

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Informed

issue 44 July 2023

NUJ to fight AI media threat

Journalism is in peril from the rapid development of AI, which not only threatens copyright, the loss of intellectual property rights and jobs, but also poses an existential crisis about trust in journalism and freedom of speech, the union's national executive council was told.

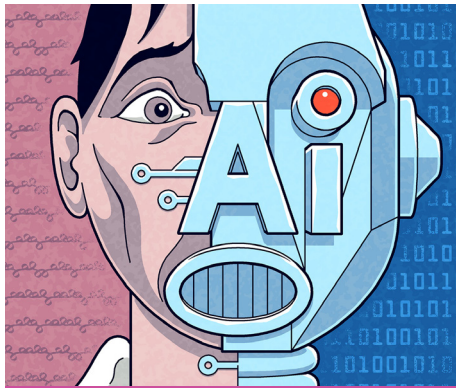
A paper, presented by Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, outlined campaign priorities for the NUJ, and Michelle said the union must be on the front foot in highlighting the dangers of the technology which is being adopted by the industry. The NUJ is working with the Trade Union Congress, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and their members in the creative industry to map developments in workplaces and raise awareness of the risks posed. Union bodies, such as the NUJ's Photography Council, Ethics Council and industrial councils will input and ensure the specific threats to their sectors are reflected in this work.

The union will develop a toolkit for members to help them avoid losing copyrights and ensuring fair contracts, for example when AI is used to generate "new works" by scraping and using original content created by journalists and photographers. Michelle said: "We will put 'Journalism by Humans' at the heart of this campaign."

Campaigning on pay and pay progression would remain a key priority. Michelle Stanistreet said: "The current impact of the cost-of-living crisis after a period of cuts and contraction in many parts of our industry makes co-ordinating our work on pay and boosting our collective strength across workplaces we organise in more important than ever."

There will a "more structured" approach moving through the pay bargaining schedule and reps will be provided with training and advice. Data from employers and information from the wider industry, including freelance rates, will be gathered.

Delegate Meeting motions called for improved starting salaries and a campaign for job advertisements to include salary ranges so people do not find themselves negotiating their pay rate during a job interview. The union will work with the TUC and ICTU to continue tackling gender, ethnic and other pay gaps. The Fair Deal for Freelances campaign will ramp up work on freelance rates and rights.



Read about the latest developments in AI on [page 10](#)

This edition of NUJ Informed covers two scandals at the major national broadcasters in Ireland and the UK. The Irish public service broadcaster RTÉ has been rocked by revelations of secret payments to one of its presenters while journalists were taking a pay cut because of budget problems. The BBC has been the centre of a maelstrom over a story by The

Sun about payments made by one of its presenters for photographs of a young man. In both cases the journalists at RTÉ and the BBC were fearless in their pursuing the story about their own organisations.

BBC staff were on strike for the third time this week. The corporation wants to cut local radio output by almost half, is making major changes to journalists' terms and conditions and 90 members of staff have been told their job is at risk. The dates were chosen to disrupt coverage of the byelections (see page five). The NUJ has also been battling against cuts at the World Service. In the run-up to the general election, the NUJ will seek manifesto commitments to preserve a vibrant and sustainable public service broadcasting sector.

The union is to take the lead on the government's National Committee for the Safety of Journalists in the creation of a safety tracker to ensure press freedom violations can be reported and logged, including arrests of journalists, seizure of equipment, assaults, police interrogation and use of lawfare. Michelle Stanistreet recently met with the PersVeilig project in the Netherlands, in which our sister union plays an important role.

The union will continue to liaise with the UK and Irish police and redouble its efforts with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) to secure a UN convention to protect media workers.

The NUJ's support for international media freedom campaigns, together with the IFJ, in Palestine, Hong Kong, Iran and other regimes where journalists' lives and liberty are in danger, will remain an important part of the union's broader work.

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NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

Séamus Says



It would make a great mini-series on RTÉ; unfortunately it's all true. Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, on a national scandal

200 Havaianas flip flops, €4,956.
 Summer party catering, €20,900.
 2019 World Cup, Japan, €110,000.
 Rugby season tickets, Avia Stadium Dublin, €138,000.
 2019 Champions League final, Madrid, €26,000.
 Secret Ryan Tubridy payment, €150,000.
 Public trust. Priceless.
 Let's not even mention Bruce Springsteen, Phil Collins, U2, Harry Styles, Westlife and the Eagles, outings, picnics, breakfasts, dinners and assorted hooleys.

When it comes to corporate entertainment for advertising clients and their mates, to paraphrase Prince, nothing, well nothing compares to

RTÉ. The working conditions of staff is in sharp contrast to what has been revealed. When I noted membership of the Soho Club – used for client meetings, I recalled how the London correspondent was forced to broadcast from a hotel toilet after they closed the UK office.

Using a barter account managed by the Astus Group, a London-based global operation, RTÉ splashed out €1m in 10 years on commercial transactions mainly to keep advertisers on side in a market dominated by the public service broadcaster. Much of the entertaining was directed at advertising agencies.

Astus apparently offers “bespoke business solutions” for clients and media partners.

So, media companies like RTÉ sell advertising space through Astus and get goods and services, as well as cash, in return. Astus offers the payment on invoices on behalf of media companies who pay them in “soft currency”, the term used to describe media space rather than hard cash.

