and ministers at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Last week I raised the 90 jobs at risk at Midland News Association and, while welcoming the Chancellor's extension of the Jobs Retention Scheme, said there was a critical need for further financial aid for freelancers and self-employed – and an urgent closing of the gaps in provision that have left so many freelancers adrift. I also pushed for independent newspapers and hyperlocals who missed out on government-generated advertising and argued for an exemption for journalists to new quarantine rules which could severely restrict reporting from abroad in the coming months.

The Minister was shocked to be told of the situation in Northern Ireland, where the entire staff at The Sunday Life and Sunday World has been threatened by the break-away South East Antrim Ulster Defence Association after reporting on its criminal activities. The union has worked with the Irish press, unions, politicians, religious and other communities to condemn this blatant attack on press freedom. (see page 5).

From my kitchen table, I've had the pleasure of attending the Zoom meetings

of London Freelance and Sunderland, Shield and Hartlepool branches. I've also held countless video meetings with a range of organisations to build support for our News Recovery Plan.

We've seen in recent days how BuzzFeed is closing its UK and Australian offices, Vice has cut 55 jobs in the US and 100 elsewhere and Quartz are cutting 80 jobs and closing its London office. These online start-up upstarts were supposed to be the future. But as Vice's CEO Nancy Dubuc said, they've all been "choked" by the big tech companies. That's why we are calling for a windfall levy of 6 per cent on Google and Facebook and companies which have sucked journalism dry. We have had meetings with DCMS officials, the Labour shadow team and a group of leading LibDems to discuss the Plan. A number of branches are already going great guns playing their part in building support – as we start to ramp up our campaign, we want as many other branches to help fight not just for the survival of the industry, but a sustainable future.

In Solidarity,

Michelle Stanistreet

London freelances get together

Planning, practice and even more practice is how Matt Salusbury prepared for London Freelance Branch's first meeting via Zoom.

It is one of the NUJ's biggest branches, but with more than 70 people joining – someone counted 76 – it was an impressive number and feat for Matt who was chairing.

Guest speakers for the evening were Michelle Stanistreet and Pamela Morton, national freelance organiser.

Matt took some tips from Edinburgh Freelance Branch meeting and the LFB committee met to get familiar with Zoom and its tools. The agenda was drawn up carefully; it was agreed business should be arranged where possible with a series of “yes”, “no” questions, with people raising their Zoom hands.

Matt said: “Because of security issues with Zoom, we sent out the link for the meeting a few hours before, via the email list for members only, not by social media. It also meant we had to be careful during the section of our meeting where we raise work issues, because it's just too leaky a space

for identifiable workplace stuff, compared to the NUJ's basement. “We'd decided to stick with Zoom as a lot of our members are used to it.” Inevitably there were technology hitches, but Matt thinks it will



be sorted for next time. He was aided by committee member Mike Holderness, putting up relevant documents, and branch co-chair Nick Renaud-Komiya was on stand-by if Matt's signal dropped. Michelle outlined the union's work during the Covid-19 crisis and its

News Recovery Plan's measures to help get the industry through the present crisis and re-boot a more inclusive, diverse public-interest journalism. Pamela Morton said: “I am very aware of the desperate situation and the stress many freelances are experiencing. The NUJ's freelance office is doing its best to deal with your queries and is lobbying government over the failure of its aid schemes to cover many of our members.”

A photographer reported being harassed from the public while working, and the issue of whether freelance sports journalists would get access to behind-doors matches was raised. Most people who wanted to, had their say.

The LFB's new members' meeting, usually at a café near the British Museum, went well despite being virtual and cake-less. Zoom was used for an LFB student recruitment event for 50 students at City University, with a Q&A on how to get work and be properly paid.

