

THE IRISH JOURNALIST

Newsletter of the National Union of Journalists in Ireland

August 2026

Editorial Message

Welcome to the August 2026 edition of the Irish Journalist, marking the festival of Lúnasa and the beginning of the Autumn harvest season.

Our lead story in this issue is the victory of Vincent Kearney at the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, following a campaign of unlawful surveillance by MI5 and the PSNI.

We also cover the NUJ response to the Lyra McKee murder trial verdict, and remember Veronica Guerin on the 30th anniversary of her murder.

If there is an issue you would like to highlight in a future edition, or activities involving your branch or chapel you want to bring to a broader audience, get in touch.

Until the next time, enjoy this issue, and enjoy the weekend break.

Gerard Cunningham, Editor

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NUJ hails Vincent Kearney vindication Welcome victory in state surveillance tribunal

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has welcomed the findings of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) into the case taken by union member Vincent Kearney and the BBC arising from the long and consistent campaign of unlawful surveillance by MI5 and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

The Tribunal found that Kearney, who is now Northern Ireland editor for RTÉ News, had been subject to unlawful surveillance. The IPT ordered PSNI and MI5 to pay £10,000 each in damages.

The judgement was hailed by the NUJ as a damning indictment of the police and security services and a complete vindication of Vincent Kearney, the BBC and investigative journalism.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said: "This is a landmark judgement by the IPT, and is a clear and unambiguous vindication of our member Vincent Kearney and the BBC.

"It follows on the successful case taken by our members Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney, and represents a victory for journalists and investigative journalism. The outrageous treatment of Vincent and his family would not have been revealed without the action taken by Barry and Trevor.

"The revelations at the IPT hearings have given a deeply worrying insight into the actions of the police and security forces against journalists. The criminalisation of journalists is an affront to democracy and a fundamental breach of trust.

"It is important to acknowledge the courage and resilience of Vincent Kearney, a journalist of the highest integrity, and his family, who should never have been caught in the illegal network of surveillance. This has been a costly, protracted, and emotionally draining process. The BBC and their legal team have been extremely supportive while credit is also due to NUJ members who have supported Vincent.

“Today’s judgment is not only a welcome vindication of Vincent, it also reinforces the need for a judge-led inquiry into the unlawful surveillance of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders by police and security forces.

“We have witnessed the impact of illegal surveillance on our members and it is time to call a halt. There is

an opportunity for the new Northern Ireland Secretary and the Chief Constable to act to restore public trust. However, it is vital MI5 is subject to scrutiny in any review. For far too long, national security has been used as a shield by police and intelligence services — but the IPT findings have revealed an abuse of that cover that can no longer be tolerated.”

Tributes as Stephen steps down

Tributes have been paid to former journalist Stephen Corrigan as he steps down as chair and member of the union's Irish Executive Council (IEC).

Stephen recently resigned his editorial position with the Connacht Tribune to take up a new job with sister union SIPTU as a full-time official in the health sector.

He has served at chapel, branch and IEC level and chaired his last meeting on Saturday at the Wisdom Centre, Dublin where members marked his departure with an informal lunch.

At his final meeting Stephen stressed the importance of trade union organisation, especially in the regional newspaper sector, and spoke of the challenges posed by the dominance of anti-union companies such as Iconic, who recently acquired the Connacht Tribune.

Donegal based freelance journalist Carolyn Farrar was unanimously elected as Cathaoirleach.

Carolyn made a presentation to Stephen on behalf of the IEC and tributes were led by Séamus Dooley, Assistant General Secretary, who wished him well in his new career.



Carolyn Farrar and Stephen Corrigan



Officials and members of the Irish Executive Council at Stephen's last meeting.

Time for talking about branch reform is over

By Séamus Dooley, Irish Secretary

At the summer meeting of the Irish Executive Council, members held the latest in a series of discussions on the future of Irish branches.

There was broad agreement on the need to reform our branch structures and consensus on the scale of the problems, but little agreement on what needs to be done.

This followed a lively discussion at our delegate conference last year and took place in the context of the work of the NEC's development committee, which has identified the need to address the decline in our branch activity.

At the IEC meeting I tabled a menu of possible mergers and changes, designed to prompt reaction and action.