For the pleasure of these transactions RTÉ pays a hefty handling charge to Astus. As Colm Keena of The Irish Times pointed out, to get Astus to pay an invoice for €100, RTÉ had to transfer advertising space worth €150 which the broker then sells on to a client.

At the heart of the current crisis in RTÉ was the secretive payment of €150,000 to RTÉ's top earner Ryan Tubridy through the barter account, accurately described in parliament as a slush fund.

On €400,000 a year the talented Tubridy was doing fine. Managed by an agent, Noel Kelly, he's a member of an elite group engaged as companies. During pay talks in RTÉ trade unions were consistently assured that the top earners were also taking pay cuts, but it would take a bit longer to renegotiate contracts. We were misled and not told of a secret arrangement to pay Tubridy through a grubby deal involving a commitment to undertake work for the sponsors of The Late Show, Renault.

Payment was via the barter account,

not normally used for wages, and if Renault pulled out as sponsors RTÉ could underwrite the payment and cough up. Nice work if you can get it. The promotional work never happened but RTÉ paid Tubridy anyway.

“Yes, there is anger at the grubby deal and extravagant spending but also support for RTÉ staff, who live in and work in a world far removed from the vulgar excess revealed.”

The secretive deal was brought to the attention of the RTÉ board by auditors and credit is due to the audit and risk committee for prompt action in initiating a full investigation. In a dark period for public service broadcasting the work of staff elected member Robert Shortt, a long time NUJ activist, and his colleagues should be acknowledged.

As noted elsewhere, the Tubridy deal lifted the lid on a series of corporate governance failures culminating in fundamental questions about how top executives, including the chief financial officer, availed of a voluntary exit package without full approval of the executive board.

In an odd way the public response reflects an appetite for public service journalism. Yes, there is anger at the grubby deal and extravagant spending but also support for RTÉ staff, the majority of whom live in and work in a world far removed from the vulgar excess revealed before two parliamentary committees.

When Ryan Tubridy appeared in parliament, viewing numbers on the parliamentary channel, Oireachtas TV soared.

The total number of minutes watched

on Oireachtas TV was 9.1 million - a 300-fold increase on normal. It is the equivalent of 150,000 hours, 6,250 days or 17 years of total viewing! A friend travelling across New Zealand in a camper van contacted me on WhatsApp to report positive reaction from Dublin relatives to coverage of the NUJ response to the scandal.

The debates generated memes, obscure TDs and senators found themselves trending on Twitter and TickTok, including an indie version of debate highlights.

The entire nation suddenly became expert on the intricacies of the smoke and dagger world of barter accounts, aka media industry norms.

Public sentiment may be with the staff but there are worrying signs. There was a notable drop in the number of TV licences issued in the first week in July compared to the same time last year, with 11,241 licences issued compared to 15,432 in 2022.

A total of 5,837 fewer TV licences were issued during June and the first week in July than there was in the same period in 2022.

According to official figures the decline in licences is most pronounced in the opening week of this month, when 4,191 fewer licences were issued in comparison to this time last year, a drop of 27%.

The financial crisis in RTÉ is a result of a model of public service broadcasting which is outmoded, combined with political cowardice of successive governments who failed to provide funds to protect public service broadcasting.

Public service broadcasting is under attack on many fronts. Corporate governance failures, ill conceived attacks on local services by the BBC, inadequate funding for core services threaten to damage public interest journalism at a time when authoritative, independent news and current affairs is so necessary to counter misinformation.

Whether on picket lines across the UK or at meetings and rallies in Ireland



S O S





We Offer Support and Help

The NUJ is your lifeline if you get arrested or the authorities try to confiscate your data or images. We chase non-payers, represent and support you during disciplinary or redundancy procedures or if you are being bullied or have other work-related problems. We offer professional help with reporting guides and advice on ethics, networking opportunities and training to help you develop your skills throughout your career.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at
nuj.org.uk/join



www.nuj.org.uk

NUJ members are standing up for public service journalism.

Before taking up his role new RTÉ director general Kevin Bakhurst met the RTÉ Group of Unions and confirmed his commitment to engagement with workers and their representatives.

When the Dublin broadcasting branch held a rally in support of public service broadcasting the new DG, on his third day in office, greeted union members with enthusiasm.

An important first step in rebuilding a shattered trust.

Update

NUJ offers aid to BBC members

The union has sought clarity and information about the BBC's investigation into the events following The Sun's story which claimed Huw Edwards had paid for pictures of a young man, and subsequent BBC News reports claiming he had messaged young employees at the corporation.

The letter to NUJ members said: "We know from previous work the NUJ has led on that there are many barriers that can deter staff or freelancers from taking up formal complaints. Anyone who would like to seek advice, guidance or support from the NUJ can do so in confidence." The letter acknowledged how it must have been difficult for members reporting on their own employer.

While the presenter's identity remained a mystery a frenzy of rumour and lies was unleashed on social media. Presenters including Jeremy Vine, Nicky Campbell and Gary Lineker had to deny they were the person involved. It was a huge story – and completely dominated BBC's coverage, knocking the stabbing of a teacher to the second news lead and eclipsing the NATO summit in Vilnius.

