

theJournalist

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AI: Friend or Foe?

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Technology has transformed our industry many times – from the end of hot metal printing to the migration of news online and the challenges that has posed for print media. But now many feel we are facing the biggest challenge of all with AI. While it can be brilliant for tedious tasks, the danger is it replaces

journalists and further devalues news.

In our cover feature Stephanie Power looks at the pros and cons of a development we can't ignore.

And we face huge job losses at Reach as the publisher of the Daily Mirror, Express and many regional titles looks to reposition its operation. Our members at the Mirror and at Scottish titles are preparing to ballot on industrial action and they are asking what role AI has in the future shape of Reach.

As we went to press, I was sad to hear of the death of Dame Jilly Cooper, a long-standing NUJ member. She told me how much she enjoyed The Journalist and liked to keep in touch with news of the union and that she greatly valued journalism.

We also carry an obituary of Barry Fitzpatrick, the former deputy general secretary of the NUJ. A highly effective union negotiator and a thoroughly decent person, he was a big loss when he left.

May they both rest in peace.

Christie

Christine Buckley
Editor

@mschrisbuckley

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Cover
Jacey, Debut Art

Reach staff to vote over industrial action

THE MIRROR and Reach's Scottish titles could face industrial action by NUJ members in protest over job losses, unreasonable workloads and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

The NUJ has submitted formal notice that it was to ballot members on strike action.

This comes after Reach, the UK and Ireland's largest news publisher, warned that 600 journalists could lose their roles or be redeployed. A total of 321 jobs were under threat, in what the union called a 'devastating body blow' for journalism.

The company plans to set up a national team to cover the UK and Ireland and supply news to the national and regional titles and sites.

Mirror staff will be particularly affected, losing around 40 writers and editors



JESS HURD

— including 10 news reporters and seven picture desk staff

Members of the NUJ Mirror chapels decided unanimously to be balloted for strike action.

In Scotland, four in 10 journalists at the company are at risk of redundancy. NUJ members at Reach's Scottish titles, which include the Daily Record, voted decisively in favour of a ballot.

Journalists at Reach are hugely concerned by the

workload for remaining staff, as well as the lack of clear commitments on use of AI.

The NUJ Reach group chapel has urged the company to disclose how AI is being used and consult on any proposed use of it.

Chris Morley, NUJ national Reach coordinator (pictured), said: "Yet again, morale is being dragged down by the threat of mass redundancies of journalists whose only crime is to work hard and

strive to reach massive audiences with quality journalism each day.

"The thought that any media business can afford to shed hundreds of talented journalists to secure its future makes you wonder what sort of future that will be."

The NUJ has asked members to vote 'yes' to both strike action and action short of it. It has stressed that all options remain on the table, and ballots seeking views on action may be held.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said: "These proposals, if carried out in full, will mean the dismissal of experienced and highly professional journalists.

"The hollowing out of newsroom staffing in favour of AI chatter overseen by shrinkingly small staffing is the road to nowhere."



The thought that a media business can shed hundreds of journalists to secure its future makes you wonder what sort of future that will be

Chris Morley
NUJ national Reach coordinator

Redundancies ahead at STV

THE NUJ has condemned STV's plans to make 60 staff redundant and introduce significant changes to its coverage.

STV holds the licence for the two Channel 3 licences not owned by ITV, which cover

central and north Scotland. It employs around 650 staff, including 90 journalists at its Glasgow headquarters, as well as in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee.

In a meeting with management, staff at the

Scottish broadcaster were told there would be significant job cuts, with a single 6pm news programme across the two STV licences. At present, STV Central broadcasts from Glasgow, and STV North broadcasts from Aberdeen.

Nick McGowan-Lowe, NUJ national organiser for Scotland, said: "These are devastating cuts — affecting not just hard-working local journalists but also STV viewers generally, particularly those in the north of Scotland, who will face seeing much-loved local coverage axed.

"These proposed cuts threaten the high quality of local and national journalism produced by STV News staff in Scotland. We will be meeting with our members and with STV management to discuss the next steps in opposing these cuts and protecting jobs and quality journalism."

Dame Jilly Cooper

DAME Jilly Cooper, best-selling author and lifelong NUJ member, has sadly died aged 88 after a fall, *Christine Buckley* writes.

She began her journalistic career as a reporter on the Middlesex Independent. It was then that she joined the NUJ. In an interview with *The Journalist* in 2011 she said she was very proud of her membership. She went on to write columns for *The Sunday Times* and the *Mail on Sunday*. She said the *Sunday Times* offer had been 'miraculous' and on a par with *Riders* becoming her best-selling book.

In her interview with us she said she feared the decline in regional newspapers and despaired of a "world without newspapers".

She said: "Newspapers are the guardians of democracy."

Dame Jilly received her damehood for services to journalism by King Charles last year, the same year Netflix screened their all-star series of *Rivals*. It very much felt like a revival to her fans.

Her agent told the BBC that Dame Jilly was also well known for writing to many people and keen to keep in touch. I was lucky to be one of those people and we corresponded for the past 15 years after she first wrote to say how much she liked the magazine. We went on to discuss adopting children, being dog-owners and Russian literature.

In our interview we asked her how she would like to be remembered. She said: "That I cheered people up."

JEFF MORGAN 03 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Recognition victory at Bullivant Media

JOURNALISTS at Midlands free weekly newspapers company Bullivant Media Group have successfully concluded an agreement for recognition of the NUJ.

The deal was finalised following a six-month campaign through the statutory trade union recognition process, which culminated in a legal ruling that the union must be recognised for collective bargaining on pay, hours and holidays.

The ruling was made formally in April by the Central Arbitration Committee, the official body that decides on applications for non-voluntary trade union recognition claims. The finalised recognition agreement was signed in August following months of negotiations involving the conciliation service ACAS.

All staff journalists employed by Redditch-based Bullivant Media Group, which has 15 Observer and Standard newspaper titles and associated news websites serving towns and cities in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands, are now covered by the agreement and will have their core terms determined by annual collective bargaining.

Chris Morley, NUJ Northern and Midlands senior organiser, said: "We are glad to have come to an agreement establishing a role for the NUJ in supporting our members through a proper collective bargaining process in the coming years.

"Members were very patient in what was something of a protracted statutory process. But they were clear what they wanted and stuck with the union throughout. We are now looking forward to sitting down properly with senior managers to discuss the reasonable aspirations of members.



Bullivant Media Group NUJ reps Ash Osborne and Sonny Rackham with the signed recognition agreement

"This shows that it is possible for even a small chapel to navigate the complicated statutory trade union recognition law to achieve what members are seeking. We are now looking forward to developing a mature, productive and constructive relationship with the company."

Ash Osborne, Bullivant Media Group NUJ chapel rep, said: "Both myself and members are pleased to have come to this agreement and establishing a place for the NUJ. I'm pleased that we stuck together as a department and throughout this entire process. We're looking forward to the discussion to come."

This shows it is possible for a small chapel to navigate complicated recognition law to achieve what members are seeking

Chris Morley
NUJ Northern and Midlands senior organiser

More lifers for Nottingham

THREE members of the NUJ's Nottingham branch have been made life members.

John Holmes, Jane Dodge and Steve Rogerson have a collective membership of the union of more than 125 years.

At a celebratory event at The Victoria in Beeston

attended by members from Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, they were congratulated for their commitment to journalism and the union.

Ben Cooper, chair of the Nottingham branch, said: "The branch is lucky to have many life members and we

were very pleased to welcome three more members to this distinguished group during 2025."

Holmes began his career in 1969 at Broadcasting House. He then moved to the BBC in Nottingham, followed by working at Pebble Mill in Birmingham

on Midlands Today before going on to work for BBC Radio 4 in Bristol. He later returned to the East Midlands, working in Derby and Nottingham for the BBC.

Dodge started her career in BBC local radio before moving to Belfast to work in television at BBC Northern Ireland, then to BBC Westminster. For

the past 25 years, she has been a correspondent at Channel 4 News.

Holmes and Dodge gave moving speeches about their careers and their passion for the profession.

Rogerson, who was unable to attend the event, has worked in trade and technology press since starting his career in 1979.

NUJ joins tribute to seamen's protest



A FORGOTTEN tragedy, pivotal in the development of trade unionism, was commemorated on the banks of the River Wear, with members of Sunderland, Shields and Hartlepool NUJ branch taking part.

Two hundred years ago in 1825, seven people were shot dead when soldiers opened fire on striking seamen in Sunderland.

The protest against poor conditions and low pay, organised by the nascent Seamen's Loyal Standard Association (SLSA), had blocked two ships from leaving port. Supporters gathered on the banks.

When it became a skirmish, troops were deployed. They read the Riot Act and fired first over the heads of the crowd, then directly at protesters. Three seafarers and four bystanders, including a 22-year-old shipwright and

a woman in her 70s, were shot dead.

The SLSA was dissolved in 1894, but laid the groundwork for later maritime unions.

On the 200th anniversary of what is now known as the North Sands Massacre, about 80 people walked to the site to hear speakers including Sunderland mayor Ehtesham Haque and national secretary of the RMT union Darren Procter. The victims' names were read out and a wreath laid.

Police used reporters' data to trap sources

POLICE in Northern Ireland tried to identify journalists' sources 21 times through unlawful uses of covert powers – twice the figure previously disclosed.

The 200-page report by Angus McCullough KC into the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) found they used reporters' phone numbers to identify information leaks by its staff.

However, McCullough reported that the PSNI's surveillance of journalists was not 'widespread or systemic'.

The review also raised 'significant concerns' about PSNI trawling its records in "an untargeted wholesale attempt to identify unauthorised contact between PSNI personnel and journalists".

The NUJ has called for a wider investigation into the surveillance of journalists in the province after it emerged that the security service MI5 illegally obtained data from the mobile phone of former BBC Northern Ireland home affairs correspondent Vincent Kearney.

MI5 admitted obtaining data from Kearney's phone on two occasions in 2006

and 2009 in documents submitted to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal.

The case arose after reports in separate proceedings involving journalists Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney (pictured), who were subjected to surveillance by the police in Northern Ireland, suggested that public bodies, including police forces, had also monitored Kearney.

Kearney, who is now RTÉ News' northern editor, said his legal inquiries, backed by the BBC, would try to establish as much detail as possible about the two instances of unlawful intrusion, and would also seek to determine whether there had been any more such incidents.

Kearney described the admission by MI5 as 'unprecedented' and said it was 'deeply concerning' for himself and other journalists.

Séamus Dooley, the NUJ's assistant general secretary, said: "These revelations are within a deeply worrying pattern of the authorities' surveillance of journalists."

