

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Informed

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Victory for equality



Emphatic judgment: Michelle Stanistreet and Samira Ahmed after the tribunal supported the BBC's presenter's case that she had been discriminated against over pay.

The decision by the NUJ to back Samira Ahmed's equal pay claim at an employment tribunal resulted in a resounding victory for the union and BBC presenter, and has been celebrated throughout the union world.

The landmark judgment was unequivocal in supporting her case against the BBC for paying a man, Jeremy Vine, six times the amount she was getting for doing a similar programme. The panel agreed that she was doing "like work" on Newswatch to his on Points of View. The BBC and Samira have now reached a settlement.

Samira, who met the union's Parliamentary Group and discussed the need for the right to know how much colleagues are earning, will now be the

keynote speaker at the TUC's Women's conference and address the NUJ's Delegate Meeting in April.

The BBC's legal team had cited Jeremy Vine's ability to have a "glint in his eye" or to be "cheeky" as a reason for the discrepancy, but this was dismissed as directions, such as "roll your eyes", appeared on his script. The judges heard he was paid £3,000 per episode in 2018 despite being viewed as up-and-coming talent.

The result was cheered by colleagues and friends who had shown their support by marching alongside Samira and NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet to the tribunal hearings. It also led to the BBC showing a new willingness to resolve some of the many outstanding equal pay cases at the corporation.

The judgment highlighted the lack of transparency and inconsistency in the BBC's approach to setting pay: "The BBC found itself in difficulties in this case because it did not (and, to an extent, still does not) have a transparent and consistent process for evaluating and determining pay for its on-air talent."

So far this year, in equal pay claims alone, NUJ members have secured many millions in compensation and back pay, plus increases in salary.

Michelle said: "The tribunal outcome was a major victory, and about as emphatic a verdict as we could have hoped for. Samira's determination to be treated properly has also inspired women in other workplaces to stand up and fight for pay parity."

Samira tweeted: "Just want to say: thank you to everyone who supported me and understands equal pay is about men and women as allies. To my amazing union @NUJofficial who backed me. And to the Ford Dagenham and Grunwick women who blazed the trail & to whom I'll always be grateful."

Samira's victory was mirrored in Ireland where the union helped secure €100,000 for former executive TV producer Anne Roper from RTÉ, which had forced her to retire against her wishes at 65. RTÉ argued she had to go to allow younger talent to progress at the station.

Anne claimed discrimination and the Workplace Relations Commission, in its ruling, said other employees had been allowed to continue beyond 65 and that Anne had been keen to train younger producers. It awarded her the equivalent to a year's salary.

Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary, said: "The NUJ did its best to secure a local resolution; Anne should not have been forced to go to the WRC and it is most regrettable that RTÉ has now appealed."

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NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
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JOURNALISTS

Séamus Says



As DM looms, the union has a lot of battles to fight and issues to debate, says Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary

And so, it's nearly time to head for Southport again.

The union's biennial delegate conference is a time to take stock, to celebrate success, review failures and plan for the future. As evident in this edition we can be proud of what we have achieved against enormous odds.

Inevitably the focus this year will be on the financial challenges facing the union as we seek the support of delegates for an increase in membership subscriptions so we can continue serving members throughout the UK and Ireland.

We will also look at how we recruit and organise, how we run our chapels and branches, how the NUJ serves you, the member.

As we prepare for DM it feels like journalists and journalism are under siege at home and abroad. On every front there are attempts to thwart journalists, to make it more difficult to do our jobs

Imagine a world where you can't trust the news

and to undermine the media. The threats are felt at local level, nationally and globally.

In Northern Ireland female journalists have been the target of vicious online abuse. NUJ intervention has been crucial in securing police action. In Derry, where Lyra McKee was killed last April, another female journalist has been the subject of sectarian abuse and threats of intimidation.

Leona O'Neill, who witnessed Lyra's killing, was branded a "tout" and "an informer" on walls in the Creggan and denounced as "a shit stirrer". The graffiti also falsely and dangerously linked Leona to MIS.

For Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey, the battle to secure justice following their vindication by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland is still going on. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has still not returned materials seized in the unlawful raid on their homes and offices and the makers of No Stone Unturned have yet to secure justice.

As a global union the NUJ is mindful of the threats to colleagues around the world and the news from Iran is cause for grave concern. Since the beginning of the year the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have raided the homes of at least six journalists in Tehran, confiscating documents and reporting equipment.

These arbitrary raids are part of a disturbing pattern of behaviour in the run up to this month's general election, which saw hardline conservatives elected to power with the lowest turnout since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

A report by the UK government's Independent High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, set up last year by the UK and Canada to advise

governments on how to better protect journalists and media freedom, has called for targeted sanctions as a tool to enforce governments' international human rights obligations, including their obligation to respect free speech and protect the media.

The report, authored by human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, said: "Media freedom has been in decline for a decade, through systemic censorship as well as relentless attacks on journalists ranging from online harassment to arbitrary detention and extra-judicial killings. Many governments are refusing to hold perpetrators of such attacks to account, and in many places the governments are the perpetrators. International sanctions targeting individuals responsible for the abuses can highlight their misconduct, limit their impact and act as a deterrent to future misdeeds. Such sanctions are indeed, in the current global political climate, often the only way to hold those responsible to account."

