

Michelle's Message



With DM advancing, I've been reflecting on events of the past year while writing the addendum to the annual report – the sheer scale of industrial work the NUJ has been engaged in, the many victories and wins for our members, really stand out.

They've all involved a sterling effort from members, reps and officials, working together to deliver up an agreement with employers intended to help shape the industrial relationship and improve collective terms and conditions.

News of the conclusion of negotiations with one employer this month was a red letter Day for all involved. The path to recognition at Iran International has been the most arduous and painful of journeys and reaching an agreement was a very special – and emotional – moment. No sooner had our national broadcasting official shared the news with me and our reps then we were all exchanging emails, with some of us in tears. Our reps spoke of their joy after keeping the faith in the face of the odds.

My tears were of pride in their strength of character and fortitude in sticking with the NUJ in the face of the most stressful and challenging of difficulties over the past couple of years – the kind no-one should have to put up with simply for wanting to organise collectively in the union of their choice. The pressure they have faced has been extreme and wholly unacceptable.

NUJ members have supported our Iran International chapel through this long process – sending message of support and speaking out publicly when the company tried to thwart the application for recognition by signing a secret sweetheart deal with the British Association of Journalists. A deal their general secretary charmingly likened to “walking past a sweet shop when the owner comes out with a big bag of sweets and offers them to you for free, ‘of course you're going to say yes.’” In the face of public pressure, BAJ walked away from the deal – although we subsequently discovered through the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) process that they went on to sign a second secret recognition deal just days after publicly disavowing the first. Despicable behaviour from a union not worthy of the name.

Re-reading those solidarity messages [<https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/messages-of-support-flood-in-for-iran-international-chapel.html>] this week,

When the Iran International recognition deal was eventually done, there were tears of relief from members and for me tears of pride.

from NUJ members and reps right across the unions, is also emotional as I know how much they buoyed our chapel members and gave them heart to fight on when the situation seemed almost hopeless.

Dealing with pressure to quit the NUJ, to join BAJ to provide them with a fig-leaf of legitimacy, supporting members who felt threatened and bullied, keeping the chapel together – it's been quite the slog for our reps. It's also one that led to the forced redundancy of our amazing FoC and another founding committee member – both cases we're pursuing for trade union victimisation through the tribunal process. Our team, including lawyers from Thompsons, ensured our arguments through the CAC won out, and eventually a recognition deal has been reached.

It's not the end of a process of course, this is simply the beginning. It's going to take some collective effort to improve industrial relations and to start the real work at hand. It's important our chapel committee has a period of stability to regroup and focus with chapel members on the priorities they would like to see addressed in the coming months.

It's twenty years since my own involvement as a young rep helping revitalise a chapel and regaining recognition at Express Newspapers – spurred into action by the overnight sale of the newspapers to Richard Desmond,

a little-known purveyor of porn mags and OK magazine. We were supported by then newspapers organiser Jeremy Dear. Just as it looked like the NUJ was about to get its first national newspaper recognition back in many years, a spat over the imposed closure of the staff canteen had Jeremy receiving ever more angry early morning messages from executives arriving at our Blackfriars Road office, the Grey Lubyanka. We'd commissioned a cartoon – a brilliant depiction of Desmond, legs up on his desk, fat cigar in hand, his butler serving up a banana on a silver platter (all true) with a group of hungry hacks in the doorway. I'd stayed in the office until late the night before, and worked my way around the building sticking up posters everywhere – on pillars, noticeboards, toilet doors, lifts, the stairwells... Given the company had refused to talk to the chapel reps, we thought we'd make them take notice another way. And how they did.

First entreaties to remove them all before the chairman's chauffeur arrived in SE1, then threats to kibosh any recognition deal before it even got off the ground. All while the butler was dispatched to tear down posters – just as quickly replaced by NUJ members. We stood firm and within hours we had the discussions we had first sought to ensure that staff working through the nights and weekends – without the perk of a liveried butler on hand – were fed and watered.

We got our recognition deal and embarked upon what was to be many crazy years of dealing with dysfunction and using our collective strength to neuter the management's worst excesses and secure better terms and conditions for our members.

