



December 2020 Branch

What a year it has been – and what an amazing job our branches have done in carrying on the vital grassroots work of the NUJ at a time when members needed support, solidarity, and a friendly face more than ever, says Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary.

Our excellent team of staff and officials, NUJ branch officers stepped up to take the plunge into remote working in order to ensure that, as far as possible, branches continued to function. Our branches and chapels have always been the beating heart of the NUJ and never more than during this unprecedented crisis.

It has been particularly heartening to see how that move to virtual has actually persuaded many more members to engage, to come along to meetings, and hear what their branch and union is up to and is achieving on their collective behalf. It's also made inter-branch contact more easily achievable and helped NEC reps and other committee and council members get along to meetings away from home.

If improved diversity and attendance is a knock-on benefit of a weird and unexpected year, at least that is a silver lining of 2021, and a lesson we can reflect on and find ways of sustaining when face to face meetings are once again an option. For many members, it's clear that getting along to a venue at a particular time in the evening is simply not doable, and I know that many branches are already considering ways of continuing to make meetings as accessible for as many members as possible.

Branches have played an important role this year lobbying to build awareness and support for our NUJ News Recovery Plan. Our industrial work has been flat out and top-notch despite the challenges

of Covid-19 – supporting chapels, fighting and achieving recognition (with a great victory at Cogora just this week!), battling redundancies and pay cuts, securing improvements to pay and conditions, winning victories against discrimination and stamping out unequal pay. Ensuring that our members know we have their backs, and are not on their own, no matter the challenges they face.

We've launched initiatives on safety and tackling the targeting of journalists, on reforms to ensure a Fair Deal for Freelancers, a robust defence of public service broadcasting, at the same time as continuing to liaise with and support our sister unions, standing up for press freedom at home and around the globe. We have truly punched above our weight this year, standing up for issues that matter to journalists and journalism.

The work of our charities is also a brilliant testament to the spirit of the NUJ. We have selected an incredibly impressive and talented bunch of students who we felt sure will go on to become great journalists and a credit to the George Viner Memorial Fund (GVMF). The work of NUJ Extra has demonstrated just what a difference this charity makes – ensuring that members struggling through this pandemic have had a safety net offering practical and financial support and assistance. Thanks are owed to Jim Boumelha, chair of the GVMF, and Chris Wheal and Francis Sedgemore, chief and vice chair respectively of NUJ Extra. Special thanks also for our network of committed



branch welfare officers and of course to our administrator Leyla Yusuf, who has been the compassionate voice at the end of the phone for countless applicants this year.

We know this year has been a tough one, and that is why we are about to repeat our all-member survey which took place earlier in lockdown. Assessing the impact of Covid-19, the lockdowns and ongoing restrictions are a vital tool in helping the NUJ continue to press politicians and policymakers about the need for intervention to support the news industry. Knowing the impact – financially, emotionally, physically and mentally – on our members and their livelihoods, provides powerful testimony and information to back up our work and campaigning. If all branches can promote this survey and encourage members to participate, it will help inform that work's resumption in the New Year.

As the year draws to a close, I wish you and yours a safe and happy Christmas, and let's all look forward to a better 2021 ahead. Take care.

In Solidarity

Michelle Stanistreet

CAMPAIGN

02

Fair Deal for Freelances



Pamela Morton, NUJ national freelance organiser, asks branches to get behind the campaign for a fairer deal for freelances

Covid-19 has laid bare the precarious position of a major section of the UK's workforce, particularly in the media where one third of our members are freelance.

It's been heart-breaking hearing from so many whose work dried up during the pandemic, especially those who have fallen through the

cracks of the government's financial aid schemes. We have been working hard with the TUC and other unions seeking redress from the Treasury.

But as the union's national freelance organiser I have long been aware of the second-class treatment the self-employed experience in terms of their pay, conditions and benefits in comparison to colleagues on staff. Many UK freelances and casuals are legally entitled to holiday pay, but an NUJ survey found that almost nine in 10 did not receive it. The problem is the law that leaves the self-employed vulnerable to employers who place them on unsuitable working terms. They pay their taxes, but have no right to holidays, sick, parental or pregnancy leave.

The law needs to be radically reformed to suit the needs of a growing part of the economy. The industry couldn't exist without them and freelancing suits many of our members, but they are still getting a raw deal.