This is something the NUJ supports; there must be a real commitment by governments to fight impunity for crimes committed against journalists. That is why the NUJ is working with the Federation of International Journalists to promote a UN Convention to protect journalists and media workers.

In America Trump continues his nasty verbal assaults on the media and we can expect his behaviour to worsen as November's election looms into sight. Indeed, the UK government and its aides have been accused of playing by the Trump playbook in its treatment of journalists.

Against this backdrop the importance of public service broadcasting is reinforced and for the NUJ the threats to public service broadcasting in the UK and

Ireland are a source of real concern. It's a threat that is not confined to these isles.

Boris Johnson and his advisors appear to be on a mission against the BBC. The undermining of public service broadcasting would have major consequences for democracy in the UK.

During the election campaign Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, warned against what she termed "flagrant bullying rhetoric" targeted at the BBC and Channel 4 and her worse fears have been confirmed.

The plan to decriminalise the non-payment of the licence fee is a vindictive act devoid of principle.

In Ireland RTÉ faces a financial crisis after years of political cowardice by politicians unwilling to risk unpopularity by increasing the licence fee and reforming the archaic collection system. Before the General Election the outgoing government appointed a chair of a new Commission on the Future of Public Service Broadcasting but neglected to appoint any members.

At the time of going to print the RTÉ Trade Union Group is engaged in talks with management on a cost reduction programme which can only succeed if it is part of a reorganisation plan with increased state funding.

Privately-owned broadcasters are lobbying against the public funded because they have been hit hard by digital giants hoovering up advertising and moving discourse to the wild west of social media. Catherine Tait, chief executive of Canada's national public broadcaster, also under review, told the FT: "Something worrisome is afoot... how do we secure a safe public space for civil civic exchange and a place for fact-based argument, for science, for enlightenment?"

The need for public interest journalism has never been greater. The protection of public service broadcasting is fundamental to a vibrant, independent media.

Plenty to talk about at DM.

See you in Southport!

Diary

TV detectives

Spark up the TV detector van. Speaking at a Tortoise think-in, run by the slow-news organisation and hosted by its founder, former director of BBC News James Harding, Amber Rudd, the ex-Home Secretary was discussing the future of the BBC licence, saying she doubted her two children in their 20s paid it. This led to Ed Vaizey, former culture minister recalling John Whittingdale, newly appointed back at the DCMS as minister for media and data, dobbing in his son for illegally downloading films in Parliament. John, he said, should not be seen as an anti-BBC ogre, rather he has been put in by Downing Street to calm the Tory attack dogs. He said Whittingdale may not be a cheerleader for the public service broadcaster, but he wasn't idiotic.

Look east

Sally Chidzoy, Cambridge branch's new chair surely has a claim to be our most journalistically decorated lay official? For 30 years Chidzoy was the doyenne of the BBC's East Anglian television news, during which time she scooped a cabinet full of reporting gongs, including a Royal Television Society award. Her arrival at Cambridge branch is timely - long-time stalwart Keith Murray has stepped aside to concentrate on his new job. Toasting the regime change, more than 50 turned up for a Christmas bash - a record turnout.

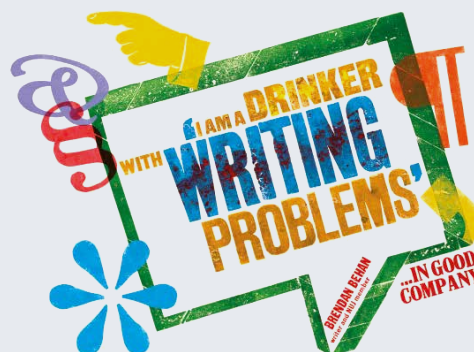
Sparks might fly

Hair-shirt trade unionists tut disapprovingly at second home ownership - but occasionally a warm-weather retreat can be deployed for progressive purpose. National Executive member Gerry Curran

treated himself recently to a bolthole in Greece. As a result, he was able to advise his fellow NEC members on the ingenious solution to television licensing pioneered in the birthplace of democracy. Each household's contribution to the state broadcaster is simply added to their electricity bill. Disconnection discourages non-payment. Curran, an unashamed 'Continental', argued that the future of BBC and RTÉ might be every bit as sunny as his holidays, were they to adopt a similar scheme.

Skye's the limit

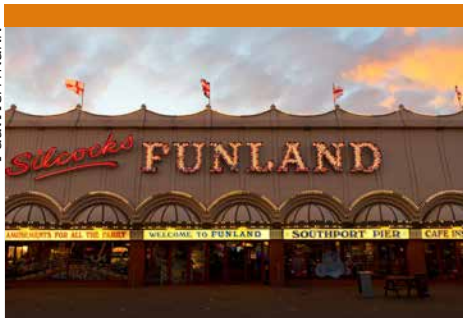
Farewell Ian McCormack who has retired from the editorship of the West Highland Free press after 44 years in the chair. An NUJ life member, he is thought to be the longest serving newspaper editor of the modern era.



