

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Informed

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Recovery starts for media industry

The effects of the pandemic are still being felt by NUJ members as the news and publishing industries report a bounce-back in digital advertising revenue and evidence that consumers will pay for quality information.

On page 10, media journalist, Ian Birrell, finds the outlook for journalism "surprisingly good" with publishers saying subscriptions are growing and a new generation of start-ups is appearing.

Preliminary results from the current NUJ all-members' survey show shifts in the ways people are working because of the pandemic and that some are slowly clawing back work from the darkest days of the lockdown.

Almost 70 per cent of freelance members said their income had been adversely affected by Covid. Of these, a third said their pre-lockdown employers had not returned, and of those half had

not found new clients to replace them.

Nine per cent of those surveyed said they had been made redundant since the pandemic struck, with only a third finding new work within three months.

A quarter of members said they had been asked to do work for no pay, with more than one in five (22 per cent) having done so.

More than two-thirds of members (67 per cent) said the pandemic had led to greater flexibility in attending the office and home working but, of those working from home, more than half (54 per cent) did not receive a home-working allowance from their employer.

Almost 60 per cent of those surveyed said they did not receive a pay rise in 2020 - in 2021 only 33 per cent got an increase. This has been feeding into the latest pay rounds, with members having had their pay frozen particularly anxious

as the threat of ever-higher inflation looms. Many members are clearly feeling the pinch, with 28 per cent saying their earnings were not enough to cover the cost of living and more than half (53 per cent) not earning enough to permit savings. One in five (20 per cent) said they had experienced harassment, hostility or threats while doing their job.

Despite a digital recruitment drive in the regional press following the redundancies of 2020 the NUJ is dealing with threats to jobs at Reach and JPIMedia. Newsquest's working conditions remain grim; low staffing levels, high workloads and poor pay mean members are voting with their feet and getting jobs elsewhere. Freelance members have also complained Newsquest is not paying them.

BBC members were hit with the news that the licence fee will be frozen for two years, putting real pressure on budgets already brutally hacked back (see page 4).

A third of those who took part in the survey said they had sought help from the union in the past three years. The union was also able to provide financial aid for many members in difficulty from its welfare charity, NUJ Extra, which now finds itself in good health following a generous bequest and donations from members and branches (page 5).

Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, said: "Positive signs of growth in the industry are to be welcomed, and will act as a spur to the organising and campaigning work taking place and planned throughout the union, particularly around pay and working conditions."

Have your say before the NUJ survey closes on Monday 7 February:
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/nujmembers2021>

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Michelle's Message



An angry mob greeted Chris Mullin two years ago as he left the new inquests into the Birmingham pub bombings, the blasts which killed 21 people in 1974. For some of the victims' families, it was clear that the passing of 44 years had done little to dim their pain.

Julie Hambleton, whose sister Maxine died in The Tavern In The Town explosion was particularly vehement. According to the Birmingham Post she called Mullin a 'disgrace' and questioned 'how he slept at night'.

Despite this fierce emotional pressure, and now an application to the courts, Mullin, an NUJ member for more than 50 years, has refused to disclose information given him in confidence. Some believe that his records could confirm the identity of one or more of those who planted the bombs. The case will be heard at the Old Bailey later this month.

I have deep sympathy for those who lost loved ones in such shocking circumstances. But I am just as clear that the NUJ will be backing our member to the hilt. In doing so, I hope that we can persuade the broader public that far from hampering justice, it is Mullin's steadfast determination to protect his sources that has inched this whole sorry episode towards just resolution.

The important facts of this case span my lifetime, happening in the year I was born. In November 1974 two bombs were detonated in Birmingham pubs, killing 21 and injuring 182. Within hours of the blasts, six Irishmen were arrested, and subsequently given life sentences. In the ensuing 16 years, significant evidence emerged that those convicted had nothing to do with the bombings - most of it unearthed by Mullin's investigative journalism. Finally, in 1991, their convictions were quashed and the six walked free from the Old Bailey, where they stood, arms aloft, with Mullin in their midst.

It is hard to think of a journalistic campaign that was braver at its inception, more doggedly pursued, nor that has been so spectacularly vindicated. Had Mullin not persisted as he did, it is highly likely that 'the Birmingham Six' would still in prison, rather than being recognised as victims themselves.

Nothing that Mullin achieved, however,

would have been possible without his absolute commitment to protecting his sources. Seeking out those who planted bombs and directed terrorism, as he did, placed him in very real danger. To win their trust and thereby get to the truth, with no special powers save his dedication and integrity, is a towering journalistic achievement. Had there been any doubt of his commitment to protect his sources, a far greater darkness would hang over this case still.

