



# October 2020 Branch

*With the threat of a second major wave of Covid-19, Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, sets out how the union is supporting members' well-being and battling on the industrial front to preserve jobs and secure fair deal for freelances*

**A**s the Covid-19 infection rate rises and the UK and Irish governments put forward further rules and restrictions, it all bodes for a challenging winter ahead.

The union is providing a range of resources to help members get through this crisis and NUJ Training, in collaboration with the union's health and safety committee, is now offering 90-minute webinars to branches and NUJ committee members called Working Safely through the Pandemic. Each session will start with a short presentation identifying some of the challenges you may face in working safely - whether that's from home, the office, or a blend of the two - followed by the chance to ask questions.

Meanwhile we will be battling on behalf of members on the industrial front as the current furlough scheme comes to a close at the end of this month, with a clear focus on preserving jobs and standards of journalism. Through the TUC the movement continues to push for a National Recovery Council, bringing trade unions together with government and industry to prioritise an economic recovery that puts jobs and livelihoods first.

We are continuing to stress the gaps in provision for freelances and the self-employed in dialogue with the Treasury, with a major new campaign launching across the union later this month to call for a fair deal for

freelances. My discussions with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's stakeholder's group are ongoing; the NUJ continues to raise the need for quarantine exemptions; a Brexit deal that enables journalists to cross borders with ease to do their jobs; a package of tax credits, to include Jobs for Journalists, advertising breaks and tax credits for digital and print subscriptions; as well as all other aspects of our NUJ News Recovery Plan.

Thanks to all members who've taken part in our safety survey - it's generated really helpful contributions to our work to help shape the action plan of the new National Committee for the Protection of Journalists which continues through the autumn. Only this week the union has had to call on the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland to investigate the failure of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to act on violent threats made against Sunday World reporter Patricia Devlin and her family. As well as the awful personal impact, we know how impunity for those who choose to threaten, harass and attempt to silence journalists has a collective chilling impact on the journalistic community.

At a time when retraining and new skills should be top of the government's agenda, it was particularly head-slapping to learn of the bizarre decision to end the funding of the Union Learning Fund for England (ULF). This shows the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister who says he is committed to boosting the



delivery of skills. NUJ members have greatly benefited from the training and resources provided by the Federation of Entertainment Unions' project over successive years. Independent analysis of the scheme has shown how it has contributed hugely to the economy.

We will be joining the TUC's public #SaveUnionLearning campaign to rescue the union learning project and will be asking you to sign a petition telling Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, to reverse the decision. In 2019-20, the ULF supported more than 200,000 learners in workplaces across England - both union members and non-members. For every ULF £1 spent there is a return of £12.30: £7.60 to the worker, £4.70 to the employer.

Branches should be getting right behind this campaign and writing to their local MPs. Watch out for more information on the NUJ and TUC websites.

Rest assured the TUC will be doing all it can to revoke this wrongheaded decision.

In Solidarity,

**Michelle Stanistreet**

# COVID-19

02



## As seen on TV...

*Pippa Crerar, Daily Mirror political editor, on press and government relations during the pandemic*

The appointment of Allegra Stratton as Boris Johnson's White House-style press secretary is a defining moment in the relationship between Number 10 and the media. I hope the intention is to increase scrutiny and accountability. But I fear that it could be used as an excuse to reduce transparency by limiting questions, those who can ask them, or our on-the-record access to ministers.

Britain has a parliamentary system, not a presidential one. It also has a Number 10 that has adopted a particularly belligerent approach to the media. They may claim the new system is designed to increase transparency, but many in political journalism regard that with scepticism. They suspect Downing Street wants to go straight over the heads of the press directly to the public, removing a crucial layer of accountability.

The appointment is one fraught with risk for the government. Stratton may be an experienced and respected professional, but she is also acting as the PM's frontman at a time when more ire is directed towards him than ever. When things go wrong, as they inevitably

will, they will be beamed in full technicolour glory straight into peoples' living rooms.

