



April 2020 Branch

Welcome to NUJ Branch, a special newsletter for branches to provide information and swap experiences during the present crisis. We can report that the Zoom meetings have been a great success – and will undoubtedly change how we'll be doing our business in the future. Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, in her message to you, shares her first experience as a virtual guest branch speaker and brings you up-to-date with the NUJ's recent work – and how your branch can get involved.



This week I was the guest speaker for the Edinburgh Freelance Branch. This did not involve a 500-mile journey and overnight stay, instead I caught up with NUJ colleagues after a busy day of meetings and calls, and was able to hook in from my kitchen table. Since the lockdown, Edinburgh Freelance has been organising meetings on a weekly basis, attracting new attendees, organising guest speakers from across the union and responding quickly to members' issues and concerns. And at the meeting I attended, as secretary Mark Fisher reported at the end, it wasn't just gender-balanced – it was actually a majority of women in attendance. A number of other branches have been similarly proactive, and finding that there is a real appetite from members to connect and engage with the union at this challenging time.

We have all become Zoomers – the software has been a real hit during the crisis from holding Zoom cocktail parties to Zoom NUJ branch meetings. One positive aspect has been lots of new faces appearing at the meetings; some because they are concerned about the present situation, but others who have just found it easier to attend virtually whilst juggling work and home life.

These are incredibly difficult times, with hundreds of newspaper journalists on furloughs and facing pay cuts, publications closing or taking a pause, freelancers and photographers seeing their work disappear over-night. That is why it is doubly important that we can keep in contact with members. There is lots of advice on the NUJ's website and information is being sent out from (the now virtual) Headland House – but branch activity on local issues is more important than ever, as is maintaining or developing contacts with nearby chapels so we can meet the challenges together and provide joined-up support.

Members are keen to hear more about the work the union is doing. I have been taking part in weekly meetings with the Secretary of State and DCMS officials, alongside other industry representatives, we've been having regular contact with the Treasury, and working closely with the TUC and ICTU as we grapple with the various government schemes, fighting to ensure the right protections are in place. We are battling against cynical employers taking the 'never waste a crisis' approach to further compromise already stretched standards and resources. We're keen to help branches organise, engage and support the broader

membership and to that end I hope this newsletter will be useful. It's an opportunity to share the experiences of colleagues and to galvanise your branch behind the union's initiatives, such as the News Recovery Plan, our new campaign to sustain the press and media through the Covid-19 crisis and reinvigorate the industry into the future – please sign the petition and contact MP/TDs and other political representatives in your areas. Please also support our #ForgottenFreelances campaign, highlighting those falling through the cracks of government schemes. If your branch hasn't already, please make a donation to NUJ Extra, the union's hardship fund and perhaps consider some virtual fundraising initiatives that could bring colleagues together socially – I hear that online quizzes are also becoming a thing! And please complete our Covid-19 survey.

Most of all look after yourself, your loved ones, fellow members and colleagues.

In Solidarity,

Michelle Stanistreet

MEETINGS

02

Digital democracy proves a success

NUJ branches have shown how quickly they have adapted to the crisis, using new technology to have virtual meetings, WhatsApp groups to sort out problems and other innovations that could be far-reaching.

Edinburgh Freelance branch is now meeting once a week and for its first online meeting it invited the NUJ's freelance office's Pamela Morton and three members of the Freelance Industrial Council. Mark Fisher, branch secretary, said: "We are meeting weekly, rather than monthly, not only because of the fast-moving crisis, but because freelancers are particularly vulnerable to the lockdown. They tend to work in isolation and many have lost a major part of their income at a stroke. Zoom meetings are an easy way to keep them informed, lending emotional support and raising awareness of the NUJ's importance. The technology has enabled us to bring in guest speakers from further afield."

The Netherlands branch, early adopter of online meetings, has been able

to bring together members from all over the country.

Bristol branch has moved to fortnightly meetings via Zoom, set up a WhatsApp group for Covid-19 related problems and posted useful



information on its website. Bristol Live is furloughing members and the Voice is likely to suspend printing but will remain digitally. Branch chair Paul Breedon said: "We're asking members to write to their local MP to get public sector advertising directed to local publications to provide them

with a lifeline." Paul had to have a word with Lord Mayor Jos Clark after a disapproving post on Facebook about two freelance photographers covering the new morgue in Brislington. After explaining why they needed to be out reporting, she said she got it.

Sunderland, Shields & Hartlepool organised an email link-up among branch officers to ensure their meeting went ahead, so did not lose its record of having every one quorate since 2011.