"They raise fundamental issues of concern regarding



This is only the tip of the iceberg, and the question now is how much of the iceberg are we actually going to see

Trevor Birney
Journalist

the role of MI5 that must be explored to ensure they do not evade scrutiny.

"The damage done by covert surveillance to the trust and confidence in MI5 and other bodies cannot be overstated. Journalists will be alarmed by yet another unacceptable case of intrusion."

A BBC spokesperson commented: "MI5's admission that it illegally obtained communications data of a BBC journalist is a matter of grave concern."

"It raises serious and

important questions that we will continue to pursue."

Birney has also called for a public inquiry into surveillance, saying: "We welcome what MI5 have done here in finally coming clean, but this is only the tip of the iceberg, and the question now is how much of the iceberg are we actually going to see."

Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International's Northern Ireland director, said: "The right of a journalist to protect their confidential sources is the bedrock on which the free press is built."

VUK WALIC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

What a nerve

A GROUP of former senior women Observer journalists have launched a culture-focused publication which is partly funded by their redundancy pay-outs following the Observer's sale to Tortoise Media in March.

The Nerve will begin as a twice-weekly newsletter through Beehiiv, a rival to the Substack platform. It is planned that it will become a full website next year and that it will also produce a print publication twice a year.

The group of five journalists includes Carole Cadwalladr who was a high-profile critic of the sale of The Observer to the loss-making start-up Tortoise.

The Nerve, so called because the team

believes that nerve is the key quality needed in the world as it is now, is led by Sarah Donaldson, former deputy editor of Observer New Review and digital editor of The Observer. The other founders are former Observer New Review editor Jane Ferguson, former Observer creative director Lynsey Irvine, and former New Review senior editor Imogen Carter.

Michael Sheen, the actor and activist, will be one of the contributing editors along with the broadcaster Carol Vorderman, Brian Eno, the musician and activist and Peter Geoghegan, the investigative journalist who was editor-in-chief of Open Democracy.

Contributing writers include reporter John Sweeney, film critic and broadcaster Ellen E Jones, freelance journalist and arts critic Kadish Morris.

THE NERVE



Founders of The Nerve, from left to right: Lynsey Irvine, Sarah Donaldson, Carole Cadwalladr, Jane Ferguson and Imogen Carter.

THE NERVE

Labour under fire from unions as employment rights bill weakened

Reports by
Barrie Clement
Images by
Jess Hurd



The bill tinkers around the edges while leaving in place the laws that continue to shackle our movement

Sarah Woolley
general secretary,
Bakers, Food and Allied
Workers Union

DELEGATES at the TUC annual congress tore into the Labour government amid signs that the employment rights bill was being watered down.

Meeting in Brighton not long after the resignation of deputy prime minister Angela Rayner – a key proponent of the proposed legislation – speakers urged ministers to stick with manifesto promises.

However, the government was under pressure from business leaders to renege on measures aimed at cracking down on zero hours contracts and ‘fire and rehire’ tactics.

Sharon Graham, whose Unite union pays £1.4 million a year to Labour in affiliation fees, indicated that the union could withdraw its financial backing unless the government stuck to its guns.

Despite ministerial attempts to reassure the



union movement, Graham took aim at the government’s approach to employment rights, warning that her members would “feel duped unless Labour stuck to its manifesto promises”.

UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea said: “Anyone calling for the changes to be put on hold is not on the side of working people. Good companies and

their leaders have absolutely nothing to fear. This legislation will help organisations become better employers.

“Firms engaging positively with their staff and trade unions will be best placed to win future public contracts and be seen as employers that people want to work for.”

A motion backed unanimously demanded the repeal of all anti-union

regulations and urged the TUC to draft a ‘comprehensive’ workers’ rights package, including a demand for a £15 an hour minimum wage and a statutory right to collective bargaining.

The resolution called for a nationwide campaign to oppose austerity, leaving the door open to industrial action if demands were not met.

Sarah Woolley, general secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, said: “The bill offers some welcome steps forward... but we have to be honest with ourselves – it still falls far short of what is needed. It tinkers around the edges while leaving in place the framework of laws that continue to shackle our movement.

“We need an immediate repeal of anti-union laws – all of them.”

Call for wealth tax to pay for public services

CONFERENCE voted unanimously in favour of a wealth tax to fund public services and to shift power in favour of working people.

Proposing the motion, the Unite union said the poorest faced cuts to welfare while the super-rich benefited from outdated and unfair tax rules.

Conference heard that the UK was home to a record number of billionaires, with the top one per

cent holding more wealth than the entire bottom 50 per cent. The richest 50 families are worth about £500 billion, the same as half the entire UK population.

According to official estimates, the difference between the amount of tax that should be paid in theory in the UK and the amount actually collected stands at £46.8 billion. But congress heard that tax experts

estimate it to be more than twice that – around £100 billion. If the richest one per cent were taxed just one per cent more, that would generate about £25 billion.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Fairer, better taxes can deliver a stronger economy, reduce poverty, fund better public services and our national defence. We need a wealth tax now.”



Novak: Reform no friend to workers

THE BIGGEST threat to working-class people is not so much a government that has failed to deliver its manifesto but bad bosses and right-wing populists, said TUC general secretary Paul Nowak.

In a keynote address, Nowak pointed out that the communities that Reform UK leader Nigel Farage claimed to represent had been hit hard by low pay and conditions, but Farage and his colleagues in parliament fought against improved employment rights.

They voted against outlawing ‘fire and rehire’, zero hours contracts and day one rights for millions of workers, said Nowak.

“So here’s my challenge to Nigel Farage. You say you stand up for working people? Then ignore your wealthy backers and vote for the employment rights bill.”

Pay creators for AI training use

DELEGATES representing around 5.5 million employees throughout British industry expressed alarm at big tech's wholesale theft of material from journalists and a wide range of other workers.

The TUC congress also attacked the government's intention to weaken copyright law. It is feared an upcoming bill will withdraw protection from content used to train artificial intelligence (AI).

Fran McNulty, NUJ joint president, urged congress to back the union's campaign seeking redress from big tech, which makes vast profits at the expense of copyright holders.

These companies should be forced to reveal the sources used for training data, which would allow journalists – in particular freelancers – to seek compensation, he said.



"Any upcoming legislation must require rightsholders to opt in not opt out of the use of their work," he said.

AI should be used only with human oversight and introduced in cooperation with unions to ensure workers are protected and supported where job losses are unavoidable, he said. The potential impact of AI had been shown by the threat of 300 job losses at Reach.

Moving the resolution, Hywel Morgan of Equity pointed out that the creative industries accounted for over 5 per cent of the UK's gross value added in 2024, worth around £123 billion to its economy.

"Creative workers are the backbone of the UK's world-leading performing arts and entertainment industry, yet they often find themselves in precarious working conditions," he said.

He told of a film company that took a 3D scan of an actor's body on his first day on set then used it in succeeding scenes, having dispensed with his services with a day's pay.

In another case, an actor whose voice and image were fed into an AI system found this data was being used to spread misinformation by the Venezuelan government.

Morgan urged delegates to adopt the TUC's AI for Creative Workers manifesto. He said Equity had been trying to find a solution but was now preparing for industrial action.

Seconding the motion, Naomi Pohl, the Musicians' Union general secretary, urged ministers to ensure copyright law covered music used to train AI. Otherwise, "AI-generated music will not only devalue MU members' work – it could replace it," she said.



Any upcoming legislation must require rightsholders to opt in not opt out of the use of their work

Fran McNulty
NUJ joint president

Journalism now more dangerous than ever

THIS is the deadliest time for journalists in recorded history, NUJ general secretary Laura Davison told conference.

Figures from the International Federation of Journalists revealed that at least 235 journalists and media workers had been killed since October 7 2023, 221 of them Palestinian, she said.

"Let that sink in," she urged delegates. "Two hundred and thirty-five workers killed doing their job – 235 journalists working on behalf of the world to tell us what is happening. Our eyes and ears on the ground."

Globally, in the past six years, more than 600 journalists had been killed with nine in 10 cases remaining unpunished, she added.

Davison demanded:

- An International Criminal Court investigation into the targeting of journalists by Israeli forces, with Israeli authorities held to account
- Press freedom for Gaza with international journalists allowed access to work alongside their Palestinian colleagues 'to whom we owe an enormous debt'.

• The adoption of a binding UN Convention on the safety and independence of media professionals.

"Journalists are a vulnerable category targeted on account of their profession," said Davidson.

Congress heard horrendous examples of abuse, injury and death to NUJ members. She added: "No worker should have to face that; no worker should pay with their life for simply doing their job."

Abuse and discrimination hit workers



FEMALE journalists are the victims of 'appalling misogyny' with black women especially affected, Natasha Hirst of the NUJ told congress.

She said the union was constantly challenging regulators to uphold higher standards, and that the union would represent members who refused to produce work they felt breached the NUJ's code of conduct.

She added that the union had set up an online

safety tracker so members could report abuse they experienced during their work.

Hirst also pointed out that because of the insecurity of their work, NUJ members who are freelance and disabled were particularly affected by cuts to social security.

"There's no sick pay, no holiday pay and definitely no disability leave. Social security safeguards are vital to disabled people to access our

rights including our right to access employment."

She pointed out that the cuts were happening at the same time as assisted dying legislation was going through parliament.

"The government will support us to die but not to live well," she said. "Every time a politician undermines our humanity or presents us as a burden, it normalises hatred and discrimination and coercion of disabled people."

Vigils for colleagues in Gaza

Events held to show solidarity and remember journalists killed

NUJ members across the UK and Ireland held vigils and protests in August and September in solidarity with colleagues who have died in Gaza.

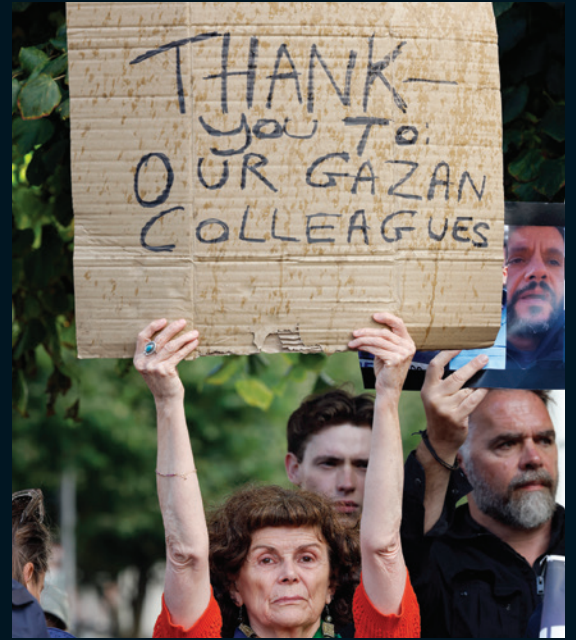
The names of journalists who have been killed were read out at a vigil held by the NUJ Leeds branch at the city's Workers Memorial monument where a wreath was laid in their honour. In Dublin, more than 250 people gathered in the city centre for a protest vigil organised by NUJ members to commemorate Al Jazeera journalists who died in a targeted attack. The Belfast & district branch solidarity vigil for media workers in Gaza at the city's Writers Square, included a minute's silence.