Plans by the BBC's director general, Tim Davie, to discuss the corporation's

annual report turned into an hour-long quizzing from the press about the BBC's role when it was revealed the young man's parents had made a complaint in May. The BBC published a timeline in response to questions. The Sun did not answer queries from its rival publications.



Huw Edward's wife revealed he was the "unnamed" man and that he was in hospital suffering from serious mental health issues. Edwards is the BBC's most senior presenter, fronting the BBC's News at Ten and high-profile stories such as the coronation. The police said there was no information to indicate criminal offences had been committed.

The Daily Express's headline "BBC branded 'a safe haven for perverts' with Tory MPs demanding licence fee is scrapped" followed an interview with the Tory deputy chairman, Lee Anderson, who also works for GB News. The story was red meat to the BBC bashers, while others told the BBC to stop self-

flagellating and turned their ire on The Sun. The creeping impact of privacy legislation on journalism and some of the confusion felt across the industry about its constraints was keenly felt in the round. Former Sun editor, Kelvin MacKenzie, had claimed that in "the good old days" he would have named the person and printed the pictures. The press regulator IPSO is said to be investigating the newspaper. Other commentators pointed to the question of abuse of power within organisations being a live and important matter of public interest.

Professor Chris Frost, chair of NUJ's Ethics Council, said: "This story goes to the heart of ethical journalism, dealing with privacy, reputation and accuracy. It underlines that that tabloids have long found that it is the worst of us, human weakness and tragedy, that sells best. The BBC is a public service that has been so systematically bullied by politicians and the tabloids that it no longer seems able to uphold its own high standards and has failed in this instance to properly investigate and protect.

"No one comes out of this debacle with any honour; the NUJ must play a leading role in bringing back decency to journalism, politics and the media."

BBC Northern Ireland

Members at BBC Northern Ireland staged a 24-hour strike over the corporation's decision to cut the Radio Foyle Breakfast Programme from two hours to 30 minutes and a range of other industrial issues including unpaid acting up and constant breaches of members' terms and conditions particular in Belfast newsrooms.

Since the strike on May

19, the NUJ has made good progress in many areas, although the length of the breakfast show remains in dispute.

Iran International

The 24/7 news channel says it plans to move back to its London office from Washington in August, but some staff are sceptical. It stopped broadcasting from its London studios in March

because of threats made against staff based here by the Iranian regime. Meanwhile, Al Jazeera is closing 37 programming posts as the company moves some of its output from London to Doha.

BBC chief

The next chair of the BBC should be an independent appointment and not in the gift of the Prime Minister, says the **Federation of**

Entertainment Unions,

which includes the NUJ, because it must be impartial at the top and "licence fee payers need a champion that is independent from the government and prepared to act in their interest".

The out-going chair, Richard Sharp, was forced to quit after not disclosing that he had facilitated a loan for the then prime minister, Boris Johnson.

Update

Third BBC strike disrupts local news

The third strike by BBC Local was yet again solid, with picket lines outside radio stations across England winning huge support from local communities and normal schedules disrupted.

Visitors to the picket lines included Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and Labour MP Rachel Long Bailey. The walkouts were timed to affect the coverage of three by-elections.

Despite the dispute winning huge support among the 5.4m loyal local radio listeners, MPs and councillors of all parties, a huge range of charities, non-league football fans, and community groups, the BBC is going ahead with plans to cut local content by almost half, with many popular presenters losing their jobs or choosing to go. Dozens of BBC members are on the verge of being put at risk of compulsory redundancy, with others facing changes to their jobs and rotas. Those taking strike action work in local radio, regional TV and online in England. The journalists have also been on a work to rule as part of the dispute.

The BBC's Digital First strategy is to move more local news online, despite many people still tuning into linear radio, especially the old, vulnerable, those who are not digitally savvy or do not have good digital connections. The NUJ believes the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, has a duty to include all licence fee payers.



“Mixed bag” BBC report

The BBC is the UK's number one media brand, with nine in 10 adults on average using it each week and audiences spending more time using BBC TV and iPlayer than the biggest streaming services combined, the corporation's latest annual report reveals.

“The BBC overwhelmingly remains the most trusted source of news in this country and around the world, with eight in 10 UK adults consuming BBC News services each week – double the next nearest provider,” said the report.

Other good news was that its

commercial arm, BBC Studios, delivered “record-breaking” results with more than £2bn in sales. The report shows it has made progress of creating a more representative staff – 50 per cent are women, 17 per cent are black and ethnic minority staff, 9.4 per cent disabled and 21 per cent from low socio-economic backgrounds: more women appeared in the top pay league as presenters and executives.

Yet, audiences from black and ethnic backgrounds and the less well-off are falling and fewer young people are tuning in – 5 per cent fewer 16-34-year-

olds accessed iPlayer, radio and online content compared with last year. Overall radio listening figures have also dropped.

The BBC cut the World Service's budget by £28.5m per year from April with 382 posts (almost one in five) going. The latest figures show its audience had dropped 12 per cent to 318m per week, with the weekly digital audience down 5 per cent.

Paul Siegert, NUJ national broadcasting organiser, called the report a “mixed bag”. He said: “It's great that the figures for iPlayer and BBC Sounds are up, but the number younger viewers and listeners continues to fall and the cuts at World Service are clearly causing harm.”