The lobby's relationship with government changed when the pandemic hit. Up until that point, it was extremely combative as the Tories had never quite shifted out of campaigning mode after the election. It culminated in the now infamous Brexit briefing when political editors were divided into two groups depending on whether they were in favour or not, on the orders of the PM's pugilistic director of communications Lee Cain. The whole group walked out in protest.

But then the pandemic struck. No 10 called a truce. After criticism that it had been selectively briefing during a national crisis, the government moved to daily press conferences. As this year's press gallery chair, I was responsible for drawing up a rota for questions. We tried to broaden the conversation, bringing in specialist publications, health/ science editors and regional reporters.

Just as the government came under attack for its handling of the pandemic, so did the media for some of our coverage. Many people felt we didn't challenge them

enough in the early days, others felt that we challenged too much. The reality is that, just like the rest of the country, we were dealing with an unprecedented situation. Parliament was shut down for four weeks. Political journalism is not designed to work in isolation.

After the Mirror and The Guardian broke the Dominic Cummings lockdown story, the PM refused to let his top scientific advisers Prof Chris Whitty and Sir Patrick Vallance answer questions. He claimed they didn't want to be dragged into the politics. It was Orwellian.

Part of the government's problem has been its communications strategy. This has too often been confused, muddled by policy U-turns, complicated by different approaches across the UK and undermined by high-profile breaches. Dominic Cummings gets blamed for much of that, but building him up into some sort of all-knowing genius ultimately just lets the PM off the hook.

In these dark times, with the media being hit financially together with the rest of the economy, there are still reasons for hope for journalism. Trust in established media rose during the first lockdown. We should harness that faith and remind the public that journalism is still a force for good.

Matt Kenyon

## Felling the tech giants



One of the major planks of the NUJ's News Recovery Plan is that the tech giants pay their way after years of using journalistic content for free.

The plan calls for a one-off windfall tax of 6 per cent from the likes of Facebook and Google, then a levy based on profits imposed as part of a Digital Services Tax to fund public interest journalism. The union has long advocated a levy and now a consensus is growing. Governments and the EU have become bolder in calling out these companies for the great harm caused by their market dominance and failure to self-regulate while the platforms are used by trolls and to disseminate false news, lies and hate.

A report by the United States' Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law [<https://cnb.cx/34yqH6b>] released this month concluded that the dominance of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google has put the USA's economy and democracy at stake. They have acquired hundreds of companies in the past 10 years. The committee said Congress must quash their market monopoly and change antitrust laws which could result in parts of their businesses

being separated. American news industry representatives described how harmful Google and Facebook had been. Since 2006, newspaper advertising revenue fell by more than 50 per cent. Despite significant growth in online traffic, titles were closing and the number of journalists' posts halved. "As a result, communities throughout the United States are increasingly going without sources for local news," the report said. News aggregation packages removed stories from their sources and changes to Google's and Facebook's algorithms had devastating effects on news publishers' digital strategies. The report linked reduced quality local news to lower rates of voter turnout and lower levels of social cohesion.

The committee drew on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's draft code of conduct to force the tech giants to negotiate with publishers over fair payment and algorithm changes. If no agreement is reached, the code allows an arbitrator to decide terms. Google and Facebook responded by threatening to ditch Australian news from their platforms and the big tech bosses were equally

truculent during questioning from the US committee.

Closer to home, the News Media Association has called on the UK government to legislate to make the tech giants pay for news. It said that of about £14bn spent on digital ads in 2019, 80 per cent was earned by Google and Facebook, with national and local news websites taking just 4 per cent.

## Action

- Discuss how your branch can lobby for curbs on the tech giants' powers

- Promote the News Recovery Plan to local and regional politicians  
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-launches-news-recovery-plan/>



# CAMPAIGN

## Hands off our BBC

*Back the broadcaster attacked from all sides, says NUJ broadcasting organiser, Paul Siegert*

**W**hen a man who says he doesn't watch television and was fined for non-payment of his TV licence has to rule himself out of heading the corporation you realise you're living in bizarre times.