Branch bloggers

The PR & Communication branch meeting was a more modest affair in terms of numbers. Once branch business was concluded, one of the members delivered a session in well-being, showing how to deal with worries and keep a

positive mind. Attention was drawn to a blog by new member, Imthiaz Rehman, who explained how helpful he had found being a member of the NUJ. “It's a great way to learn more about who to pitch to, how to build campaigns and what journalists are really

looking for,” he said. “It also helps to have a friendly space where you can talk to others in the same field and ask questions you would shy away from asking at work. Am I underpaid? Is my workload too much? Am I being discriminated against?”

COVID-19 SURVEY

NUJ survey shows growing hardship

The NUI's Covid-19 survey produced a valuable snapshot of how members have been affected by the pandemic. It is a shocking picture, with two-thirds of members having suffered financially because of the lockdown, with freelancers being hit especially hard, many unsupported by the government's financial aid packages.

It has provided valuable information for our discussions with ministers and inquiries by the Digital, Culture & Media and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy committees.

It showed members were braced for further economic shockwaves with 84 per cent fearing the crisis would lead to redundancies and most freelancers not expecting work to pick up until next year, with 16 per cent predicting they would drop out

of the industry altogether following the pandemic.

At the time the survey was taken, 45 per cent said their employer had furloughed editorial staff; with more than a half not having had their pay topped up by their employer and a fifth said their employers made up the full 20 per cent difference. This looks worrying should the government decide to decrease its contribution in the Job Retention Scheme.

Of those working, 42 per cent had their pay cut and one quarter were covering work of colleagues on furlough. Freelancers on the PAYE system are eligible to be furloughed, but only 5.5 per cent said their employer was doing so.

Of those at home, 79 per cent said they had the necessary equipment to work remotely, although more

than half experienced some internet problems. There are plenty examples of broadcasters working from their sheds and interviewing by Zoom or Skype, but for others this has been a frustrating experience. Many office-based members throughout the lockdown raised concerns about health and safety at work, including lack of social distancing and extra cleaning – posing questions about how media companies will ensure any return to office-based working will meet the threshold of being “Covid-secure”.

Michelle Stanistreet said: “This crisis has underlined the critical role that quality journalism plays in our communities – its survival cannot be left to the vagaries of the market and that’s why we need the News Recovery Plan to reboot the industry.”

The survey of more than 1,200 members was carried out by SurveyMonkey from 24 April-10 May 2020

What you can do

Discuss the survey results at your next meeting – how can members be supported? <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/two-thirds-of-media-workers-have-suffered-financially-because/>

Get behind the #ForgottenFreelances campaign: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/forgottenfreelances-a-third-say-they-do-not-expect-their-income/>

#Forgotten Freelances

CAMPAIGN

local
news
matters
www.nuj.org.uk

04

Local News Matters

Sports reporter James Roberts, currently furloughed, looks at how the Oxford Mail has covered Covid-19.

During the lockdown, our local journalists have gone the extra mile to keep us informed about how the virus and the lockdown are affecting all aspects of our lives, and how we can best protect our own health and well-being and support one another.

Oxford Mail reporters have been the go-to source of coronavirus news for thousands of people. In the face of a much-changed working environment, reporters have addressed the key issues, holding

health chiefs and the government to account with concise, quality stories.

A pandemic in the social media age results in a sea of rumours and speculation, but the Mail has brought readers the key facts and figures.

The wider public health implications have been addressed, from a fall in visits to A&E departments at Oxfordshire's hospitals to reassuring expectant mothers due to give birth during the pandemic.

Such stories change – and save – lives, influencing readers' decision-making and helping reduce the strain on the NHS.

The Mail has shown the value of campaigning journalism through its campaign to back local businesses, #StillOpenInOxfordshire.

Reporters have highlighted small businesses going above and beyond to serve locals at a time when their very existence is in the balance. Shining a light on community institutions such as pubs illustrates how the Mail's coverage can make a real difference to Oxfordshire employers from all sectors.

It has tapped into the human-interest stories, revealing how a

doctor had been kicked out of his accommodation by his landlady because she feared he might bring home coronavirus.