IEC members and the union's full-time officials are now consulting activists on the viability and wisdom of branch mergers and changes, as well as examining alternatives.

Our branch structures underpin the union's democracy. Yet most branches meet infrequently and struggle to attract a quorum. In-person and online meetings tend to be attended by a handful of hard-working activists, many retired or semi-retired.

So, what can we do?

In the greater Dublin region there are four branches. Only Dublin Freelance branch meets on a regular basis.

One proposal being considered is renaming Dublin Freelance branch, the Dublin and District Freelance branch, reflecting its broader membership; and

merging Dublin Newspapers and Agencies with Dublin P&PR. This proposal is at a tentative stage and is already meeting with resistance.

Dublin Broadcasting would be redesigned as the Public Service Broadcasting Branch.

Would the mergers strengthen or weaken the union's presence on the media landscape? This is one of the questions under discussion.

Maintaining the status quo is not an option, and I have been charged with discussing the proposals — and alternatives — with branch officers in the coming weeks.

My colleague Ian McGuinness is tasked with reviewing the two key branches on the western seaboard. A proposal to merge Irish South West and West of Ireland has proved unpopular with IEC members, but there's acceptance of the need to revitalise the union in an area with historically strong branch activity.

That's not the end of the story. We are also examining how to rebuild in Ireland South and South East while there's an urgent need to re-engage with members in Leinster, in the old Irish Eastern, Midlands and Mid Leinster branches.

Declining numbers in the regional media sector pose a significant challenge but it is also clear that we need a stronger branch presence.

Anyone interested in getting involved in the branch revival should contact the Dublin office on info@nuj.ie. You don't have to have been involved previously, and new members are especially welcome.



NUJ flags on display. Image © Michael Fisher/ Flickr

Coming Soon: Freelance Forum Autumn 2026

By Gerard Cunningham

Director of Public Prosecutions Catherine Pierse will be the opening guest at the next Freelance Forum, to take place on Monday 19 October in Dublin.

“Beyond the Headline: The Role of the DPP in Focus” will be the theme of the opening, with the DPP in conversation with journalist Margaret Ward.

The ever popular session on pitching and commissioning returns after a hiatus this Spring, featuring Deirdre O’Shaughnessy, Irish Examiner opinion editor, fflSinead O’Carroll from fflTheJournal.ie, and Alan Caulfield, assistant news editor and co-head of the chapel in the Irish Independent. fflPriyanka Borpujari will chair the session.

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In a world of misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and ‘fake news’, how can journalists decide which sources to trust, and how to decipher bad faith messaging.

Liz Carolan, freelance writer, and author of The Briefing newsletter and Aidan O’Brien, European

Digital Media Observatory Ireland, DCU, will discuss social media influence campaigns and stealth media with freelance journalist Stephanie Costello.

In the afternoon, media consultant Aileen O’Meara will give an overview of the latest ‘Pivot to Video’. Whether for promotion or reporting, the rise of TikTok and YouTube mean video is becoming a necessary part of everyone’s toolkit. Aileen goes over what journalist’s needs to know.

Finally, the day winds up with a look at how journalists can find stories in public records. Dublin Freelance member Robert Dunne, an Oireachtas researcher, outlines how journalists can access legislation, easy-to-understand explainers on legislation, transcripts of Oireachtas debates, information from committees, archive footage and information from the Oireachtas Library and Research Services. He will also cover effective strategies for identifying information that can be turned into stories.

Writer and journalist Dean Buckley talks about using public databases, from openly available online resources to databases such as the Company Registration Office, using ‘Ireland in the Epstein Files’ as a case study.

The Autumn 2026 Freelance Forum takes place in the Pearse Centre, 27 Pearse Street, Dublin 2 [Closest Luas stops at Westmoreland / Trinity College].

Admission is €5 for NUJ members/students, others €20

Places can be reserved for the event at <https://ti.to/freelance-forum/freelance-forum-autumn-2026>



NUJ joint president Gerry Curran, assistant general secretary Séamus Dooley, Orlagh Flood, office of the DPP, the Hon Mr Justice David Barniville, president of the High Court, and John Maher BL at the last 2026 Freelance Forum held in March 2026. Image: Guth Publication

NUJ Chapel marks Veronica Guerin anniversary

“NUJ members at Independent House gathered on 26 June to mark the 30th anniversary of the murder of Veronica Guerin.