That first brush was a lesson for me – in sticking together, in the power of satire, and in the lengths some will go to in order to protect the ego and vanity of an overgrown toddler in an executive suit.

More than any other union, the NUJ has a vast number of collective agreements, all of which we put significant collective

REASONS TO JOIN

Networking

The union puts on events for media workers to come together to share their knowledge and expertise. These can be by sector, such as the freelance forums and photographers' summits, or cross-sector on issues that unite all media workers. Students and newcomers can benefit from meeting experienced members in the industry.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at nuj.org.uk/join

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effort into securing regardless of size. We do that because we know the real difference they can make to our members' lives – they are the conduit to a genuine voice at work. Something former general secretary John Foster knew instinctively when he pioneered the Press for Union Rights campaign that led

to the Fairness at Work legislation. An imperfect but pivotal law that restored a legal right to recognition and spurred organisation across the NUJ ever since – enabling members to breathe life and spirit into those agreements, working together to ensure a collective voice at work becomes a reality.

DM Update

DM but not as you know it

Tim Dawson sets the scene for a virtual DM, plus events now open to all members

Imagine, for a moment, that somewhere in Birmingham's Acorn Hotel, in the year of 1907, there is a crack in the space/time continuum. Through this, a delegate to the NUJ's inaugural annual meeting inadvertently slips. From Edwardian England they emerge into Southport's Floral Hall in April 2018 where the NUJ's most recent delegate meeting is in full swing. Ubiquitous digital devices, the absence of hats, and air free from tobacco smoke may bewilder our time traveller for a moment, but once they focused on the NUJ at work much would be reassuringly familiar.

At heart, our union's policy making and priority setting have changed little during an otherwise turbulent century. Branches and other tabling bodies draft motions describing policy positions and changes to our union's rule book. These are published in a lengthy final agenda document. Then delegates gather to argue the toss - adopting or rejecting propositions by show of hands.

If, however, that same activist logs on to our first virtual delegate meeting at the end of May 2021, it will be a radically changed format they encounter. Had Covid-19 not swept the world the spring before last, the NUJ would have assembled in Southport in April 2020 for a meeting much like those that have taken place for more than a century. Lockdown put paid to that and DM had to be postponed to May this year.

Hitherto, only world wars have interrupted the NUJ's decision and policy making. As the current crisis took hold, it became clear that our rule book was ill-suited to the circumstances.

The union decided to make an opportunity out of what was a crisis.

Moving all proceedings online also meant that parts of DM could be opened up to all members. From Monday 17 May a series of online events, including the 5pm Talk-Ins, a series of panel events with expert guests, fringe meetings and sectoral get togethers will be open to all members, including a show with comedian Mark Thomas and friends in aid of the union's charities.

On the Friday and Saturday delegates will settle down to do the real business of conference. The video platform will be one and the electronic voting system should, hopefully, end all card vote disputes. The order paper will, in essence, be that from last April, although with modifications. To streamline proceedings, Standing Orders Committee (the elected body that runs the Delegate Meeting) has taken all uncontroversial motions under Standing Order 3, known as SO3. This allows motions to be adopted into policy without discussion. Should any prove to

be controversial, delegates can object, and a conventional debate initiated.

Where tabling bodies have submitted rule-changing motions that have been overtaken by events, they can update their texts. For example the NEC's motion to revise subscription levels which, of necessity, must contain a future date from which a change will occur, will need that addition.

Tabling bodies have also been given a fresh window to propose Late Notice Motions, referring to events that have occurred since the deadline for the conference's main business. The format for discussions - proposers, seconders and alternative speeches for and against - will be just as usual. Our observer from the union's founding conference may well experience brain melt at the prospect of conferring with a camera. Hopefully, streaming's rhetorical requirements won't tax the rest of us unduly after 12 months on Zoom. What our Edwardian interloper will, hopefully, recognise is that, despite our deliberations being shared in the form of pixels, they remain true to the NUJ's robust democratic traditions.



DM

Financing the union

After seven years without a subscriptions increase, rates must rise to maintain a top-level service, argues Chris Frost

The union's national executive council (NEC) has agreed the union's subs should increase in July 2021.

Members' payments have held at the same level for the past seven years but, despite various cost savings, including reducing staff through restructuring, the union now needs to increase its income or risk its ability to support members in the future.