That why we have launched the Freelance Charter (see back page) which sets out the rights and benefits the self-employed should enjoy. It calls for the right to organise in a trade union, to have a written contract with fair terms and conditions, prompt payment and equal treatment at work in terms of health and safety. Freelances should get holiday pay, parental leave and allowances and a retirement pension. They should have the right to resist companies forcing them on to PAYE, to incorporate as a limited company, or work under umbrella companies.

The campaign has been highlighted in Parliament with an Early Day Motion and Munira Wilson, Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham, was briefed before for her Westminster Hall debate on support for freelances excluded from government covid-19 support schemes. The charter has been sent to ministers at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Branches must do what they can to get employers, employer organisations, industry bodies, politicians and individual supporters to sign up to its aims.

Action

Branches must...

- Appoint a freelance officer
- Be able to provide advice on paid holiday and employment rights for freelance members
- Signpost freelance members to training and resources on the websites of the NUJ and London Freelance Branch

Keep up with the #FD4F campaign:
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/tags/fair+deal+for+freelances/>

#FairDeal4Freelances

Fighting for freelance rights

Benedict Cooper on his role as Nottingham branch's freelance officer



There are three major freelance branches in the NUJ in London, Edinburgh and Dublin and each branch should have a freelance officer such as Benedict Cooper, member of Nottingham branch.

Benedict has been a freelance for 10 years, writing mainly about business and politics, but will try his hand at most things, including at present some copywriting which pays better than his usual press work. Like many freelances, Benedict is having a difficult time. Since the pandemic hit, many of his employers have pulled up the drawbridge - freelance budgets are always the first to go during financial downturns.

"It's pretty tough," he said. "For the past decade it has never been easy freelancing, but to see it get even worse with no signs of things improving until well into next year has been very stressful."

Nottingham branch is an active and lively branch which this year has seen its membership rise and attendance at meetings increase to about 25 since business went

online. The talk among freelances has been about the government's support grants, particular those working under the PAYE system and others who found themselves falling through the cracks of the schemes. Photographers, who are increasingly working on a freelance basis, have also voiced problems about getting work and reported concerns about treatment by the police while working.

Benedict said: "I have found it a comfort being able to discuss these issues with colleagues. By definition, being freelance can be isolating, sitting alone working from home. Every month I have an opportunity to get together with others to swap information and news. The social side is really nice, it does help knowing that it isn't just you going through all this. In my role I am keen to increase my campaigning activity and Fair Deal for Freelances and promoting the Freelance Charter will provide that opportunity."

He has been involved in a number of campaigns in Nottingham, including supporting

the local press. The branch has discussed the NUJ's News Recovery Plan and will be putting Fair Deal for Freelances on its agenda. #FD4F is about seeking aid for freelances during Covid-19, but also proposes radical reform of the terms of employment and benefits for freelances.

Follow Benedict at [@Ben_JS_Cooper](https://twitter.com/Ben_JS_Cooper) and www.benedictcooper.co.uk

Action

Put Fair Deal for Freelances on the agenda - email campaigns@nuj.org.uk if you need help finding a speaker

Promote the Freelance Charter with local employers, business organisations, politicians and trades councils
<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/fair-deal-for-freelance-charter/>

Positive response to online branch meetings

Survey shows virtual branches have been a success, but many miss the pub get-together afterwards

The move to holding branch meetings online in response to the pandemic has largely been a success, attracting increased participation and a more diverse group of people attending, a survey of branches has found.

The survey, carried out this October and based on 54 responses, revealed that most branches found it easy to switch to online, the virtual meetings were cheaper, led to an increase in

women and younger members joining in and were useful for branches with a large geographical area – they allowed speakers from elsewhere to address the meeting and branches to hold joint meetings with others.

However, the social side of branches was much missed and, while 71 per cent of branches said they would continue with online meetings, when possible they would prefer to hold a mixture of virtual and face-to-face meetings.

As one respondent said: “The advantages are that members living further away are more likely now to take part, that our members can more easily participate in other branches, we can attract speakers more easily and we are all, out of necessity, becoming more online tech-savvy. The disadvantage is that you lose the personal contact, the sense of belonging to a union branch. I do feel that us journalists are innately social beings who like crowds and busy places, gossip and hanging out together. The branch and the union as a whole have responded magnificently to the Covid-19 crisis and learnt a lot. We will never go back to how it was before, but we do need – as soon as it’s safe and

possible – to return to a degree of real social contact.”

The survey revealed that more work might be needed to investigate accessibility issues for disabled members, and occasional technical glitches/broadband connections have also caused problems.

