



Dec 2023 Branch

As the year comes to a close, NUJ Branch notes the wars and conflicts covered by journalists, the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence, and the amazing work of branches in supporting disputes and campaigning for press freedom

As the last NUJ Branch of 2023 goes out, the Hamas-Israeli war will be on all our minds, with our collective thoughts with the families of the journalists killed to date in the Middle East. That's why I am asking your branch to donate to the International Federation of Journalists' Safety Fund which supports journalists at times of crisis and is currently providing journalists in Gaza with vital supplies and equipment.

On the home front, the year ends with the union grappling with major job losses at Reach and RTÉ, and the ongoing dispute at National World over continuing poor pay. Although it has been a tough year, we can also celebrate the union's successes - stemming many redundancies across the sector, wringing important concessions out of the BBC in the dispute over local radio cuts, getting the government to act against Slapps and fighting back against those who intimidated journalists into silence through so-called 'lawfare', blocking the police from confiscating journalists' and photographers' materials, securing millions of pounds for members and working extensively to protect journalists and ensure their safety, including the development of a tracker to monitor attacks and abuse.

Branches have played a vital role - supporting members on picket lines, writing to MPs, inviting speakers to talk to members about our campaigns and initiatives and assisting recruitment drives. I'd especially like to thank your continued generosity in donating to

the NUJ's charities **NUJ extra**, the union's welfare charity, and the **George Viner Memorial Fund**, which provides bursaries for black and minority ethnic students - as well as your support of the IFJ's lifeline Safety Fund.

Those who heard Tahseen al-Astall, vice-president of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, broadcasting from his makeshift tent near the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis were taken right to the heart of the war zone. He was speaking at an event organised by the NUJ's Brussel's branch chaired by Cailin Mackenzie and also with Tim Dawson, deputy general secretary of the IFJ.

Aid for Gaza

Journalists in the Gaza need your help to do their job in desperate circumstances.

The IFJ is supplying vital equipment and aid. Please donate to its safety fund.

Branches can email jackie@nuj.org to transfer from their management allowances.

DONATE NOW

Al-Astall talked of the hardships and "harsh and arduous conditions" - lack of food, water and communications - and, shockingly, of how journalists were being targeted by the Israeli Defence Force. He described how he had been distributing phone chargers, medical kits, personal blast-trauma kits and battery packs to colleagues, paid for by



the IFJ Safety Fund, but the hook-up ended dramatically and abruptly when the interpreter, Ola Kassab, said: "There is too much bombing now for us to carry on," and the Zoom screen showed them scrambling to safety. You can read [Tim's blog](#) and view the meeting on YouTube.

Belfast and District Branch marked the eve of International Day to end Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists with the inaugural Lyra McKee lecture to commemorate and celebrate the young journalist, killed by a New IRA bullet in Derry, and other journalists in Northern Ireland who lost their lives doing their job. Anne Hailes, branch chair said: "It was a remarkable night. We talked about Lyra, her influence, her writing, her love of honesty and equality that have become the goal of many, especially young people, coming into our industry." Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, called the evening "an outstanding event, a triumph of organisation which touched on media freedom, trade union solidarity, workers' rights, ethical remembrance, and stirring commitment to defending the most vulnerable people with whom we share the earth". You can watch it [on YouTube](#)

Michelle Stanistreet

CAMPAIGN

02

Journalism by humans

Publishers must seek collaborative approaches with the NUJ to ensure their use of AI respects the rights of journalists, says Bea Bennett

Advancements in artificial intelligence are proceeding at pace, with the impact of technology on journalists complex and wide-ranging. It is for this reason that the NUJ's campaign calls for bold action from government and employers to ensure journalists' rights are protected before it is too late.

The NUJ's response to the UK government's recent consultation on AI stressed the need for adherence to ethical principles. Underlining this is the union's core belief that

the pursuit of AI - without necessary frameworks protecting journalists and the wider public - risks the erosion of confidence in journalism and the subsequent potential to undermine democracy.

The NUJ is calling on the UK and Irish governments to introduce legislation mandating developers to clearly indicate where content is generated by AI, an essential step towards ensuring public trust is retained. Without trust in the words we read and images we see, journalism is under threat.

As developers scrape content from the internet to inform generative AI systems, they are incorporating biases and inaccuracies embedded in internet content.

The NUJ is concerned about the use of AI in recruitment, appraisal and selection processes and has called for the consent of affected workers, along with all algorithms, to be made transparently and intelligibly available as a matter of right. The Trades Union Congress stressed the need for a legal duty on employers to consult trade unions on the use of "high risk" and intrusive forms of AI in the workplace.

