



NUJ response to the Welsh Government's proposed budget allocation of £100,000 a year in 2018-19 and 2019-20 for start-up grants for journalists setting up their own business in hyperlocal news.

November 2017

The NUJ welcomes the government's response in acknowledging the crisis in local media in Wales and for listening to the concerns of the union.

The union agrees that some kind of state financial support will be necessary to enable hyperlocal news outlets to become sustainable businesses. We therefore commend the Welsh Government's proposal to allocate £100,000 per year for two years as start-up grants for new hyperlocals, since it offers the opportunity to judge the effectiveness of public sector intervention.

The development of hyperlocals is one way to stimulate local news. This small sector relies mostly on people working without pay since it takes time to build a profitable business. So, to the question "Is the funding enough?" the answer will be whether it is able to establish and sustain journalists who are paid properly for their work. The revival of local media cannot rely on unpaid labour. The revival of local media must be based on people who are qualified or have had training in the skills required for journalism, including media law.

We strongly believe that if hyperlocals are to make a contribution to public interest journalism, those working for them need either to be qualified journalists, or those ready to acquire such training. This would include appropriate business planning, budgeting and marketing tuition to secure adequate advertising revenue and develop the skills necessary to run a business.

There are already many trained journalists out of work or underemployed, as well as a wealth of graduates from Cardiff University and the union would like to see this funding treated as an incentive for these people to start up hyperlocals where there is a need. In terms of financial support offered to hyperlocals, there could be a "hierarchy of help", where outlets get additional support when training has been completed.

The grant for hyperlocals should come with strings attached to ensure the production of quality journalism and public-interest reporting, and recipients of the grant must sign a code of conduct to ensure ethical practice. The NUJ's code of conduct (see below) could provide the basis for this code. There must also be safeguards to ensure these new publications are seen to be truly independent from the government, despite the nature of the funding.

The development of the hyperlocal sector can only be one part of the solution. The real problem has been the long-term structure of media ownership, which has led to the press in Wales being dominated by two owners. These media companies also have a history of taking huge profit margins out of newspapers and not investing it in journalism or journalists, as the union made clear in its original submission to the inquiry into media provision.

NUJ code of conduct

A journalist:

1. At all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.
2. Strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.
3. Does her/his utmost to correct harmful inaccuracies.
4. Differentiates between fact and opinion.
5. Obtains material by honest, straightforward and open means, with the exception of investigations that are both overwhelmingly in the public interest and which involve evidence that cannot be obtained by straightforward means.
6. Does nothing to intrude into anybody's private life, grief or distress unless justified by overriding consideration of the public interest.
7. Protects the identity of sources who supply information in confidence and material gathered in the course of her/his work.
8. Resists threats or any other inducements to influence, distort or suppress information and takes no unfair personal advantage of information gained in the course of her/his duties before the information is public knowledge.
9. Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.
10. Does not by way of statement, voice or appearance endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of her/his own work or of the medium by which she/he is employed.
11. A journalist shall normally seek the consent of an appropriate adult when interviewing or photographing a child for a story about her/his welfare.
12. Avoids plagiarism.