Delegate Meeting

#DM20: Subs' rise tops the agenda

Paul Herrmann



A motion calling for a meaningful subs' increase is likely to be the most important motion discussed at this April's Delegate Meeting in Southport, the NEC was told.

Michelle Stanistreet said it was vital for the NUJ's survival as an independent union. The motion notes subscription rates have remained static for the past six years while costs to the union have increased and its contribution to pension deficit payments must significantly increase from this year.

With the staff now totalling 31, working across the UK and Ireland, cutting posts was not an option without

cutting services to members, she said.

Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, said the union was under pressure to deliver additional services as a result of recent successes, such as the recent Samira Ahmed and Anne Roper cases. While strides have been made in recruitment, with the NEC being told of seven bids for recognition in the magazines sector alone, the income was not enough to sustain the union.

NEC motions also include: an end to a two-thirds majority for contributions and benefits motions at DM; a broad-based campaign against the use of face-recognition technology; allowing students to remain members while searching for work; promoting the IFJ Convention on the Protection of Journalists and creating an alliance to improve media literacy. Other motions call for a commemorative event in honour of Lyra McKee and campaigns to boost members' pay, in support of quality journalism at Newsquest and ending individual targets for journalists.

Speakers at DM include BBC presenter

Samira Ahmed and Fatima Mutahar of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate.

DM takes place from April 24-26. The final agenda and annual report will be available on 10 March. All documents can be found on the NUJ website, including the guide to DM for delegates: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/union-democracy/nuj-delegate-meeting/>

Join the skills hub

Caroline Holmes, leader of the NUJ's reps' training, will be hosting a skills hub throughout DM. It will include taster sessions on branch revival, signposting to professional development and a range of activities including how to support workers through the menopause. It will showcase new online courses, including the collaborative leadership skills module, resources for reps and new recruitment materials. Caroline can answer your queries on the NUJ's training programme, including the new workshop on dealing with redundancies.

He's back

John Whittingdale has returned to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as minister of state. His boss is Oliver Dowden, the new Secretary of State, the tenth in the past decade, who was previously paymaster general and minister for the Cabinet Office and has worked for the PR company Hill & Knowlton. Caroline Dinéage was also appointed minister of state. She was previously minister of state at the Department

of Health and Social Care. Julian Knight was voted as chair of the media and culture select committee. He said his priorities were to start an open conversation about how the BBC can be funded, getting broadband done and the online harms legislation.

Get it in writing

The NUJ's freelance office has launched a campaign to inform members that from April 6, every employee and worker in the UK will have the

right to a written "statement of particulars", summarising their terms of employment from day one of starting work. This includes hours of work, holiday pay and other benefits, plus details of any probationary period. Even if you are freelance you may be eligible for the statement as a "worker". Freelancers are also encouraged to see if they qualify as a "worker" and are eligible for holiday pay. More information can be found on the campaign page: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/>

[*should-you-be-getting-paid-holiday/*](#)

Peers' press inquiry

The Communications and Digital Committee is looking at the future of journalism. It is taking evidence on how digital technology is changing the production and consumption of journalism and role of journalists and how the profession can become more trusted by the general public. The deadline for written submissions is Wednesday 25 March.

Broadcasting

Hands off our BBC



BBC

It was a packed room of BBC reps at the NUJ's London headquarters, just days after an announcement of 450 job cuts in the news division, who heard from the NUJ rep on Victoria Derbyshire's show how members of the team learned that their jobs would go from a story in *The Times*.

He was assured the NUJ would fight

any and every compulsory redundancy and would help him find an alternative post; the union would be launching a broad-based campaign to defend the corporation.

It isn't the first time the BBC has been attacked, but in a response to the jobs announcement which brings the total to more than 500 cuts – 70 from the World Service, 380 from news and 60 from Network Radio – Michelle Stanistreet said it amounted to an existential threat at the same time the broadcaster faced an ideological attack from the heart of government.

Newsnight is losing 12 posts and cuts to its investigative journalism budget, 12 posts are to go at 5Live and there will be more sharing of radio bulletins across the BBC, with a loss of 12 posts.

The meeting pledged to resist by all means, including industrial action, any attempt to impose compulsory redundancies and any measures

adversely affecting journalistic quality and the ability to respond to 24/7 breaking news. Its statement said: "If the BBC needs to save money it should urgently address the number of senior managers and levels of executive pay and create a more transparent and flatter pay structure." It said the next director general – Tony Hall had announced his early departure – must champion public service broadcastings and robustly resist political interference.

The reps decried "ill-informed and crass attempts by managers within the BBC" to blame the equal pay settlements on the funding crisis. Culpability was laid squarely on Tony Hall, whose secret licence fee deal with the government led to the BBC taking on payment of free licence fees for the over-75s.

The reps were urged to take part in the DCMS inquiry into decriminalisation of non-payment of the licence fee; the BBC estimates this would cost £200m. The proposal will send out the message that paying for a TV licence is voluntary and is intended to be a backdoor route to dismantle the BBC.

Subs offer

A discount on membership is being offered at the BBC which runs from Saturday 1 February to Wednesday 1 April. New joiners will get six months' membership for half the normal price. This discount is not available to those who have left the union in the previous 12 months. There will be a recruitment drive at BBC Wales on 1 April. Join the *NUJ*: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/join/>

P10 Is it payback time for the BBC?

