



NUJ briefing on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

October 2023

The NUJ's AI campaign calls for urgent regulatory oversight promoting ethical approaches that centres the work of journalists.

Journalism before algorithms

The NUJ is calling for fast paced developments within AI to include engagement with journalists and those whose work is used in the technology. Threats of exploitation and intellectual copyright breaches have already been realised, with reports of inaccurate data used to inform AI generated stories, false attributions to journalists, and creators discovering use of their likeness without their knowledge or consent. Such advancements in the use of AI directly threaten journalism and risks the reputation of every journalist abiding by ethical standards to ensure accuracy and honesty through their work.

The NUJ is engaging with sister unions including members of the Federation of Entertainment Unions, on AI's impact on journalists and creators across industries. In September, the union hosted a roundtable attended by Michelle Stanistreet and senior officials from Creators' Rights Alliance member organisations exploring the scraping of content, licensing agreements, copyright and more.

Journalism by humans remains at the core of our calls to employers and governments. We have urged the UK government to engage with the union as Ministers shape policy that has huge implications for journalists and journalism. The NUJ must be central to discussions on decision making to ensure the voice of members including your concerns on pay, job security, and rights infringements are considered and used to inform guidance.

As the use of AI is explored by employers, the NUJ is firm in its stance that valuing journalism by humans will ensure the role of journalists in upholding democracy, publishing stories in the public interest and holding the powerful to account is trusted. The union is engaging with employers considering ways to include or expand their use of AI across workplaces. Encouraging employers to draft key principles focused on ethical approaches, these must be shared with journalists and the union in meaningful engagement.

NUJ calls

Ethics –The NUJ is calling for an immediate end to the unlawful scraping of content, and for fair contract terms that avoid the exploitation of historic contracts. AI developers must not

unlawfully access or use journalistic content to inform data input or output by systems. Instead, legal and ethical practices must be adopted, ensuring transparent processes are followed with necessary licences obtained before content is used.

AI work should always be labelled as such to avoid eroding the public's trust in journalism. There are examples of regenerative AI reinforcing discriminatory practices and beliefs and we know stories on elections, corruption and the pandemic all require confidence in the information being consumed. Content generated by AI risks undermining public confidence if falsely presented.

Government action – UK and Irish governments must introduce mandatory legislative frameworks requiring developers to adhere to agreed standards, protecting journalists and their rights. There is an urgent need for strengthened legal frameworks that hold developers to account and create accessible methods to seek redress where journalists' rights are breached. Journalists including freelancers, must have access to information on how their content can be removed by platforms unlawfully using material.

The NUJ has submitted a response to UK government's consultation on AI and has briefed the NUJ Parliamentary Group formed of cross-party MPs with our calls. A submission has also been made to the Communications and Digital Committee's call for evidence on large language models. We will continue to raise member concerns through structures in Ireland.

In October, Michelle Stanistreet will attend a government-led roundtable on AI & journalism exploring the opportunities of AI within the sector. Another planned on risks to journalism and trustworthy news will ensure the union's views are fed to the UK's Culture Secretary.

Journalism before algorithms – AI generated journalism cannot replace the talent, creativity, or skill sets held by journalists. The use of AI must be considered against a background of pay stagnation, below-inflation wage increases, under-staffed newsrooms, and growing redundancies. Threats to journalists' jobs are at the forefront of minds, and although many are already adapting to developments, governments and employers must recognise the benefits of a human-centred approach and invest in skills and training that considers the long-term sustainability of journalism. This includes adopting calls in the NUJ's News Recovery Plan stressing the importance and value of local news to communities.

In July, an article titled "Should refugees in Ireland go home?" was published across titles owned by the Iconic Media Group. The use of clickbait on a subject the ChatGPT generated piece failed to consider in detail. The union reaffirmed its position that **AI is no substitute for genuine journalism.**

In July, Shutterstock announced it would provide the artificial intelligence company OpenAI, with access to its video, image and music libraries, allowing customers to edit and alter images. The NUJ has grave concerns about the impact of this approach on copyright owners and repeats its call for informed, transparent processes with creators fairly compensated for use of their works.

An NUJ Photographers' Council representative will present a paper at The Royal Photographic Society's conference on Artificial intelligence in October 2023, where topics

including ethical issues around AI generated photography and intellectual property rights issues will be discussed.

Licensing agreements – the NUJ calls for any agreements between media owners and AI companies to ensure licensing arrangements include representative organisations and agreements that allow journalists to receive fair payment for their work. Many NUJ members already receive payouts from the Authors Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) and we’re calling for similar models to be considered at the start of discussions.

International impact – The union is liaising closely with the International Federation of Journalists, who have also called for the inclusion of journalists and representative bodies to be involved in discussions held between publishers and developers. The IFJ has stressed the need for “democratic discussion about how humanity can benefit from AI and how we can regulate its operation.”

Next steps

The union’s work on AI including a focus on ethical, legal and equalities ramifications is progressing at pace. Members will remain updated on our campaign and helpful resources will be shared in coming months, including information on member rights.