Failure to do so would mean journalists would cease to have the specialist support that has been so invaluable to so many over the years, leaving members to struggle alone with hostile employers, low salaries, vicious social media and a government determined to prevent criticism.

Our present income from subs in 20/21 is projected to be £4.73m, despite an increase in membership during the past year, but our costs are now running closer to £5.5m. Media redundancies and changing working patterns throughout the UK and Ireland have

reduced membership by 21.8 per cent in the past 10 years from 28,170 to 22,027.

Significant savings have been made and the Covid-19 pandemic measures, such as reductions in travel costs and the temporary suspension of printed copies of the Journalist have cut costs significantly. This allowed the union to continue functioning during this past difficult year, but no further savings of significance can be made without massively reducing its services.

Organising collective action over working conditions and personal workplace support is at the heart of the union. The NUJ provides a level of service that is significantly more than most unions through our democratic structures, from local chapels to the NEC and our paid organisers. All of our organisers, from the general secretary down, undertake personal casework. NUJ legal and industrial representation has secured more than £9m for members in the past year alone.

The union campaigns for members on issues such as media freedom, government policy, media training, education and international issues, represents members and their views to government and other authorities. It organises professional training for members and provides support services, such as legal advice and insurance services, as well as shopping discounts schemes.

There is an understandable concern that an increase in subs could lead to a fall in membership, but the union's subs structure means those earning less than £25,000 can limit what they pay to 1 per cent of their income; 60 per cent of new recruits in 2019 fell into that category.

The NEC will ask our Delegate Meeting next week to approve a change in subscriptions, so members earning less than £14,500 per annum (€16,000) will only be asked to pay £12 (€12.60) a month from July. Those earning less than £16,000 (€17,500) in 2022 will only pay £13 (€13.80) a month. For all other members the subs will rise in 2021 by another (£1) (€1) a month for all earning up to £20,000 (€24,000) p.a., £2 (€2) a month for those earning from £20,000 (€24,000) p.a. to £29,000 (€36,000) p.a. and an additional £3 (€3) a month for those earning more than £29,000 (€36,000) pa.

Journalist safety

An NEC motion will call for a major campaign to protect members from the escalating levels of attacks and intimidation. It commends the union's role in the government's action plan on the safety of journalists and says the union will prioritise the development of a safety toolkit, greater engagement with the police, put pressure

on the tech giants to end online abuse and encourage members to respond to the UK government's call for evidence on threats to journalists.

Recovery plan

The NEC will call on the union to step up its work across the UK and Ireland to secure a plural and vital media as set out in the union's News Recovery

Plan, with a levy on the tech giants to fund public interest journalism, a stable funding model for public service broadcasters, greater media literacy, a package of tax breaks for newspapers and reform of media ownership rules.

Media freedom

A third NEC Late Notice Motion backs the International Federation

of Journalists' Global Journalism white paper, noting its warnings on the decline of media freedom. It pledges the union to participate in the global effort to stand up for press freedom and the rights of journalists by lobbying for the release of the more than 250 jailed journalists around the world and the enactment of the IFJ's International Safety Convention.

DM

DM Week Events

Welcome to DM week, here is the programme of events, taster training sessions and a special gig during the week leading up to DM weekend.

Every evening from 5pm Monday to Thursday of DM week
SPM Talk-ins.

Starting on Monday 17 May, you can take part in a series of debates and discussions with an expert panel.

Monday 17 May, 17.00
Following the Road Map: NUJ's News Recovery Plan.

Join **Michelle Stanistreet** and NUJ colleagues who have been working with the Westminster, Irish, Welsh and Scottish governments to put in place measures to bring about a vibrant, diverse and plural press as the industry recovers from the pandemic. Speakers: **Siobhan Holliman**, joint chair, Irish Executive Council and member of the Irish government's Future of Media Commission; **Joyce McMillan**, NUJ Edinburgh Freelance branch chair and a member of the Scottish government's short-life working group on public interest journalism; **Nick Powell**, chair of the NUJ's Welsh Executive Council; and **Andy Grimm**, reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times and lay activist at The NewsGuild - Communications Workers of America.