While AI's emergence presents opportunities we can embrace in

journalism, transparency must lie at its heart. Developers must record and disclose journalistic sources used to inform their systems, alongside the terms of their licences which permit AI use. Without adequate regulatory oversight, governments risk pursuing innovation at the expense of rights holders who own their content but find themselves powerless to resist the resources of big tech.

Reports of some media companies seeking payment for content used by developers has also stirred discontent among journalists who correctly stress that they must rightly get a piece of the pie by receiving fair remuneration through licensing agreements.

The union is also engaging with the Federation of Entertainment Unions on how AI will affect the arts and media, and the Creators' Rights Alliance has been consulted on ways to protect copyright. Earlier this year, Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, attended a UK government roundtable on AI and journalism and the union's campaigns page, ***Artificial intelligence: journalism before algorithms***, is now live on the NUJ website.

Action

• Invite speakers to discuss the opportunities and dangers of AI.

• Go to the NUJ's [campaign page](#).

• Share updates on AI initiatives from your employer with the NUJ campaigns team campaigns@nuj.org.uk

AI event for creatives

Join an expert panel online on Monday 4 December, 6pm-7.30pm to explore the threats and opportunities AI poses for the media and arts. [Book here](#).



Finance conference

The NUJ needs funds to be a campaigning union which represents members collectively and personally. So how do we build a fair subscriptions structure that maintains a quality service? asks Professor Chris Frost, chair of the finance committee

For years inevitable subscription increases have raised an important debate about our subs' structure and membership types. The April 2023 DM was no exception and it was agreed to hold a special conference to discuss these issues:

- Risks of hardship for the lower paid.
- Concerns about recruiting those just breaking into journalism who have to take other part-time work to fund themselves, preventing them breaking the 50 per cent membership earnings barrier.
- The attempt to balance different membership classes with their fee rate.
- A need to recruit more members in an era of diverse offices with small eligible staffs or those working from home.

Subscriptions are the NUJ's major source of income. To provide the fullest detail of finances and membership to aid the discussion, the national executive council

(NEC) has released a **consultation paper** which includes draft annual accounts, ways of looking at a range of models and previous attempts to reform the subscription structure. This paper, circulated to branches, gives members and chapels a chance to identify and debate the issues.

A national webinar will be held in the spring, open to all members, with branches and tabling bodies encouraged to send a representative. This will be an advisory conference, developing ideas and themes that will allow the NEC, councils and branches to consider motions during the summer. Conclusions will then be submitted to the 25 November 2024 Delegate Meeting preliminary agenda and lead to a formal discussion at DM2025 in April 2025.

The NEC asks branches and chapels to add the subs' debate to their meeting agenda during the next few months. Senior officers of the union can be invited to visit branch meetings (in person or online) and join in the discussion.

Have your say

- Invite a speaker to your branch meeting: you can contact national officers – president, vice-presidents, treasurer, general secretary – via campaigns@nuj.org.uk – and chair of the finance committee, Chris Frost, at chrisfnuj@gmail.com.
 - Use the report to inform discussions. Study the union's membership types: full, temporary, associate (retired, student [developmental]), and life, and the membership grading: grade one up £20,000; grade two: £20,000 to £30,000; grade three: £30,000 or more. Should there be a grade four, or more?
 - Should the membership qualification of 50 per cent of income from journalism be changed?
 - Publicise the webinar and nominate representatives to attend to put forward the branch's views.
 - Agree motions for Delegate Meeting.
- To inform your discussions, download the [finance report](#) from the website (you will have to login).**



Phew not a scorcher

Responsible reporting on the weather can save lives, says the Met Office's Stephen Dixon

If you're hoping to read a comment from someone at the Met Office telling you if this Christmas will have snow, then I'm afraid this could be a disappointing read.

Having worked in newsrooms, I know the strengths of journalism. Holding power to account, getting under the skin of local issues or writing 500 compelling words on local council issues and debates: it's all journalism and it's all vital for the media ecosystem of the UK.

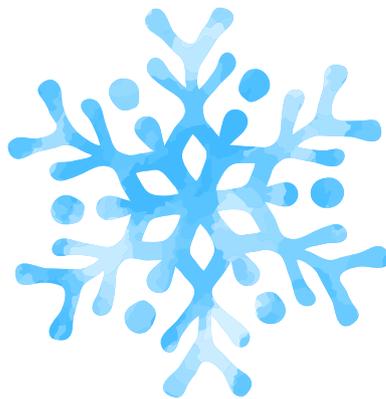
At the Met Office, we see how important it is for journalists to understand and communicate a story effectively to viewers, readers and listeners. Expert science from the Met Office informs journalists to help the public not only to understand the weather so they can be better prepared, but also understand complex issues like climate change.