Radio Rupert

News UK is to launch Times Radio, providing a daily

schedule of news, analysis and commentary, later this year. The station will broadcast nationally on DAB and online. BBC News deputy political editor John Pienaar will present the drivetime show. The Murdoch-owned station will target BBC Radio 4 and 5 Live listeners.

TalkRadio was fined £75,000 by watchdog Ofcom after it found presenter George Galloway broke impartiality rules. The former MP was sacked by the station last year. TalkRadio argued it should not be hit with a large sum as very few people listened to the show.

Iranian threats

Journalists working for the UK-based broadcaster Iran International, as well as BBC Persian staff, have been subjected to new threats by the Iranian authorities, as have their family members living in Iran.

The union is supporting members and liaising with the Foreign Office. It is also pushing for union recognition at Iran International.

Al Jazeera English

Staff have roundly rejected a proposed performance-related pay system based on appraisals instead of

collectively bargained deals across the board. Discussions with the management continue. Morale is very low at the broadcaster and a recent stress survey showed alarming results. Two years ago, the union brokered a 9 per cent pay rise.

High 5s

Channel 5, owned by Viacom CBS Networks International, has renewed a three-year contract with ITN to produce 5 News. The deal follows ITN securing a four-year contract to continue producing ITV News and ITV News London last year.

News Update

No. 10 strikes blow against press freedom



The Prime Minister taken by in-house photographer Andrew Parsons

The union has been forced to intervene on behalf of reporters and photographers denied access to Downing Street in a worrying development threatening press freedom.

Without consultation, Number 10 changed the location of its lobby briefings to Downing Street instead of Parliament; this particularly caused problems for smaller press organisations. Political journalists then boycotted a Number 10 briefing on the Britain's future trade with the European Union when Lee Cain excluded reporters from the Mirror, the i, HuffPost, Politics Home, the Independent among others. Johnson's senior communications adviser, who used to wear a chicken suit for a Daily Mirror stunt, was accused of sorting the press into sheep and goats. A briefing on Huawei was equally restricted.

Michelle Stanistreet commended the political correspondents' act of solidarity and said: "Johnson's government must stop this paranoia and engage with all

the press, not just its favourites."

The union's Photographers' Council complained when Number 10 started to release images of the Prime Minister from its in-house photographer rather than those on an agreed rota. Natasha Hirst, the council's chair, said: "Staged PR images will further erode transparency and public trust. This strategy of choosing what emerges into the public domain must be halted."

Reports stated ministers had been told not to lunch with political journalists and that Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's senior adviser, had a "network of spies" to see whether other special advisers were fraternising with the media. Cummings is seen as being behind the ban on ministers appearing on the BBC's Radio 4's Today show and other political and news programmes.

These tactics led to a critical leader from even the Daily Mail, which is usually loyal to the Prime Minister. Its commentator Stephen Glover wrote: "All this comes from President Trump's playbook."

BMC's shock poll

More than half of members who took part in the NUJ's disability survey said their opportunities at work were limited because of a lack of understanding of disability/mental issues and access problems.

Almost two-thirds (73 per cent) suffered anxiety or stress at work and 60 per cent said their situation or condition was poorly understood by colleagues. A third had been ill-treated at work and a third described a lack of access or reasonable adjustments for them at work.

More than half (54 per cent) said they found it stressful having to ask for adjustments and extra support to help them at work. More than a third said they had approached the union with work and access problems. One in three had problems accessing training, with 43 per cent calling for more online resources.

One in five said they did not understand their rights at work under the Equality Act 2010, with a third saying they would benefit from more information. There was a mixed response to Access to Work, the government programme aimed at supporting disabled people to take up or remain in work.

Of those who took part, 32 per cent were staff and 43 per cent freelance and just under 10 per cent were unemployed; 84 per cent considered they were disabled or had a long-term health condition.

Ann Galpin, Black Members' Council chair, said the survey showed that disabled members needed much more support at work and employers must remove barriers restricting them. "The survey responses will inform the council's priorities for the next two years," she said.

Local News Matters Week

A week of action for Local News Matters Week is planned next week, for March 7-14.

This campaign raises the profile of local news services and celebrates local journalism. A motion passed at DM 2018 called for this year's Local News Matters Week to explore the issue of media ownership, new models for news services and provide an opportunity for branches and chapels to lead events promoting local journalism, alerting MPs to the threats to local and regional journalism. Court reporting will also be a theme of the week.

Nesta, the innovation foundation which administered the £2m Future News Fund set up following the Cairncross Review on sustainability of the press, has announced its list of recipients to the fund. Nesta

said the crisis in public interest news must be solved by transforming the way news is created and distributed.

The co-operative Bristol Cable will use its £41,143 funding to test "open newsrooms", moving their media team into the communities they serve. The not-for-profit Manchester Meteor was given £25,000 to expand its membership. Slow news outlet Tortoise got £50,000. The same sum went to WT Social created by Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, which uses a social network model to share quality news. Shout Out UK, the media literacy project for 14 to 19-year-olds, received £30,000.



Open Democracy will use its £69,800 on a prototype to provide data online to inform public debate and support public interest investigations.