The London freelance branch held a vigil opposite Downing Street then delivered a letter to prime minister Keir Starmer demanding to know what action would be taken to stop the killing of journalists.



Pennie Quinton, chair of London freelance branch, delivers a letter to prime minister Keir Starmer demanding an end to the killing of journalists
© Julio Etchart; London Freelance branch members hold a vigil opposite Downing Street
© Julio Etchart





Clockwise from above: The Belfast and district branch Solidarity Vigil for Journalists and Media Workers in Gaza held a minute's silence © Kevin Cooper; Roisin Boyd at the NUJ Day of Action in support of Palestinian Journalists in Dublin; NUJ members together in Dublin, a call for press freedom © Paula Geraghty; The names of journalists killed were read out at a vigil held by NUJ Leeds branch members © Garry Clarkson / BMT Film & Media; Messages by badge at the London freelance event at Downing Street © Julio Etchart



An ideas exchange

Branch officers learnt from each other at a summit. **Kath Grant** reports

Venues, speakers and radical challenges within the industry are all issues NUJ branches are wrestling with as they try to recruit new members.

A branch summit held online in September brought together branch officers to discuss new ways of organising and recruiting in the wake of job losses and the rapid growth of AI.

Problems and success stories were shared, with an emphasis placed on discovering what works for most members and how branches can best use members' skills and knowledge.

The summit was the result of a motion passed at the delegate meeting in Blackpool. Ideas and experiences outlined by branches will be shared more widely in a handbook being put together by the NEC.

NUJ joint president Gerry Curran said the national executive council (NEC) wanted to hear from branches about how they were adapting to change. The summit provided an opportunity for them to support each other.

The power of NUJ branches had been visible over the summer, said general secretary Laura Davison.

They had responded swiftly to members' requests for solidarity events in support of journalists killed, particularly in Gaza but also in other places around the world.

Davison also highlighted the job cuts at Reach, with 600 journalists at risk of redundancy. Supporting journalists who are losing or changing jobs is a 'whole union approach' and branches have their part to play, she said.

All branch officers had reconsidered how they organised meetings during the pandemic.

In some cases, new practices have continued. Mark Fisher of Edinburgh freelance branch said more frequent online meetings had first been held because of the vulnerability of some members. His branch still meets regularly every Monday afternoon. "We've never lost that impetus," he said.

Officers agreed that hybrid meetings were ideal but relied on having members able to facilitate them.

New members were often reluctant to speak at online meetings unless specifically invited to do so. They sometimes felt they were 'eavesdropping' rather than taking part, one officer said.

Nonetheless, Fisher reported, online meetings have been welcomed by many. They enable disabled members, parents and those with caring responsibilities to attend much more regularly and have also improved the gender balance.

Ray Tostevin from South West England branch discussed being able to bring together members from various geographical areas, including the Channel Islands.

"We even had a member join us from Sri Lanka and another, who would not be able to travel to a physical meeting in Bristol, is able to dial in from Penzance. "It enables people who relocate to other countries to stay in touch and it unites members across the region."

Fisher said weekly meetings ensure ongoing issues are never overtaken or lost. He admitted that



Supporting journalists who are losing or changing jobs is a 'whole union approach' and branches have their part to play



some members did not prefer online meetings, which was why socials were important.

Some meetings are set aside for general branch business, while others featured speakers on topics such as copyright and freedom of information.

Cailin Mackenzie, from Brussels branch, said most members there were freelancers. The branch meets in person; it offers expenses for carers and publicises how accessible venues are.

Newsletters, holding meetings with other branches and WhatsApp groups are all useful for communication between members, said Phil Sutcliffe of London freelance branch. The branch's hybrid meetings attract a range of speakers and the branch also holds online coffee mornings, which have a regular attendance of 35–40 people.

All officers spoke of the importance of opening up special meetings and seminars to students and non-members as part of the union's recruitment and retention work.

Vice-president Georgina Morris pointed to radical changes in the way journalists work, with many feeling isolated, working at home and not seeing colleagues in newsrooms. The threat of job cuts continues to affect livelihoods, so the role of branches has never been more important.

Gerard Cunningham organises the Dublin freelance forum, which has been running for more than 15 years and is open to members and non-members. He said it organises two events a year and finds newsletters are a good way of staying in touch with all freelancers.





Endless poll coverage but weak on the details

The media covers Reform's popularity but should scrutinise it more closely, says **Raymond Snoddy**

Party political conferences are strange beasts where the party faithful can be whipped up by emotion to believe almost anything.

Those with long memories can recall Liberal Leader David Steel telling his troops to leave the 1981 conference hall and return to their constituencies and prepare for government.

There are echoes of those times in this year's conferences, although this time the challenge is from the right in the form of Nigel Farage's Reform UK rather than the liberal centre.

Once again, the opinion polls, with the apparently never-ending coverage given to them in the media, are centre stage and seen to be the ghost at the conference banquets.

Dominating everything has been the fact that Reform has been consistently leading in the polls.

As Sir John Curtice, the political and polling guru of University of Strathclyde, has warned, the polls are consistently showing a large minority of more than 30 per cent who are completely disaffected with traditional politics.

Under the first-past-the-post electoral system, it is possible that Reform support and vote, first displayed in May's local elections, could translate into a Reform government – with the important caveat 'if a general election were to be held today'.

Nevertheless, it is that reality that has led to Farage and Reform dominating both this year's political conference season and media coverage of it.

Those who count these things noted that LibDem leader Sir Ed Davey

attacked Farage and Reform 30 times in his conference speech.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer took a similar approach when he argued that Britain faced an 'era-defining' choice between the decency of a Labour Britain and the division of Reform.

Bizarrely, Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch got her attack on Reform in even before the Tory conference, in the Daily Express on the morning after Sir Keir's speech.

Badenoch warned that Nigel Farage would 'blow up the economy' and that only she could clear up the mess made by 'dangerous' Labour.

This is all very strange because, by any objective standards, Farage had a disastrous conference other than the fact his speech was carried in its entirety live by the BBC and Sky News. This was not a privilege granted to Sir Ed despite the 72-5 disparity in commons seats held by both parties.

Immediately after its conference, Reform had to backtrack from the mad and irresponsible claims from the platform by Dr Aseem Malhotra that Covid vaccines had been linked to the cancers affecting the King and Queen.

Farage's claim that he would stop the small boats within two weeks of taking power soon became within two weeks of passing legislation.

Likewise, a claim that women and children arriving illegally would be deported was 'clarified' to say that women and children would not be deported in the first five years, though presumably that means families could be split up for years.

This and the fact that former Reform leader in Wales Nathan Giles admitted to pro-Russia bribery and 22 new Reform councillors have already stepped down, many under pressure to quit, seem to have made little difference so far.

As always, there are many perceptions of political conferences – in the hall, in the media and in the country.

By general consent, Sir Keir did well in the hall with many standing ovations and saw off potential rival Andy Burnham, the Manchester mayor, at least for now.

Apart from the usual suspects, the media coverage was far from hostile although many anonymous comments predicted the prime minister was unlikely to survive much beyond next year's regional and local elections.

The Daily Mail suggested that Labour was now the nasty party and had 'dragged politics into the gutter'.

Earlier it had said, inaccurately, that Sir Keir called Reform voters racist when he said that Reform deportation policies were racist.

In the conference coverage, the paper appeared to want to have it both ways. As Dan Hodges commented, it was easily Sir Keir's best speech since his election.

"Passionate. Articulate. Uncompromising," argued Hodges, before adding that it would be almost certainly be his last as Labour leader and prime minister.

What is also certain is that the media will play a central role in the future of Sir Keir, the Labour government and perhaps even the country.

For now, it would be helpful if more journalistic attention were paid to the finances of Farage and Reform, the issue of the £800,000 Clacton house, where the party's funds come from and whether anyone else has had access to Russian finances.

There really are larger issues than the tax implications of Sir Keir buying a field.

Above all else, it is time for journalists to take Farage and Reform at their own words – a potential party of government – and subject them to the detailed critical scrutiny such a claim merits.

Farage had a disastrous conference other than the fact his speech was carried in its entirety live by the BBC and Sky News

Matt Kelly talks to **Neil Merrick** about a global magazine where nothing is taboo

The brave New

Britain's departure from the EU stirred a variety of emotions. Some people rejoiced, others despaired – and Matt Kelly showed defiance by launching a newspaper.

The first edition of The New European appeared in July 2016, just 10 days after the EU referendum. It aimed to show that Brexit would not prevent the UK from having a constructive relationship with the rest of Europe and sold 40,000 copies, a figure that was never to be surpassed.

"There was a sense of frustration that the UK had gone that way but it was also a publishing opportunity," recalls Kelly. "There was a large constituency of people that suddenly had a new name and were angry about the same thing."

Nine years later, The New European is no more. Since June, it has been rebranded The New World, in recognition of the fact that, while leaving the EU may have been a huge mistake, it is no longer enough to be simply anti-Brexit.

The new title was dreamt up by Saul Klein, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist, and one of thousands of people (including more than 2,000 subscribers) who can claim to be investors in The New World.

During a meeting with Kelly in March, Klein noted that, as The New European, the paper had broadened its horizons and was portraying what might be seen as a new world.

"It was a lightbulb moment," says Kelly, who was delighted to discover there was not already a title with the same name.

"I thought the name change would open up new markets and give us a shot in the arm in terms of publicity. We also wanted to rethink what we were doing and be more of a magazine rather than a paper."

As editor-in-chief, Kelly ensured his big-name writers, including Alistair Campbell and Paul Mason, moved across to the new title. New recruits included Sonia Sodha, once of The Observer, and Tom Baldwin, biographer of Keir Starmer.

The New World employs 10 full-time staff, often working remotely. Some freelancers work three days a week, while others write one article per edition or contribute more occasionally.

"We want to keep fixed costs low but employ the best journalists we can on a freelance basis," says Kelly.

The magazine (as it has in effect become) is published each Thursday, with the digital edition normally available a day earlier. There is, however, a different feel to the print edition, which is on shiny white paper in stark contrast to what Kelly describes as "48 pages of the cheapest dog shit newspaper".