Tuesday 18 May, 17.00

The Right to Know.

NUJ president **Sian Jones**, NUJ president, introduces: **Rob Evans**, Guardian reporter; **Jenna Corderoy**, openDemocracy; **Paul Lashmar** investigative journalist and research academic; **Lizzie Dearden**, home affairs and security correspondent at The Independent; **Aasma Day**, former HuffPost correspondent and JP investigations unit; and **Tim Dawson**, NUJ NEC, to discuss the challenges they face when reporting in the public interest.

Wednesday 19 May, 17.00

Journalism under attack: unions fight back!

From killings to jailings, from internet shutdowns to job cuts and media closures journalism across the globe is under threat. Join the International Federation of Journalists and unions from around the world to hear about how unions are fighting back - and what you can do to stand in solidarity. **Jeremy Dear**, IFJ deputy general secretary, will chair a panel of speakers including;

Sakeus Iikela, General Secretary of the Namibia Media Professionals Union, talking about the strike at NBC; **Sabina Inderjit**, General Secretary of the Indian Journalists Union, speaking about the siege of Kashmir and the use of sedition laws against journalists; **Jim Boumelha**, IFJ Honorary Treasurer, on the unions' fight against impunity; plus contributions from Turkey and the US.

Thursday 20 May, 17.00

Defending public service broadcasting.

The BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, S4C have a long and proud tradition in the UK, delivering impartial and trusted news and UK-originated programmes. They were the heroes of the pandemic as people tuned into them for trusted news. **Rebecca Keating**, Radio 4's Today programme output editor, will ask **Jo Stevens**, Labour's media and digital shadow secretary, **Sir Peter Bazalgette**, ITV chair, **Owen Evans** S4C chief executive, **Patrick Barwise**, co-author of The War Against the BBC and **Cearbhall Ó Síocháin**, RTÉ Irish language broadcaster, how the PSBs can stave off the threats of cuts to journalist jobs, political interference and competition from the likes of Netflix and Disney+.



Skills taster workshops.

There is a programme of lunch-time taster skills classes, to introduce you to accomplishments:

Monday 17 May, 12.30-14.30
News writing with David McKay, NUJ Training Scotland.

News writing is a craft, not an art, where facts are king and simplicity is all.

Email: amyw@nuj.org.uk to book.

Tuesday 18 May, 12.30-13.30
Podcasting taster with Dan Mason.

With so many journalists working from home, there has never been a better time to launch a podcast. With a little know-how, you can join the podcast boom and get started for free.

Wednesday 19 May, 12.30-13.30
Social media campaigning taster with Dan Mason.

Social media is a vital tool in getting your message across. The key to a good social media campaign is a structured approach, creative content and result that hits a measured target.

Thursday 20 May, 12.30-14.30
Introduction to scriptwriting with James Doherty.

NUJ Training Scotland. You will learn about what makes good stories, the characters that drive them and how to bring ideas to life.

Email: amyw@nuj.org.uk to book.

15.00-16.00
Fast and Free Online Tools for Journalists with Dan Mason.

Includes tools for reading, sharing, searching and storytelling, as well as tips that cover research, networking and self-promotion.

Trade union workshops
Wednesday 12.00-13.00

Organising and recruitment in a hybrid/remote workplace.

With **Caroline Holmes**, NUJ reps' training co-ordinator.

Stand up for Journalism gig: Friday night social

Thursday 20 May at 19.30

Join comedian **Mark Thomas**, winner of Amnesty Freedom of Expression award for his show about spy cops and in the Guinness Book of World Records for attending the most political demos in a day; **Shazia Mirza**, award-winning British stand-up comedian and star of *Celebrity Island* with Bear Grylls; and **Jonny & The Baptists**, musical satirists as seen on TV and radio; for a Friday night social starting at 19.30.

This gig is free – although we're asking everyone who registers to make a donation to the NUJ's welfare charity, NUJ Extra, and the George Viner Memorial Fund, which awards training bursaries to aspiring black and minority ethnic journalists. Tickets for the gig will be snapped up quickly so book your Friday night in now!