The Media Trust charity will spend its £65,000 on improving representation of people with disabilities, creating a disabled experts directory and providing media training. My Society will use £70,000 to expand its project promoting public interest stories driven by Freedom of Information requests. Entale will use its £50,000 funding to explore alternative distribution and monetisation mechanisms for public interest podcasting and Axate has been given £70,000 to develop its "Oyster card for news" which allows casual readers to pay by the article. So put the dates in your diary and start your plans for Local News Matters Week. Check the NUJ website for more details.

Reason breaks out in Glasgow

Newsquest agreed to drop compulsory redundancies on its Glasgow titles after staff voted for industrial action. A ballot of members working on The Herald, The Herald on Sunday, the Glasgow Times, The National and The Sunday National returned a result of 87 per cent supporting action. Eight members of staff left voluntarily, and the company informed the union it would not seek further job cuts. Six new posts were to be filled from external applications. Newsquest also dealt with a case of bullying highlighted by the union. John Toner, NUJ national

organiser for Scotland, said: "This proves that when members express themselves collectively, management will take notice. A chapel that has been subjected to cuts and increasing workloads over many years now feels empowered and will have the confidence to continue raising issues with the employer."

No buyer for JPI Media

JPI Media has announced its sale has been put on hold, presumably because it could not find a suitable bidder. Reach had shown some interest and David Montgomery, former head

of Local World, had also been in the running. JPI Media did sell The i to DMGT for £49.6m, a deal now being investigated by the government's competition watchdog. The union has challenged JPI Media for cutting its homeworking allowance, representing a £20 cut per month for members. A final hearing is expected in April.

Vice victory

The Vice chapel has signed its union recognition agreement. The members and reps were congratulated for their diligent work and successful campaign. They are now submitting their

first pay claim and looking at other industrial issues that need addressing. Two of the reps will be telling their story on a panel at a special training event for reps at Headland House on Saturday 14 March.

Diversity dosh

The National Council for the Training of Journalists is asking for news organisations to contribute to its diversity fund.

In the past 15 years the fund has taken 347 people from diverse backgrounds through NCTJ training. The NUJ provides bursaries though its George Viner Memorial Fund.

Spotlight

Government shuns public interest news project



Has this once-in-a-generation chance to save the UK press been a wasted opportunity? Frances Rafferty assesses the Cairncross Review

The NUJ warmly welcomed the news in 2018 that the government had at last agreed to investigate the sustainability of the UK press.

The review, set up by Theresa May and headed by former journalist, Dame Frances Cairncross, aimed to protect the future of high-quality journalism. However it did not start auspiciously. The union was not consulted, was not invited to join the review's advisory panel, and the quotes accompanying the announcement were from the newspaper publishers' lobby the News Media Association.

However, after having long called for for such a review, the NUJ decided to take it seriously, despite the snubs. In the event, Michelle Stanistreet met Dame Frances, the union provided an extensive submission to the consultation and fed further information to the review's secretariat throughout the process. Following the publication of the

report in February 2019, NUJ reps were invited to a round table discussion of its recommendations with the then digital minister, Margot James.

It took a year for the government to respond to the review's conclusions, published on 27 January 2020. The union's reaction was deep disappointment, particularly the rejection of the proposed Institute for Public Interest News to protect the sort of journalism essential for a functioning democracy in the wake of the market's failure to do so. Michelle Stanistreet said: "The response fails to address the need to bolster diverse and sustainable journalism in the UK... this 'more of the same' approach is simply not going to cut it."

The government had put in train a review of the digital advertising market (due in July) by the Competition and Markets Authority and Ofcom was asked to explore the market impact of BBC News. A £2m Future News Fund was set up to encourage innovative news models (see p7).

Dame Frances's report set out an overview of challenges facing high-quality journalism and recommendations to help secure its future. It is a masterly marshalling of the evidence, research, and accounts of major media players. It detailed the changes brought by the internet, the way people access news, the rise of news aggregators, the decline of journalist numbers from 23,000 in 2007, to 17,000, with job losses swiftly continuing, and the domination of platforms such as Facebook and Google which have sucked the lifeblood of advertising revenue from newspapers.

These factors all made a robust case for intervention, the report said, noting research showed that a reduction in public-interest reporting led to reduced

Government response to the review:

- New codes of conduct will “rebalance and redefine the relationships between news publishers and online platforms”.
- Platforms will be required to identify the reliability and trustworthiness of online news sources.
- An online media literacy strategy will be published this summer.
- Treasury will consider tax incentives – removing VAT charged on online news subscriptions and extending the business

- rate relief on local newspapers in England.
- The government said no to an Institute for Public Interest News and charitable status for public-interest newspapers, and the BBC must fund expansion of the local democracy reporter

community engagement with local democracy. It found that investigative journalism was expensive – The Times spent £48,000 on its 10-month investigation into sexual abuse by charity workers, The Sun spent £73,000 on an investigation which was not published. Such journalism is costly and high risk, while documenting the day-to-day goings on in local public institutions is time-consuming and not generally well read. New players, however, are emerging.

Cairncross cited the new models of The Bureau for Investigative Journalism and the Glasgow-based Ferret.