"It was the NUJ's defence of Bill Goodwin that established beyond any doubt that a journalist defending their sources has protection in law."

That the NUJ stands shoulder to shoulder with Mullin will come as no surprise to those who know our union. It was the NUJ's defence of Bill Goodwin in the 1980s and 1990s that established beyond any doubt that a journalist defending their sources has protection in law.

Goodwin's case went to the European Court of Human Rights (a body whose jurisdiction the UK has accepted since 1950 and is unrelated to the European Union). Its ruling was that: "Protection of journalistic sources is one of the basic conditions for press freedom ... without such protection, sources may be deterred from assisting the press in informing the public on matters of public interest. As a result the vital public watchdog role of the press may be undermined and the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information may be adversely affected."

This enshrines a vital principle. Alas, it has proved one that prosecutors have found it depressingly easy to forget. A flick through the union's legal case book provides a depressing litany.

We successfully defended Ed Moloney in 1999 when the police demanded his records of a conversation with a loyalist paramilitary. Safeguarding Robin Ackroyd's notebooks, took seven years, but we stood with him and his notes retained their secrets when we won in 2007. A year later, we supported Shiv Malik at a judicial review that significantly narrowed the scope of information he was required to disclose. Similarly, the production order served on videographer Jason Parkinson in 2011 in respect of his footage from the Dale Hall Farm evictions was substantially resisted. And just two years ago, the NUJ supported Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey when they successfully argued they were entitled to protect their sources - despite suffering dawn raids, and the hijacking of their computer server.

Indeed, the assault on sources is ongoing and widespread. Julian Assange is facing extradition from this country to face charges of cultivating and protecting a source. Daily we hear about intrusive software, such as NSO's Pegasus, being used to snoop on journalists - to find out who are their sources. And, the Government is currently preparing legislation that would broaden the scope of the Official Secrets Act to criminalise journalists who receive documents from whistleblowers.

This should concern us all. The ability of reporters to expose wrongdoing, incompetence and corruption is a vital check on democracy. Undermine that ability and the electorates will be hoodwinked, the power of corporations will be unchecked, and the innocent will languish in jail.

For a grieving individual it is understandable when those broader benefits are obscured. The purpose of a civilised legal system, however, is to resist atavistic justice. Given the previous failings in the case by West Midlands's Police, their conduct in this case is particularly depressing.

What will happen when the case gets

REASONS TO JOIN

Be Part of a Collective Voice

As a member of the NUJ you are part of a united force championing the rights of media workers and defending attacks on press freedom. Successful workplaces are those where the management and workers share the same aims and talk to each other. Being a member of the NUJ means giving yourself and colleagues a real voice at work.

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to the Old Bailey - I don't know. Of Chris Mullin's instincts, however, I am pretty certain. As his former Parliamentary colleague, Jack Straw wrote to The Times last week: "I have known Mr Mullin for 40 years. Wild horses, thumb screws, and a lengthy spell in prison would not make him break a confidence".

I hope that the court rules out the application of any of the above. If they don't, however, I am certain that journalism's most sacred commitment will be safeguarded by one of its doughtiest defenders. He will have by his side, in spirit at least, every member of our union.

Update

BBC's birthday bash



Tough licence fee deal tempers 100th birthday celebrations

It wasn't the greatest of birthday presents. As the BBC celebrates its centenary year, the corporation was told its licence fee would be frozen for two years.

Tim Davie, BBC director general, said the settlement would affect "frontline output" and, when asked what might be cut, said "everything's on the agenda". The corporation's income for UK services is already 30 per cent lower in real terms than it was 10 years ago. And last year it made £1bn in cuts, with more

2,000 journalist jobs going.

What made the announcement more galling was that the news was leaked to the Sunday press before being announced to Parliament and Nadine Dorries, Culture Secretary, had tweeted: "This licence fee announcement will be the last...Time now to discuss and debate new ways of funding, supporting and selling great British content." It was seen as a means of distraction from the Partygate stories dogging the Prime Minister and the BBC-bashing culture secretary was happy oblige.

A TV licence costs £159, with the BBC receiving £3.7bn a year to fund services such as TV, radio, the BBC website, podcasts, iPlayer and apps. After the two-year freeze, the fee will rise in line with inflation until 2027 when the broadcaster's royal charter expires.

Nadine Dorries said the freeze was to help working people hit by the rise of living – an inflation-rate licence fee rise would have cost 80 pence a month. She was unable to answer questions from Labour MP, John McDonnell, on what the BBC contributed to the creative industry

and the regions – he knew that every £1-worth of the BBC's economic activity generated £2.63 in the economy; and 50 per cent of the BBC's economic impact was outside London, compared to a sector average of 20 per cent.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "Freezing the licence fee for the next two years will do enormous damage to programming and services, to employment and, ultimately, to democracy. Those Reithian principles of informing, educating and entertaining are as important today as they have ever been. To undermine that would be an act of cultural vandalism and we hope the public rallies to support the BBC and its unarguable value to our society."