Update

Major overhaul for scandal-hit RTÉ

A crisis sparked by revelations of a secretive deal with RTÉ top earner Ryan Tubridy has led to revelations of a culture of entitlement, a lack of transparency, a two-tier approach to remuneration, and double standards in deciding upon applications for voluntary exit packages.

Last month the RTÉ board revealed that between 2017 and 2022, Tubridy received a series of payments totalling €345,000 on top of his annual published salary, which were not declared to the public or parliament. The payments were uncovered after the company's auditors alerted the board to some of the transactions.

Separately, Tubridy was guaranteed by RTÉ an additional annual income of €75,000 intended to come from commercial partner, Renault. Independent chair of the RTÉ board Siún Ní Raghallaigh told parliamentarians the scheme was "designed to deceive".

The deal brokered by Tubridy's agent Noel Kelly, occurred months after staff had incremental payments frozen and



Cearbhaill Ó Siochain, secretary of the RTÉ trade union group

just before negotiations on pay cuts aimed at averting a financial crisis at RTÉ. The RTÉ Trade Union Group was lied too during those negotiations. The NUJ has been to the fore in highlighting the breach of trust on the part of the executive board.

Members at RTÉ organised two public protests. Media Minister Catherine

Martin met the RTÉ Trade Union Group and agreed to establish an independent HR review into pay, remuneration, use of third-party agencies, recruitment, and gender inequality. Patricia King, former ICTU general secretary, is a member of the three-person group. A second corporate governance review will deal with many of the management failures long highlighted by the NUJ.

Kevin Bakhurst, the new director general, has ordered an investigation into the voluntary exit programme following revelations that the former chief financial officer had benefited from the scheme without the approval of the full executive board, as provided for in the scheme. He also met trade union reps prior to taking up office.

Many NUJ members were refused the voluntary redundancy/early retirement programmes on the basis that posts must be suppressed. Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary has warned that revelations about the exit scheme could be even more damaging to RTÉ than the Tubridy crisis.

RTÉ model broken

The events of recent weeks have highlighted it: there are two RTÉs. One is a public service, that produces news and current affairs, along with arts programmes, while the second is a commercial operation.

In one, the workers are judged on accuracy, public interest and verification, and get paid a salary or wage often negotiated by a trade union. In the other, it is about the size of the audience and advertising take, where the 'talent's' remuneration is negotiated by an agent.

For the past two weeks, the distance between the two RTÉs has strained

to breaking point, with one side investigating and reporting on the other – with stories of lavish entertainment, travel to sporting events across the world and special payments and cars for top earners.

RTÉ was established 62 years ago as a public service, and to play an important role in our democracy. It was not to be a burden on the public purse and is financed by the licence fee and advertising. But it needs greater investment. Yet, when the Future of Media Commission reported last year, the government approved 49 of its 50 recommendations, but reform of RTÉ's

finances was the one exception.

If RTÉ is to remain relevant it will be exclusively a public service. It will be critically, responsibly and truthfully reflect Ireland, and the world, through its news and current affairs, in addition to quality drama, and other original programming. Being ethical and trusted will allow it to be heard and rise above the vast amounts of media out there. If the past few weeks has taught us anything the public service/commercial hybrid does not work. RTÉ must be funded by the people of Ireland in whatever way works.

Michael Foley is a former RTÉ employee and member of the NUJ's Ethics Council

Update

Axe falls again on local news

Regional and local newspapers have been hit by yet more rounds of redundancies at National World titles, with the publisher of the Yorkshire Post and Scotsman announcing 34 roles to go, with 54 individuals originally placed at risk, and Reach revealing another 11 roles under scrutiny after two previous job cuts this year.

Members passed a no confidence vote in David Montgomery, CEO of National World, formally JPIMedia Ltd, condemning the “damaging culture” under his leadership. After the company posted full-year results for 2022 indicating operating profits of more than £9m, the cuts came as a real shock to staff. Laura Davison, senior newspapers’ organiser, in her report to the NEC, said: “The period which followed was torrid and extremely stressful for members as announcements trickled out over a number of days in different sections of the business – for example, one team was told there would be cuts but that the details would not be shared until

PA IMAGES



the following week.” The NUJ was forced to put out a press release highlighting the shambolic redundancy process. The union was able to save the job of the Yorkshire Evening Post’s rugby league reporter and the proposed removal of his role proved just how little the management cared for the culture of its readers, the NUJ said.

National World had imposed a below-inflation pay deal of 4.5 per cent in April. Newly-qualified senior journalists on some of its titles can earn as little as £22,753 a year, with others at that grade being paid £26,855 at the flagship Yorkshire Post. The minimum rate for

senior journalists at Reach is £30,000, pending this year’s settlement.

National World threatened chapels that if they did not accept the company’s pay offer by June 30 it would not backdate any final settlement to April. However, members stuck together and refused to be bullied – they again rejected the 4.5 per cent deal – and the conciliation service ACAS has been called in. Laura Davison said: “Our chapels want to see real engagement on issues around unfair pay that our reps have been raising for three years, and more meaningful recognition of the cost-of-living crisis that is having an impact on NUJ members across the board.”