The consequences of not doing this sort of journalism can be deadly, the report implied; commentators said the failure to report Grenfell Tower residents’ concerns was a key reason why the local authority did not act to prevent the catastrophe.

The review examined the change in news-consuming habits. Most people now find their news online. While newspapers

provide an array of stories and topics, the “unbundling” of content online meant readers selected only the articles they wished to view, “so they may be less likely to read public-interest news”. It found people spent less time on news online than they did in print and concluded that “UK adults may be less well-informed online than through more traditional forms of news delivery”.

When the report was published, the union criticised its timid approach to the tech giants. “Letting the tech giants off the hook sidesteps the real issues of how they get a free ride with the content they suck up online and disseminate on their platforms,” said Michelle Stanistreet. “We wish Dame Frances had been braver in making Facebook and Google responsible for the news they exploit.”

With the government further watering down Cairncross’s solutions to the crisis in local papers and threats to quality journalism, will it be too late by the time the next generation’s review is held?

How to improve your boss

Tim Dawson takes lessons in challenging poor office behaviour

I’ve had some choice editors in my time. Prof Tantrum – intense, prone to explosions of anger and content to leave subordinates in tears. The Weasel who got others to do his dirty work. “Sack him immediately” and “cut her fee by 20 per cent” were among the directives he fired my way. Finally, Easy Rider who was wont to send me to knock on the door of the known violent psychopath without a warning.

They all came to mind when I read about NUJ Training Scotland’s Collaborative Leadership course. It promises to combat poor management practices, including hierarchical management structures, misogynistic

attitudes and poor people management.

I joined 11 others in Glasgow, under the tutelage of Vèrène Nicolas and Richard Golsworthy, respectively a non-violent communication practitioner and a psychologist. We first divided into groups of three and acted as subject,

mentoring interviewer and observer. Rotating roles, we described incidents from our own lives where our core beliefs had been challenged, where we had undermined a colleague and where we had undermined ourselves. It was the first of several sessions in threes, tugging apart preconceptions about comfort zones, inner voices, and our need for affirmation.

The collaborative leadership strategy focuses on how to challenge others’ behaviour while reflecting on their motives, how to create opportunities to respond more effectively and how to signal ways in which future actions might be improved.

Homeward bound, my mind returned to Tantrum, Weasel and Easy Rider, and I am certain of one thing: with my new knowledge, I would have responded to them differently and life on both sides of the managerial divide might have been happier.

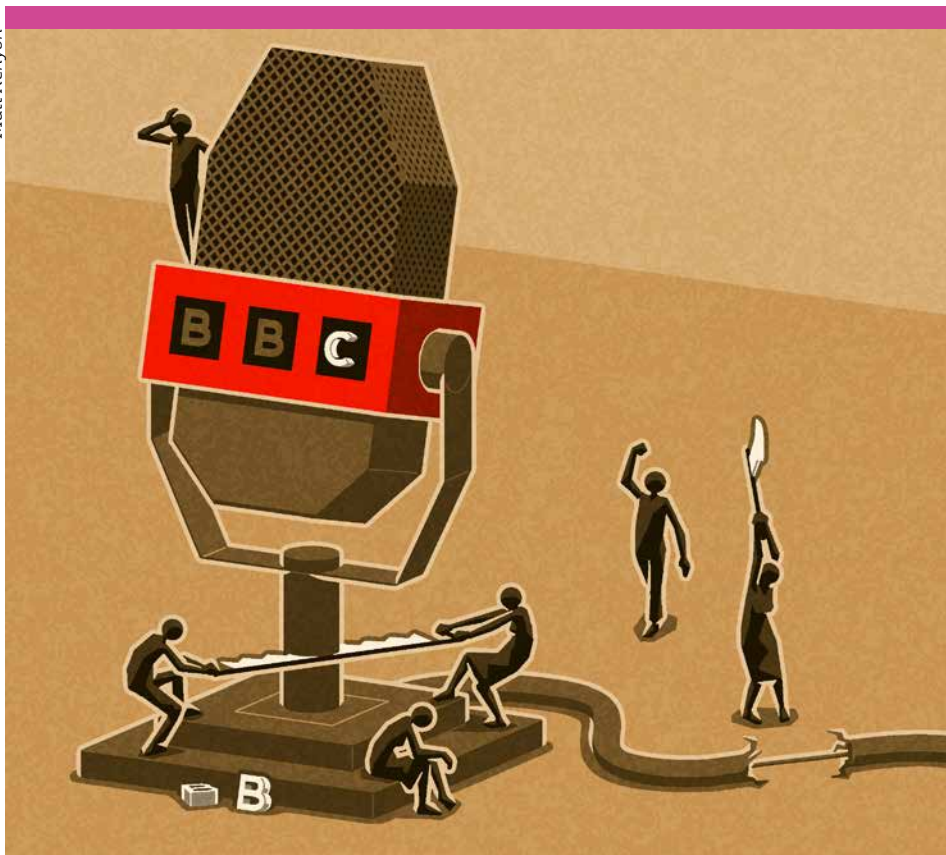


Tutor Vèrène Nicolas

Spotlight

Is it payback time for the BBC?