At Nottingham branch, 12 members attended a Zoom meeting. It set up a Freelance Hardship Fund and will discuss its donation to NUJ Extra at the May meeting. Di Peasey said: "The learning curve is making sure everyone is clearly visible. One member appeared as a dark blob and she has promised she will ensure there is adequate lighting next time." She has sent members the union's News Recovery Plan and joined Chris Morley, Northern and Midlands senior organiser to give members at Birmingham and Coventry an update on local employers Reach and JPI Media.

Chips with everything

Professor Chris Frost believes the experience will change NUJ meetings for ever. He said: "We had 15 at Manchester and Salford - more than for a long time. It clearly suits people and now we are familiar with the technology it will be the

future for a lot of the union's business. It was a very good meeting, people were focused and I was able to pop out to the kitchen and turn down the potatoes at the same time. In the long run it will save the union a fortune."

The union's finance,

policy and development committees have also successfully carried out their business in an online meeting. It's a different way of working and the meetings need well chairing; but it's worked. With greater demand, the technology can only improve.

News Recovery Plan

The NUJ has launched a News Recovery Plan, From Health Crisis to Good News, with a bold set of measures, fiscal stimuli and interventions to support and protect jobs and quality journalism, to get the industry out of the crisis and to reimagine the news of the future.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "Our aim is to create a healthy diverse press, focussed squarely on the public good, one that can be sustained now and into the future. That's why we want governmental commitments to a range of actions - some immediate and some when the worst of this crisis is over - that will create a

news industry firmly rooted in the public interest journalism which will deepen public engagement in our democratic structures."

The plan calls for the tech giants, such as Facebook and Google, to properly pay their way. For too long they have had a free ride on the back of the mainstream press and in return have taken away its advertising revenue. The union also demanded for a tripling of the government's Digital Services Tax to a 6 per cent windfall with an ongoing mechanism either through this tax or a new arrangement to fund the measures contained in the News Recovery Plan, alongside other investment.

Other measures include:

- Tax credits and interest free loans to support journalist jobs, for frontline reporters covering the Covid-19 crisis and recovery.
 - No public money for firms making redundancies, cutting pay, giving executive bonuses or blocking trade union organisation.
 - Strategic investment in government advertising, including the hyperlocal sector, involving central and local governments and public bodies.
 - Further funding by NESTA's Future News Fund of innovative, public interest journalism and a similar scheme in Ireland.
 - Free vouchers for online or print subscriptions to all 18-and-19-year olds and tax credits for households with subscriptions.
- The debate is now open, with a sound set of principles to guide us.

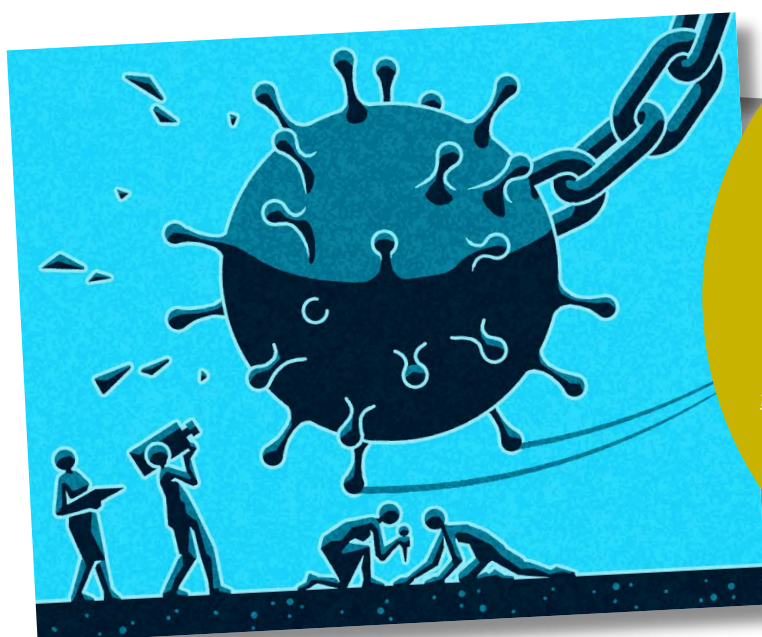
What your branch can do

Tweet your support and disseminate the recovery plan: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/from-health-crisis-to-good-news/>

Ask people to sign the petition in support of the plan: www.nuj.org.uk/mediaplan

Use this letter as a template to write to your local and national politicians; <https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nujs-news-recovery-plan-template-letter-to-politicians/>

Use the plan as the starting point for debate at your next branch meeting and feedback to campaigns@nuj.org.uk



FUNDING & DONATING

04

Donate to NUJ Extra

The union's welfare charity trustees have thanked all those who have contributed to the Covid-19 appeal -- so far raising more than £30,000. But more is needed, particularly for our freelance colleagues, so please put it on your agenda and donate. Chris Wheal, chair of the NUJ Extra trustees, said: "We have agreed to fund affected members for two months. We will review that when we see the



details of the level of government support available. The feedback so far from those we have helped is that this is a welcomed and sensible approach." The charity's rules have changed so all those adversely affected can apply for funds.