Charles Moore, the former editor of the Daily Telegraph, has now passed up the chance, apparently placed on a plate by the Prime Minister to become chair of the BBC

board. The Sunday Times revealed it was almost a done deal and that Paul Dacre, former editor of the Daily Mail, was favourite for chair of the broadcasting watchdog, Ofcom.

For a government quite happy to break international law, a flagrant flouting of the formal appointment processes seemed perfectly possible. Julian Knight, Conservative chair of the MPs' culture and media committee, said having a TV licence evader as chair was tantamount to a convicted fraudster running a bank.

It was surely no coincidence that this championing of the two right-wing arch critics of the BBC came about the same time Tim Davie was about to take over as director general. Maybe it was a ruse to persuade him Baroness Morgan, earlier punted as chair, might not be that bad after all, despite likening the BBC to Blockbuster, the defunct video rental firm? Current chair David Clementi is to step down in February.

The briefing was a sign that the gloves are back on again. Johnson's government made no secret of its antipathy to the BBC: unnamed sources (Dominic Cummings) said it would be "whacked", ministers boycotted

Radio 4's Today and Whitehall consulted on decriminalising licence-fee evasion. Then Covid-19 arrived and the PM had another fight on his hands - the BBC acquitted itself as the model public service broadcaster, providing trusted news and a whole range of services. Now Kelvin Mackenzie, former Sun editor and supporter of the #DefundtheBBC movement says he should be chair (surely a wind-up) and would halve the licence fee, close stations and flog online to the commercial sector. Meanwhile, the NUJ has been in the throes of dealing with a huge redundancy programme. Hardest hit, the English regions, where 450 posts are to be cut. By the end of next year, the BBC will have made £800m in savings in just five years and will be landed with the bill for over-75s' licence fees and the £125m extra costs caused by Covid-19. The threat of having the non-payment of licences decriminalised remains at a possible loss of £200m. The BBC will soon be celebrating its 100th birthday. We should be fighting for another century of a properly-funded broadcaster, free from shareholder pressure, advertiser influence and the chase for ratings - and a major driver of the nation's £111bn creative sector. We must tell the government: Hands Off Our BBC.



### Info

Invite a local BBC rep to your branch meeting.

Follow the Hands Off campaign:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/hands-of-our-bbc/>

Licence-evasion briefing:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-response-to-the-dcms-consultation-on-decriminalising-tv/>

# RECRUIT

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## Promoting diversity

*A new, black member, The Voice's Izin Akhabau asks unions to listen to under-represented groups*



Izin Akhabau has just started a new role as online editor at The Voice, Britain's black national newspaper. She started her career at the BBC, where she became the youngest person to report on the News at Ten after being selected as an apprentice journalist.

She is passionate about the need for a more diverse media industry and for unions to attract young members from all backgrounds, so she produced a video on getting into journalism [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCG59Luxgng&t=442s>] for the charity TRiBE, which helps black women develop fulfilling careers.

Izin had always meant to join the NUJ, but it was only recently, after a union rep invited her to join, that she signed up. "I finished my half-completed application and thanked her for prompting me," she said. She says if unions want to involve under-represented groups, they need to start by speaking to them: "Ask them what kind of event they would find interesting, rather than running one and hoping they come. I would certainly go along to an event on how your union rep can help you tackle racism (or discrimination) at

work. "The solution is not just to get more women, non-white, working class, disabled, young or LGBTQI+ people to become members. It's about whether they are able to say things - even things that will make you, as well-meaning members and leaders, uncomfortable - and, most importantly, whether their words will result in action."

If people are not included in the organisations for which they work, these firms become unsuitable for them - which further fuels underrepresentation, she believes.