On July 3, Reach, the publisher of the Mirror and Express and 240 regional papers including the Bristol Post, Liverpool Echo and Manchester Evening News, announced its third round of cuts this year. Chris Morley, NUJ Reach national co-ordinator, said it was not only “extremely distressing for those put at risk but also had a corrosive effect throughout the workforce”.

Legal wins for members

The NUJ’s legal department has reported £1.7 million in negotiated compensation settlements for its members and £500,000 for the month of May alone for claims. A legal challenge brought by the NUJ and several unions defeated the UK government’s efforts to allow agency workers to fill in for employees on strike. The judgment was damning in its assessment of ministers’ failure to consult and of the conduct of the former business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, and was hailed a

major victory for the unions. The department has also acted for members arrested by police during protests, including a member whose electronic devices were seized under the Official Secrets Act, plus various cases of discrimination and unequal pay. One member reported: “I’ve realised just recently how much I should value my NUJ membership. I was a witness in legal proceedings in which I was being pressured to reveal sources used in a news story. The NUJ didn’t hesitate to provide an excellent solicitor

who assisted me in my refusal to co-operate in naming the sources. There was a successful outcome.”

Terrorism charges dropped

A French publisher, Ernest Moret, who was arrested by police using anti-terrorism laws as he arrived in the UK for the London Book Fair, will face no further action, the Metropolitan Police confirmed. He was detained, searched, and belongings including his computer were confiscated. He was quizzed about taking part

in anti-Macron protests. The NUJ supported Moret, who works at Paris-based publisher Éditions La Fabrique, and Michelle Stanistreet held a meeting with counterintelligence chiefs at the Met to discuss the use of Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 which gives the police wide powers to search people at border crossings. Other matters, such as threats to journalists in the UK from the Iranian authorities were also discussed. The NUJ and Met have agreed to continue to liaise on the issues.

Update

Fighting discrimination

NUJ delegates took full part in the TUC's 2023 conferences for disabled, LGBT+ and black workers, proposing motions and contributing to the lively debates as TUC research showed workplaces can be hostile and discriminatory environments for minority groups.

Tony Adams, Saadeya Shamsuddin, Roger McKenzie, Leoni Robertson and Raj Ford represented the NUJ in May with a motion about black presenters and correspondents in the broadcasting industry. Tony Adams highlighted the situation where professional make-up artists were often not sufficiently trained to deal with their skin tones, saying: "Together, we can create an industry that celebrates and uplifts the talent of black individuals, ensuring they receive the recognition and opportunities they truly deserve." Saadeya Shamsuddin spoke in support of Royal College of Podiatry's motion on the lack of racial diversity in leadership positions and called for initiatives to tackle low promotion rates. Leoni Robertson seconded Equity's motion on immigration, asylum, and racism in media reporting, which emphasised the importance of the



NUJ's **race reporting guidelines.**

The NUJ's James Doherty **told conference delegates** in June the NUJ's Ethics Council was working on guidance for journalists and content creators to prevent misinformation that could contribute to transphobia. "Colleagues, please let's find a way to take the hate out of this debate," he said.

Natasha Hirst, NUJ president, seconded a Musicians' Union motion which called on unions to challenge organisations hostile to trans and non-binary people and to create best practice guides to make workplaces safer for LGBT+ workers. She also spoke up for

freelancers, saying: "Sometimes we have no clue what kind of environment we are stepping into when we go off to work. It makes it really hard to be your whole self." Ann Galpin supported a motion about the attacks on LGBT+ rights in Turkey and Uganda.

The TUC released research during the TUC Disabled Workers' conference in July showing disabled workers were much more likely to be low paid than non-disabled workers. The union's ethics and disabled members' councils have **criticised** the Independent Press Standards Organisation failure to act on the harm caused by negative stories about disabled people and welfare recipients. Paul Nowak, TUC general secretary, said: "I want to place on record my thanks to the NUJ for exposing the Daily Telegraph's so-called tax calculator for what it is – nasty, inaccurate, right-wing drivel." Delegates supported **the RMT's campaign** to stop the closure of railway tickets offices, which will affect disabled travellers. Johny Cassidy (pictured) moved the NUJ's motion on making graphics and data visualisations in print and online more accessible.

Vice victory

Following job losses at the digital publisher, which has filed for bankruptcy, the NUJ persuaded the company to increase its redundancy payment by £5,000 per person, bringing the full redundancy package to £5,000, plus statutory redundancy pay and an extra £1,000 for those volunteering for redundancy. The chapel then called off a strike threat.

Subs probe

Work will start in earnest in autumn to fulfil DM's commitment to widespread engagement across the NUJ's branches and tabling bodies on reviewing the NUJ's subscription rates and structures, to inform motions that can be debated at Delegate Meeting 2025. Michelle Stanistreet told the NEC that she wanted the fullest possible consultation across the union, which will

begin in the early autumn and culminate in a summit in the New Year to explore collective ways forward – all branches will be encouraged to send a representative.

Have your say

The union will conduct a series of surveys with members, so make sure you take part and have your say. There will be an all-members' survey in September which will include questions

on pay and working from home, and members and former delegates at Delegate Meeting will be asked to help reshape the policy making forum to make it more engaging.

The union will seek out members' training needs and those of reps specifically, and the NEC has agreed to establish a group to review the structure, operations and organisation of the union's industrial councils.