Funding & Grants

Journalism Emergency Relief Fund: Google is funding small and medium-sized news organisations producing original news for local communities. Apply on the fund's website: <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/journalism-emergency-relief-fund>

European Journalism COVID-19 Support Fund: this scheme funded by the Facebook Journalism Project supports community, local and regional European news organisations. Find out more at: <https://europeanjournalism.fund/>

For more funds, go to the News Media Association website: <http://www.newsmediauk.org/Latest/google-launches-journalism-emergency-relief-fund>

Latest news from NUJExtra and how to donate on the NUJ website: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-extra-update-on-covid-19-response>



Subs

Branches should be helping people who are losing work to move to new sub rates rather than leave the union – just at a time when they most need its help.

Chris Frost, chair of the finance committee, said: "There have been a few calls for a subs' freeze, but that isn't the answer. To be a member, you need to pay a sub and now more than ever is the time when people need support and help from the NUJ. Clearly, people are losing money and we are sympathetic to that. But there is flexibility in the subs structure for people to move to a lower rate and the 1 per cent rule, as ever, applies. The emergency committee has agreed that the lowest rate available is £5 per month or £60 per year, as the rule book allows.

"The union needs subs to operate, to get us through the Covid crisis and the years to come. Branches must not let people leave the union because they say they cannot afford the membership fee and encourage them to apply for a more manageable rate, so they can continue to have access to the union's services.

"The union must be able to function, so our officials can continue to deal with the day-to-day problems members are facing because of Covid-19, to negotiate with employers and put pressure on the government."

CAMPAIGN

05

#Forgotten Freelances

When the virus struck the industry, it was freelancers who first experienced its devastating effect on the industry.

Sports writers had no football, racing or any other events to cover and as the theatres went dark and everything began to shut down, so did the work diaries of freelancers.

The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, unveiled a scheme to protect jobs, whereby 80 per cent of workers' salaries would be paid by the government, to tide companies over. But there was nothing on the table for freelancers. The NUJ and sister unions went into action.

On 26 March, the UK Government announced the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). The NUJ welcomed it, calling for further detail, but it soon became

clear many people were excluded. The union's freelance office was inundated with pleas for help from other members who had fallen foul of criteria laid down in the scheme.

That is why the union launched its #ForgottenFreelances campaign. It had already collaborated on a letter to the Chancellor with the Federation of Entertainment Unions, but there are also specific problems journalists faced in trying to get access to financial help.

News organisations put staff on furloughs, but freelancers, although on PAYE, were excluded. Their employers refused to put them on the scheme. Another letter was sent, and campaign material prepared.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "Practical support and help now is vital if freelance journalists are to sustain

themselves and their families and be in a position to work once the economic shockwaves of lockdown subside and the recovery begins."

The TUC believes that as many as 2m self-employed are losing out. The NUJ's letter to Chancellor Rishi Sunak, says: "The UK economy is heavily reliant on freelancers. The huge complexity in addressing financial support is a result of the casualisation of our industry and has resulted in deeply unfair working conditions for self-employed people. The gaps to the scheme must be addressed and the financial aid must start before the beginning of June, as this will be too late and will cause real hardship for our members."

What you can do

Share the letter to Rishi Sunak

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/forgottenfreelances-letter-to-the-chancellor/>

If you are freelance, this letter can help you get help from your MP

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/forgottenfreelances-letter-for-freelances/>

Support freelance members by sending this letter to your MP:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/forgottenfreelances-letter-of-support/>

#Forgotten Freelances

COVID-19 ADVICE

06

Survey

Complete the
confidential survey
[https://www.
surveymonkey.co.uk
/r/NUJCovid19](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NUJCovid19)



Take part in the Covid-19 survey

The Covid-19 green button on NUJ website is the go-to place for advice, guidance and the latest announcements from the UK and Irish governments and organisations such as the TUC and Acas on employment matters, health and safety and how to contact NUJ officials. There is advice for freelancers, including a helpline, and

the protocol between the police and journalists covering the crisis.

