



NUJ submission to Low Wages Commission consultation 2014

October 2013

The National Union of Journalists is the voice for journalism and for journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 30,000 members. It is an affiliate of the European Federation of Journalists and International Federation of Journalists. The NUJ represents members working across the media – as staffers, casuals and freelancers. NUJ members work in broadcasting, newspapers, magazines, books, in public relations, photography and in new media.

The NUJ is a member of TUC's working party on the Low Pay Commission consultation.

We endorse the recommendations put forward by the TUC:

- The adult NMW should be increased by more than inflation and average earnings, whichever is the higher;
 - The rates for 16-17 and 18-21 year olds should increase in 2014 by at least the same percentage as the adult rate, and that in the coming period the adult rate should be phased down to be paid at the age of 18;
 - The apprentice rate should be raised to the level of the current youth rates.
1. In previous years, the NUJ has reported that the problem for many of our students, young and entry-level members is that they are being forced to work for nothing in order to gain a foothold in an extremely competitive industry. It has become the case that it is almost a requirement to have undertaken an internship. In many cases a would-be intern has to compete with others and have an interview to secure a position. Figures quoted by Hazel Blears MP in parliament (Hansard, 18 June 2013) estimated that 92 per cent of arts internships and 76 per cent of internships in the public relations industry are unpaid. This is a similar picture to internships in the media.

2. The union supports structured work experience and has produced guidelines to help members get the best possible experience from accepting short-term placements, but the problem is that many employers are exploiting the situation and are not paying people who are clearing working as intern, with fixed times and responsibilities.
3. Since our last submission to the commission, the NUJ can report that the situation is the same, if not worse. Many publications – including some high-profile magazines and national newspapers -- depend on unpaid internships.
4. The union has won cash back for journalists at tribunals under minimum wage legislation, but has no significant cases to report this year. Young people are often reluctant to report unscrupulous employers because they fear it will harm their career. Taking a case can be time consuming and stressful.
5. The union's legal department continues to issue “take down” notices when jobs have been advertised detailing employee roles as internships without pay. This loophole must be closed; the NUJ believes that advertising unpaid internships should be made illegal and that HMRC should view such advertisements as an attempt to breach the law. A major problem is enforcement. In our experience, HMRC will not investigate complaints about advertisements unless these are presented to them in bulk and even then they cannot guarantee that action will be taken.
6. The Cabinet Office’s report Fair Access to Professional Careers: A progress report by the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty (May 2012) identified journalism as “one of the most socially exclusive of professions”. It said: “All too often, unpaid internships are a key entry route into journalism and the media industry more generally. What seems to distinguish journalism from other professions, however, is that interns are substitutes for what in other sectors would be regarded as functions carried out by mainstream paid employees.” It added: “The stories we heard are legion, of access to an internship being made through connection rather than ability. That is unacceptable and must change.”
7. According to Labour Force Survey statistics (2012) 28 per cent of journalists are freelance. The ever-increasing trend of casualisation in the media industry means that the trend of freelance or part freelance working is growing. This has had a dramatic effect on the earning potential of journalists. It has also been exacerbated by shift rates, lineage rates and other fees either being frozen for many years or in many cases being cut. Traditionally, freelances were experienced staff who made the switch to self-employment out of choice. Increasingly, freelance status is being forced upon journalists because of redundancy and, with staff jobs thin on the ground, it is often the only option

for entrants to the profession.

8. It was commonly held that journalists – now a profession that in most cases calls for a post-graduate qualification – are well paid. This is no longer the case. There are very few people in the Jeremy Paxman league. The wages on local papers are extremely low. Newsquest, one of the "big four" newspaper groups, which includes titles such as Herald (Glasgow), The Northern Echo (Darlington), Telegraph & Argus (Bradford), Evening Times (Glasgow), Southern Daily Echo (Southampton), The Argus (Brighton), The Press (York), Oxford Mail and South Wales Argus (Newport), has had a pay freeze for four of the past five years. Typically a journalist working for the group can earn £21,000, once they have qualified as a senior reporter with two years' experience. In one case, a reporter had to beg a hand-out from a news editor to enable her to cover an important story because she could not afford to put petrol in her car. A senior journalist revealed to the NUJ she was spending half of her net weekly pay on child care. These stories are typical of the financial challenges faced by our members at work.
9. NUJ reps have reported that trainee journalists in Yorkshire are paid 7 pence above the living wage. Journalists in Cheshire and Merseyside can earn as little as £14,500. We are anticipating yet another round of redundancies at one of the local newspaper groups and expect plenty of volunteers from older, experienced staff who are fed up with the long-hours culture and low wages, especially if they have a family.
10. The blame has been put on the transition to the internet with a lot of content being made free, the drop in advertising revenue caused by the recession and falling circulations. But it is not that simple. By the late 90s, local newspaper profit margins ranged from a minimum of 20 per cent to 35 per cent and more. Between the start of 2003 and the end of 2007, Media Wales's profit margins averaged 34 per cent, peaking at 38 per cent for the 12 months to the end of 2005. These profits made Media Wales one of the most profitable companies in Wales of any kind, let alone in the media industry.
11. While there are well-paid journalists on national papers, new entrants on one title are being taken on with salaries of just under £22,500. The wave after wave of redundancies on national titles have resulted in older, experienced staff taking the money and going. These posts are often changed into "digital posts", with much lower salaries.
12. The union's Rate for the Job website shows that shift rates on newspapers and magazines have either remained virtually the same for a decade or in some cases cut, despite cost of living increases. Newspapers have introduced shorter shifts (knocking off one-two hours) which pay less and make it

impossible to make up the hours elsewhere. One journalist who became freelance again said: "I discovered that the sub-editing rate on national magazines and papers was £130, the same as when I was freelancing a decade ago. Quite a few places now ask for half an hour more (9.30am to 6pm) and as holiday pay is often included, the rate is more like £110-120." She is no longer a journalist.

13. At one newspaper group in London, "trainees" who may have worked there for years were on around £16,000 which is just over the London living wage. They did not get London weighting. Another high-profile local newspaper in the capital pays £18,000. People writing content for website and digital companies can expect to be on similar sums. A "leading national magazine publisher based in Bristol" has asked for "a multi-skilled journalist" on a rate of £14,000, moving to £16,000 after 1 month probation.
14. Publisher Penguin Dorling Kindersley changed the pay rates on its travel guides. Instead of paying freelancers on the basis of a planning fee and then a rate per listing entry, it has moved to a flat rate of £100–£130 per double-page spread, while increasing the required content of each spread by more than 50 per cent. The changes have meant a 30 per cent to 60 per cent pay cut for some NUJ members.
15. There is a great reluctance, particularly on the web, to pay for what online publications call content, journalists call copy and most people call words.
16. The NUJ could supply many more examples of low pay and rates being cut. While media pay may not be as abject as in other sectors, it is still a significant trend. This is a profession which generally requires a post-graduate qualification for entry, yet it pays wages that make it very difficult for journalists, especially those living in London and the South East, where they have to because that is where the work is. According to the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) report *Journalists at Work 2012*, 72 per cent of new entrants to journalism had debts incurred whilst in education when they started work. Many journalists are finding their wages are being over-taken by the cost of living – accommodation, food and fuel.
17. In the regions, it is a similar story. Journalists are seeing their wages outstripped by other sectors, such as teachers, and for many putting a deposit down on a home is a dream.

Journalists at Work 2012, by the NCTJ: <http://www.nctj.com/latestnews/NCTJ-publishes-first-independent-journalism-survey-in-a-decade>