From top: Mark Thomas, Jonny & The Baptists and Shazia Mirza



Tuesday 12.00-13.00
Equality in Action:

How chapels can embed equality into all their structures and policies, with **Natasha Hirst**, Equality Council chair,

Caroline Holmes, NUJ reps' training, **Federica Cocco**, FT rep & **Raj Ford**, BBC rep.

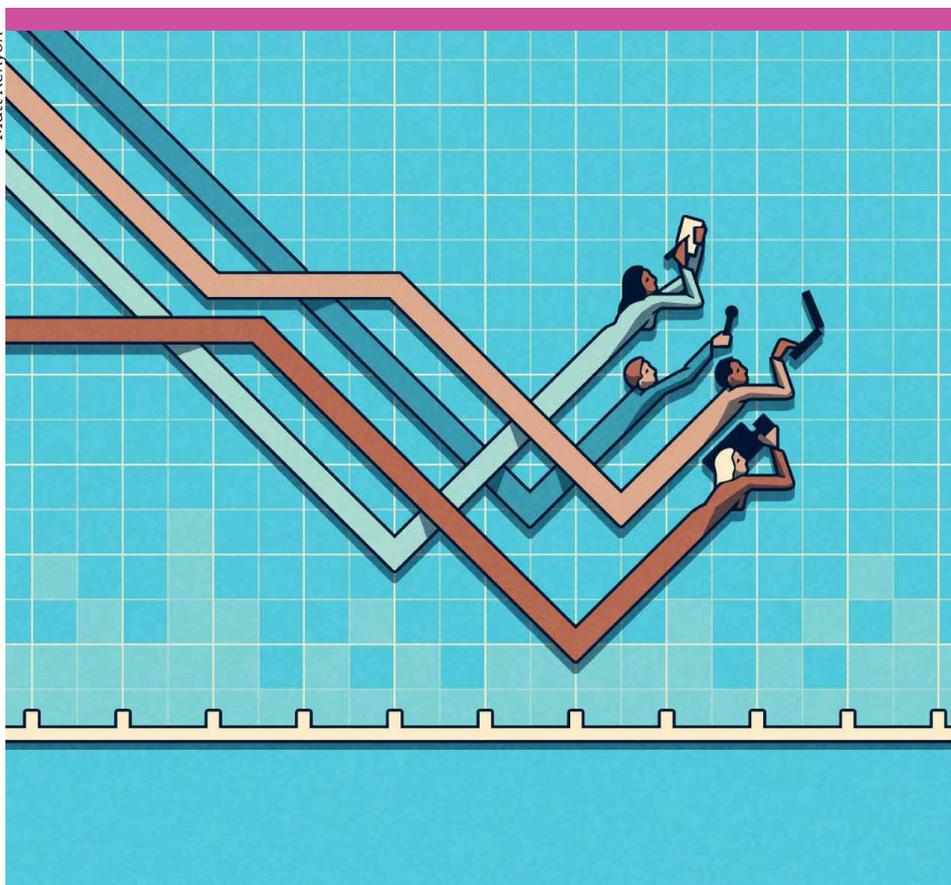
Special event
Thursday 20 May at 18.30
Remembering Lyra McKee.

Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary introduces a panel discussion on the life and legacy of NUJ member Lyra McKee, left, who was killed in Derry on 18 April 2019. Guests will include **Sara Canning**, Lyra's partner, **Kathryn Johnson**, freelance journalist and friend of Lyra and **Owen Reidy**, assistant general secretary, ICTU.

BOOK FOR ALL EVENTS:
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/learn/ems-event-calendar/nuj-delegate-meeting-2021-full.html>

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



Battered but not beaten

Despite initial doomsaying, the pandemic has injected innovation and change for good in the media, argues Ian Burrell

A little over a year ago, much of the news media appeared to be facing annihilation. With locked-down consumers avoiding newsagents for fear of catching Covid-19, titles that depended on cash sales were deprived of even the dwindling circulation revenues that had kept them viable.

Around the country printing presses were turned off, from Northumberland's News Post Leader to Brighton & Hove's Independent, as distribution became impossible. National papers saw physical sales fall by 30 per cent. Hardest hit were free titles that served commuters. Christian May, editor of City AM,

messaged colleagues from self-isolation in March 2020 to tell them the print edition was being suspended. He said Covid-19 presented the business with the "two horns of a buffalo".