Update

News should be a public service

Ministers in Wales have been called on to make public interest news a public service and for a Welsh Media Institute to promote a well-funded, plural and diverse media.

The industry group, which included the NUJ, was established following lobbying by the union's Welsh Executive Council. Its report, *Of and For Wales: towards a sustainable future for public interest journalism*, argues that access to trustworthy and accurate news which holds the powerful to account and protects Welsh-language journalism is essential for a democratic Wales. It calls for an institute, independent from government, to raise funds, administer government grants and foster a diverse and vibrant media industry.

The institute would:

- Commission research, develop journalism training, including apprenticeships, promote media literacy and prioritise coverage of "news deserts" in Wales.
- Guarantee community news organisations access to public advertising and revenue from statutory notices and confer "asset of community value" status on local newspapers to ensure titles are preserved.
- Set up a contestable fund for new and existing news outlets.



A government scheme will fund a Senedd reporter

The estimated cost of establishing the institute is £1m.

The report cited the decline of the newspaper sector in Wales and dominance of London-based titles. "There remain six daily print newspapers produced in Wales, one Sunday title and more than 30 local weekly titles," it said. "In some cases, print circulation decline has been offset by digital readership growth as well as a proliferation of newer online-only providers. However, print revenues are declining and online operations are less profitable, meaning there are fewer journalists working across all of these publications, and less journalism about Wales and its communities."

The National newspaper, launched by Newsquest, was opened to a fanfare in

2021 but closed 18 months later.

Pamela Morton, NUJ Welsh organiser, said: "Although there were differing perspectives and interests within the working group, compromises were made, and we have an excellent report with some radical ideas for revitalising Welsh media. It now needs the enthusiastic backing of the Welsh government and funding to get the institute off the ground. The union will be consulting our members on how to take the report's ideas forward."

Dawn Butler, deputy arts minister, gave support to public interest journalism being a public service during a recent Senedd debate.

The government recently announced a £200,000 package for journalism in Wales. Ten independent community media organisations will share £100,000, administered by the Independent Community News Network (ICNN). The other £100,000 will fund three projects: a dedicated journalist post to cover the Senedd; research by Cardiff University on the state of the journalism sector; and a grant to Inclusive Journalism Cymru to run journalism training for underrepresented groups, including migrants. In 2019, the government gave the ICNN £200,000 to support the hyperlocal sector.

Award for The Journalist

The Journalist has been named best union journal by the TUC at its annual communications awards. The TUC said: "The judges were impressed by the magazine's low-cost, direct, and effective design and diverse content relevant to the NUJ's membership. Well-written and edited with an easy-to-read layout and clear

headlines, this magazine stood out for its interesting stories combined with practical tips for journalists. The mix of relevant UK and international news related to journalism rights abroad was commended by the judges who enjoyed reading the stories." Former NEC member John Millington won the award for best media story.

NUJ vacancy

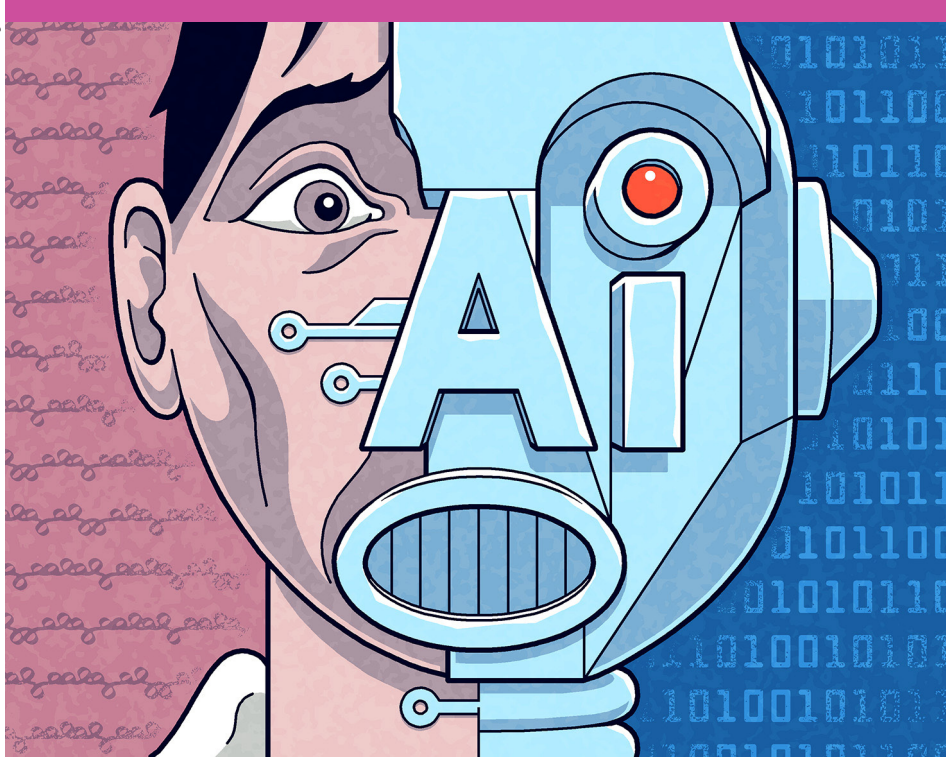
The NUJ is looking for a full-time organiser to be based in its Glasgow office, with hybrid working. The role will involve dealing with personal cases, servicing committees or councils and recruitment campaigns. The deadline for applications is 10am Monday 24 July. For more details go to the [NUJ website](#).