The NUJ will now renew its campaign to champion public service broadcasting – the threat of privatisation is hanging over Channel 4, BBC England is already in crisis after losing 450 journalists and, according to a poll published in The Telegraph, two-thirds of Britons want the TV licence scrapped. The NEC passed a motion in support of campaigning for the BBC.

In other TV news...

ITV evening news is to double in length to become an hour-long programme from March, creating 27 jobs, the broadcaster has announced.

Some concessions were made during **ITV/NUJ** negotiations on its proposed Editorial Framework for regional news staff. The framework aims to increase flexibility of roles without paying extra when members act up in more senior roles. It was agreed staff would not be forced into senior roles and

a £50,000 salary maximum was removed. ITV staff also accepted a 3 per cent pay increase after rejecting the management offer of 2.5 per cent.

Members at **Al Jazeera** are set to ballot for action over pay after members' 6 per cent pay claim was turned down following last year's pay freeze.

Members at **STV** initially rejected a 3 per cent increase but agreed when management included a £500 bonus. **RTÉ** has commissioned Willis Tower

Watson to carry out an analysis of the complex grading structure within the organisation. The NUJ will highlight pay inequality and pay anomalies in specific areas as part of this process.

ITN members are seeking an above-inflation pay deal following last year's unconsolidated bonus and no across-the-board increase. **Alaraby** is moving its TV operation from London to Doha. Most staff are being offered a role in Doha but the union is in dispute with the company over the terms of

the voluntary redundancy package for those who cannot relocate.

Journalists at **BBC Turkey's** Istanbul bureau ended a two-week strike highlighting how their pay had been robbed by rampant inflation after winning concessions. The BBC agreed an annual pay raise of 32 per cent, private health insurance for their families and vouchers for their lunch and eye tests and glasses. They say the action will encourage colleagues to continue to fight for better conditions.

Update

Bumper bequest for NUJ charity

NUJ extra has received a bequest of £36,000 (almost €43,000) after the proceeds of a will were split between the union's welfare charity and Irish Guide Dogs.

Ms Tanney died 1 January 2019 and after the sale of her house, solicitors Barry, Healy & Company said the money totalled €85,781.35; NUJ extra's share was €42,890.67 (£36,245.29). She had no family and the charity's trustees agreed to send a letter of thanks to her friend, Frank Dolan, executor of her will, and to ask him for more details about the generous benefactor.

Chris Wheal was re-elected as the chair of NUJ extra trustees and Francis Sedgemore as the vice-chair. Chris told his fellow trustees they should be proud of the charity's work during the



pandemic – many members whose jobs vanished or who were too ill to work were provided with a lifeline.

He said a lot of money had been spent, but the charity's assets had not suffered thanks to generous donations from branches and members, and its investments had since bounced back. A survey sent out during the pandemic brought praise from recipients.

The Covid scheme is now closed but those still suffering can apply for grants in the usual way. Francis added the charity was now in "a good position".

NUJ Extra: www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/nuj-charities/nuj-extra.html

Union finances

John Barsby, NUJ honorary treasurer, told the NEC the union ended the year with positive net current assets of just over £1m and positive reserves of almost £2.8m. However, he warned, there were still financial challenges presented by its significant pension scheme liability, the need to continue to invest in the repair and maintenance of the London HQ Headland House – starting with the windows and building facade which

needed urgent attention – and the end of upper floors' tenancies at the beginning of 2023.

Claudia Jones lecture

The Black Members' Council held a successful event with keynote speaker Charlie Brinkhurst Cuff, a senior staff editor at The New York Times, in memory of the journalist, activist and founder of the Notting Hill Carnival. Charlie spoke of her belief that what she called joy was a major factor in the way black journalists could

deal with the past and confront the present and future: "If we accept that a fundamental part of the media at this moment is capitalising on Black pain without giving us space to exist outside those boundaries, how do we move forward?" she asked.

Video and text of lecture: www.nuj.org.uk/resource/the-sharing-of-joy.html

The 20th anniversary of the memorial lecture will be held in October and the BMC intends to celebrate it in style.

Union wins millions for members

The NUJ's legal department together with union officials and reps have negotiated more than £3m in compensation for members on settlement agreements alone last year, and £300,000-plus since the last NEC meeting.