"As a black women member, would I feel comfortable talking to a rep about racism and all the micro-aggressions black people feel undermine them at work? Would the rep feel comfortable answering? We become so accustomed to not saying these things, that it becomes scary to even consider talking about them," she said. "I imagine every union rep will support people in brilliant ways, both big and small. There are always people doing excellent work which is not properly

recognised. As a recent member, I cannot profess to know all the details, but I wanted to hear what the union was saying about why there were so few black people in senior leadership, or what kept pushing black people to leave the organisation I worked for."

Industry figures show the UK media is 94 per cent white and at senior levels in television black and minority ethnic representation stood at just 8 per cent. The NUJ is working within the media to end the barriers BME journalists face, its George Viner charity has provided bursaries and support for almost 200 young BME students, many of whom have gone to successful careers and are now well-known and respected journalists.

## Action

Hold a fund-raising event for the George Viner Memorial Fund:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/rights/george-viner-memorial-fund/>

Invite one of the George Viner scholars to speak at your branch/chapel meeting

# TRAINING

06

## Keeping safe

*Whether back in the office or working from home, this webinar will address your safety needs*



**N**UJ Training, in collaboration with the union's health and safety committee, is offering 90-minute webinars to branches called Working Safely through the Pandemic.

Presented by Caroline Holmes (pictured), the co-ordinator of the NUJ's trade union training programme, the sessions will cover: understanding why it is important to look after your health and wellbeing at this time; identifying some of the challenges you face in working safely, whether from home, in the workplace or a blend of the two; being clear about what support you can expect from your employer; and identifying the help available from the NUJ.

Each session will include a short presentation followed by a chance for questions and a brief open discussion. The degree of interactivity will vary according to the number of people taking part.

While trying to maintain consistency, Caroline and the health and safety committee acknowledge that "not one size fits all", so each webinar will be delivered to meet the specific needs of members attending, including freelancers and photographers.

Adam Christie, NUJ health and

safety committee chair, said: "We hope this format will also allow the concerns of each industrial sector - books, magazines, newspapers and agencies, new media, PR and communications, broadcasting, and freelancing - to be addressed.

"We're trying to practise what we'll be preaching by hoping that none will end later than about 8pm so people can log off early enough for their sleep not to be disturbed."

The Health and Safety Committee has written to branch officers offering them the webinar either for regular meetings or as a special event. Members interested in

taking part should contact their branches: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/contacts/branch-contacts/>

Separate welfare webinars are being run for members of the national executive council, industrial chapels and the union's other councils and committees.

If you would like to become a health and safety rep, the next training sessions are Stage 1 on Wednesday 11 October and Stage 2 on Wednesday 2 December. Dates for all reps' training can be found on the NUJ website: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-trade-union-training/>

## Getting election-ready

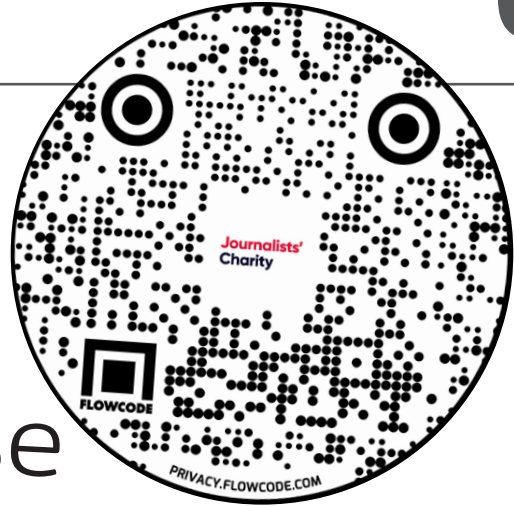
NUJ Wales is running a five-part online programme primarily to provide members working in Wales' PR industry, charities, NGOs and community organisations with the skills and tactics needed to promote their aims to political parties during election times. It is open to all members who are interested in preparing campaigns for elections. The workshops can be taken together as a series or individually, and

cover: crafting manifesto demands for your organisation; how to get the political parties to adopt elements of your manifesto; digital organising tactics for building motivation during the campaign; working with partners, such as the Electoral Commission, to encourage people to register to vote; the latest guidance under Electoral Commission restrictions; and getting out the vote. Find out more at: <https://www.nujtrainingwales.org/events/election-strategic-communications-for-an-election-year/>