The story, written by Local Democracy Reporter, David Lynch, made the BBC News homepage and generated countless offers of help from the public, with the doctor setting up a webpage for NHS staff with similar problems.

Its coverage of the Bicester family who took part in the first Oxford University trials of a coronavirus vaccine offered insights that can only come from professional, quality journalism.

The importance of this trustworthy, campaigning and human-interest reporting is reflected in the figures. By Tuesday, April 28, the Mail had amassed 4.35m page views for the calendar month – easily surpassing the target of 3.36 million by April 30. The statistics only tell part of the story, but they underline how the press needs protecting so it does not just survive but thrive.

This is an edited version of James' blog for the NUJ Oxford & district branch.

<https://oxfordnuj.wordpress.com/2020/05/07/local-journalists-how-they-inform-and-support-us-through-the-covid-crisis/>

What your branch can do

Commission pieces from your members, highlighting the work colleagues on local newspapers and radio are doing during the pandemic. These can be used to lobby MPs and government and explain to the public why, as key workers, we need to be able to do our job.

Send your blogs to
campaigns@nuj.org.uk

CAMPAIGN

Terrorist threats condemned

An unprecedented alliance, brought together by the NUJ, has publicly condemned the increasing spate of threats to staff on Belfast-based newspapers from paramilitary groups.

Under the banner #StandupforJournalism, an advertisement signed by journalists, politicians of all parties, media organisations, religious groups, trade unions, community groups and creative workers was published by the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter.

Signatories to the statement, which called for "the immediate withdrawal of all threats against journalists in Northern Ireland and for the freedom of the press to be respected and protected", included the first minister, Arlene Foster, the deputy first minister, Michelle O'Neill, and the majority of MLAs from the Northern Ireland Assembly, plus UK government ministers Oliver Dowden and Brandon Lewis.

During the past 12 months there has been an increase in the number of violent threats against journalists in Northern Ireland from Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups. A journalist working for The Irish News was a recent target. The union learned that many journalists in Northern Ireland had learned to see these threats as part of the job, but Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant secretary, said this was totally unacceptable.

Martin Breen, Sunday Life editor, said that 26 years after the ceasefire terrorist organisations were continuing to threaten journalists because they were "exposing their dirty deeds and criminal empires".

He said: "We all have to stand up against these vile threats - their sole aim is to silence investigative journalism and curtail the public's right to know about those gangsters operating in their

communities across Northern Ireland."

Brian Farrell, Sunday World editor, said: "The recent threats issued to our journalists only serve to highlight the risk and importance of exposing the criminal menace that plagues our society. We will not be silenced nor intimidated and will not rest until those responsible are brought to justice."

Advert with full list of signatories:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/stand-up-for-journalism-northern-ireland-advert/>

Action

Add your name to the NUJ petition to support press freedom and stop the rise in death threats against Northern Ireland journalists. <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-rise-in-death-threats-against-northern-ireland-journalists>

Tweet your support at #StandupforJournalism

Make reporting in Northern Ireland a topic for branch discussion, contact campaigns@nuj.org.uk for a speaker

Stand Up for Journalism

ADVICE SESSIONS

Repping from the box room



Getting in a fix with the rules on furloughs? Is your boss trying to make you take your holidays in lockdown? What can you do if a member starts to get backache because she is filing from her sofa?

These were just a selection of issues that have come up during a new series of Friday morning advice sessions, hosted by tutor Caroline Holmes, with NUJ officials on hand to answer questions and offer advice during these uncertain and difficult times.

Caroline (pictured) said: "Webinars cannot replace the positive experience of face to face meetings, but they do allow reps to feel less isolated, share common

concerns, and really importantly to see and hear each other. It's a great opportunity to share experiences, discuss issues and have expert advice on tap. And, don't forget, trade union reps are still covered by their house agreements so have access to facility time.

"Health, safety and welfare continue to be a key issue, particularly around home working, equipment, and for many, doing an increased number of hours. The NUJ health and safety committee is developing a checklist for reps of issues that need to be addressed in Covid-19 risk assessments."

