



## Misinformation Mythbuster

There's a lot of misinformation being aired about the push for NUJ recognition backed by well over 100 staff at PA, and what collective bargaining would mean for everyone. Here are answers to some of the most FAQs so everyone knows what's really going on. Please see the PA NUJ chapel's **Real Say, Better PAY** campaign page here for more answers: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/realsaybetterpay> You can also contact your chapel co-chairs Jonathan Brady and Emily Pennink by emailing [nujchapelpa@gmail.com](mailto:nujchapelpa@gmail.com) - all communications are treated in strictest confidence.

### **Why am I being asked to join the NUJ?**

Current NUJ members within PA want management to recognise the union so that collective bargaining can take place. Collective bargaining is a process of negotiation between an employer and employees with the aim of reaching agreements on core issues such as collective pay, working hours and holiday entitlement - for example ensuring salaries are more fairly distributed. The union can also raise health and safety and welfare issues with management on behalf of staff. In order for the union to be recognised there needs to be a majority of NUJ members within an agreed bargaining unit, so joining shows you are in support of effective and meaningful discussions between management and staff on those important issues. Of course there are many more benefits to union membership, including advice and support, career development and networking opportunities.

### **What if I'm worried about strike action?**

Any industrial action, including strike action, is always the very last resort - the whole purpose of having an organised way of negotiating on pay and conditions is to seek to avoid workplace disputes after all. Strike action could only take place if a majority of members voted in favour of it, with a majority turnout in a legal ballot – this would only happen after other avenues had been exhausted. There can never be a scenario where a small number of staff could insist on strike action. There are scores of union members at PA and the number is growing, so any suggestion a small group of people could hold sway over the majority is incorrect and ill-founded. Most other newsrooms which have NUJ recognition have not taken strike action for many years, if ever.

### **If the union is recognised and I don't join, does that mean I won't get any say over my own pay, conditions and benefits?**

Not at all. All staff - members or not - are encouraged to contact the PA NUJ chapel to raise any issues they may have. Members of the chapel committee have previously offered advice to colleagues who are not in the union, and representations made by NUJ organisers have benefited both members of the NUJ and non-members alike - for example support with car policies and allowances. In a recognised workplace, the chapel committee would be able to raise issues with management on behalf of individuals. The chapel would also consider all colleagues' views - regardless of membership - when putting together any proposals on agreements, which would in turn be voted on in a fully democratic process by NUJ members within the agreed bargaining unit (which would have to be established by a majority of staff within that unit in a recognised workplace). Every colleague is encouraged to join the union however, as this would bring voting rights and a host of other benefits (see above).

**Would union recognition mean I could no longer discuss pay and other conditions with my manager?**

If the NUJ was recognised then it would collectively bargain on pay on your behalf and seek to ensure everyone got the best pay rise possible. It would do this through a democratic process in which you as a member would feed directly into. It would therefore make your voice infinitely more powerful within the structure of the company as it would be supported collectively by your colleagues. However, for the avoidance of doubt union recognition does not prevent an individual employee approaching his employer and seeking to discuss his or her own terms and conditions.

**What if I'm worried about my manager finding out I'm a union member?**

It is your legal right to join a union and, by law, you do not have to reveal that you are a union member to PA management, even if directly asked. It is against the law to be victimised/discriminated against as a result of your NUJ membership or union activity. The NUJ will never disclose your union membership to PA management and your colleagues on the chapel committee treat all membership information and contact in the strictest confidence.

**Would the union ever ask me not to do work involving another media organisation in the event staff there were taking industrial action?**

No. The NUJ can only ask you to take industrial action if you are engaged by the company with whom it is in dispute. It cannot ask you not to work for someone with whom you have no contractual relationship. This would be unlawful secondary action. The NUJ would of course discuss any issues with members at the time if this were to happen and make sure they were supported.

**What sort of pay rises are on the cards?**

In short, no-one knows. There are no guarantees and union recognition doesn't mean salaries will dramatically improve overnight. What it does mean is that a majority of staff will have a meaningful say on their priorities for improving things at PA and will be able to propose an agreement to management that will promote a fairer and more transparent workplace. The previous pay letters that were organised by the PA NUJ chapel team have made a difference - staff were told the 2022 increase was going to be 3% before that year's letter was sent to management and as a result it was 6%. This has been a vast improvement on the previous method of pay awards being made, only for some people, in an unfair and secretive process controlled entirely by line managers, with no input from staff. A fully recognised chapel would be in a position to negotiate properly with management to secure fair outcomes for the majority. Staff in other media organisations which have active NUJ chapels, such as the Financial Times, Associated Press, Reuters and the Guardian have successfully negotiated agreements with their management which have included reasonable pay rises each year - latest pay awards have been around the 5-7% mark and they've also negotiated staggered increases so lower earners are not left behind. Some chapels have also reached agreements which include minimum salaries for roles, so everyone receives a sustainable income. These are the kind of issues a recognised PA chapel would work on, but it would be for all staff to have an input into what an agreement looked like.

**I'm being told union recognition will lead to cuts, job losses and losing customers**

A recognised PA chapel would be made up of you and your colleagues, so cuts and lost business would be completely against the interests of the chapel. The basis of negotiations would be informed by a fair, democratic and transparent process, and every member would get to vote on proposals for an agreement. It is in the best interests of all staff that more people have a say on pay and conditions, as a workplace with open dialogue is more likely to make material improvements and retain staff as a result.

**Won't any issues be dealt with by the new staff forum?**

Anything which improves communication between staff and the executives is welcome, and the chapel supports open and constructive dialogue. But only union recognition allows all staff to have a proper voice through collective bargaining. There are scores of members, who can all support each other as well as their colleagues who aren't in the union through negotiations with management, rather than just a few people who are expected to co-ordinate and raise issues on behalf of all staff - a difficult task for a small number. Previous round tables have also proved ineffective, especially on pay as representatives weren't allowed to discuss it. There are no guarantees the departure of the CEO will bring the meaningful change promised by management.