Storms Babet, Ciaran and Debi demonstrated how vital it is for people to appreciate the magnitude of threat the weather can bring. Our research showed 97 per cent of people in the amber and red warning areas for Babet were aware of the warnings and 89 per cent of these took action. These impressive

results simply wouldn't be possible if the Met Office was only trying to communicate the risks.

Journalists shoulder a huge responsibility for people getting the information they need to make decisions to stay safe ahead of severe weather and it undoubtedly saves lives. That's why it's so important that people believe the information from the weather forecast.

When a forecast in the UK is benign, perhaps a typical mix of sunshine and showers, some news sources – largely online – are tempted to embellish often well beyond what the meteorological science is saying. "Deluge of snow", "battering rain", even the dreaded "Beast from the East" headlines that do the rounds in



winter are often based on little more than media conjecture about the months ahead.

Meteorology is a complex science. Met Office forecasts are informed by hundreds of modelled projections of the future, with experts working on the details and uncertainties at the cutting edge of their job. For these professionals, an embellished or exaggerated weather headline can quickly undermine their work.

Robust sources of forecast information are available for journalists. The Met Office's present four-day forecast is as accurate as the one-day forecast was 30 years ago. A wealth of weather information is available directly online, and journalists can also access a free daily syndication email, complete with multimedia content, to fully understand what the forecast is and, sometimes more importantly, isn't, saying.

For those who are still wondering, it will snow this Christmas ... somewhere.

Email PressOffice@MetOffice.gov.uk for access to the free Met Office syndication email. Visit [metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/guide-to-emails](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/guide-to-emails) to sign up for press releases from the Met Office.



Consultation

Gerry Curran, vice-president, is inviting views on the format and style of Delegate Meeting and the operation of the union's industrial councils

The last Delegate Meeting (DM) in London had a motion for debate that the national executive council (NEC) would prepare a report on and reorganise our industrial councils which the framers of the motion said were no longer representative of today's work patterns.

The motion was withdrawn on the undertaking that the new NEC would conduct a consultation process, organise reports, and bring back to the next DM in April 2025 a rule-changing proposal to revamp the industrial councils which at present are organised by the following sectors: broadcasting; freelance; magazine and books; newspapers and agencies; new media; and public relations and communications.

I have taken on the role of organising this review and have started with requests to all committees and councils to include these topics on their agendas for discussion. This article is an open invitation to all members and all branches to add their voices to

the consultation.

Any member of the union with ideas, opinions, suggestions, information or inspiration regarding the future role and look of the industrial councils are invited to submit them to campaigns@nuj.org.uk and me at gerry.curran@icloud.com. Please mark subject line as Industrial Councils Review.



Delegate Meeting

Likewise, the last DM passed motion asking the NEC to draw up new ideas, plans and structures for how we conduct our biennial delegate meetings. There was a general feeling in the hall that the huge levels of energy present could be focussed in another way or ways instead of us continually debating and hearing speeches on lots of similar motions - with a particular desire to facilitate more engagement and meaningful discussion. The DM instructed the

NEC to change the use of time in imaginative and positive ways to get more out of the gathering.

All members, branches and committees are also invited to submit proposals, ideas, long or short, as to how best we might change our conference to make the best use of time available, of delegates' efforts and energy, and the facilities available to us. Submissions should be addressed to campaigns@nuj.org.uk, copying in me at gerry.curran@icloud.com with the in subject marked DM Renewal.

NUJ EXTRA



06

Give a little extra

Debbie Cavaldoro, chair of the NUJ's welfare charity, rattles the tin for donations in the run up to Christmas

NUJ extra is the union's charity which helps members and their dependents who have fallen on hard times. And with the ongoing cost of living crisis, high inflation and the approach of winter, times are hard for many.

During the Covid crisis, many branches dug deep to provide the charity with the funds it needed to get members through those difficult years, and we are asking once again if branches can make a

special donation this winter.

For those who already make a regular donation – thank you – this really is the best way to help the charity do its work, but please look at whether you may be able to increase the amount to account for inflation? For those branches who are not able to donate regularly, please consider making a one-off gift. Perhaps your branch has a Christmas social planned where you could ask members to contribute? Or your AGM might be coming up and your treasurer's report shows a little bit left over at year end?

The support of individuals is also greatly appreciated. Whether it's a personal direct debit, a one-off payment or the promise of a gift in your will, it all makes a big difference.

Thanks to your support, we are able to help members in need, with regular support and one-off grants. We assist those with caring responsibilities or long-term medical needs.

Recently we helped a member from the magazine branch cover mortgage arrears which had built up while they were recovering from an operation and unable to work. We've helped a freelance colleague with the purchase of an electric wheelchair – enabling them to get back to work. Leaflets are available from campaigns@nuj.org.uk

Action

Invite a NUJ extra trustee to your branch meeting. Email extra@nuj.org.uk

Make [a donation](#).