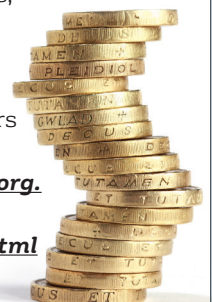
More than £150,000 in compensation has also been paid out in personal injury cases and more than £1.5m won in awards ranging from discrimination to unfair dismissal claims.

The union's work in successfully concluding individual compensation for equal pay claims, in excess of £100,000 for some members from a range of employers, continues, following the many millions secured for women working at the BBC, including the high-profile case of presenter, Samira Ahmed.

Natasha Morris, legal & equality officer, said: "The NUJ legal department and partner firms are extremely pleased to have been able to support so many members through often difficult and distressing circumstances. Cases such as these show the value of the union's service and that it is prepared to hold companies to account."

As well as representing members on workplace issues, the NUJ offers a comprehensive range of legal services to members and their families:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/advice/legal-assistance.html>



Update

NUJ supports ex-MP to contest Terrorism Act order

GL Portrait / Alamy Stock Photo

Chris Mullin, the journalist, former MP and government minister, is being supported by the NUJ to contest an order served on him by police using the Terrorism Act to seek source material relating to the Birmingham pub bombings.

The West Midlands Police have applied for an order requiring Chris Mullin, a NUJ member for more than 50 years, to disclose material relating to his 1985-6 investigation of the Birmingham pub bombings, which took place in November 1974. His book, *Error of Judgement*, and a series of documentaries helped expose one of the worst miscarriages of justice in legal history, leading to the release of six men – known as the Birmingham Six – whose convictions were quashed in 1991.

The application is contested on the grounds that to disclose the material



requested would be a fundamental breach of the principle that journalists are entitled to protect their sources.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said: "The principle of protecting your source and keeping your word when confidentiality is pledged is a vital one for all journalists and lies at the heart of the NUJ's Code of Conduct. The

case brought by West Midlands Police risks compromising that core principle and undermining press freedom which is why the NUJ stands four-square behind Chris and is backing this case."

Chris Mullin said: "If West Midlands Police had carried out a proper investigation after the bombings, instead of framing the first half-dozen people unlucky enough to fall into their hands, they might have caught the real perpetrators in the first place. It is beyond irony. They appear to have gone for the guy who blew the whistle."

The hearing will take place at the Old Bailey on Thursday and Friday 24-25 of February, at a hearing before the Recorder of London, His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft, QC. Mr Mullin is being represented by Louis Charalambous of Simons Muirhead Burton and Gavin Millar QC.



Stand Up to Racism

On Saturday 5 February trade unionists from across Britain, including the NUJ's Tony Adamson, will come together at the Fighting for Anti-racist Workplaces online conference, hosted by the TUC and Stand Up To Racism, to discuss opposing the Nationality and Borders Bill, which will effectively remove the right to seek

asylum in Britain while scapegoating refugees and migrants, and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which targets Black Lives Matters activists and the Roma and Traveller communities. Members are also encouraged to take part in the UN anti-racism day marches on Saturday 19 March. More information: www.nuj.org.uk/resource/stand-up-to-racism.html

Publishing Show

This major event for the publishing industry on 8-9 March will discuss new industry trends and

the future of B2B and B2C publications, newspapers and content providers. The NUJ is a partner and will be speaking at a number of panel events. Go along, get informed and discover the latest trends. Free for NUJ members – go to the NUJ website to get the discount code. <https://nuj.org.uk/learn/ems-event-calendar/the-publishing-show>.

Assange case

The Wikileaks founder has won the right to ask the UK Supreme Court to block his extradition to the US. Julian Assange has spent nearly

three years in Belmarsh prison while the US seeks his prosecution on 18 charges, most arising from the Espionage Act, and relating to Wikileaks' publication of the Iran and Afghan "war logs" in 2010.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "Welcome as this decision is, this case is damaging media freedom every day that it drags on. The US is seeking Assange on charges that relate to the very business of news gathering. As long as this is treated as an indictable offence, reporters will be looking over their shoulders."

Update

Fair deal for freelances

The freelance office, Freelance Industrial Council and Photographers' Council have agreed their key priorities for the year.

This includes helping members to negotiate fair contracts with decent pay and conditions while protecting their copyright. The union is working with the police to produce a new video to help officers understand the work of journalists and the Photographers' Council will be adding items to the union's safety toolkit.

Andy Smith, freelance national organiser, said: "We will ask insurance companies to improve the terms available to members being covered for professional indemnity and public liability." He also joined talks at The Guardian on improved shift rates for freelances and photographers.

London Freelance Branch's Mike Holderness wrote the union's submission to the UK government's consultation on artificial intelligence and copyright. Catherine Brereton, NEC books member, had some good news –



the UK government has announced it will not, for now, change the current laws on copyright exhaustion. The NUJ made a submission to last summer's consultation on copyright and supported the publishers' campaign, Save Our Books.