About half of The New World's 30,000 subscribers pay for the print edition. In a typical week, the magazine also sells between 4,000 and 5,000 copies on news stands, depending on whether people can find it.

While Waitrose and WH Smith (now TGJones) normally place copies alongside the likes of The Economist and the London Review of Books but some supermarkets are less

How The New European became The New World

• 2016 The New European appears for the first time, 10 days after the UK voted to leave the European Union

• 2019 Jasper Copping replaces Matt Kelly as editor, but Kelly remains editor-in-chief

• 2021 Kelly and others buy the paper from regional publisher Archant after the latter runs into financial trouble

• 2023 Co-owners' campaign sees 2,200 subscribers invest about £1m in the paper

• 2025 The New World is launched in place of The New European

keen. "They want to sell more tins of baked beans," says Kelly.

But he is reassured that, by and large, former readers of The New European are finding their way to The New World for quality journalism and a different perspective on a world that, nine years after Brexit, continues to 'unravel' in front of voters who are seduced by promises of populist politicians.

There is no editorial line. In July, Paul Mason stirred up more than a little controversy by suggesting the UK government had been correct to ban Palestine Action by declaring it a terrorist organisation.

Letters poured in, to the delight of Kelly, who nevertheless staunchly disagrees with Mason on this point. "There are no taboos," explains Kelly. "I'd never dream of telling people what our line is. I want a collection of opinionated and talented writers."

At the time The New European was launched in 2016, Kelly was chief content officer at Archant, a regional publisher. While he saw Archant as the best publisher to launch the anti-Brexit paper, Kelly did not consider it the right one for long-term success.

By the time Archant ran into financial trouble in late 2020, The New European had been 'pootling along' for more than four years. A buyout involving Kelly and others gave the paper a new lease of life and felt like a sea change. "I don't think they understood its value. I got it very cheap," he adds.

But more money was needed and was subsequently raised via a co-owners' campaign in 2023 that saw 2,200 subscribers put in anything between £15 and £20,000. Together, they raised about £1m, meaning readers now own about 16% of the title.

By the time The New World appeared in June, the title had been running at a profit for more than six months.

"With the rebrand, we've been in investment mode so we don't anticipate returning to profit until quarter four of this year," says Kelly. "The important thing for me personally was to prove the theory that the business could be profitable. Now the job is growth."

The rebrand, he says, was comparatively easy. Kelly expresses surprise that other publications do not take on a fresh look or new title more frequently in the same way as non-media products.

As the title suggests, The New World is taking an increasingly worldwide outlook. It is not enough to focus on Europe (where the magazine employs regular freelancers) or even Trumpian America. Moving forward, it plans to devote more coverage to China, South America and sub-Saharan Africa. For now, most readers are in the UK, but perhaps not for long. "I think it would be a bit mad for a title called The New World not to think about international markets, so it's on the radar," says Kelly.

Within the magazine, there is a mix of hard and less serious news. Front covers in the weeks following the relaunch featured Vladimir Putin, Keir Starmer and Oasis.



World

This can throw up some juxtapositions, with the opening section, Carousel, as likely to report on the trauma and heartache of a teenager in Gaza as the problems Italians have in finding somewhere to swim during heatwaves. "It's a reflection of the world that we live in," he says.

Roughly 35 years after Kelly waved goodbye to regional journalism, he continues to enjoy the challenge of confronting political change and producing a forthright weekly magazine.

At a recent get-together with former colleagues from the Liverpool Echo, a few were slightly envious that staff at The New World still work to a flat plan.

But what about younger people venturing into journalism? How can they ensure they succeed? In future, he says, successful journalists will be those who think with greatest clarity. "In the old days, we were taught to go out and report. It was quite a factual job. That will be overtaken by other forms of content, such as AI."

This also means reflecting on where journalism can add most value. "If you think that the future of journalism is the Mail Online, then you're in trouble," says Kelly. "It's something that AI is going to spit out."

Duo talk news reporting

It is probably the highlight of Matt Kelly's week. Every Tuesday and Thursday, after that week's edition has been put to bed, he sits down with Matthew D'Ancona to record The Two Matts podcast.

Essentially, the podcast consists of two blokes having a chat, in this case about the news and how it is being reported in the media.

Like many podcasts, it seems to involve minimum preparation (with readers' letters stimulating much of the conversation) but also serves up large doses of conviviality and the occasional argument.

Kelly says he enjoys exploring "the mind and

intellect" of D'Ancona, one of The New World's editors at large and formerly of both The Telegraph and The Guardian. "He helps me to decide what I should be angry about," says Kelly.

Kelly accepts it is virtually impossible to work in journalism in the 21st century without venturing into podcasts.

About 35,000 people download The Two

Matts each week, a similar number to The New World's readership.

Assuming they do not already have the same audience, could the podcast attract subscribers to the magazine?

Kelly believes it provides valuable publicity while giving people an insight into why journalists produce stories and headlines in the way they do.

"It's a much more human environment than text and images," he says.

"The more of people's attention we win over, then the stronger our relationship is with them and therefore, one hopes, the better our retention rates will be."



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Complaints are disproportionately harsh on freelancers, says **Charlie Moloney**

When IPSO comes calling



Whenever I've had a particularly busy month of writing articles, I tend to experience three feelings. First, a certain sense of relief that as a freelance journalist I have invoices to send out and can keep the wolf from the door. Second, a certain amount of pride that my work is able to catch the attention of editors in this competitive field. But third, a deep sense of unease as the number of articles I have published stacks up, expanding the potential for complaints.

Since going freelance in January 2021, I had never been the subject of a complaint, though the prospect of facing one has always loomed large. Although I had previously faced down legal letters and regulatory complaints as a staff reporter for a regional agency, being a freelance makes you feel more exposed.

Complaints pose a significant reputational threat to a journalist. No publisher will run stories from a 'dodgy' reporter. This is an existential danger for freelancers, whose earnings are based on how much copy they sell.

It finally happened in February this year, in the form of a complaint to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) from a man who had been jailed for 20 months for stalking. The complainant accused me of including 'various serious inaccuracies and blatant fabrication' in six different articles about his case. In total there were seven different complaints under IPSO's editors' code of practice, mostly dealing with clause 1 (accuracy).

Responding to this complaint was a big job. I had to dust off three separate

shorthand notepads, go back over the three separate hearings and create transcriptions for IPSO to review. I also had to create a comprehensive bundle setting out the facts of the case, respond to each complaint in turn and I also included a section urging IPSO not to provide any 'succour or encouragement' to a convicted stalker.

All the work I did responding to the complaint was unpaid. Most outlets have it in their terms of engagement that contributors will be expected to assist – at no extra cost – if any complaints arise.

This makes business sense but it creates a disproportionately harsh outcome for freelancers. While staff journalists would respond to complaints during their working day, freelancers must take time away from paid work to defend their journalism.

Also, immense anxiety descends when a complaint comes in. Your article is placed under the glare of a searchlight. Any failure to express yourself clearly enough, or to provide enough context, or to have sufficient attention to detail, will be exposed. This is particularly true in news journalism, where we write everything at 100mph (or 100wpm).

News reporting is fast paced and tightly written. Brutal cutting decisions are made to stay within word count. The top line has to be extraordinarily engaging for the copy to get noticed.

I also put my copy 'all around', which means I can end up dealing with queries from numerous journalists simultaneously. All of this is done without any team member to confer with before making crucial decisions.

Regretfully, I did notice immediately there was one mistake. My article stated the defendant had moved to live on the same street or next door to the victim. In fact, it had been said in court he moved 'round the corner' from her. This required a correction.

I was crestfallen to discover this mistake. Journalists pride themselves on getting all the details correct and noting I had not managed to get that one detail right, despite having the correct information available in my notes, left me feeling despondent.

Overall though, IPSO found in my favour in respect of all four other complaints – two have not been ruled on. The complaints committee even took the opportunity to thank me for the level of detail I was able to provide in terms of contemporaneous notes and court documents and said they did not wish to minimise the complainant's conviction.

This was something of a victory, given the articles weathered the storm and all remain online.

But it has given me cause to reflect on regulatory complaints generally. IPSO prominently features the outcome at the top of their decisions. It is pretty binary – either 'breach' or 'no breach'. My one reads 'breach' because of the one error I've mentioned.

In future, if I see other journalists who have been found to have breached the code, I think I'll take a bit more trouble to read about what they got right rather than just focusing on what they got wrong.

Immense anxiety descends when a complaint comes in. Your article is placed under the glare of a searchlight

Destroyer or

Should we panic about the rise of AI?
Stephanie Power says it's all about how
and why media companies use it

I have been working on stories about the impact of AI on our lives for some time. It's always so much easier to focus on the AI takeover of law or medicine, or even of our relationships. But scrolls through LinkedIn have drawn my attention to the rise of AI in journalism.

In the summer, The Washington Post advertised a new role, director of AI and machine learning, guiding the development of 'intelligent, ethical, and secure platforms that power everything from operational efficiency to innovative newsroom tools'. The job ad says that the successful candidate will believe deeply in the mission of journalism. The salary range isn't bad at between \$200,000 and \$350,000. But you need a master's degree in computer science, machine learning or statistics to apply. They'd prefer a PhD. I'm not sure there are too many journalists with PhDs in computer science.

I'd also spotted someone brandishing a trophy from the Association of Online Publishers. The award – Best Digital Publishing Innovation. The winners – Newsquest, for their use of AI assisted reporters.

**I have the
answer to
everything!**



Newsquest argues this innovation means reporters can spend more time in local communities. I thought it might be fun to spend a morning with one of these new reporters for this piece but, unfortunately, I couldn't get anyone to engage with me. The head of AI didn't respond to my LinkedIn messages and neither did Toby Granville, the director of editorial development.

Why don't they want to showcase their award-winning work? In March, Granville spoke to the Society of Editors Media Freedom Conference, telling the audience the company now had 36 AI assisted reporters, a move that "frees up the rest of the newsroom to actually be out pounding the beat, knocking on doors, getting original content that people are willing to pay for".

Granville was asked by Press Gazette how AI reporters would be able to progress professionally without traditional beat reporting. He suggested they were learning a different set of skills, having regular AI literacy training and brainstorming new ideas for using AI in journalism. He said these reporters could go back to a traditional role if they wanted.

Everyone is experimenting. This summer, the BBC released new editorial guidelines.

Their section on AI states that its use must:

- Never undermine audience trust
- Always be transparent and accountable with effective and informed human oversight
- Always be used consistently with BBC editorial values, in

Sources, walls and energy: a user's guide

There are many ways you can use AI to help you in your work. I have used it to double-check facts, help shape up workshop sessions for media training and write those cringey biographical blurbs you are sometimes asked to do.