The event was hosted by the Mediahuis chapel and attended by chapel members, senior editorial staff and NUJ representatives including Martin Fitzpatrick, Chair, Dublin branch and a former colleague of Veronica Guerin at the Sunday Independent.

Séamus Dooley, Assistant General Secretary, spoke at the event. Below is his script.

“We gather in solidarity and in sadness.

The sun is shining as it was 30 years ago before an evil gunman transformed June 26th into our darkest day.

As we remember Veronica and prepare for a celebration of her life tonight I am reminded of the letter send by George Bernard Shaw, himself an NUJ member, to the sister of Michael Collins:

“Tear up your mourning and hang up your brightest colours in his honour.”

Thank you to our chapel officers, Alan Caulfield and Edel Hughes for organising this event and for the invitation to attend. Thank you also to editorial management for their support.

Thirty years ago, around this time, I was due to begin an early shift on the subs desk at the Irish Independent. Instead, I was at a meeting with Chapel officers discussing how best to respond to the murder of our colleague Veronica Guerin.

For Kevin Moore FOC and Martin Fitzpatrick the news was especially devastating since Veronica was a colleague on the Sunday Independent.

There was a sad irony in the fact thar Veronica was killed two days before she was due to speak at a Freedom Forum conference in London.

Her theme was “Dying to Tell the Story: Journalists at Risk”.

As Deputy FOC of the then Independent Newspaper chapel, I recall having to ring the conference organisers after learning of her death.

Producing the following day’s paper was an extraordinary difficult task. Veronica’s colleagues left her funeral the following Saturday and went straight back to write up her funeral for a poignant edition of the Sunday Independent.

To this day I remember with pride the efforts of our colleagues.

I worked on the sub editing desk of the Irish Independent and so had limited professional contact with Veronica but as a chapel officer met her from time to time. The last time we spoke she was involved in a dispute with the GRA conference over accreditation.

Long before home working became the norm Veronica worked mainly out of the office and enjoyed a high degree of editorial independence.

Although integrated into the staff she remained a freelance up to the time of her death, not by choice.

She was hugely supported in her career by Graham and by her family.



Veronica Guerin Image: Brian Farrell

She was, literally and metaphorically, the face of the Sunday Independent, featuring in ad campaigns, yet had no automatic employment rights despite the efforts of the NUJ.

Veronica was fiercely competitive, a dogged, determined female journalist in a male dominated industry and she was not without her detractors within our own profession.

Veronica often wrote about her criminal contacts and was open about her investigative activities. She had a rapport with readers and the wider public, so news of her death sent shockwaves across the country.

The NUJ successfully called for a national moment’s silence on 4 July. During work stoppages the murder of Veronica Guerin and Garda Jerry McCabe was recalled. Traffic literally came to a halt.

Within a week of her murder, the government had introduced the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996 and the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996, so that assets purchased with money obtained through crime could be seized by the government.

The formation of the Criminal Assets Bureau could be described as Veronica’s legacy, marking as it did a new weapon in the war against crime.

But Veronica Guerin should not be defined by her death or by those who killed her. She is remembered as a dogged, ambitious journalist but that's only part of the story. She is remembered for her loyalty to family and friends, as a fanatical sports fan, a political junkie, as someone who loved and rejoiced in life.

When the Irish Executive Council hosted the union's delegate meeting in Ennis in 2000 Veronica's mother Bernie travelled to accept the hundreds of books of condolences and to take part in a panel discussion on media freedom and the right to report.

Bernie recalled how some people had referred to Veronica "giving" her life for press freedom.

My daughter, she declared, did not give her life for press freedom. It was taken from her. Journalists do not give up freedom to report, it is stolen from them!

Bernie also spoke of the horror inflicted by those who made money from drugs. Bernie reminded us that while her daughter might have been a victim of their cruel trade but so too were the many families blighted by drugs.

In remembering Veronica today, we remember Bernie's message at a time when media freedom in under threat across the globe.

At a meeting of the National Executive Council this month members marked this anniversary with a moment of reflection remembering not just Veronica, but all the journalists killed in the line of duty over the past 30 years.

Bernie's pleas for government action on drugs remains as relevant today as Veronica's pioneering work three decades ago. Within a stone's throw of this building, we can still see the devastation caused by drugs.