In America, Joshua Benton, head of Harvard University's Nieman Journalism Lab, prophesied doom. "We'll see cities lose their last daily newspapers at a scale far beyond anything this country has seen."

The World Economic Forum published an article warning the pandemic signalled "the imminent loss of local news".

Yet the picture today, as the United Kingdom lifts its latest Covid restrictions, is of a news media battered but not beaten. The pandemic has also introduced a new working culture which may have changed the practice of journalism forever. "The industry hasn't sunk into a depression, it has responded really positively and you can see innovation almost everywhere you look," says Douglas McCabe, CEO of Enders Analysis.

Charlie Beckett, media professor at the London School of Economics, is similarly impressed. "The pandemic has been very good for the news industry in the sense that we have seen huge [online] traffic, increases in subscriptions and, vitally, much more attention paid to mainstream media," he says. "Generally speaking, I think UK media responded very well."

The fears expressed for the local press were not unfounded. The chief threats to its existence – the demise of print sales and falling ad revenues – were only exacerbated by the pandemic. But the UK's quality national press has, in many ways, thrived during the crisis.

The Guardian reports a 43 per cent increase in digital reader support, with 268,000 additional subscriptions and recurring payments. Its total of 900,000 paying supporters is up from 632,000 before the pandemic. The Telegraph announced in March that it had passed the 600,000 subscriber mark in print and digital, worth an average £188 per reader, and claims to be on course for its target of 1m subscribers by 2023.

Covid-19 has helped to make the case that quality journalism is worth paying for online. "We can see a sustainable future for quality publications with subscription models," says Nic Newman of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Traffic to news sites surged, especially during the first lockdown, improving programmatic ad revenues. Free from the distribution issues of print rivals, online-only The Independent racked up pre-tax profits of £2.7m in the year to 27 September 2020, up 17 per cent on the year before.

Douglas McCabe estimates that UK publishers added 800,000 paying customers during the crisis. "It's funny that a pandemic can force companies to make sharper decisions," he says. "One of the reasons subscription couldn't work in the news industry [previously] was that the news industry didn't experiment and make it work." He has praised publishers for introducing niche newsletters and podcasts to improve their editorial offerings. News UK's launch of Times Radio during the crisis was "extraordinary", he says. "It's a completely different experience of The Times than anyone has had before."

Broadcast news is also emerging from the pandemic in a stronger place. At regional and local level, broadcast news has "never been so popular" as audiences have flocked to public service outlets for trusted coverage, says Paul Siegert, the NUJ's national broadcasting organiser. He says BBC local radio's Make A Difference campaign played a key role in building community cohesion during lockdown.

But some journalists at the BBC and ITV believe those broadcasters were wrong to impose pay freezes on hard-working staff after their newsrooms delivered a big increase in public confidence. ITV paid staff an unconsolidated bonus of £750 for their efforts, while BBC staff received an extra day's holiday.

"There is a sense of anger that people went beyond the call of duty during the pandemic, being out on the streets and in hospitals reporting on what's going on,"

says Paul Siegert. "Many risked their own health to bring these stories to people and they feel let down that there has not been more financial reward for them."

While BBC News continues to implement a pre-pandemic programme of job cuts, the new TV channel GB News is recruiting.

The tech giants have had a good pandemic, with profits soaring and the shares prices of Facebook, Alphabet and Microsoft hitting an all-time high. Last month's Financial Times reported that first-quarter revenues at Facebook increased 48 per cent to \$26.1bn. That is why the NEC's motion to DM demands urgent action to ensure the tech giants pay their share, after years of benefiting from news content they have not funded.

"The industry has responded positively and you can see innovation almost everywhere"

Yet local papers remain in peril. At the onset of the crisis, Newsquest and JPIMedia announced pay cuts and put large numbers of staff on the government's furlough scheme. Months later, Newsquest imposed job losses across the country, prompting Chris Morley, the NUJ's Northern & Midlands senior organiser, to complain that furlough was "fast turning into a waiting room for redundancy".

More positively, Brian Murphy, head of news operations for the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, says intense promotion of the Deliver My Newspaper scheme has led to an upturn in home delivery. "If that's what the consumer wants, then the supply chain has got to deliver that."