First, my advice would be to ask yourself who your commissioning editor is. Does their organisation request transparency? Do you need to ask/tell them how you are

using AI and which large language model (LLM)?

Second, use an LLM that provides detailed sources. I use Perplexity Pro, which in turn uses several other models, including xAI, Anthropic, Open AI and Google. But just because there is a source attached to a piece of information, that is not a get-out-of-jail-free card. Some sources are better than others. So check and check again.

Some in-house LLMs will act like a walled garden so any information you put in should be protected. Off-the-shelf LLMs won't. So be careful about your data. I wouldn't have a problem asking Perplexity for help with a media training exercise. But I won't be putting my potential soon-to-be best-selling novel in any time soon.

The results you get are only as good as the prompts you put in. So think through what

you are asking for. Be clear about what you want. Try to get the question right first time because advanced LLMs use a lot of computational power. Even MIT says it's nearly impossible to work out how much power your questions might use. It suggests asking ChatGPT 15 questions about fundraising, playing round with

10 flyer designs, and three attempts at a five second promotional video would be the equivalent of running a microwave for more than three hours. Small questions will make you feel less guilty.



useful tool?

particular accuracy, impartiality, fairness and privacy.

In all cases, where AI is used for editorial, a senior editorial figure is responsible for overseeing its deployment and continuing use.

The guidelines draw special attention to two potentially problematic areas. First is algorithmic bias; journalists are reminded that the outcomes produced by AI are only as good as whatever has been inputted in the first place by flawed humans. Second is hallucinations: generative AI operates on a probability basis, giving what is the 'most likely' response to a question or an instruction. Sometimes that 'most likely' response isn't correct.

The BBC has announced two pilot projects: At-a-Glance Summaries using AI to bullet point stories, something The Independent is already doing with Google Gemini. The other project is called Style-Assist.

Matthew Eltringham is senior adviser on editorial policy for the BBC.

"The majority of the AI that we are looking at is to make our content go further, to do things that we wouldn't be able to do otherwise," he says. "In World Service, we are translating copy. Style-Assist will enable us to use more content generated by the BBC's local democracy reporter scheme. There's a lot of raw copy that we don't use because we don't have the bodies to be able to turn it around."

Style Assist uses a BBC-trained smart AI system that has 'read' thousands of BBC articles so it can amend text quickly, matching the BBC's house style. Any stories going through

this large language model will be reviewed by a senior BBC journalist for accuracy and clarity.

A near-futurist might suggest that an agentic AI system would be able to take the minutes of all council meetings across the country, write them up as stories and list them in order of importance without any human interaction at all.

The only thing stopping that is the time it takes for councils to release those minutes.

Eltringham is keen to point out that, at the BBC, generative AI is never used to create content, only to re-version or rewrite.

"We will use AI to help us crunch data to analyse documents, possibly to summarise documents, to transcribe, to assist. What we won't do is use it to direct journalism. We won't let AI come up with questions for interview."

Why not?

"We think humans are better than AI at coming up with questions and we need to keep editorial independence. However sophisticated and nuanced your prompt is, the information it is giving you back is based on the algorithm and the training data. Subcontracting that is not something we are particularly keen on at the moment. Also, we think it is massively deskilling. Younger journalists would be learning how to use AI, but not how to do the journalism."

Steve Bird is head of the NUJ's chapel at the Financial Times Group. He agrees there should be a dividing line between assisting journalism and creating content.

"The FT has been conscientious about how AI is used and rolled out. It is focused on supporting journalism rather than the bottom line."

So how is it used in practice?

"One of the easiest wins for us was with picture captioning. Alt text is used on images to help visually impaired

Sources

BBC guidelines on AI use:

<http://bit.ly/4n4XV3Q>

MIT on the energy consumption of AI searches:

<https://tinyurl.com/yvdtcdv>

Reuters survey:

<https://bit.ly/3HEWaLN>

Ask me anything.

readers. It's a description of the image. But it wasn't always getting done. We introduced AI to that task, and now it is."

The FT Group, which includes specialist magazines as well as the newspaper, is actively considering several potential AI projects, including helping journalists get through big documents for investigations and analysis, voicing up articles, and bullet pointing stories.

Like the BBC, Steve says the FT has strong safeguards around content.

"Our policy says that people are at the centre of our journalism and everything must be created by humans. If AI is used, it should be declared. When you start to automate without safeguards, that's when you can lose your credibility."

Bird says the technology isn't the problem. The problem comes when companies are aggressively focused on commercial return.

"Developments need to be driven by journalists, but too often, commercial managers see this as a quick fix. And it isn't."

Not all employers in our industry are so conscientious.

I sent an email to a contact who works for Reach. They say that while they don't want to be thought of as Luddites, many journalists are worried about jobs going and standards dropping. There is talk of a news 'hub' being created and from that AI will rewrite stories for each title – which could include The Mirror, The Express, the Daily Record, the Daily Star and local papers such as the Manchester Evening News and the Liverpool Echo.

Reach already uses something they call Gutenbot, which re-versions stories by Reach journalists so they can be shared across titles. Is this the same idea that the BBC has, but seen through a profit-only lens? My source tells me Reach does not care about standards and is all about cutting costs and getting online clicks rather than concentrating on journalistic skill, contacts and hard work.

It does seem like the main national media outlets are all on the same track in terms of the ways technology can be used, but, as Bird says, that's not the problem – it's how you use it.

The Guardian newspaper came under fire at the beginning of the year after bosses used AI to help write headlines during

I asked Perplexity AI to explain what a large language model is

Could you explain in 150 words what a large language model is? For an audience of unionised journalists

A large language model (LLM) is a sophisticated type of artificial intelligence designed to understand, interpret, and generate human language. At its core, an LLM is powered by artificial neural networks – a computational approach inspired by how the human brain works. These models are 'large' because they are

trained on vast amounts of text data, such as books, news articles, websites, and social media, which enables them to predict and construct language in a contextually appropriate way.

For journalists, LLMs can quickly produce text summaries, suggest headlines, and even draft articles, influencing how

newsrooms operate. They can also assist with fact-checking and multilingual translation. However, concerns remain: LLMs can reproduce biases present in their training data and may accidentally generate inaccuracies. As professionals dedicated to truth and employment rights, unionised journalists should scrutinise both the benefits and challenges these tools introduce to the craft and workplace.



a dispute over the sale of The Observer. While staff recognised that AI was being used in the industry, they say they had been told that it would be used at The Guardian only after consultation and with readers being fully informed. The union is in discussion with the paper about the use of AI.

Over the past decade, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report has been surveying thousands of people across the world to find out their relationship with the news. They've started to ask respondents about the use of AI.

This year's report showed that AI chatbots and interfaces are emerging as search engines and other platforms integrate real-time news. The report says that both the FT and The Washington Post are trialling chatbots on their own content.

This may be similar to a project that Time Magazine has undertaken with a company called Eleven Labs, where you can ask Time's conversational AI (or chatbot) questions about their person of the year, so it almost seems as if you have access to your own personal journalist. You can be more sure of the accuracy, as the large language model is trained only on verified Time material.

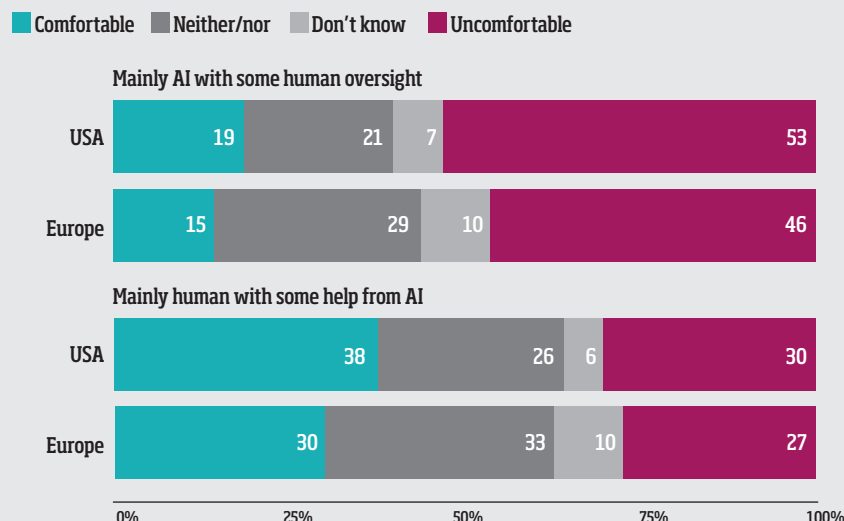
So what do audiences think? The majority of respondents to Reuters' survey are still uncomfortable with its use, which will be a relief to NUJ members, at least for now. There is some enthusiasm for making the news more accessible or relevant, including summarisation (27 per cent), translation (24 per cent), better story recommendations (21 per cent) and using chatbots to ask questions about news (18 per cent).

Respondents were asked what they thought would be good about AI. They said it would make news cheaper and more up to date, but they also said it might make it less transparent, less accurate and less trustworthy.

It would be interesting to be in the shoes of whoever gets that gig as director of AI and machine learning at The Washington Post. Tasked with ensuring operational efficiency and innovative journalism, it may be that they both come out on top – but at what cost to us humans?

Below: Readers prefer news with human oversight, according to Reuters Institute Digital News Report

Proportion that say they are very or somewhat comfortable with news being produced in the following ways - USA and Europe



Q2_AIComfortlevel_2024_1. In general, how comfortable or uncomfortable are you with using news produced in each of the following ways? Base: total sample in USA = 2053, Europe = 50,532.

Pay from AI is only fair

If your work is used in big tech, you should be paid.
Katharine Quarmby on a scheme to ensure this

Andrew Wiard's article on taking an ethical approach to generative artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism (August/September) raises important issues.

As he says, we journalists need to question our part in any uses of our work in AI. In particular, he points to 'inauthentic photorealistic pictures' and urges photographers to avoid licensing their images for generative AI uses.

He also discusses SCOOP, a venture between our union and three collecting societies, the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), DACS and PICSEL, and raises concerns about secondary uses through this that may include AI.

A lot has happened with AI and journalism since I first became aware of its uses, when the London School of Economics launched JournalismAI in 2019, which aimed to inform news organisations about the opportunities offered by AI and foster debate about the editorial, ethical and financial implications of using it in journalism.

That and other initiatives, such as the work done by the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, have helped me and other journalists pick our way through a rapidly changing and bewildering landscape.

