

NUJ seeks meeting with DCMS as government threatens BBC

THE campaign for free TV licences for the over-75s to be funded from general taxation looks set to be part of a wider battle to save the BBC in 2020.

The cost was transferred from the government to the BBC in the last licence fee settlement by former Conservative chancellor (and now London *Evening Standard* editor) George Osborne.

The last Conservative government resisted all calls for the licences to be tax-funded when the implications for the BBC became apparent. Not only could hundreds of jobs be lost but those getting free licences would face far more repeats and less new original, UK-produced programming.

Those losing their careers would include many in the NUJ as well as members of the technicians' union Bectu, the performers' union Equity and the Musicians' Union.

Last year, BBC executives tried to limit the damage by saying that only those on pension credits would be eligible for free licences from 2021.

Those trying to retain free licenses, including the National Pensioners Convention, trade unions and Age UK, also said a broadcasting organisation should not be in charge of an aspect of wider national social policy.

Just after the election, the NUJ warned the government and politicians not to undermine public service broadcasting.

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet, pictured, said the BBC and Channel 4 had both been the targets of "bullying rhetoric". The campaign ended with comments from the government about reviewing the BBC's funding and decriminalising non-payment of the licence fee.

"Let's be clear – knee-jerk changes to the licence fee would massively damage BBC programmes and news," said Michelle. "The corporation is already facing serious cuts in the coming year, with potentially more on the horizon. It needs greater resources, not an attempt to destabilise its very existence.

"The NUJ salutes the hard work and professionalism of its

members who covered one of the most divisive and difficult of election campaigns. Of course some mistakes are made in the midst of wall-to-wall, 24 hour multi-platform coverage – that is no need to descend into threats, mudslinging and some of the most vile trolling of BBC journalists and staff on social media networks.

"With accusations of bias and unfair coverage flying, it's important to remember that Ofcom, the broadcasting watchdog, found 79 per cent of people rate the BBC's news highly, with 73 per cent rating the BBC as trustworthy.

"That is why the BBC's resources need to be protected – not attacked by ministers and politicians of all sides.

'Knee-jerk changes to the licence fee would massively damage BBC programmes and news ...'

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet

"The NUJ will be seeking a meeting as soon as possible with the ... culture secretary to raise our concerns and seek guarantees on the future of the BBC and protections for public service broadcasting."

During the election campaign the prime minister appeared to be question BBC funding arrangements. In an interview on BBC's Andrew Marr Show on Sunday 15 December, treasury minister Rishi Sunak confirmed that Boris Johnson had ordered a review of the sanction for non-payment of the £154.50 charge, which funds the corporation, a view reiterated by a Number 10 spokesperson.

The BBC said decriminalisation could cost it £200m a year. Licence fee income brought about £3.6bn to the BBC in 2018-9, approximately 75 per cent of the broadcaster's revenues and funding TV, radio and online content. In 2018, 25.8m households had licences.

Council calls for campaigning to continue over women's pensions

DESPITE the general election set back to the Women Against State Pension Inequality (Waspi) campaign, the 60-Plus Council wants the issue to remain high on the government's agenda.

One of the council's motions submitted to this year's delegate meeting in Southport in April calls for the NUJ to try to keep concerns alive about the short-notice change to the pension age.

DMs in both 2016 and 2018 had called on the union to support the wider campaign for greater equity from women who had been seriously hit financially by early retirement.

Weekly titles' FoC adds Scots' perspective to council's work...



THE latest addition to the 60+ Council is Derek Forrest, who works on JPIMedia's Scottish Borders weekly titles.

Derek, 62, represents the union's Scottish executive council (SEC). A life member of both the NUJ and Journalists' Charity (formerly the Newspaper Press Fund), he is the face of the Berwick and Borders branch on the SEC, as well as being FoC of JPIMedia's Scottish Borders chapel.

Coldstream-born Derek has been a journalist for 45 years – most of them as a sub-editor – and has also worked on weekly and regional daily newspapers in Northumberland, the south coast of England, Newcastle and Aberdeen.

Despite living in an area which boasts a proud rugby union heritage, Derek is a football fan, particularly following the mixed fortunes of the Scottish national team and Manchester United/ "Denis Law was my boyhood hero," he said.

BORDERS FORCE: Berwick branch member Derek Forrest has joined the 60-Plus Council after being nominated by the Scottish Executive Council. He has been a member of NUJ for more than 40 years.

Picture: Alwyn Johnston, ___

... while Roy decides to put safety first

A FOUNDING member of the 60-Plus council is standing down after 10 years.

Stalwart activist Roy Jones, pictured, announced his decision this winter, saying safety had become paramount, especially while travelling

to meetings in London.

Roy joined the NUJ in 1982 after a career in the oil industry and then construction. He worked for the *Morning Star* from 1982 until 1995. He says he will continue being active as chair of the NUJ's North Wales branch.



Hopefuls to face election

AN election for the next 60-Plus council will take place at this year's NUJ delegate meeting in Southport in April.

Seven names have been put forward for six seats.

Those standing include existing

members Mary Brobin, Anne Coltart, Jenny Sims, Julian Swainson, Jim Symons and Guy Thornton.

Alex Pascall has also been nominated by London Freelance branch.

Seats on the council are also allocated to

nominees from each of the industrial councils, the Continental Europe Council and Welsh, Irish and Scottish executive councils.

After noticing an anomaly that while these three executive councils have seats on the Equality Council, Black Members' and Disabled Members' Councils and 60-Plus, but the NEC does not, a motion has been submitted to DM calling for this to be corrected in time for DM 2022.

NUJ warns Lords of digital exclusion's impact on democracy

OLDER people who are not online are being excluded from political debate and public engagement with the widespread closure of local and regional papers, the House of Lords Select Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies has been warned.

In its response to the committee's call for evidence, the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), of which the NUJ is an affiliate, pointed to a "significant omission" in its questions – which did not consider the issue of exclusion from participation in online political discourse from non-internet users.

Jenny Sims, pictured, 60-Plus Council co-chair, and chair of the NPC's digital inclusion/exclusion working party which helped draw up the submission, said: "We also included references to the NUJ's recommendations to another select committee – that media literacy should be part of the national curriculum and that life-long learning courses should be available for adults to learn new digital skills; to receive advice and guidance on 'staying safe' online; and to discern, distinguish and guard against 'false news'".



The digital working party, a result of an NUJ motion at the NPC's biennial delegates conference, is currently carrying out a pilot study among the more than 1 million members to find out how much they use digital technologies and, if they don't, why not.

The findings will inform the NPC in its campaign to help get more older people online and to support those digitally disadvantaged access information and services.

■ <https://bit.ly/2SRDso6>

DM asked to continue backing inclusion initiative

THE 60-Plus council has submitted a motion for the this year's NUJ delegate meeting calling for the union to continue supporting this NPC initiative.

The motion calls on the NUJ to continue to support the NPC's campaigning around digital inclusion – and exclusion – as it develops but until at least the next NPC conference in 2021.

SENIOR REPORTER

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