Matt Kenyon



Johnson's government has made it known that it intends to "whack" the corporation. Ian Burrell looks at a broadcaster in peril

In a memorable moment from the election campaign, the BBC journalist Andrew Neil looked into the camera and challenged Boris Johnson to answer "a question of trust" by appearing on his show. "We have been asking him for weeks now to give us a date, a time, a venue. As of now, none has been forthcoming," he said. "It's not too late. We have an interview prepared, oven-ready as Mr Johnson likes to say."

Neil's chutzpah failed to provoke the future Prime Minister into giving an interview. But now that Johnson is inside Downing Street he is giving the BBC his full attention – and the grandstanding of

its chief political interrogator has not been forgotten.

Through back channels, the government has let it be known that it was "immensely annoyed" with the BBC's election coverage, and especially Neil's throwing down of the gauntlet. Scores are being settled. The coming months will see the BBC facing an onslaught from which it may not recover in its current form. In a front-page story in the *Sunday Times*, we were told by what *ConservativeHome*'s Paul Goodman described as "a scarcely-disguised Downing Street source that" the BBC was about to be "whacked". Days later "another source" said the Prime Minister was less gung-ho about the destruction of the BBC.

On 5 February the government announced a review of the BBC's funding which could mean that the licence fee is scrapped in 2027. It will consider decriminalising non-payment of the licence fee from 2022, a step that would cost the BBC at least £200m. "None of this was in their manifesto," complained one source.

Shortly after the review concludes, the BBC must take responsibility for funding free licences for the over-75s at a minimum cost of £250m (for those on pension credit), and possibly £750m (for all over-75s). Before it takes those mighty blows, the BBC will in April risk undermining public support for the licence fee by raising the annual charge by 2 per cent to £157.50.

It is in this dire context that the BBC must find its new leader, after the sudden decision by director-general Tony Hall to step down in the summer. "These are very dangerous times for the BBC," says Suzanne Franks, professor of journalism at City University and a former BBC broadcaster. "It is going to need a very skilled leadership to steer it through this now."

So bad is the crisis that John Mair, a publisher and former BBC producer, has commissioned a book titled *Is the BBC in Peril? (And Should It Be?)*. He answers both those questions in the affirmative

and is critical of the departing leader. "If you are losing 25 per cent or more of your revenue that's pretty bloody perilous," he says. "Tony Hall has not been a huge success as a DG, let's be frank. He steadied the ship, but maybe he is sinking the ship as well."

The Tory party has a long legacy of hostility towards the BBC. But BBC insiders say it is the combination of characters in key positions that makes the current threat an existential one.

Johnson's adviser Dominic Cummings once described the BBC as the party's "mortal enemy". Julian Knight, newly appointed as chair of the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport committee, has compared the licence fee to a "poll tax". The new Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, is a loyalist said by the Telegraph to have impressed Johnson with his "ability to get things done".

One senior figure close to the BBC said that, while Tory anti-BBC rhetoric historically "flickers on and off", the current animosity is unprecedented. "The starting line position for the Johnson government is that the party has a very substantial faction within it which wants to destroy the BBC and sees it as being irrelevant and positively harmful."

Paul Siegert, a former BBC political correspondent and now NUJ national broadcasting organiser, said: "Even Margaret Thatcher in her heyday wouldn't take on the BBC. We are extremely worried. With a majority of 80, the government feels it can pick a fight with anyone and certainly has the BBC within its sights."

The BBC is struggling to respond. In a speech in Salford, the BBC's chairman David Clementi reminded the government that the BBC is "a great national asset" which can unite post-Brexit Britain. "A diminished BBC would weaken the country as a whole," he said.

Franks, speaking from India, said there is international dismay that a fine example of independent media might be being pushed around. "In countries like India the soft power of the BBC is so

evident and yet sometimes it's just not valued or appreciated at home," she said.

According to one BBC executive, the Johnson administration desires "a fundamental change of government status for the BBC, taking away its right to be the nation's broadcaster".

Broadcasting House is fuming that it is being cast as just another media outlet, and one that has failed to keep up with rivals, such as Netflix. "What a lot of the commentary seems to ignore is that we have actually kept pace with that change and are often at the forefront of it," Clare Sumner, BBC director of policy, tells NUJ Informed. "It shouldn't be forgotten that we still reach nine out of ten people in the UK and we are by far the most used media organisation." The licence fee allows the BBC to provide a "universal range of services", she says. "We're not just making programmes to drive subscribers or delivering news to meet commercial targets."

"People who care about the BBC should fight for it"

Damian Collins, the Conservative MP and former chair of the DCMS committee, agrees that the comparison with Netflix is unfair but says this is unappreciated by many licence fee payers.

"They are comparing services like Netflix with the bits of the BBC they access, because a lot of licence fee payers only access a relatively small part of what the BBC offers."

Collins says continued public support for the licence fee will be very important for its survival but that the BBC faces an increasing battle for the attention of audiences. "The BBC is in a position now where I think the number of people paying the licence fee is starting to decline for the first time in a decade and the cost of making programmes is going up." But he denies that BBC election coverage enraged the Tories, pointing out that its output "was criticised by all sides".