NUJ bursary

Applications are open for George Viner Memorial Fund bursaries which help black and minority ethnic journalism students with their fees, accommodation, and other expenses, as well as providing support from a mentor. Go to the [NUJ website](#) for more details. The deadline for applications is Monday 31 July.

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



Journalism by humans

Humankind will need real-life journalists to cover AI's evolution with reporting that people can trust, says Ian Burrell, as the technology's growth poses a real threat

Day after day, automatons and bots grow more influential in media while humans – politicians, publishers, and the news-consuming public – seem powerless or unwilling to stop them.

Sky News has created a chatbot-powered news reporter to test the capabilities of AI journalism in writing news articles and doing pieces to camera. Publishers are locked in talks with big tech companies to do deals that allow their news stories and pictures to be used to train AI models.

And the robots are on a PR offensive. At what was billed as the “world’s first human-robot press conference”, nine humanoid robots assured journalists in Geneva that they “will not be replacing any jobs” and can be trusted. “Robots like me can be used to help improve our lives and make the world a better place,” insisted Ameca, a robot with its own facial expressions.

The pace of developments is causing deep concern in parts of the news industry. Rachel Corp, CEO of ITN, has called on government to set up a working party to tackle the “pressing threat” of AI’s capacity for generating mass misinformation. She told me she was alarmed by the speed and scale of the technology’s growth. Trusted news outlets could be “brought down by the weight” of AI’s output, undermining public trust in journalism. “It’s the potential for people giving up on information, that they are so swamped by it that they are not going to trust anything,” she said.

AI-generated journalism is proliferating. Research by NewsGuard, a tool which analyses the credibility of news outlets, has identified 217 news and information sites written almost entirely by AI. Sky News’s AI experiment found that its robot “journalist” could pitch story ideas, research and write a 300-word article and host a 90-second TV report. But the chatbot reporter’s work was so riddled with critical errors of misconception – known to AI developers as “hallucinations” – that Sky News science and technology editor Tom Clarke concludes that “my job is safe for now”.

But for how long? In the film and television industry, where AI is already entrenched, many actors are convinced that their careers are being curtailed by the technology. Voiceover artists are being asked to sign contracts that mean their spoken words become data for AI to reuse over and over again. Actors, especially extras, can be readily replaced with AI-generated figures.

Getty Images, one of the oldest names in photojournalism, has taken action in the London High Court to prevent Stability AI, an artificial intelligence company, from using Getty’s photo archive to train up Stable Diffusion, an AI model that generates photo-realistic images.

Other news industry organisations are deciding that they must work with big

tech to try and manage the impact on news of a technology that promises to be both threatening and beneficial to the future of journalism. The Financial Times reports that publishers including News Corp, Axel Springer, the New York Times Company and Guardian News & Media have all held talks with at least one big AI developer, such as Google, Microsoft, Adobe and OpenAI, which built the popular natural language model ChatGPT. On the agenda were copyright issues around the use of publishers' content in training chatbots and image generators.

"Any such deals must ensure copyright owners are fairly compensated and that it is not solely developers benefiting financially from the economic benefits of the use of AI", says Michelle Stanistreet. AI poses "clear and vital threats" to news and journalism, she says. "We've seen instances of content used without permission, content falsely attributed to journalists, and creators' voices and likenesses used by developers."

The NUJ general secretary calls for clear legal frameworks to be introduced for the regulation of AI, with mandatory practices that developers understand, and meaningful sanctions for those who do not comply. She advocates the use of collecting societies, such as those used to allocate royalties to music creators and authors, so that copyright owners can be compensated.

A problem, suggests Seamus McGibbon of the Creators' Rights Alliance, is that the government white paper on AI regulation, published in March, takes an explicitly "pro-innovation" approach. "The government wants a voluntary code of practice, not a legislative framework, and its thinking is obviously geared much more towards the developers than the creators. The government is incorrectly thinking that AI is going to be the financial solution to the country's economic woes."

The difficulty with a voluntary code, says McGibbon, is that you cannot enforce it. Many developers, he claims,

think that the scraping of what they would call 'data' but we would call 'creative work' is legal.

Media companies are embracing opportunities to use AI to save money and time in carrying out laborious tasks. The Associated Press has been publishing automated company earnings reports for nearly a decade. Radar AI, an innovate British AI firm, has helped PA Media produce hundreds of thousands of data stories for local media, using only five journalists. AI is being used to moderate online comments, to refine paywall models, to do translation and proof-reading.

"AI poses clear and vital threats to news and journalism. We need clear legal frameworks to be introduced"

The CRA worries that entrusting more tasks to AI will limit young media workers in having "access to a career and to learning on the job". Those from disadvantaged communities could be most affected. The trend has huge social impacts, says McGibbon.

Media companies, Michelle Stanistreet argues, should use AI for "augmenting the value of the journalism being produced" and not "to further cut costs or create artificially produced fodder to fill pages on the cheap".