As Wiard says, its use is an ethical issue that we cannot duck – we need to examine every new initiative closely to see if we feel it is ethically acceptable.

Yet, as Press Gazette reported in May, while AI is being used in news outlets, its impact is not clear. Two recent studies painted different pictures, with one, 'Large language models, small labor market effects' by researchers from the University of Copenhagen and

the University of Chicago, finding that while reporters are using AI tools, this has not driven down earnings nor taken jobs. However, a survey by Pressat of 2,000 journalists worldwide found that well over half (57 per cent) of respondents believed that AI could mean job losses.

I and other journalists raised the ethical issues around AI use by news outlets at a recent roundtable discussion organised by The New Statesman with ALCS. Entitled 'How do we create a sustainable future for freelance journalism?' participants addressed how AI is affecting creatives, particularly freelancers. We highlighted how freelance incomes could be driven down further as news organisations use our content for free to feed AI learning models.

So how to make it more fair? As well as having been a freelance journalist for decades, I became a non-executive director of ALCS last year. Simply put, ALCS collects then distributes money to creatives for secondary uses of their copyrighted work.

As secondary uses evolve, it is necessary to respond. Working with the Copyright Licensing Agency and other collective management organisations, ALCS is developing various licensing models to ensure creators' AI rights are recognised, protected and remunerated.

ALCS has been working closely with the NUJ. Launching SCOOP in December 2024 at the

same time as a survey of over 13,500 ALCS members, it showed that writers overwhelmingly support some form of remuneration along with choice and transparency when their works are used to train AI systems.

This was followed by a survey of NUJ members on various AI-related issues, such as what we want SCOOP to do and whether that should include licensing permitted uses of our work for AI.

I think we are more powerful if we act collectively – and that could include licensing permitted uses that we deem ethical as journalists. A voluntary approach that gives us the option of being paid for secondary uses – including AI if we want to – is most likely to succeed with the power of the collective. It means we would be paid for uses that are not currently covered.

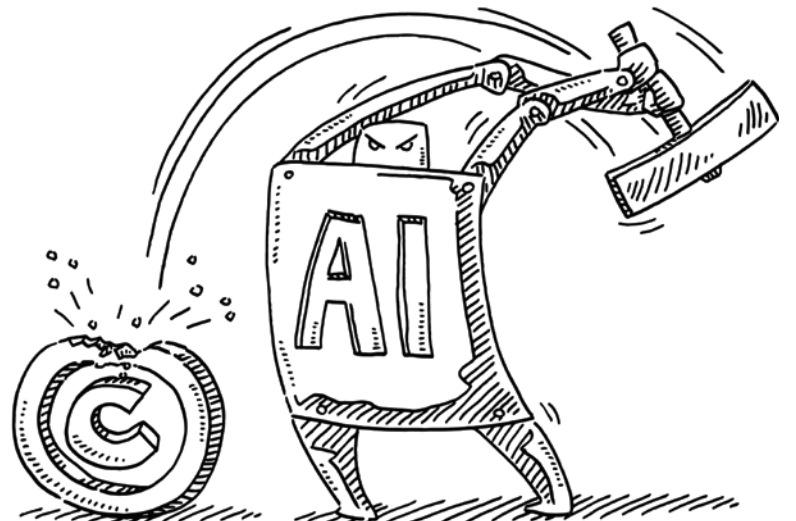
Richard Combes, deputy CEO of ALCS, explains: "The focus for SCOOP will be ensuring that freelancers collectively have the option to secure payment for works that have already been used by AI companies, either through unlawful online scraping or under licences entered into by publishers."

We are still in the foothills of AI in terms of ethics, and Wiard's caution is important because there are so many things to consider. But AI is another tool for reproducing our work so it makes sense to use established ways in which to license secondary uses so all of us can be paid fairly for 'copying', wherever it happens.

Katharine Quarmby is a non-executive director of ALCS and specialises in environmental investigations.

//
We need to examine every new initiative closely to see if we feel it is ethically acceptable

Sustaining Creativity
SCOOP



At first hand

The most powerful stories come from people who have experienced something directly. **Ellie Broughton** looks at how case studies bring a story to life

Torture in Bucha, deaths of fellow soldiers in Afghanistan, life as a dissident in exile: Rob Hastings' subject matter is not for the faint-hearted. As special projects editor at the i Paper, Hastings has now spent nine years finding eye-catching quotes and stories for its front page.

During that time, he says, the first-person interview has become increasingly important for national news journalists and their audiences.

"It shows why their insights matter," he says. "That is reflected not just in the number and variety of stories commissioned, but in how they're presented."

At the i Paper, even straight news interviews – which would usually once have had a formal headline – are often published under a synthesised quote today, he says: "They immediately focus our attention on the experience. That might seem an obvious approach as we've grown used to it as readers, but I don't think it was quite so common a few years ago."

Not everyone likes this approach, he adds, given the risk it could be reductive or simplistic: "It doesn't work for every story, but I feel there's a legitimate reason why it's becoming more common."

As news media vie for views, the first-person piece has risen in popularity across UK journalism. Competing with social media, some journalists may feel they have to work harder to connect with audiences. Leading with someone's experience humanises a story and puts its experiential side – from lifestyle trends to global conflicts – front and centre of coverage.

The explosion in short-form video and podcasts may also have given audiences – and writers – a stronger preference for hearing directly from interviewees. Whatever the reason for the trend, journalists may need to develop their interview skills to stay ahead.

More than ever, Hastings says, journalists need to spend more energy listening than, for example, coming up with sparkling questions.

"Take care not to make assumptions about their emotions," he says. "It's the more surprising reactions that you as an interviewer don't see coming that are usually the more interesting ones for readers."

Better pitches

Like Hastings, Sarah Graham almost always covers stories about taboo or life-changing experiences. As a freelancer, her stories on miscarriage, alcoholism, long covid and maternal mental health have been featured in national newspapers, shortlisted for awards by her peers and published in her book, *Rebel Bodies*, out on an imprint at Bloomsbury.

Talking points

- It's the more surprising reactions that you don't see coming that are usually the more interesting ones for readers

Rob Hastings

- Patience, relationship-building and boundaries are key to gaining trust

Sarah Graham

- Case studies are almost always needed if I'm going to get a story picked up

Lauren Crosby Medicott

- Mental health can fluctuate so, if someone agrees to an interview while unwell, it doesn't mean they'll be comfortable with it forever

Rehema Figueiredo

Graham says that featuring the people who have experienced such issues is key to the power of her features. "Experiences are really essential when it comes to bringing health features to life – no doctor or researcher can fully encapsulate what it's like to live with a condition day to day in the same way that a patient can, so their voices are vital to readers' understanding," she says.

A former communications officer for a charity, Graham says she is still mindful of keeping the balance between safeguarding case studies and getting the best story.

"I'm often dealing with sensitive and personal issues affecting women's everyday lives, so patience, relationship-building and boundaries are key to gaining case studies' trust," she says. "For example, I'm always clear and up front with interviewees that being identified, ideally with photos, makes for a stronger story. I'm open to anonymising whole stories or leaving out sensitive details, and I always start interviews by telling the subject they don't have to answer questions they're not comfortable with."

She says giving the interviewee a chance to check their quotes before she uses them is something she does more regularly now she's experienced. "I'm now probably more generous than many journalists – including my past self," she says. "Again, I find this builds trust and confidence in me and my work, and often makes the difference to someone agreeing to be identified who might previously have been reluctant."

As with most freelancers, Graham never pays for stories. Undoubtedly an ethical problem, chequebook journalism is also a financial impossibility for almost every journalist.

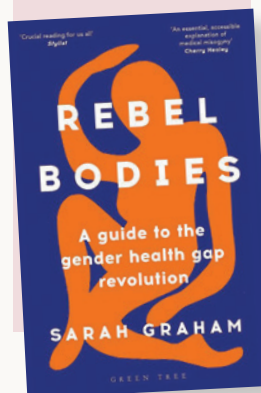
"Most of the publications I write for don't include a budget for case studies and I can't afford to pay interviewees out of my own fee, but I am always up front about this," she says.

Many of the case studies she speaks to come via charities or campaign groups, so they're generally happy just to raise awareness of their cause; Graham always tries to include links to relevant organisations, support groups or social media platforms when working with an individual patient.

Like Graham, Lauren Crosby Medicott has freelanced for The Guardian, the i Paper, The Independent and Stylist. She agrees with Hastings that first-hand experience interviewees now seem essential.

"Case studies are almost always needed if I'm going to get a story picked up because, typically, a staff writer can pretty easily write something that doesn't involve case studies," she says.

She says she finds interviewees' experiences hook her in, and believes readers (and editors) feel the same way. "It just brings so much life to features. If I'm writing about an issue that feels 'in the clouds', it brings it back down to earth when people can read a story of somebody who's actually gone



Horror at the arena

Ruth Addicott speaks to journalists who covered the Manchester Arena bombing

On May 22 2017, Manchester suffered the deadliest terrorist attack in the UK since the 2005 London bombings. Twenty-two people were killed and hundreds injured, many of them children, as they left a concert by Ariana Grande at Manchester Arena.

The suicide bomb attack, perpetrated by Islamist extremist Salman Abedi, prompted a public inquiry and criticism of the emergency services, the MI5 and the media.

The families said they felt 'hounded'. One child was given condolences on the doorstep before the official notification of the death of her mother.

It also hit home the need for more resources and reporters based outside London.

Helen Pidd was northern editor of The Guardian at the time and at home in Old Trafford when she received a call from the newsdesk. Within half an hour of the device being detonated, she was at the scene.

"As soon as I reached Exchange Square and saw people sobbing, including loads of little kids wearing flashing bunny ears and Ariana Grande t-shirts, I realised something serious had happened," she says. "I was interviewing people when

suddenly armed police officers in full gear with huge guns started shouting at us to leave. They thought there might be a marauding terror attack after the bomb, as happened in Paris not long before, and the prospect suddenly felt very real."

Pidd spent most of the night outside Manchester Royal Infirmary, talking to people who were looking for lost relatives. She stayed until 8am, slept for about two hours, then went back out.

"I just couldn't quite take in that someone would do that to a concert full of children," she says. Looking back, Pidd says she would not approach families outside a hospital again.

"I learned a lot about approaching potentially bereaved people from Dan Hett, the brother of Martyn Hett, one of those killed. He was furious at how reporters had doorstepped his family when they didn't know if Martyn was dead or alive, and it really stuck with me. They kept answering the door because they thought it was the police."

One newspaper that won awards for its coverage was the Manchester Evening News (MEN). Rob Irvine, then editor, was at home on the night of the attack when he received a call from the duty editor and remembers the long line of ambulances as he drove to the office.