How to apply [for help](#).

Find out more on the [NUJ website](#).



TRAINING



07

Have your say

NUJ trainer Caroline Holmes invites members to say what topics and content they would find useful in next year's NUJ's trade union training programme

Don't forget to check out the new dates for the NUJ Trade Union Training Programme for 2024.

The full list of course dates and outlines are **[on the NUJ website](#)**. There are plenty of courses for new and more experienced reps to enjoy, and customised workshops are available for chapels which would like to run lunchtime drop-in sessions for members or evening training courses as part of a branch meeting. Email **tutrain@nuj.org.uk** to find out more.

However, the news, publishing and communication industries are forever changing, posing new challenges. That's why we are asking members to have their say in a training needs survey to assess what people think will be useful and relevant to them. Let us know the sorts of content and topics you would like covered. The survey is also designed to identify the best times for reps to access the courses, and whether they would like to take part online or face-to-face. Its results will shape the development of the new programme which will be relaunched in spring/

summer 2024. **[Complete the survey](#)**.

If you are thinking of arranging speakers and events for your branch or chapel members next year, it could be worth booking the workshop, Knowing more about the NUJ. This tells new – and not so new – members about the union, its structures, the benefits and how to get involved. Get in touch at **tutrain@nuj.org.uk**

• For professional skills training, **[NUJ Scotland Training](#)** and **[NUJ Training Wales](#)** provide a huge range of courses, workshops and lunchtime learning sessions. Most are online and open to all members in the UK and Ireland. This winter's courses can be found **[on the NUJ website](#)**.



New opportunities

The NUJ is launching two more training strands – on Leadership Skills and News Verification, free to NUJ members, starting in January.

The NUJ, supported by the Google News Initiative, has developed a leadership training programme for mid-career journalists to equip them with newsroom management and strategic planning skills. Open to members, both staff and freelancers, it is a one-day in-person session at various locations across the UK and Ireland.

Also on offer are tutor-led, half-day training sessions online via Google Meet in news verification skills for journalists. The topics covered are: disinformation/misinformation and how to identify it; a history of fake news; the impact and causes of disinformation; political propaganda and conspiracy theory and 21st century tools to identify disinformation.

The dates and locations of in-person sessions will be published on the NUJ website.

INFO

Get Active

Catch up on the NUJ's events, campaigns and resources and get involved.

AI

Artificial Intelligence is a fast-moving technology which will affect all of us at work. Go to the **Journalism before Algorithms** website page for more information.

The **TUC's guide** on artificial intelligence for union reps has helpful information on encouraging and participating in consultation when AI use is considered at work.

Campaigns

The **NUJ's Pay Campaign** calls for fair pay and flexible working and provides practical support to chapels when dealing with employers and on the rights of freelancers. The TUC's latest jobs and recovery monitor is assessing **gender and pay**.

Let's Stop SLAPPs

Go to the **website page** to see the latest on our campaign to stop lawsuits brought by the powerful and rich against journalists to censor and stymie reporting.

Recruiting students: there's lots of info, FAQs and materials for branches and chapels to encourage local journalism, publishing and photography students to join the union **on the NUJ website**.

Useful stuff

Freelance members can access help and useful information in the union's **freelance resources**.

Protect your sources: your rights as a journalist and how to protect your sources.

Legal assistance: one of the many benefits of NUJ membership is its legal advice.

Health and safety: advice, guidance and news.

The **safety toolkit** is

a mobile friendly resource to help media workers protect themselves and their journalism from harm.

Photographers: **the toolkit** has tips and a number for legal assistance when covering protests, and guidelines on

taking photographs in public places.

Storysmart: is a set of online training modules to help journalists prepare to work in hostile environments and keep their data safe.

Mental health: find help for **post-traumatic stress disorder**. NUJ freelance members can apply for funding via the **Rory Peck Trust** for urgent financial assistance or the cost of treatment for professional psychological support. **Other resources**, includes a mental health toolkit.

Reporting on refugees: inaccurate terminology and commentary can cause confusion and breed prejudice.

The **NUJ code of conduct** has set out the main principles of UK and Irish journalism since 1936.

Donate

The **IFJ's safety fund** helps journalists across the globe, including in Ukraine and Afghanistan and those covering the Israeli-Hamas war.

The NUJ's **George Viner Memorial Award** provides

bursaries for black and minority ethnic students.

NUJ extra helps members and their dependents who have fallen on hard times.



NUJ extra

NUJ training

The union provides a free programme of **training for reps**. **NUJ Scotland Training** and **NUJ Training Wales** provide a huge range of professional skills courses.