To help the union help its members and also to guide us in our lobbying of government, we have launched a survey to find out how the effects of Covid-19 are affecting us and our jobs. This will give the union a greater insight into the range and breadth of the effects of the pandemic on the industry and individual lives of members. This will feed into our

policy making, so in our meetings with ministers at the Treasury we will have strong examples of where their schemes are letting people down. Michelle Stanistreet said: "We want to hear from all members how they're being impacted by Covid-19 – the effect on their work, their livelihoods and pay, any challenges they're facing in working from home and juggling family life. All contributions will be treated in confidence."

Support public service broadcasting

The present emergency has shown just how important it is to have trusted news sources and properly funded, independent public service broadcasters.

People are turning to the BBC for news during this crisis, with a third of the population watching the BBC News at Six and digital audiences increasing, with more than 40m unique UK browsers daily. The BBC has risen to the occasion by

deferring payment of the licence fee for the over-75s, at a cost of over £80m, and postponed cuts of £40m in news which would have resulted in 450 job losses.

As well as providing around-the-clock news on the pandemic, the BBC is offering advice on everything from helping people protect themselves against the virus to healthy eating on a low income and keeping fit. But this comes at a cost. The NUJ has called for the government to ditch its inquiry into

whether to decriminalise non-payment of the TV licence – this wrongheaded act of ideological malice would cost anything between £200m and £500m.

The political mood-music towards the BBC has improved, but there will be a financial reckoning and we need to be making the case for proper funding, especially in the run up to the 2022 mid-term review of the licence.

Sadly, while viewing figures have probably never

been higher for the news on the commercial public broadcasting services (PBS), advertising revenue is hitting rock-bottom at ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5.

What your branch can do:

- Lobby to get the decriminalisation inquiry ditched.
- Invite a speaker from your local radio station.
- Irish branches should invite Seamus Dooley to brief on the crisis.

**HANDS
OFF OUR
BBC**

Join the NUJ
www.nuj.org.uk/join

TRAINING

07

Put podcasting on the agenda

The NUJ is launching a set of online webinars, workshops and podcasts to help you get through this present crisis. We want to help you develop new skills, brush up on others, and provide branches with the opportunity for some bespoke training, plus aspects of the reps' four-stage programme.

This week we're launching, **Helping you to stay fit and healthy at home and work**, produced by Caroline Holmes (pictured), who runs the NUJ's reps' training. The focus is not just about surviving at work and home, but how to thrive, be productive, and positive throughout his uncertain time.

Caroline said: "If branches want me to run sessions, say for example on Covid-19 and health and safety, negotiating or other topics, it can be organised."

It will help you to understand why it's important to be physically and mentally fit, identify some of the challenges that you are dealing with and explore some ideas and tips for helping you learn how to live and work in a healthier way. Check the NUJ website for details.

This May's freelance workshops, **First steps in freelancing** and **Winning and negotiating freelance**

work, will be carried out via Zoom.

You can book your place on the NUJ website: <https://bit.ly/2XUuVDr> SOLAS eCollege which provides a range of interactive online learning courses, is making them temporarily available free of charge to Irish members. <https://www.ecollege.ie/>

We're liaising with the BBC to see if it would release some training it's made available to staff in a Lockdown Learning programme, and make it available to our freelance members.

Freelances can also access some special free masterclasses and workshops via ScreenSkills at <https://www.screenskills.com/>

The twice-monthly NUJActive gives details of the union's training scheme's in Scotland and Wales, which all have online offerings, plus the TUC's and other courses of interest. NUJ Training Wales courses are now open to non-Welsh residents, for a small fee. www.nujtrainingwales.org/

Why not organise a virtual branch training event? It could be a 60-90minute



masterclass in some of the courses the NUJ has put on before, such as digital skills, podcasting, publishing e-books, creating a portfolio career, media law, data journalism – or even a special bespoke reps' event to boost relationships with your local chapel committees. Any branch looking for trainer suggestions and contact details, email campaigns@nuj.org.uk

Webinar watch

The FEU, for members in England, is running **Cash flow planning through the crisis and beyond** at 11.00 on Tuesday 28 April <https://www.feutraining.org/2020/webinar-cash-flow-planning-through-the-crisis-and-beyond-28-apr/>

Good time to blog on Thursday 7 May at 11.00 <https://www.feutraining.org/2020/webinar-good-time-to-blog-7-may/>

All FEU training: <https://www.feutraining.org/>

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.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join

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