A **poll** by the Writers' Guild of Great Britain found that 65 per cent of respondents believed that the increased use of AI will reduce their income from writing, and 61 per cent were worried that the technology will replace jobs in their sector.

The values of news outlets and their commitment to journalism are being tested. Early this year BuzzFeed was revealed to be using AI to generate whole articles for its travel guides. Weeks later, it

closed down its award-winning newsroom, BuzzFeed News.

Meanwhile, AI's threat to the quality of the information ecosystem is becoming more obvious.

A picture of an apparent explosion close to the Pentagon was widely circulated on social media in May. It was a fake image produced by AI. Another AI-generated image showed Donald Trump hugging the former White House chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci, who the former president had publicly insulted. The fake picture was cynically used in a campaign by Ron DeSantis, Trump's Republican rival. America's National Public Radio was embarrassed when its AI tweeted news of the recent SpaceX launch with a reference to Elon Musk's "massive space sex rocket".

Waiting in the wings, Microsoft has an AI model that can replicate a person's voice with three seconds of sample audio.

With the UK government apparently committed to a "pro-innovation" approach, eyes are turning to Brussels for a lead in AI legislation. The European Union's AI Act attempts to balance the various benefits of the emerging technology against a ranking of potential risk, from unacceptable to minimal. A final draft is due by the end of the year.

Big tech is pushing back. The legislation would "jeopardise Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty", claimed a letter signed by 160 executives of companies that included Meta, as well as banks and telecoms giants. Nick Clegg, Meta's head of global affairs, then wrote a blog promising "openness" on the AI models propelling the social media behemoth's algorithms. Yet even Sundar Pinchai, chief executive of Google, admitted recently that AI is something that keeps "me up at night" and is a technology "more profound than fire or electricity".

Humankind will need real-life journalists to cover its evolution with reporting that people can trust.

International

Putting the boot into climate change

Tim Dawson reports on scheme to train Namibian reporters with funds from the Scoop author's charity

Namibia's Kavango region encompasses some of southern Africa's most productive farmland. Its crops are critical to the region's food supply. So, when drought struck in 2018 and 2019, it resulted in the worst famine for 90 years.

Few doubt that changing weather patterns caused by global warming are to blame. When surveyed by their union, however, Namibian journalists said that they lacked the knowledge or resources to do the story justice.

The International Federation of Journalists stepped in to run a training event to plug that gap using charitable funds from England. Doing so brought full circle an improbable chain of events linking colonial war, inept reporting and fiction's most famous journalist.

Our story ends earlier this year. One sunny Friday Jemima Beukes, deputy general secretary of the Namibian Media Professionals Union, mounted a rostrum before 30 of her members. "Climate change has already brought drought and floods to our country", she told them.



Namibia is vulnerable from climate change

"If we are going to hold government officials and others to account, then the media is key." It was the start of a two-day workshop on reporting climate change. Meteorologists, government officials and NGO representatives took it in turn, guiding the reporters through the science and politics of rising global temperatures.

Funding for the training came from the Lord Deedes of Aldington Charitable Trust, a fund established by the former

Daily Telegraph editor Bill Deedes. He enjoyed a remarkable career – a member of Harold Macmillan's cabinet in the 1960s, he later took the Telegraph's helm for a dozen of its most influential and successful years. He stepped down in 1986, but wrote columns until the very end of his life in 2007.

Dispatched to Africa in 1936, aged 22, to cover the second Italo-Abyssinian war, he found himself in the company of an equally youthful Evelyn Waugh. Neither made a great success of war reporting. Deedes' misadventures, however, provided the raw material for Waugh's most enduring character, William Boot, protagonist of his 1938 novel *Scoop*.

It was the books that Deedes wrote in later years that generated the funds that are today administered by his Trust.

Participants at the climate change workshop were certainly positive. Martin Endjala, a journalist at the Windhoek Observer said: "This course was a pivotal moment for me. Reporting climate change requires technical understanding, particularly of terminology, something that not all of us possessed. Learning about UN work on this issue, and standards that our own government should achieve will really help us to hold them accountable. Training opportunities are scarce for Namibian reporters, so grasping this was a no-brainer."

Rather like Deedes' life itself, it is evidence that whatever our starting point, with sufficient application, great things are always possible.

MPs back Assange

The NUJ supported an event in the House of Commons where MPs met Stella Assange whose husband, the former Wikileaks founder, faces extradition to the US on espionage charges and faces 175 years in prison. Former foreign minister, David Davis, described the treatment

of Julian Assange as an "atrocious breach of natural justice". Tim Dawson, the newly appointed IFJ deputy general secretary, said the UK government talked big about promoting free speech and free journalism around the world, "while helping the US with this repressive act".

NUJ member deported

The NUJ's attempt to halt the deportation of a Kurdish journalist, Ghazi Ghareeb Zorab, whose safety was at threat if he returned to Iraq, failed. The NUJ's Manchester & Salford branch led the efforts to overturn Ghazi's removal. He was told to attend a meeting at the

Home Office Dallas Court Reporting Centre, Salford, and was then detained. Grahame Morris, chair of the NUJ's Parliamentary Group, and Ghazi's MP, Afzal Khan, made pleas on his behalf. A letter was sent to Robert Jenrick, immigration minister, but all legal attempts were rebuffed.