

NUJ response to Ofcom consultation on implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023

Introduction

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has over 21,000 members working in broadcasting, newspapers, news agencies, digital media, magazines, journals, book publishing, public relations, communications, photography, and videography. The NUJ is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and is not affiliated to any political party.

The union welcomes the opportunity to engage on the implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023. The union urges Ofcom to make effective use of the provisions of the Act to better protect journalists from online abuse and help maintain journalistic standards through the application of a News Quality Obligation.

News Quality Obligation

The NUJ strongly supports a recommendation from the Cairncross Review for a News Quality Obligation that would require online platforms to improve how users understand the origin of a news article and the trustworthiness of its source.

In its [response](#) to the UK government's recent media green paper, the union noted the prevalence of online mis- and disinformation - including AI-generated content and the algorithmic fueling of prejudice and hate - and the need for regulatory intervention.

The union believes that Ofcom's Broadcasting Code principles should apply to online content - including Video on Demand Services. A 2026 report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that 62% of people are concerned about online misinformation. Meanwhile in a 2024 Ofcom survey, four in ten UK adults said they had encountered misinformation or deepfake content in the previous month, with 71% claiming they had seen it online.

Social media companies have failed to address the spread of mis- and disinformation. A [report](#) by the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee found that within hours of the 2024 Southport attack, false information around the identity of the killer began spreading on social media. On X, a post stating that the suspect was "a Muslim immigrant" received 3.8 million impressions in a day, and not long after, a false name featured as a trending topic in the UK. That name also showed up in TikTok search recommendations, while posts calling for violence against migrants spread on Facebook.

The NUJ notes with particular concern Meta's decision in January 2025 to abandon the use of independent fact checkers - which included a number of reputable news

organisations, journalists and charities. The move to X-style 'community notes' further erodes the quality of online information as such notes only appear once enough people from diverse ideological perspectives rate them as “helpful”. This means that in many cases they don’t appear, and in some instances they contain misinformation.

The spread of mis- and disinformation on social media is exacerbated by the rise in AI-generated fake news and deepfakes, which make it increasingly difficult for the public to distinguish between authentic and AI-generated content. The union has called for AI-generated content to be clearly labelled to avoid eroding public trust in journalism.

A healthy democracy depends on access to accurate information that enables the public to make informed decisions and hold those in power to account. This in turn depends on a free, plural and independent press accompanied by strong independent regulation. Implementing a News Quality Obligation would place the onus on social media companies to take responsibility for what is published on their platforms. The NUJ recognises the need for regulation to compel these companies to comply with the law, while cautioning that the determination of journalistic standards must not be liable to government interference nor lead to censorship of freedom of expression.

Journalists’ safety

The NUJ has long campaigned for the safety of journalists, condemning the online abuse many journalists encounter in the course of their work.

Although technology platforms use a combination of algorithms and humans to moderate content, there are numerous examples where offensive and harmful material - including that which is racist and misogynistic - is not removed.

Earlier this year the union published findings from its inaugural Journalists' Safety Tracker [report](#), which revealed that journalists in the UK and Ireland are increasingly becoming the targets of abuse and harassment. More than half of submissions received by the union contained an element of online abuse with the majority occurring on X/Twitter. One journalist said they received “threats by thousands” from users on X/Twitter, Facebook and TikTok because of a court report they wrote on protestors being charged with public order incidents. The threats included finding where the journalist lived, following them to and from work, and burning down their home. Another journalist who had posted on X/Twitter in support of industrial action at their workplace received a comment that said: “I hope you all get Hebdo’d” - a reference to the massacre at the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015.

The data shows the urgent need for social media companies to finally recognise their responsibility in preventing the abuse and harassment published on their platforms and pushed by their algorithms - and the need for regulation to compel them to do so.