Local titles have also seen increased web traffic. Reach put its digital news service "Live" on a national footing, adding 50 new journalists. Morley says it's

imperative that local publishers focus on quality online information. "There is still this insatiable desire for quick and easy stories. Reliable and trusted news has worked well throughout the pandemic, so it's in publishers' interests to keep promoting it."

Reach has also announced widespread newsroom closures and a decisive shift towards working from home, leaving just 15 office "hubs" to service a national portfolio of 110 titles.

Charlie Beckett, who has been "amazed by the amount of work being done from bedrooms" under lockdown, is concerned that the strain of working in isolation from other journalists will prove detrimental. "It's not just that they can help you out on a story but the support system; the solidarity and company that you get from your colleagues."

Ceri Gould, Reach's editorial director, says its Home & Hub approach recognises that staff have lives outside of work. It allows parents to avoid 5.30am commutes and allocate their time more effectively, she claims. "The idea that you would conduct a better interview because you have been working in a newsroom is a nonsense."

Laura Davison, NUJ national organiser for newspapers and news agencies, argues the case for staff being paid home-working allowances. "There are additional costs which come with working from home; utility costs, broadband costs, having to upgrade where living arrangements aren't suitable. People working in living- or dining-rooms have lost their own private space."

We emerge from lockdown with a media that is starting to look quite different from the one at the start of the pandemic, with The Times operating as a radio station, GB News pioneering an opinionated, rolling news channel, and news executives around the country actually encouraging staff to work from home.

Covid-19 has been terrible for so many people in so many different ways but for the news industry it has so far not been the catastrophe that was predicted.

International

Kees Metselaar / Alamy Stock Photo



Democracy dies in darkness

Reports show 70 per cent of the globe does not have access to a free press, Tara Conlan investigates

Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent, has a long and award-winning career which has taken her to many trouble spots across the globe and she is in no doubt that journalism and journalists are under attack as never before.

The numbers tell the story. The Press Gazette's Media Freedom Health Check revealed this March that 70 per cent of the world's population has little media freedom. The index used 18 indicators, including pluralism and journalists' safety to evaluate each country under a traffic light system. Just eight countries – including all those in Scandinavia – were given a green light for all sectors.

But 71 countries were marked red, including Eritrea, China and Turkey.

The Media Freedom Coalition conference, hosted by Canada online in November 2020, revealed 1,000 journalists were killed worldwide during the past 12 years; in 2019 49 were killed,

389 in prison, 57 held hostage and nine in 10 killings of journalists remained unsolved.

Lyse Doucet said: "I don't think we've lived in a time where people in power, people who don't want to be written about, don't want to be held to account and don't want questions asked or answered can act with impunity and get away with it. You need more than the fingers on your two hands to count the number of places where journalists have been murdered in broad daylight and there is no accountability. Questions go unanswered, the grief of families and friends is unrepaired and justice is denied."

All this is not happening just in far-off conflict zones. While Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark lead the World Press Freedom Index of 180 countries, some of the EU's members such as Malta, Hungary and Bulgaria rank among the lowest.

An independent press is one of the cornerstones of democracy but political polarisation, the rise of social media and advertising money moving from publishers to tech companies – leading to fewer resources for some publishers – have been blamed for the situation, together with the rise of authoritarian political leaders.

As a Reuters Institute's research paper, *What can be done? Digital Media Policy Options for Europe (and beyond)*, said in 2019: "If journalism is undermined, it will leave European citizens less able to play an active and informed part in the political process and European democracies less resilient to internal and external threats."

One of the key aspects it identified was funding. "Given the rapid decline of legacy businesses, this funding will have to come from a combination of a new, digital, business of news and various forms of public support, including for independent public-service media and non-profit media," argued the paper.

Increasingly governments are blocking a plural press. In Poland, the government has targeted independent media outlets with a levy on media advertising revenue. Hungary's media regulator refused to renew the licence of an opposition-leaning station called Klubrádió in February and Czech TV has been stacked with governors sympathetic to the government just ahead of a parliamentary election. Meanwhile, in Russia journalists say there is increasing pressure on independent media, with popular site Meduza branded a "foreign agent".