Catherine said: "This is a great relief to the publishing industry and its thousands of workers – for now. The Intellectual Property Office said there was not enough data available to understand the economic impact of

any of the alternatives to the current regime, whereas there is ample data to demonstrate that any weakening of our intellectual property laws would have been devastating. Along with industry leaders and the wider public, the NUJ will continue to make its case to government in future discussions."

The campaign will also be promoting the NUJ Freelance Charter: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/fair-deal-for-freelances.html>

Investigations grant

The Justice for Journalists Foundation has opened applications for its annual investigative grant programme. Proposals to conduct journalistic investigations into crimes against media workers will be accepted until Sunday 20 March.

The maximum amount offered for each individual grant will be US\$80,000. Find out more on the JFJ website: <https://jff.fund/call-for-applications-investigative-grant-programme-2022/>

Human Rights Act

The second webinar on changes to the Human Rights Act, organised by the NUJ Ethic's Council and British Institute of Human Rights, will take place at 5.30pm on 24 February and will examine the threat posed by the government's plan to reform human rights laws, described as a "power grab" by civil rights groups. The first webinar debunked scare stories such as police suspects had a right to chicken takeaways: <https://bit.ly/3s7ZfYR>

Second Time Around

Barry White, formerly of the London Public Relations and Communications branch, spent nine years as the NUJ's representative for the European Federation of Journalists. His new book, *Second Time Around*, records his many solidarity visits to Turkish journalists, including covering their arrests and trials, and his 19 years as national organiser for the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. Email barry.white.cpbpf@googlemail.com to order your £5 copy.

Newsquest members

Please take part in our group-wide survey. We want to hear your concerns and priorities. We need a good response rate for it to have impact on management. The survey is anonymous and for NUJ members but if other colleagues are interested in taking part in good faith, forward them the link: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GKH76QG – it will be sent to your personal email address, so if you don't receive it, contact publishing@nuj.org.uk

Update

Anti-troll law for Ireland published

Artur Widak/NurPhoto



The Irish government has published an online safety and media regulation bill which establishes a new regulator, replacing the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

An online safety commissioner will set safety codes outlining how social media services should deal with harmful content, including criminal material, cyberbullying and posts promoting self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

Tech giants, such as Google-owned YouTube and Facebook, could be fined 10 per cent of their Irish turnover if they do not comply with the new rules. However, the bill does not allow for individual complaints.

Following a briefing by Michelle

Stanistreet to representatives of Ireland's leading publisher, Mediahuis Ireland, on the union's role on the UK safety committee, a letter, also signed by RTÉ, was sent to media and justice ministers highlighting specific threats to journalists.

The letter said members reporting on the Covid-19 emergency and issues around vaccine disinformation had experienced abuse and personal attacks on social media. After writing articles about the tragic death of Joe McCarron in Letterkenny, Sunday Independent journalist Rodney Edwards experienced a torrent of threatening and vile online messages. Women had been the target of especially vile abuse.

forward to this next chapter in my union journey."

John Toner, NUJ national organiser Scotland, said: "Claire's energy and insight will be hugely important as the SEC pushes the Scottish government on the Public Interest Journalism Working Group recommendations, defends the BBC and revives Scottish branches. The SEC vice-chair is Mark Fisher, one of our most hard-working and experienced activists."

Funding for Welsh members

The NUJ, as part of the Wales TUC Cultural and Creative Sector Group, has persuaded the Welsh government to increase the funding package to support the sector in Wales during Covid restrictions.

Local authorities will pay out from a £120m discretionary Emergency Business Fund. Following discussions with the industry and trade unions, the government agreed to increase the award for sole traders and freelancers who do not pay rates to £1,000 from £500.

The industry-wide Wales Public Interest Journalism Working Group met for its second meeting this month and discussed how to spend a £100,000 pot of funding from the Welsh government by the end of March and further define the scope of the working party's remit.

The Welsh language broadcaster S4C, which this year loses its Westminster government grant and is to be funded by the BBC, was told it had been allocated an extra £7.5 million a year to develop its digital offering.

NUJ Cymru/Wales Training Fund had its government funding for 2022-2025 confirmed. The Welsh Executive Council gave thanks to the project's staff, manager Rachel Howells and co-ordinator Zena Chandler-Burnell, for their work securing the bid and their exciting professional training programme.

Book now for professional training courses and online resources, also open to members outside Wales: <https://www.nujtrainingwales.org/>

Scottish chair

Claire Harris has become the first woman to chair the Scottish Executive Council.