After the sessions, Caroline sends outs notes of the issues covered, tips and examples of good practice. The sessions are interactive, but

for those who cannot make it, they are recorded and put on YouTube. Questions can be sent in advance or made on the Zoom chat function.

Laura Davison, national organiser, said: "I have to pay tribute to our reps. They are all doing a great job in difficult circumstances - and making a huge difference for members. It is really nice for us all to get together, if remotely, and catch up with what is happening on the ground and how people are getting on. It might be new territory, but the trade union principles remain the same, as do employment law and health and safety regulations."

Quiz night for NUJ Extra?

As the NUJ's survey has found, Covid-19 has led to hardship for many of our members. So, why not hold a fund-raising event at your branch or donate your room fee if you are meeting by Zo-om. Latest update from the welfare charity <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-extra-covid-19-update-may-2020/>

Caroline Catch-up

Watch Caroline's reps' sessions:
<https://youtu.be/pDZZ6-wP03o>
and

<https://youtu.be/bhH6e6Z4Mxo>

The next one is on Friday 27 May, from 11.00 to 12.30. Book your place at tuttraining@nuj.org.uk

Watch: Helping you to stay fit and healthy at home and work:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnOBDS_U8yU&feature=youtu.be

TRAINING

07



Training without borders

Rachell Howells, project manager of NUJ Training Wales, describes adapting its training programme to digital only as a rollercoaster.

Once lockdown occurred all the classroom-based workshops and courses were cancelled, and the training programme, subsidised by the Welsh government, had to be quickly reimaged. "It's been a matter of trial and error," said Rachel (pictured). "Early on we ran a brilliant two-hour session with simple, engaging slides, but another three-hour course with too much information on the slides, proved less successful.

"We learnt a lot from these experiences and commissioned two hour webinars, on coronavirus and its impact on journalism, wellbeing during this very uncertain time, and a new series we've called Lockdown Skillbuilders to help journalists and communications professionals use this time to diversify into new areas and bump up their CVs."

The project has now it run its first day-long interactive workshop with Dan Mason on launching a podcast in one day, as part of the Lockdown Skillbuilder series. "We were concerned that people might find a 10.30am - 4pm day on Zoom

too long and tiring, but the course offered a great mix of learning styles and plenty of breaks, which made it enjoyable. You almost forgot you were on Zoom," she said. "And we've had some fantastic feedback." Rachel is looking forward to getting back to face-to-face classes, but greater digital learning, open to the most remote parts of Wales and beyond, will remain as an important part of the project.

The NUJ's four-stage reps' programme will soon be online; a reps' stage 1 pilot took place on Friday 22 May.

NUJ Training Scotland has also launched an excellent programme of online professional development courses and the Federation of Entertainment Unions has secured a fantastic deal for freelancers, allowing them to take part in the BBC Academy's Lockdown Learning professional development courses.

Branches are encouraged to contact tuttraining@nuj.org.uk if they have a need for bespoke training.

The Journalist: the next three editions of the magazine will be sent out digitally to all members, making necessary savings in the union's budget after a drop in income and increased legal service costs. Around a third of members receive a digital version with the rest printed and posted. The affected issues are those which run to the end of September. Encourage branch members to send updated contact details, including their email address to membership@nuj.org.uk

Lockdown Learning

Online courses available from the NU include: podcasting, creative writing, writing for TV and film, collaborative leadership, editing on i-devices, tackling stress, video editing, social media networking, getting started on Instagram, plus many others. Go to NUJ Active for more details: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/comms/archive/active/615.html>

REASONS TO JOIN



Press Freedom

The NUJ lobbies for journalists' rights so you can protect your sources, have editorial independence and do your job safely and freely, without censorship from the state. As a member of the International Federation of Journalists we are part of a 600,000-strong community working to ensure the safety of media workers across the globe, fighting for freedom of information, open government and plurality of the media.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

www.nuj.org.uk