



The National Union of Journalists is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 30,000 members working in broadcasting, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and digital media.

Introduction

Wales has a long and proud journalism tradition. But the Covid-19 pandemic hit an industry with underlying health conditions. Welsh newspaper titles had already had cuts to journalist numbers and a lack of investment in journalism before the virus appeared. Quality journalistic content had been a much lower priority than the interests of shareholders, the requirements of investors and the pursuit of profits. When the going was good the publishers creamed off profits, rather than investing in the future. Mergers had severely dented media plurality.

The decline quickened as printed publications started to lose advertising to the internet. And while they moved journalism into digital, the advertising did not follow; particularly hitting local newspapers. Since then Facebook, Google and the other tech giants have taken the newspapers' content without paying for it and thanked them by hoovering up all the advertising. As the 2019 Cairncross Review reported, the number of fulltime frontline journalists working in the UK had fallen from 23,000 in 2007 to 17,000. In that period, newspaper annual advertising spend dropped by 69 per cent (£3.2 billion) and annual circulation revenue declined by 23 per cent (£500 million). Having already seen companies make large scale redundancies in 2020 and in the first half of 2021, as the government Covid-19 aid schemes end, the fear remains that without further action, there will be further redundancies and newspaper closures.

In April 2020, the NUJ published its News Recovery Plan as a response to the crisis caused by Covid-19 to the industry and also to reboot the media to create a more plural and diverse press and broadcasting ecology which puts public interest journalism at its heart. The

union's Welsh Executive Council is now exploring with journalists, politicians, business and communities a Recovery Plan for Wales.

The Issues

- Welsh newspaper titles had been hollowed out before the pandemic with publishers creaming off 20-30 per cent profits instead of investing.
- Significant redundancies across newspapers, including Reach and Newsquest.
- Titles such as The Glamorgan Gem series covering the Vale community closed.
- Facebook, Google and other tech giants have taken content without paying and have monopolised online advertising revenue. The pandemic further reduced advertising and some newspaper circulations have dropped.
- Cuts in broadcasting include: BBC Wales budget cuts of £4.5m, with job losses; ITV advertising income fell by 42 per cent, and its capital spend cut by £30m with programme budgets to be cut by £100m; S4C funding has had a net cut of £20m over the past 10 years and UK govt funding worth £7m per annum ends in 2022 - funding to be transferred to BBC.
- The pandemic also exposed a lack of plurality and independence of the press as Welsh newspapers carried advertising with Covid-19 advice for England.
- For sustainable progress on increasing diversity in both the media and audience, the presence of local journalism is also necessary. Younger journalists and those from a diverse background need to see journalism as a career, and to have local paid opportunities to get into journalism. Unpaid internships are a huge barrier.

Proposals for the Welsh Government

- Formally recognise journalism as a public service.
- Recognise that the independent hyperlocal media is as important as the mainstream media.
- Establishment of a short-term working party - the Public Interest Journalism Working Group. A similar initiative set up by the Scottish Government has proved very successful with the expertise of contributors from the NUJ, Independent Community News Network (ICNN) and IWA.
- Redistribution of Statutory Notices funding, and access to public sector press releases to members of the ICNN.
- No public funding for companies cutting pay, making redundancies and paying executive pay bonuses, with funding conditional on recognising trade unions, fair pay and terms and conditions.

- Windfall tax on tech giants – the Recovery Plans calls for a windfall tax of 6 per cent and then a levy based on profits imposed as part of a Digital Services Tax to fund public interest journalism. The Welsh Government should discuss specific funding possibilities in Wales with Facebook, Google and Apple.
- The establishment of a Welsh Journalism Foundation (at arms-length from the Government) to invest in local news and innovative journalistic projects.
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport made £2m in grants available via the innovation foundation NESTA to provide funding for start-ups and new models of journalism. A similar model could be followed by Wales.
- Confer ‘asset of community value’ status on local newspapers (including in community empowerment legislation) ensuring titles are preserved. This would be coupled with financial and business support for local social enterprise and journalistic cooperatives taking over titles.
- Nationwide media literacy strategy to tackle online disinformation and fake news. This could be organised in conjunction with BBC, ITV, NUJ and schools of journalism.
- Vouchers could be considered for young people to purchase newspapers/news subscription - this could be limited to Welsh-based news outlets. It is vital that 16 to 18 year olds have access to trusted news sources so they can fulfil their democratic duty.
- Provide apprenticeship funding for journalist training in the FE sector.
- Tax credits and interest free loans to support media jobs in Wales. This money must go to frontline journalism.
- Financial support for local social enterprise and journalistic cooperatives taking over titles.
- Strategic investment using the Welsh Government advertising budget, including the hyperlocal sector. This should include local authorities and public sector spending.
- Employee representation of 25 per cent on executive boards for organisations in receipt of public funding.
- Longer term help for freelancers/self-employed who fell between the government schemes and are taking more time to financially recover due to cuts in freelance budgets and in available work.
- Continue calling on the UK government to retain the £20 uplift to Universal Credit due to end in October. Statistics show millions having to claim compared to before the pandemic and removing this vital uplift will push many into further poverty.
- Welsh Government to sign-up to NUJ Freelance Charter - <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/fair-deal-for-freelances.html>

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol /
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
CCWLSIR PSS26
Ymateb gan National Union of Journalists/ Response from National Union of Journalists

The NUJ welcomes the central role that the Committee will play in tackling the problems facing Welsh media and we look forward to working with the Committee.

NUJ briefing on the impact of Covid-19 on the Welsh media/Cyfarwyddyd gan yr NUJ ar effaith Covid-19 ar y cyfryngau yng Nghymru:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource-report/nuj-briefing-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-welsh-media-cyfarwyddyd-gan-yr-nuj-ar-effaith-covid-19-ar-y-cyfryngau-yng-nghymru.html>

NUJ's News Recovery Plan: from health crisis to good news:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource-report/from-health-crisis-to-good-news.html>