"There was a real sense of focus," he says. "First of all, getting reporters and photographers to the right places with reporters and news editors in the office scouring the web and social media."

Think before doorstepping

Reset in approach

ITV reporter Amy Welch says journalists went through press offices and law firms to contact families following the Southport stabbings.

She believes the landscape has changed but that this is something journalists are still navigating.

David Collins, northern editor at The Sunday Times,

believes it simplifies the process if families have a law firm to represent them and adds there has to be a 'really high' public interest reason to doorstep.

He believes there has been a 'reset', especially among journalists in the north.

Regional weakness

Collins also says the lack of staff reporters outside London has left the coverage in some nationals looking

'weak', citing the Manchester Arena attack and Lucy Letby as examples.

"The tabloids are better - I'm talking about middle market broadsheets. There are national newspapers without a single staff news reporter outside London."



ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The main obstacle was the flood of false reports on social media, photos purporting to be from the scene that were from previous terror attacks and pictures of people supposedly missing who had no connection with the event.

“The biggest challenge was getting the balance right – to ensure we told the story in a calm and complete way, and to bring people together rather than feeding fear and anger of which there was plenty around,” he says.

Irvine says his advice to editors is listen to the audience. He recalls readers were ‘horrified’ when a national newspaper printed the photo of the attacker alongside a photograph of the youngest victim on the front page.

“I vowed that, as long as I was editor, the murderer would never feature on the front page and his photo would always be kept away from those whose lives he had stolen and damaged,” he says.

The MEN helped raise more than £20 million for injured people, bereaved families and people suffering post-traumatic symptoms. This prompted Irvine to quit journalism and retrain as a psychotherapist working with trauma survivors.

David Collins was working at The Sunday Times in London at the time and says it highlighted the need for a permanent presence outside London. He created the role of northern editor and transferred to Manchester three months later.

“The news can’t just be about London and the south east – the UK is a country not a city and that is a big lesson for the media across the board,” he says. “It’s not enough to send reporters up on the train – you’ve got to be here to do the job.”

Collins covered the police investigation and inquiry in depth (it lasted two and a half years) and says a lot was not being picked up. “There were days when there was literally one freelance journalist on shift for a lot of nationals,” he says.

He felt there needed to be an ‘accurate record’ and, after getting to know Andrew Roussos, father of eight-year-old Saffie, the youngest victim to die, he decided to write a book.

Saffie had been at the concert with her mother, Lisa, who was given a 15 per cent chance of survival and 90 per cent chance

“There was a moment of profound silence when a colleague called out the police confirmation of more than 20 fatalities”

Rob Irvine, former editor, Manchester Evening News

“There was a lot of pressure to get new lines on the dead and the investigation into the attacker”

Helen Pidd, former northern editor, The Guardian

“You have to get in front of those families to build that trust and those relationships”

Amy Welch, reporter, ITV north of England

“Journalism combined with public inquiries is a powerful force”

David Collins, northern editor, Sunday Times

of being paralysed from the neck down. The book told the story of Saffie and the family’s fight for justice.

It took Collins a year to write. “I’d speak to Andrew and Lisa for about an hour every day, and write it up at night when my kids were in bed,” he says.

He says it taught him the value of public inquiries, particularly when organisations like the police and MI5 are involved. “Journalism can only go so far,” he says. “What I learnt was how far MI5 will go to protect its own reputation.”

ITV North of England reporter Amy Welch worked closely with families on the ITV documentary Manchester 100 Days After the Attack. She recalls going to the home of 14-year-old victim Nell Jones a few weeks after the attack to ask the family if they wanted to be involved.

“I’ve been a journalist for 17 years, but when you have to approach a family like that who have been through the worst thing you could possibly imagine, I feel sick to my stomach,” she says. “I always try and put myself in their shoes.”

Welch sat down with Nell’s mother, Jayne, who was creating a garden for Nell at her school; ITV helped with fundraising and publicity.

“We had a lot of coffees over the weeks that followed and it took a lot of time to build up trust,” she says. “It wasn’t just a case of ‘What do we want from you?’ – that is absolutely the wrong way to go about it – it was very much ‘How can we help you?’ and I think, at that moment, that’s what the family needed. They wanted Nell’s name to live on and we were a platform to help them do that.”

As Welch points out, not all the families wanted the same thing. Some wanted to raise awareness of first aid. Others were angry and wanted accountability.

“For me, as a journalist, it was about working with each of these families to help them achieve what they wanted to achieve as a legacy for their loved ones,” she says.

Welch has stayed in touch with Nell’s family and remains good friends. “They trusted me with Nell and her memory,” she says. “I have a duty as a journalist and as a person to make sure I honour that in the best and truest way I can.”

by **Mark Fisher**

arts

Books

Blurred Faces

Allan Radcliffe

November 13, Fairlight Books

Two men meet on a dating app – one remembers the other as a playground bully. This is the second novel by the theatre critic and NUJ member after the award-winning *The Old Haunts*.

<https://tinyurl.com/27qxsdp4>

Hearth of Darkness

Matt Blake

October 31, Elliott and Thompson

It started as an article in the Guardian about moving into a house previously occupied by a serial rapist, the man

known as the E17 night stalker. Now freelance journalist Matt Blake has extended his account into a full-length book – part true crime, part paranormal investigation.

<https://tinyurl.com/2bjzqzbw>

Do It Yourself: Making Political Theatre

Common/Wealth

Out now, Manchester

University Press

Bradford and Cardiff theatre company Common/Wealth suggests ways to root performances in the lives of working-class communities.

<https://tinyurl.com/2c4rebx3>

Exhibitions

Cecilia Vicuña: Reverse Migration a Poetic Journey

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

November 7–July 1

First solo show in Ireland for the Chilean artist, poet and activist who has discovered she has ancient ties to the country. Her new work makes links between the design of the Aran sweater and a traditional Andean system of communication involving knotted cords.

<https://tinyurl.com/2bfnmobt>

Festivals

Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival

Various venues, October 20–November 9

‘Comfort and disturb’ is the theme of the annual festival showcasing multiple art forms, promoting the use of creativity to ease mental health problems while helping people live mentally healthier lives.

<https://www.mhfestival.com>

Being Human Festival

Various venues

November 6–15

Led by the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, this celebration of academic research in the humanities focuses this year on ‘between the lines’: stories about erased histories, neglected protest movements and forgotten migration routes.

<https://tinyurl.com/2d82qlhg>

Edinburgh Radical Book Fair

Assembly Roxy, Edinburgh,

November 6–9

Hosted by the Lighthouse bookshop, this long weekend of talks and workshops typically covers topical issues such as climate change, the war in Gaza and gender equality.

<https://tinyurl.com/2anhu3kx>

Stage

David Olusoga: a Gun Through Time

November 2–22

The historian and broadcaster takes to the stage with three weapons – a rifle, a machine gun and a Tommy gun – through which he tells a social and cultural history of war and conflict and how these three firearms changed the lives of our ancestors.

<https://tinyurl.com/2btlvqe3>

In depth

A rough-and-tumble reporting life

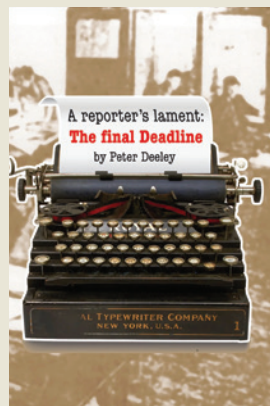
It starts with a teenager making tea in a Birmingham news agency. It ends with a reporter covering revolutionary Nicaragua. In between is a litany of increasingly forgotten newspaper practices – from copy boys running to the nearest phone box to the NUJ maintaining a closed shop.

This is the story of Peter Deeley's life as recounted in *A Reporter's Lament: the Final Deadline*, proudly self-published without, as he writes, “the disbenefit of literary agents, mega publishers or Amazon”.

It spans his working life from 1951, when he joined Cater's News Agency straight out of grammar school, to the 1990s, by which time he was

covering cricket for the Daily Telegraph.

That was after stints at Reuters and The Sun, as well as the Observer as a general reporter under David Astor and later home news editor under Donald Treford – jobs that could be challenging on a Sunday paper more interested in analysis than hard news.



Deeley's book is not an autobiography. While it follows his career, it offers scant details about life beyond the office. Rather, it is a testament to a changing industry, whether that be the demands of filing match reports to several newspapers in a pre-digital age or working under a patrician editor with a preference for ‘amateur’ writers over professional hacks.

Working his way up from the bottom was tough; enjoying a Michelin-starred lunch in France on the supposed trail of Lord Lucan, less so.

Drawing on the memories of colleagues as well as his own, Deeley fills the book with

anecdotal colour, whether he is sweet-talking the local constabulary in Birmingham or getting ill from impure water in Vietnam.

An NUJ life member, he recalls tensions at The Observer over the employment of untrained graduates and about coverage of Vietnam, South Africa and the miners' strike.

It is all part of the journalistic rough and tumble of a book that can cover Winston Churchill one minute and Geoffrey Boycott the next.

A Reporter's Lament: the Final Deadline, Peter Deeley, out now, available for £10 (including p&p) from pdknapton@gmail.com

KAREN ROBINSON



Comedy

Matt Green: Legitimate Concerns

On tour until November 30

Satirical comedy for an age of autocrats on the one hand and uninspiring opponents on the other – plus bonus material about selling a flat and moving house.

<https://tinyurl.com/2cvdc44r>

Films

Souleymane's Story

General release from October 24

An award-winning hit in Cannes, Boris Lojkine's fast-paced movie covers two frantic days in the life of a Guinean asylum seeker (Abou Sangare)

working as a food delivery rider in Paris while awaiting news of his residency application.

<https://tinyurl.com/2cxzcck9>



The Marbles

General release From November 7

Documentary by David Nicholas Wilkinson about the Parthenon marbles and other artefacts looted by colonialist Britain during the 19th century. Brian Cox, Janet Suzman, Tony Blair and Jeremy Corbyn make appearances. Before its wider release, it is the opening film in the Central Scotland Documentary Festival at the Macrobert Arts Centre, Stirling, on October 30.

<https://tinyurl.com/29ymcbqm>

Music Other Voices

Cardigan, October 30–November 1

The travelling West Kerry showcase of new music returns to Wales, hosted by Huw Stephens and introducing acts including Baby Brave, Bruna Garcia, Curtisy, Daithí and Danielle Lewis.

<https://tinyurl.com/26bo2q6h>

Theatre

I Dream of Theresa May

Tara Theatre, London, November 17–19

Vivek Nityananda's new play is about a gay Indian man hoping to keep living in London, only to find his nemesis, Theresa May, appearing at his flat offering to be his mentor. It is set in 2013, when the Tories' hostile environment policy is in full swing.