There was a mixed response to the



question of whether the technology had improved the branch discussions and debates. A number of those responding said it had led to shorter, more focused meetings, others said while Zoom meetings had widened participation, “the limitations of online meetings mean discussions are more limited”.

There were pros and cons, said one respondent: “It’s easier to arrange a meeting without having to book a room and we can include people wherever they are. But online meeting fatigue can set in, especially if members have spent all day on their laptops.”

Key findings

91% of branches have held online meetings.

More than two-thirds (67%) said it had increased attendance.

71% would continue online meetings

42% said it had increased the diversity of those attending

Steve Bell – uncensored

The Guardian and Journalist's cartoonist was the London Freelance Branch's end-of-year speaker

Normal union business was postponed at the LFB's December meeting and the proceedings kicked off with a fiendishly-difficult "festive" quiz which relied more on knowledge of Trotsky than Widow Twanky. Then the guest speaker – the branch's old friend Steve Bell, whose burly form appeared on the Zoom screen next to his equally famous Falkland penguin, from the long-running strip *If*. He gave a highly entertaining, illustrated talk through his career, starting with *Maggie's Farm* in *City Limits* and later his gallery of political rogues – John Major with his outsized underpants, swivel-eyed Tony Blair, George W Bush as a chimpanzee, Theresa May's pointy leopard-print shoes and the sleazy hack Harry the Hardnose.

But the main theme was censorship, and the LFB members were treated to a selection of cartoons which had been spiked – on grounds of taste, politics and editors' whims. He recalled winning condom wars with former editor Alan Rusbridger who had

objected to his portrayal of the smooth face of David Cameron as a pink prophylactic.

His image of two vertical stars and strip flags ablaze representing the destruction of New York's twin towers showed the power of a simple image and he recalled his deep sadness following the murder of colleagues at Charlie Hebdo, targeted because of their satire.

Steve will often make changes in response to editors

and said he had been censored about only 22 times in his long career, but it was happening increasingly more often. He felt that certain past cartoons – for example attacking

all religions or the Israeli government – would not get through today. He also felt the liberal, leftish-leaning *Guardian* was becoming less tolerant of having a cartoonist who disagreed with its editorial line – citing his more sympathetic view of Jeremy Corbyn.

Answering a question about reports of him leaving *The Guardian*, Steve said they were not true – but as one of



Mark's tips

Since lockdown, Edinburgh Freelance Branch has been holding weekly online meetings throughout the pandemic and has attracted an array of excellent speakers from within the union, local writers and broadcasters and media organisations. **Mark Fisher**, branch secretary, said: "We have had little difficulty in finding good people."

- **Start with a theme.** Look at topics such as threats to journalists, freedom of speech, hyperlocal publications or public-interest journalism. With that agreed it should be easy to find speakers involved in the issue eager to speak or debate.

- **Use your branch's expertise.** Many of our best meetings have drawn entirely on our own writers and photographers. And members will also have useful contacts.

- **Use the NUJ's knowledge.** The union has a network of activists and full-time officials who are invariably happy to help.

- **Book tour:** Look out for media folk with a book to flog, often a good way to secure an interesting speaker.

- **Virtual guest.** In the real world, a speaker needs to be available for a whole evening and probably requires accommodation. Online, they need only commit an hour of their time and they can be anywhere in the world. Think big, you can only ask. Just imagine having Barack Obama after Any Other Business.

the most expensive freelances, he felt he was expected to fall on his 2B pencil – the renewal of his contract next year was still for negotiation. <https://www.belltoons.co.uk/index.php>

CAMPAIGN

Get your branch to adopt a jailed journalist

The NUJ is an internationalist organisation and lobbies for global press freedom with sister unions and, in particular, the International Federation of Journalists.

Together with the IFJ, the union shines a light on regimes which allow, and in many cases conspire towards, journalists being murdered with impunity. In the past 30 years 2,658 media workers have been killed – two dying every week. Yet, only one murder in every 10 is punished. This means that it is almost virtually risk-free to kill a journalist – murder has become the easiest and cheapest way of silencing troublesome reporters.

On Thursday 10 December to mark the international day for human rights, the IFJ published its “killed list” for 2020 and launched a white paper on global journalism. So far 42 media workers have died doing their job this year. The IFJ casualty tolls include support staff such as drivers, fixers and translators who die during newsgathering activities. Most of the media workers killed are local reporters.