She works on long-form investigations for the BBC and previously in business, advising the Japanese government. She has been the Glasgow and Edinburgh chapel joint MoC for five years. "Being part of the NUJ is something I value greatly" she said, "I'm really looking

Spotlight

REUTERS / Alamy Stock Photo



All change at The Mail...

but, as Charles Gris reports, its most combative and long serving leader Paul Dacre is back at the helm

Had Paul Dacre fallen dead at this desk on his 70th birthday in November 2018, his obituaries are easy to imagine.

As editor of the Daily Mail for 26 years, he piloted Britain's arguably most successful newspaper of the era. He achieved a record circulation, over 2.5 million, and enjoyed, for a newspaper, unparalleled political influence.

Colleagues would doubtless recall his splanetic outbursts at conference – known as the Vagina Monologues – for his propensity to use a particular four-letter word. And his keen sense of the concerns of middle England would have been celebrated.

"His nickname in the newsroom is DayLate Dacre," recalls James Chapman, who served as the Mail's political editor for seven years. "Paul would say we'll do ... (the story already published

elsewhere) effing better than anybody else, and we will make it get it to the top of the news, and we will get it raised in Prime Minister's questions just through force of argument and presentation."

That is not how the commencement of his eighth decade played out, however. Instead, Dacre, aged 73, has spent a frustrating three years manoeuvring to assume the chair of Ofcom, the regulator of the BBC (among others). In this he was thwarted, to his very obvious fury. In an extraordinarily bitter piece he blamed, among others, The Guardian, 'the blob', 'the man from the ministry', and 'tickbox political correctness'.

Today the gap in his life has been filled after a night of the long knives at the Mail. Dacre's successor, the popular, less strident, Geordie Greig, is gone. Daily editorial control is now in the hands of long-time Dacre deputy, Ted Verity, and MailOnline's head, Martin Clarke, has announced his departure from the titles.

Dacre is now editor in chief with an 'active role' overseeing all the company's titles. Has a greater comeback ever been grasped from the dust, the rest of Fleet Street may wonder? Behind the scenes, however, staff fear that the easy certainties of the past will not serve the Mail well. For all Dacre's sales record, it

was set nearly 20 years ago. Since then, circulation has been in free fall to below one million. The Mail's enduring, and astonishing, clout is, in part, because its decline has been slower than that of rivals. Critically, it has now overtaken The Sun, whose four million daily sale is a distant memory.

The extraordinary success of MailOnline has also masked the print title's circulation woes. Run as an almost entirely separate operation, with its celebrity and royal led news and infamous sidebar of shame, it has grown to become the biggest news website in the world. Martin Clarke, its editor whose style is every bit as voluble as Dacre's, has steered this remarkable ascent. For a company that depends for its future on success online, however, his is surely a grievous loss.

Against this backdrop, the Mail's hereditary owner, Jonathan Harmsworth, 4th Viscount Rothermere, has successfully delisted the company after nearly 90 years on the stock exchange. If his new senior management is a signal of the company's future direction, fund managers may ultimately be grateful to have been relieved of their shares. As the clouds gathered over the party animal Prime Minister, the Mail took up the role of bombastic cheerleader. Over nine chest-beating pages, plotters were monstered, the defector pilloried and David Davies denounced. Like the Mail itself, it was a perfect marriage of outrage, nostalgia and angry spite. Dacre's stamp was unmistakable.

His improbable comeback, and the surrounding corporate whirl, is certainly evidence that, whatever his age, Dacre has tricks up his sleeve yet. Indeed, his keenest reader in Number 10 may even dream that these alone are sufficient to assure Big Dog's Downing Street tenure. However, believing this approach to portend a safe future for a venerable news platform requires a rather more challenging imaginative stretch.

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



“It’s a golden era”

Media expert Ian Birrell finds the outlook for journalism surprisingly good

While staff at the Financial Times celebrated new year with a four-figure bonus and free sushi, journalism students at Brunel University have little need for work placements after launching the Hillingdon Herald, their own 15,000-circulation local newspaper.

The news agenda at the start of 2022 may be dominated by rising Covid infections, concerns about increased living costs and the ongoing threat

of climate change but the outlook for journalism itself is surprisingly good.

An escalation of activity in the regional news sector has seen a raft of title launches and a consequent boom in the hiring of journalists. After two decades of dire predictions about the future of news, some publishers are awash with profits and technology is driving a wave of digital news start-ups, inspired by encouraging signs that consumers will pay for quality information.

All this builds on the resilient response of the news industry to the pandemic, which looked poised to deliver a coup de grâce to a struggling sector by further destroying print circulations. Instead, locked-down readers saw greater value in news they could trust.