On a daily basis, I witness first hand drug dealing on Talbot Street and O'Connell Street.

I had hoped that the murder of Veronica Guerin had debunked the myths surrounding drug lords, criminals and gangsters.

In my view the media was partly responsible for creating the cartoon characterisation of nasty criminals, through the use of endearing pseudonyms.

At the time this was justified as a means of circumventing our defamation laws but the use of names such as the General, the Penguin and the Monk in some ways masked the evil nature of their criminal activities.

It took the murder of Veronica to shook us into reality.

Decades later I found disturbing and sickening the attempt to transform the Monk into a Robin Hood character, a champion of the people whose communities have been devastated by drugs, whose sons and daughters have been the victims of the lust for blood money.

I watched with incredulity as the spectacle unfolded and not for the first time I wondered what Veronica Guerin would have made of it all."

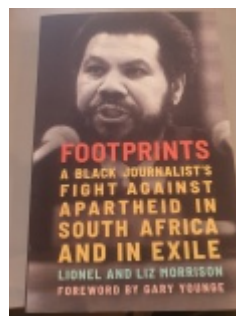
Lionel Morrison

By John Brophy

June 11 was a special day for NUJ stalwarts: it marked the launch of *Footprints: a Black journalist's fight against apartheid in South Africa and in exile*. (Haymarket books, London).

It tells the story of Lionel Morrison, who started as a friend of Nelson Mandela (including a spell in jail on Robben Island). He went on to a long career in the NUJ, culminating in being elected union president. He also succeeded in making anti-racism an integral part of union policy through the Race Relations Working Party, which morphed into the Black Members Council. And he achieved British official recognition when he was awarded the MBE.

Sadly Lionel didn't live to finish the memoir, but his wife, Liz, battled through cancer to get it finished.



And it is a great achievement.

I recall Lionel telling me how he started following Enoch Powell after the notorious Rivers of Blood speech in 1968. As Lionel said, a wily politician will only reveal racism and demagoguery when there isn't a journalist present. So Lionel made sure that all Enoch's utterances were reported, until the MP asked his name. And thereafter the MP for Wolverhampton was careful in what he said.

Lionel also did much work in social housing. He pioneered the idea that tower blocks should have social spaces for creche, laundry, library, and community meeting room, every three floors, to create living communities.

His story needs to be told and remembered.

Dominic Ledwidge-O'Reilly

Tributes paid to former Irish Independent photographer

Tributes paid to former Irish Independent photographer Dominic Ledwidge O'Reilly

Tributes were paid to the former photographer and proud NUJ member Dominic Ledwidge-O'Reilly following his death on Sunday, 26 April 2026. He was a highly respected press photographer who spent much of his professional life with Independent Newspapers, his work appeared widely across the group's titles; capturing key moments in Irish life from hard news to cultural events throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

He was a popular presence on assignments and a consummate professional. He had served as a photographer with the US Air Force, an invaluable experience — and after leaving Independent Newspapers he worked freelance for several newspapers and the Garda Review — where he was

remembered as 'one of the good guys'.

Irish Times photographer and former Independent Newspapers colleague Bryan O'Brien said of Dominic: "Domo was a brilliant colleague, a real gentleman and great company at all times. He had the amazing ability to go into a tricky news situation, calm everyone down and come out with a unique news photo; he will be sorely missed by all of us."

Raised in Ballybough on Dublin's northside, he made Bray, Co Wicklow, his home town.

Dominic is survived by his wife Gabrielle, children Geneviève, Christian and Claudine, step-daughter Gabrielle, cherished grandchildren Robert, Christopher, Ava and Vianne, sons-in-law Donal, Rory and William and daughter-in-law Monika, extended family and friends. He was predeceased by his late wife, Loreto.



A portrait of the photographer and an old NUJ press card sit on the coffin of Dominic Ledwidge-O'Reilly at his funeral in Firhouse, Dublin on 30 April 2026.

Mental health survey for members in Ireland

Shine and Maynooth University are inviting journalists and media workers in Ireland to anonymously share their experiences with mental health as part of a landmark national study.

Research shows journalists experience disproportionately high levels of stress, burnout,

anxiety, depression and psychological distress.