<https://tinyurl.com/22h6kqu2>



Spotlight

A failed safety net

This 'mixed-reality exhibition' co-created by an NUJ member is based on testimonials about deaths linked to the disability benefit system.

Museum of Austerity is a holographic gallery that presents verbatim accounts of what the UN called 'grave or systemic violations' of the rights of disabled people in the UK. After acclaimed runs in Bristol, Manchester and Newcastle, it is coming to London.

Viewed on a headset, it draws on the expertise of John Pring, editor of

Disability News Service and author of *The Department (How a Violent Government Bureaucracy Killed Hundreds and Hid the Evidence)*, who has seen what happens when safety nets fail.

"It does feel like a journalistic enterprise,"



says Pring, who worked on the installation with director Sacha Wares. "Technology is an important part but, for me, it has always been about the words and the stories."

Pring, who calls the Department for Work and Pensions, 'deeply harmful' adds: "The topicality has not changed one iota."

"Even if this work shows just a few hundred people, they haven't been forgotten, and artists, activists and journalists are fighting for them."

Museum of Austerity, Young Vic, London, December 5-January 16,
<https://tinyurl.com/2abj62j4>

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Barry Fitzpatrick

Barry Fitzpatrick, former deputy general secretary of the NUJ and hugely respected union official, died on September 17 at the age of 82 of pneumonia and renal failure. He leaves a wife Jane and three grown-up children: Lily, Gareth and Neil.

Born in Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey, Barry's mother was a single parent, who often worked as a cleaner to keep her family of six together.

Barry went to grammar school, then into apprenticeships and on to the Sunday Times, joining the paper's NATSOPA clerical chapel.

He became FOC of the chapel, leaving Times Newspapers in 1982/83 when he was elected as a full-time officer of the London clerical branch of SOGAT 82, shortly after merger with NATSOPA.

Eventually he took his formidable skills to the NUJ where he succeeded Jeremy Dear as the senior official responsible for newspapers.

Jeremy, who became the NUJ's general secretary, describes him as 'a legend'. Said Jeremy: "Some in the union opposed his appointment, arguing that he was 'too much of a print union bureaucrat' and too old, given that the union was trying to attract younger journalists. He absolutely proved all those people wrong. He not only brought us a level of experience and skill in negotiating none of the rest of us could ever emulate, but he was extremely patient and a great educator for younger reps. I also got to see his skills up close – while negotiating with employers and also as the employer

when he was the rep for NUJ staff."

David Ayrton, NUJ chapel chair, described him as a 'committed and outstanding' union official. "Many of us, not least myself, were trained and educated under Barry's stewardship and for that we owe him a great debt of gratitude. Barry served as NUJ officials' father of the chapel some considerable time before I would take the post. Barry was a tough taskmaster for those like myself who were working under his authority. He was, nevertheless, always ready to give advice and guidance. He made it clear to me that should I make any mistakes, as long as I reported them instantly to him, then he considered them to be his own mistakes and would quickly rectify them. Obviously, had I not informed him of any such errors then he would not have been best pleased!"

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, pointed out that Barry enjoyed 'the rough and tumble' of negotiations, proving himself to be 'blunt, direct and determined'. Said Seamus: "He brought those qualities to the NUJ at a time when the union was engaged in challenging negotiations on collective agreements."

Mirror journalist Paul Routledge knew him during his days at Times Newspapers: "He was well-respected by the members and rather less so by management who had to deal with his wily skills. He had an office in a Thomson building over Grays Inn road from The Times, with a desk, a leather settee, a telly and a fish tank. As I recall, as a lowly NUJ FoC, I had only a metal filing cabinet.

"I once marvelled at his comfortable office, and he said: 'Yeah, can't last, can it?' And it didn't. But I always thought that, unlike some print union officials, he liked the company of hacks. Indeed he was a journalist manque. So it was no surprise to me that he made the leap to become an official of the NUJ. He belonged with us. He found his home in the NUJ."

The editor of The Journalist Christine Buckley benefited personally from his expertise: "I met a lot of union officials as industrial editor of The Times and Barry was one of the very best –

effective, decent, modest, a great person to have on your side – as he was when I was hit by The Times' traditional annual jobs cull. He ensured I was on full pay during months of wrangling, secured a much-improved pay-off and kept me informed and even amused throughout. When I joined the staff of the NUJ, he was similarly a great colleague."

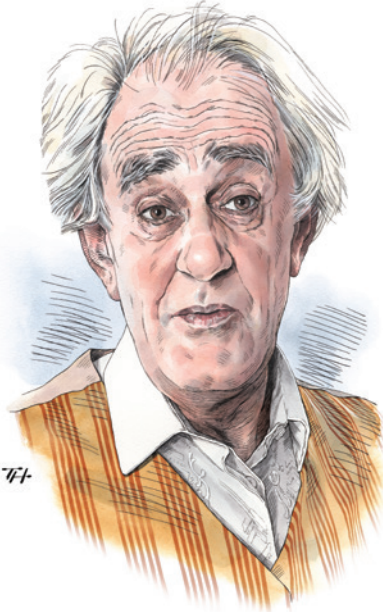
As the official responsible for national newspapers, Barry came to The Independent when I was deputy FoC there. He showed himself to be intelligent, calm and very good at his job. He was completely uninterested in the petty political squabbles of the 'troika' which represented the Indie chapel. The MoC was an activist in the Socialist Workers' Party, her deputy (me) a member of the Labour party and the third, a devotee of the then Social Democratic Party. Barry was only interested in going into bat for the members.

Perhaps Brian Williams, former FoC at the Guardian, should have the last word: "There were times Barry could almost make you feel sorry for anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves on the other side of the negotiating table. Invariably, he was better prepared, impossible to be bullied or bluffed and had an unfailing instinct of knowing when it was time to make a deal because he had extracted every last achievable concession from the employer.

"He was kinder to union reps, of course. But it paid to do your homework before you ran an idea past him, as I learned to my cost more than once over cod and chips in the North Sea fish restaurant, a short walk from Headland House in Leigh Street. Get the Fitzpatrick insouciant nod of approval and all was well. A raised eyebrow and withering look, however, meant it was clearly time to have a serious rethink – and offer to pick up the bill as well.

"So, farewell old friend – you will be missed by more people than you could ever imagine. And if there is an afterlife, the heavenly management team has my sympathy. They really have no idea what's about to hit them."

Barrie Clement



Truthful hyperbole, direct and dishonest

Our PRs could learn from the US presidential approach to media relations, says **Chris Proctor**

Before the historic visit of Trump fades in the memory, we should be sure we have learned some important lessons from his happy stay. The US has much to teach us, especially in the area of media relations.

One key element is directness. Unlike our own media, which often concedes a degree of grey in most discussions, the US sees the world exclusively in black or white. There is no in between.

Take the case of Michael Wolff, the journalist and columnist who took to enquiring about relations between the president and Jeffrey Epstein. The White House's top PR expert was fetched to give his considered response and he outlined the template for dealing with hostile questioning.

Director of communications Steven Cheung dismissed Wolff as "a lying sack of shit with a peanut-sized brain".

You see? A straight, unequivocal response, leaving no room for doubt. None of this 'economical with the truth' evasion of our own public relations practitioners.

Previously, when challenged about the president's assessment that undocumented immigrants were "poisoning the blood of our country", Mr Cheung told reporters, "That's a normal phrase that is used in everyday life" and to think differently is "racist or xenophobic". In one simple statement, he swats aside criticism and claims the moral high ground. It's simple and effective.

And what do you do if unreasonable presenters of chat shows persist in criticising The Leader? The president,

as he left our island, suggested that networks such as ABC, which only give him bad publicity, should "maybe have their licences taken away". The obvious thing to do is pull down the shutters. Shut the stations. Problem solved.

The furore was caused by chat show host Jimmy Kimmel's suggestion that the Trump administration was "trying to score political points" from the death of Charlie Kirk. It was, of course: even before they knew who the assassin was, pro-Trump officials in Utah had labelled the murderer "indoctrinated with leftist ideology".

Of course, wild anarchists like trade unions, including the Writers Guild of America and media union SAG-AFTRA, complained about Kimmel's suspension, calling it "a violation of constitutional free speech rights".

Such unreasonable moaning may provide an argument for shutting down trade unions as well but that hasn't appeared on the agenda. Yet.

An effective tactic employed by our transatlantic cousins is brazen denial then a quick exit. Donald employed this when asked by UK journalists about the sacking of Peter Mandelson as US ambassador. He had met Mandy the previous week; there are pictures of them both in the Oval Office; he's on record saying, "I like the guy" and commenting on his 'beautiful accent'.

Faced with this evidence, in his press conference with Keir Starmer, he was direct. "I don't know him," he said.

And so the matter was resolved, quickly and without fuss. UK media gurus would have wasted time prevaricating or thinking up excuses. The US approach saves time.

He also apparently doesn't know Harry, Mr Sussex. In his banquet speech, he congratulated the King for raising 'a remarkable son'. Just the one

son. The lesson here is that if you don't care for someone, simply erase them.

Elevating the notion of a 'deal' to sanctified heights has proved a splendid PR innovation. In the Trump context, a deal radiates machismo, forthrightness, success and advantage. If you want to look good, say you've done a deal. Even if you haven't, as with his Putin talks, you can always deny it the next day.

When Starmer risked a press conference with Trump (despite the experiences of Volodymyr Zelensky and Cyril Ramaphosa), the front of the rostrum was emblazoned with the three blessed words 'Tech prosperity deal'. A useful tip shown here is that, when basking in the kudos, details or facts should be kept as vague as possible.

This 'historic moment' was a fine example of the strategy. We celebrated the signing of The Deal, but were left fuzzy about trivia such as how much it's worth. The New York Times says \$350 billion, Starmer says £250 billion and the stingy BBC says £150 billion. But, in Trumpland, figures – like words – are unimportant. Also it was difficult to be exact about what The Deal means, apart from it being groundbreaking and having something to do with artificial intelligence, nuclear energy and maybe quantum computing. Things like that. Equally, we're not sure who will profit from it. But it doesn't matter. It's a deal and hence a very good thing.

He also advises making things 'historic'. People enjoy 'big, great and spectacular' news, so why not give it to them? In the book he sort-of wrote, he calls this 'truthful hyperbole'.

UK media types can learn unprecedented amounts from his visit which was, incidentally, the most popular, productive, courageous and important voyage made by any man in the history of humankind.

An effective tactic employed by our transatlantic cousins is brazen denial then a quick exit

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