

Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists
7 December 2022 14:45-15:30
Minutes

1. Welcome

The Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure, Julia Lopez MP, chairing the meeting, introduced herself. She welcomed members and emphasised the government's ongoing commitment to the safety of journalists before thanking the Committee for its work to date delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. Minister Lopez also welcomed guest speakers including Will Gore, Head of Partnerships and Projects at the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), Dr Rebecca Whittington, Online Safety Editor at Reach plc, Katy Minshall, Director of UK Public Policy at Twitter, and Sarah Brown, Head of News Partnerships for Northern Europe at Meta. Minister Lopez also noted that both Chief Constable Gavin Stephens and Sue Hemming would be moving on from their current roles and thanked them both for their engagement with the Committee and the National Action Plan.

2. Introduction by Minister for Safeguarding

The Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP, the co-chair of the Committee, introduced herself and confirmed the Home Office's ongoing commitment to the safety of journalists.

3. National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists Update

Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director for Radio, Advertising and Press at DCMS (JMH), led a detailed discussion on the progress made to date by Committee members and stakeholders to deliver the Plan.

JMH noted the Journalist Safety Study on which DCMS partnered with an external agency, Revealing Reality, as well as the National Union of Journalists and the Society of Editors, earlier this year which was part of the commitment to increase understanding of the problem of journalist safety in the UK. DCMS is currently considering options for publication of the Study.

Committee members then provided updates on the work of their organisations. **Hazel Cameron, Deputy Director for Human Rights and Rule of Law** at the FCDO provided an update on work to promote the safety of journalists internationally including via the Media Freedom Coalition and promotion of the National Action Plan by Lord Ahmad, the Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations, at international fora.

Greg Miles, Digital Public Contact Programme Communications lead, National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), provided an update on behalf of Chief Constable Gavin Stephens regarding work by the police forces, in particular noting collaboration with the NCTJ on a workshop on journalist safety to be made available across NCTJ accredited courses. He also noted a recent public order training event attended by media personnel and flagged that work will follow this to identify any areas which can be improved going forward. It was also noted that 22 forces across the UK have now appointed both an operational and

communications Journalist Safety Liaison Officer. A further 16 forces have appointed solely a communications officer.

Acting Chief Constable Sam Donaldson, Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), spoke about work being done by PSNI noting that two Journalist Safety Liaison Officers had been appointed and a Journalist Safety Group had been established to support them. He also noted the force have recently engaged student journalists at the University of Ulster on public order policing.

Superintendent Hilary Sloan, Police Scotland, provided a brief update on the work being done by Police Scotland. She flagged that the force still had one Journalist Safety Liaison Officer in place and noted ongoing work on a public order training event due to take place in March 2023 aimed at incoming public order officers.

Will Gore, Head of Partnerships and Projects, National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), noted the recent launch of an e-learning course on safety and resilience. Modules include online safety and the relationship between the police and journalists. He highlighted that the resource is free to access and available to both journalists and student journalists and has so far been completed by approximately 100 people. He also noted that the NCTJ has launched an industry-led safety and resilience forum to facilitate discussion of best practice and experience.

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists (NUJ), updated the Committee on the launch of an [Online Safety Toolkit](#) during Journalism Matters Week, in collaboration with the Society of Editors. She noted this is designed to provide journalists with access to information on a number of safety topics. The NUJ has also released a film featuring testimonies from industry on safety risks experienced by journalists. She also highlighted ongoing work with the NPCC and a number of police forces on public order training for officers.

John Neal, Head of Newsgathering, BBC, provided an update on a number of resources the BBC has implemented including a reporting tool for journalists to log cases of abuse, new guidance with a focus on online safety, and a safety training course. It was noted these resources would be available to all staff including freelancers.

Dr. Rebecca Whittington, Online Safety Editor, Reach plc, provided an update on her work to date including the introduction of a new system for journalists to report the details of abuse experienced in order to inform Reach's response. An Online Safety Network of staff trained as online safety first aiders has also recently been launched. Reach has also conducted research on the impact of comments made on both social media and Reach's own sites. It was also noted that Reach undertakes risk assessments for high profile events that journalists will attend.

Owen Meredith, Chief Executive, News Media Association (NMA), notified the Committee of the NMA's ongoing work to advocate for the National Action Plan and to continue to share best practice across industry. He also highlighted the promotion of safety issues at Journalism Matters Week earlier this year.

Minister Lopez then asked the Committee to provide an insight into journalists' awareness of the resources available to them and what support they should expect, including freelancers. John Neal (BBC) noted the BBC is prioritising raising awareness of their resources. Michelle Stanistreet (NUJ) noted the important role of unions in engaging with freelancers. Minister Dines then raised the role the Committee can play in helping to support freelancers. Sarah Brown (Meta) noted that Meta has prioritised making sure its journalist registration tool also protects freelancers.

4. Wrap up and date of next meeting

Minister Lopez thanked the Committee on behalf of herself and Minister Dines, noting that she would be keen to engage with the platforms (Meta and Twitter) going forward to understand their work to keep journalists safe online. She also highlighted the first ever G7 Media Freedom Ministerial, which she attended in the summer, and noted that throughout the course of this year, the importance of the role journalists play in democracy has been brought to the fore. She encouraged attendees to continue to engage with the Plan and welcomed the significant progress made since its publication in March 2021.