Shanthi Kalathil, director of the US International Forum for Democratic Studies at the National Endowment for Democracy, said: "Illiberal regimes and others have actively seized upon the new media environment to spread disinformation, fuel polarisation and exploit democratic vulnerabilities."

Noel Curran, European Broadcasting Union director general, said it was not a coincidence that the top 15 countries

for media freedom were all countries with a strong public service media (PSM) presence. But keeping PSM independent requires pressure on governments to ensure that all avenues are pursued to maintain press freedom, including appointments to their boards and adequate funding.

On World Press Freedom Day, Monday 3 May, the NUJ pointed to harmful UK legislative measures, including the government's Overseas Operations Bill which lets "the powerful hide from accountability" and the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which poses a substantial threat to public interest journalism.

International co-operation is key. The Global Pledge on Media Freedom was launched in 2019 and has been signed by more than 40 countries. It says signatories must shine a light on violations and abuses of media freedom and they must encourage regulatory environments promoting transparency in judicial processes.

Two of those signatories were the United States and France. Yet, according to Jim Boumelha, International Federation of Journalists' honorary treasurer, the corrosive effect of Donald Trump's negative tweets about the press while he was president, "created a toxic atmosphere that was picked up by so many other governments that journalists became, almost overnight, branded enemies of the people". And in France, the government's attempt to pass a security bill to prevent journalists from taking pictures of police during demonstrations has been met with protests from the public.

"The decline of the newsroom," said Jim Boumelha, "especially following the pandemic, makes it much more difficult for journalists to do their job and to fund and protect themselves." But recent stories, including exposing David Cameron's lobbying links provides evidence of hope that, despite the pressures they are under, journalists will continue to hold power to account.

The chilling fields

While journalism is under attack as never before, "online violence...has become the new frontline in journalism safety - and women journalists sit at the epicentre of risk", according to a study called *The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence Against Women Journalists*.

Put together by the International Centre for Journalists and Unesco, it was released on 30 April to coincide with the World Press Freedom Conference.

The global survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries included examining more than 2.5 million posts on Facebook and Twitter directed at Maria Ressa, a Filipina-American journalist and author in the Philippines, and the British investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr. It found that there was a sharp increase in threats, with "women journalists now more exposed to online violence than ever". Nearly three-quarters of women respondents said they had experienced online violence, with 20 per cent saying it spilled into real-life abuse.

The report said: "Online violence against women journalists is designed to: belittle, humiliate, and shame; induce fear, silence, and retreat; discredit them professionally, undermining accountability journalism and trust in facts; and chill their active participation (along with that of their sources, colleagues and audiences) in public debate. This amounts to an attack on democratic deliberation and media freedom... For too long, the emphasis has been on making women journalists responsible for their own defence and protection, rather than making the perpetrators and instigators, the platform enablers, and law enforcement and media employers accountable."

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said: "There is a clear and pressing need for harsher penalties to deter and punish the perpetrators, and we also need more engagement and co-ordination between law-makers, social media platforms, employers, unions and independent safety experts. The NUJ endorses many of the recommendations in the Unesco report and we want to see effective solutions implemented via cross-sectoral efforts."

The BBC's Lyse Doucet said: "In some countries it's no longer safe enough to ask the questions... and in others you can, but you won't get the answers. And so, democracy dies in darkness." She highlighted Afghanistan where, despite help from her and BBC Media Action to improve legislation protecting journalists, death threats and attacks are increasing in the country as Nato-led forces withdraw.

More than 300 Afghan women journalists have quit their job since the spate of female media workers' killings in the country, according to a report by the IFJ.

Malala Maiwand, a female journalist at Afghanistan's Enikass TV, was murdered in December 2020 and three more women colleagues were killed in March - Shahnaz Raufi, Mursal Waheedi and Saadia Sadat. Another colleague, Nadia Momand, subsequently posted a picture on social media of herself still working but her father wanted her to stay at home.

Lyse messaged Nadia Momand: "She told me, 'I love journalism, but I also love to live,' which seems to sum it up - you have to choose between your love of journalism or your love of life. How can we possibly be in this sort of situation in 2021?"

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