The IFJ also monitors journalists in jail and its analysis found at least 235 journalists in imprisoned in 34 countries for work-related cases. The



Osama Hajjaj is a Jordanian cartoonist for the newspaper *Al Arab Al Yawm* and is a participant of the Journalism Without Fear competition <https://bit.ly/2WdYrCc>

list does not include other journalists facing charges or released on bail. In Turkey, scores of journalists were detained on allegations that they supported the failed coup in July 2016. Civil unrest and elections-related protests led to large-scale arrests of journalists and other media workers in Belarus.

Online branch meetings make it easy to invite international guests, either representatives of the IFJ who can speak about the federation’s work, including the safety training it

provides for media workers in conflict zones, or it can supply journalists from around the world to explain the dangers they and colleagues face reporting the news.

Branches can hold fund raisers for the IFJ’s fund [<https://www.ifj.org/safety-fund.html>], adopt a prisoner or choose a country and organise lobbying activity, highlighting threats to press freedom.

Download the white paper: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/publications/article/ifj-white-paper-on-global-journalism.html>

The top 10 countries where journalists have killed in the past 30 years:

- Iraq (339 killed)
- Mexico (175)
- Philippines (159)
- Pakistan (138)
- India (116)
- Russian Federation (110)
- Algeria (106)
- Syria (96)
- Somalia (93)
- Afghanistan (93)

TRAINING

07

Save union learning



The UK government has decided to scrap the union-led training project in England next year – just when it could not be more vital.

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) supports more than 200,000 workers a year with skills training and career development. NUJ members living in England have access to free workshops, webinars and a range of resources as part of a Federation of Entertainment Unions project, FEU Training.

The project is aimed at freelancers in the media and creative industries, but its courses are equally useful and open to non-freelancers.

FEU Training offers a range of

practical sessions, for example an introduction to Instagram or vlogging, courses on how to run a self-employed business, as well as workshops and webinars on keeping motivated and dealing with setbacks.

Journalist Emma Sheppard said: "Apart from the workshop content, which was really useful, I enjoyed chatting to everyone there. It was such a lovely group and everyone was so friendly and supportive... the networking opportunities are fantastic."

Covid-19 has exposed just how precarious life can be as a freelance and since many journalists forced into becoming freelance have now been made redundant, FEU Training is more relevant than ever. The scheme costs £12m a year – peanuts in the scheme of government money being spent at present. It is also outstanding value: for every £1 spent, workers using the ULF gained £7.60 in better pay, while employers got a £4.70 lift through higher productivity and an independent evaluation said the economic contribution

of the project was approximately £13m.

Branches have a role to play in getting the government to reverse its decision to end the scheme in April 2021. Make sure you put the Save Union Learning campaign on your next branch agenda. Find out more: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/saveunionlearning/>

FEU Training has courses up to March but the union-led training projects in Wales and Scotland will continue to be funded and, because the course are online, many of them are open to members elsewhere.

Union-led training

FEU Training:

www.feustraining.org/

NUJ Training Scotland:

www.nujtrainingscotland.com/

NUJ Training Wales:

www.nujtrainingwales.org/

TUC Education:

www.tuceducation.org.uk/

Working safely through the pandemic: contact tuttraining@nuj.org.uk to book a bespoke 90-minute webinar for your branch.

Action

Sign and share the petition: <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/uk-gov-don-t-cut-union-learning>

Support on social media with hashtag **#SaveUnionLearning**

Write to your MP:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/saveunionlearning-mps-letter/>

FREELANCE RIGHTS CHARTER

FAIR DEAL FOR FREELANCES

The Covid-19 crisis has further marginalised already vulnerable freelances working across the media industry – this NUJ Freelance Rights Charter demands improved protections and benefits regardless of employment status.

Support our call for a Fair Deal for Freelances, where all freelances have the right to:

- 1** Trades union collective bargaining to improve terms and conditions for freelances side by side with staff
- 2** Fair written contracts free from the threat of disadvantage for asserting their rights
- 3** Respect for their creators' rights and unwaivable moral rights
- 4** Equalised rights with employees including; sick pay; maternity, paternity and parental leave; unemployment benefit; full access to benefits and social securities
- 5** Choice over how they freelance and are taxed, with an end to advance tax payments
- 6** Work free from pressure to operate on a PAYE basis, or to incorporate, or work through umbrella companies
- 7** Equal health and safety protections including parity of training, insurances and security provision
- 8** Fair fees and terms, and prompt payments
- 9** Dignity and respect at work, free from bullying, harassment or discrimination, with parity of access to grievance procedures
- 10** Equal professional rights, including the right to protect sources, seek information and uphold ethical standards

#FairDeal4Freelances

#FairDeal4Freelances

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