The BBC newsroom is in despair after 450 job cuts and £40m savings to meet the last licence fee settlement. There is a race against time to move resources from broadcast to digital before it loses touch with youth altogether. "There is a real risk that young audiences will never form a habitual relationship with the BBC of any kind," I was told.

While one executive described the newsroom's introduction of a central commissioning model as a "proportionate and sensible" response to the need for savings, another denounced it as a "Yo Sushi" conveyor belt approach to news which would devalue flagship programmes. "The place is in freefall. We're seething that such a stupid and patently flawed set of proposals could get this far," he said, blaming the departing DG for the situation. "We're appalled that Tony has once again shown his weakness as a leader. He's running away and sanctioning terrible decisions at the same time."

Lord Hall, who is heading to the National Gallery, was expected to stay until the BBC's centenary in 2022. There is no obvious successor in place. One senior BBC figure wondered whether strong outside candidates would be prepared to take on a role which "could be a full-on confrontation with the government".

Since the election, figures in Downing Street have been "slightly juvenile" in their playground bully approach towards the BBC, I was told. Indeed, when Dominic Cummings was recently asked by a BBC journalist if he was losing influence he responded bizarrely by quoting catchphrases from PJ Masks, a children's programme (not made by the BBC).

The new government has also picked early fights with the tech platforms and the parliamentary lobby, angering even supportive outlets such as the Daily Mail. The BBC is receiving backing from other parts of the UK's creative sector, where its fate is the cause of great concern. "There is still plenty to fight for," says one source. "People who care about the BBC should fight for it."

International

Best Christmas present ever

Mohammed Elfenich tells how he escaped jail, thanks to the NUJ.

For the first time in 15 years, I did not spend last Christmas with my wife. Instead, the day was a dizzying whirl of legal diplomacy by the NUJ and the IFJ that eventually saved me from spending 2020 in a Moroccan jail.

I grew up in Morocco but have lived in the UK for 16 years. My wife is from Yorkshire and I am a reporter for Alghad TV, based in London, where I cover politics and current affairs for a North African and Middle Eastern audience. My parents live in Guelmim, in southern Morocco and I visit them often.

During these visits, I started to notice that millions of pounds were reportedly spent on civic renewal, but there was not much to show. One former municipal leader appeared to be living like an oligarch. I made a few anodyne comments about what I saw to friends on Facebook.

I was then forwarded a report from a



Moroccan journalist Mohammed Elfenich

Moroccan news website which said I had been convicted of “insulting a politician”, sentenced to a year in prison and fined £25,000. So began my nightmare. Court documents showed I had signed for the summons in Morocco on a day I was in the UK. The evidence contained dozens of inflammatory Facebook posts falsely attributed to me.

The NUJ wrote to the Moroccan

authorities and Michelle Stanistreet accompanied me to see the Moroccan ambassador. The judge at the first appeal reduced the sentence to eight months. My busy life as a reporter continued, but prison hung over me.

Eventually my final appeal was listed for 30 December 2019. Now the IFJ’s president Younes M’Jahed became involved, along with the NUJ’s Jim Boumelha. Michelle proposed a form of words for a joint statement, in which the official agreed to withdraw his case, and the Moroccan union worked hard to get agreement. It was a day of frantic emails and phone calls, but we did it and my accuser agreed to drop his case.

I still went to court on 30 December, where amazingly the judge determined that although the complaint had been dropped, he would dismiss it in its entirety. That was a Christmas gift that was worth waiting for! I can lead an ordinary life again after two years of worry.

Assange attack

Journalists must put aside their personal view of Julian Assange and fight his cause, Tim Dawson, former NUJ president, told a London rally in support of the Wikileaks founder. The first steps towards extradition have started at Woolwich Crown Court. Tim Dawson said: “Unless journalists wake up to this threat and focus on the grievous harm that his successful prosecution represents, the ability of any of us to report will be seriously damaged. Debating whether Assange is, or is not, really a journalist is

irrelevant at this moment. So are judgments on his past behaviour or character. The legal devices being deployed to try and take him to the US are unprecedented and terrifying for anyone whose journalism touches on state security, defence or espionage. If Assange is sent from here to start a prison sentence that could be 175 years, then no journalist is safe.” Assange’s alleged crimes relate to Wikileaks revelations including attacks to civilians in the Iraq war.

Mexico tops killing list

Mexico remains the most

dangerous country in the world for journalists, with 10 murdered last year, The International Federation of Journalists annual report of killings of journalists found. The report detailed 49 deaths worldwide. In Mexico journalists are often threatened by organised crime cartels and the high-level impunity and lack of protection from government does nothing to buck this trend of killings. By region, the report noted Latin America had the highest number of deaths (18), followed by Asia-Pacific (12), Africa (9), the Middle East

and Arab world (8). In Europe, two journalists were killed in 2019: Lyra McKee, shot while covering a riot in Derry, Northern Ireland, and Vadym Komarov, killed following a violent attack by unidentified individuals in the centre of Cherkassy, Ukraine.

Global action

The international section of the Delegate Meeting agenda calls on the NEC to highlight journalists’ problems in the Yemen, Turkey, Afghanistan and Palestine and support the IFJ’s campaigns to release journalists jailed for doing their jobs.