Suddenly it no longer seems an act of recklessness to be embarking on a career in journalism. “This is a serious newspaper covering serious issues,”

says journalism lecturer, Rachel Sharp, founder of the Hillingdon Herald. While many local papers are produced by a single reporter, the Herald has a newsroom of 60 journalism postgraduates and undergraduates, overseen by Sharp, a former editor of Newsquest’s Hillingdon Times, and the university’s head of news, Steve Cohen, a former editor of the Bucks Free Press, another Newsquest title.

“We cover what we used to call the bread and butter of journalism; local schools, potholes, or the rubbish not being collected on time,” she says. “Those things really matter to residents. I thought there was no reason why we couldn’t be not just a student paper but a proper newspaper in the community.”

The Hillingdon Herald was one of many launches in 2021 as big regional publishers sought to widen their geographical reach to attract more regional and national advertisers. This was typically done through the low-cost strategy of digital-only production.

JPIMedia, under the leadership of David Montgomery, whose National World purchased the group in January 2021, has been rolling out its portfolio of World-branded websites, many of them in territories traditionally served by publishing rival, Reach. World sites have launched in Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as London.

This “cuckoo” tactic is largely a response to Reach’s own colonisation of turf previously linked to JPIMedia and other publishers. Reach’s digital franchise “Live”, which began in 2015 when Leeds Live was dropped on the toes of JPIMedia’s Yorkshire Evening Post, has been greatly extended during 2021 to include Wiltshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Dorset, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

These turf wars have been good for jobs – following the redundancies during the height of the pandemic.

JPIMedia created 45 posts for its World launches, while Reach hired

more than 400 staff for its Live portfolio during 2021, launching 26 new websites and sub-brands to cover every county in England and Wales. Other publishers took on new staff to defend their patches. Newsquest hired 50 digital staff in May and also launched The National in Wales as a compact paper and website to rival Reach's Wales Online.

Norfolk-based Archant hired 70 staff in summer to protect its heartlands, but it also closed most of its regional offices to save money and allow more staff to work from home, a strategy pioneered by Reach earlier in the year when it announced a retrenchment to 15 regional news hubs.

In the independent new sector, launches have included Reading Today and the Stroud Times. Manchester start-up, The Mill, marked its first anniversary by registering more than 1,000 paying members and producing a special print edition. Last year it opened sister sites The Post (Liverpool) and the Sheffield Tribune, all hosted on the online publishing platform Substack.

But independents have been hit hard economically by the pandemic, with many small outlets facing destitution, so the Public Interest News Foundation launched a philanthropy-backed grants programme to support such publishers in London and Birmingham.

The long-running Salford Star closed in 2021 – a popular community-run operation commended by local figures from actor Maxine Peak to musician Peter Hook. “We lived in the area and were part of that community. Our kids were at school here and we were in the local shops,” says editor Stephen Kingston. “But for the previous 10 years I had been working for virtually no pay at all.” He claims Salford is without dedicated media, except Salford Now – produced by journalism students at the University of Salford.

There are no such financial hardships at the FT where Japanese owner Nikkei rewarded staff with bonuses of £5,600 and a party stocked with sake and sushi

to celebrate what chief executive, John Ridding, described as “an exceptional performance in 2021”.

The rest of the national press reflects this new optimism. In a Press Gazette new year's survey, Daily Mirror editor, Alison Phillips, said newsletters would enable audience growth, while The Sun editor, Victoria Newton, stressed the value of reader data and The Times's editor, John Witherow, claimed his paper was entering a “golden era” in which it would put added emphasis on “audio, video and interactives”.

“After two decades of dire predictions about the future of news, publishers are awash with profits.”

This upturn is dwarfed by the financial gains of the Big Tech companies during the pandemic as they transformed into trillion-dollar organisations. Google's owner Alphabet, Meta and Amazon were, by a long distance, the three biggest online publishers in the UK last year and together they swallowed up more than half of global advertising outside of the People's Republic of China.

But signs are that the tide may be turning as countries attempt greater regulation – and Canada is set to follow Australia in forcing the tech giants to pay for its use of news. A story in the Mail on Sunday, from “DCMS sources” said Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries is in favour of the Digital Markets Unit having a remit to force Google and Facebook to pay for the stories they carry. The source said: “The new regime will be an important vehicle to tackle the imbalance of power between the largest platforms and publishers.”

The Competition Markets Authority also gave a signal of intent in November by ordering Meta, owner of Facebook, to sell the GIF platform Giphy, which it

bought in May 2020. The CMA ruled that Meta already had too much control over social media with ownership of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

In magazines and periodicals, star performers include Zillah Byng-Thorne and Zanny Minton Beddoes. The former is CEO of specialist publisher Future, which last year doubled pre-tax profits to £108m. The latter is editor-in-chief of The Economist, which last year increased its subscribers by 9 per cent to 1.1m.