# SUPPORT

## Charities' rapid response to Covid crisis



**T**he Journalists' Charity, founded by Charles Dickens more than 150 years ago, has seen many hard times in the industry since, and it became clear at the beginning of lockdown that journalists faced a range of threats. Ellen Bramley, the charity's outreach officer, said: "Our response to the crisis was simple: to highlight the incredible role being played by journalists working tirelessly to provide key information and scrutiny,

despite having their own lives turned upside down in the face of great uncertainty.

"Throughout the crisis, the charity has provided support to hundreds of journalists affected by the impact of coronavirus, responding quickly with confidential advice and emergency assistance. Since April, the charity has prevented 15 journalists and their families from losing their homes and dozens of others have received life-changing support. For some journalists, work has gradually

returned, but for many the future remains uncertain and here the charity stands ready to offer further assistance."

The NUJ's own welfare charity, NUJ Extra, often works in partnership with the Journalists' Charity to help journalists in need, and of course has also been helping many NUJ members in financial and other difficulties during this pandemic. Trustee Francis Sedgemore said: "Members should be reassured that NUJ Extra is always there for those suffering financial hardship, whether they be due to Covid-19 or other issues."

### Zooming in or Zoomed out?

The move to online branch meetings on Zoom, Teams or other platforms has led to more people joining in and a more diverse group of members attending, the union has learned anecdotally. In light of ongoing and widening Covid-19 restrictions, it is likely these remote meetings will continue for the next few months so the NUJ would like to hear

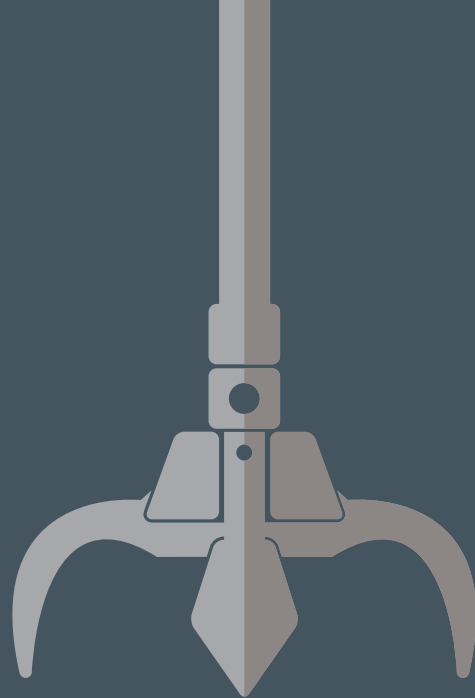
your views on the benefits and disadvantages of online branch meetings. Are there issues for those who do not have access to Zoom or feel uncomfortable with the technology? How can the NUJ support branches, whether with technological help, improving communication or ensuring that virtual meetings are fully accessible? To help the union help you, please take a few moments to complete the following survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NUJBranch1>

## Help

•  
NUJ Extra: to donate or apply for assistance, go to [www.nuj.org.uk/work/nuj-extra/](http://www.nuj.org.uk/work/nuj-extra/)

•  
The Journalists' Charity: scan the code on the logo and become a supporter [www.journalistscharity.org.uk/](http://www.journalistscharity.org.uk/)

# REASONS TO JOIN



## Diversity Matters

The media industry is one of the most socially exclusive. The NUJ fights to make the workplace socially inclusive and representative of the diverse society it serves. We protect the rights of our members and strive to ensure that media companies foster recruitment, promotion and retention of people from all backgrounds. The union has a proud record of challenging all forms of discrimination.

**Are you keeping good company?**

Join the NUJ today at

[nuj.org.uk/join](http://nuj.org.uk/join)

**NUJ**  
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