The researchers want to better understand the contributing factors and identify practical actions that can strengthen support, training and workplace wellbeing.

To take part, just click on the link below.

<https://app.onlinesurveys.jisc.ac.uk/s/maynoothuniversity/mental-health-and-irish-journalism-survey-june-2026>

Lyra McKee murder verdict

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has responded after three men were found not guilty of the murder of journalist and union member Lyra McKee in a verdict delivered at Belfast Crown Court on 3 July.

The NUJ was represented at the hearing by Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, and Kevin Cooper, Belfast & District branch acting chair, who has been a union observer at a number of hearings.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said: "The NUJ had hoped that Lyra's family would find solace by securing a conviction through the judicial process.

"Mrs Justice Smyth determined clearly and unambiguously that Lyra McKee had been murdered. However, not guilty verdicts were returned against the three accused.

"It remains a matter of grave concern that no one was

charged with the shooting of Lyra McKee; the person who pulled the trigger got off scot-free. In this case, someone has gotten away with the murder of a journalist - just as happened in the case of Martin O'Hagan.

"Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with Lyra's family, partner, and friends at this incredibly difficult and distressing time."

Kevin Cooper, Belfast & District branch acting chair, said: "This has been a traumatic period for Lyra's family, partner and friends. As Mrs Justice Smyth acknowledged in her closing remarks, today's outcome will not give Lyra's loved ones the peace they sought and to which they were entitled.

"They have waited a long time for judgment in this case and have been tenacious in pursuing justice while having to listen to the most awful, chilling evidence over the last two years. Our thoughts are with them all."

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What's Up?

The NUJ has set up a WhatsApp link for the Students and Early Careers Network. We'd really value more members joining and asking questions, sharing ideas etc.

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/CH2NkssgryQ9CvWkTcj5ug>

Scam warning

The NUJ communicates with members about direct debits only by writing, so beware of scammers who call by phone.

Get Well Soon

Best wishes to Kathryn Johnston, recovering from a serious traffic accident in Belfast.

Simon Cumbers Media Fund

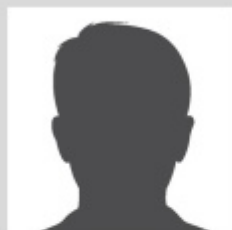
Freelance journalists applying to the Simon Cumbers Media Fund are now eligible to receive 1,000 as part of their funding to cover expenses for research and time spend travelling.

This must be included in the applicant's budget submission. This grant is available to freelance reporters only.

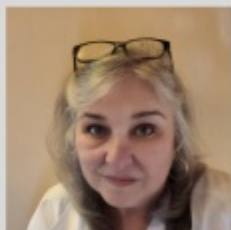


IRISH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 2025-27

Regional Newspapers (2 vacancies)



Freelance

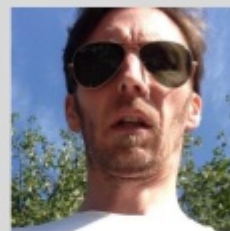


Carolyn Farrar
Chathaoirleach



Gerard Cunningham
Treasurer

Broadcasting



Cearbhall O Siochain



Trevor Keegan

National Newspapers



Kitty Holland

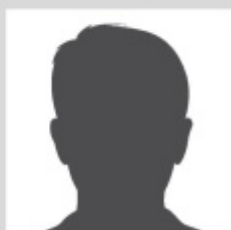


Éanna Ó Caollai



Edel Hughes

Books & Magazine



Vacant (Observer)

New Media



Phil MacGiollaBhain
(Observer)



Fran McNulty (NEC)

NEC Northern Ireland



Amanda Ferguson

PR & Information



Neil Ward

NEC Republic of Ireland



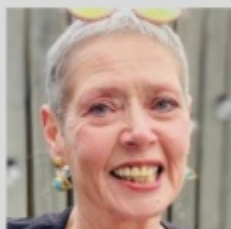
Gerry Curran

Black Members



Kais Aloui
(Observer)

Reserved Seat for Northern of Ireland



Kathryn Johnston

Retired Members



Robert Baxter
(Observer)



Bernie Ni Fhlatharta



Dara Bradley

Fran McNulty and Gerry Curran jobsharing.

Bernie Ni Fhlatharta and Dara Bradley job-sharing.