A fresh wave of digital start-ups has recently emerged to reimagine the future of news. Justin Smith quit his job as CEO of Bloomberg Media to co-found “a new kind of global news company”. Will Lewis, former publisher of the Wall Street Journal, is leading The News Movement, a social-media-driven news start-up being honed by a young team at the ITN building in London.

As recently as 2016, The Guardian's media commentator, Roy Greenslade, warned that journalism was being dwarfed by the PR industry but 2021's growth in jobs has helped to shift that balance.

Analysis of official labour market statistics carried out by PAN Communications found more people are working as journalists (112,300) than PRs (100,137). “We are seeing both sectors growing, it's just that the number of people working in journalism appears to be growing more quickly,” says Gareth Thomas, PAN's managing director. “I think that is a very good thing.”

According to an NCTJ study in May, the industry is becoming younger, with the proportion of journalists under 30 increasing from 16 per cent to 23 per cent between 2018-2020, while the proportion over 40 fell from 64 per cent to 48 per cent.

After a long period of decline, the news industry is taking on fresh blood. Now it needs the younger generations of readers and viewers to appreciate what it does.

International

Plight of the Afghan media workers

IFJ treasurer Jim Boumelha gives an update on the situation for journalists in Afghanistan

Even before the Taliban entered Kabul, the International Federation of Journalists maintained an information channel between its two affiliated unions in Afghanistan, the AIJA (Association of Independent Journalists in Afghanistan) and ANJU (Afghanistan National Journalists' Union).

While Western governments were taken surprised by the swiftness of the Taliban's take over following the pull-out of foreign troops, the journalist unions on the ground had always been fearful. But even they were taken aback as they watched as the government collapsed within, leading to panic and chaos. The IFJ brought them together to share information and organise humanitarian help for journalists and their families.

The nation-building effort undertaken by Western powers for 20 years poured in huge investment into the country, building scores of radio and TV stations, and regional news agencies. Kabul alone had 108 media organisations employing around 5,000 staff, among them 1,000 females. Immediately after the Taliban started its offensive, AIJA sent us a list of 140 radios and TV stations which ceased to function.

Many Western NGOs were in charge of huge media programmes. The US-sponsored Internews established two of Afghanistan's leading media organisations: Salam Watandar, a radio network that included 67 Afghan-owned and operated partner stations across all 34 provinces, and Nai, a media advocacy and vocational training organisation that had trained more than 19,000

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people, including 4,143 women, since 2005. Internews also played a large role in supporting and developing Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghanistan's largest newswire agency.

In the first phase we were involved in dealing with the chaotic scenes at Kabul airport. As Western media NGOS closed down their offices and started evacuating their core personnel, the vast majority were stranded with their families. Our two unions were overwhelmed by the scale of needs and the IFJ secretariat was forced into overseeing a huge and complex operation.

Help quickly came from our affiliates – the NUJ in the UK and Ireland helped with maintaining the database of journalists in danger which soon exceeded 1,000 entries. Other unions pressed their governments to grant visas

to the journalists. The priority was to pay for tickets on commercial flights, costing more than US\$1000. But as pictures of Kabul airport disappeared from our screens, the focus switched to concentrating on ensuring the survival of those still in the country.

Our Afghan unions helped determine the needs of their members – shelter for those who had fled their homes, food and urgent medication. They proved crucial in distributing the funds from the IFJ's emergency appeal, which has so far reached nearly US\$ 160,000, and is also helping media workers who escaped to other countries.

The second phase of our effort has been to ensure the protection and safety of the hundreds of journalists still working. Afghanistan already sits close to the top of the IFJ's annual list of murdered journalists. The IFJ has called on the UN and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to take a stand to ensure the protection and safety of media workers in Afghanistan, and to ensure that independent journalism is safeguarded.

Unemployment among journalists is estimated at between 70 and 80 per cent, and many are receiving warnings and death threats from terrorist groups and local Taliban officials. Journalists' unions are convinced that scores of their members are forced to censor themselves and are destroying SIM cards, deleting photos and deactivating their social media. Broadcasters have been ordered to air Taliban propaganda. How many more days before no woman is allowed to do the job of journalist?

Qari Yousaf Ahmadi, acting director of the Government Media and Information Centre and long-time Taliban spokesman, set out the direction of the future under the Taliban by unveiling 11 rules for journalists. The first one sets the tone by stressing that "Topics that contradict Islam must not be broadcast." Other points were pretty similar and confirmed that the new media bosses are Taliban and only Taliban.