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# Freelance Journalists do not Work ‘for Free’

Richenda Power, Phil Sutcliffe, Magda Ibrahim \*

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**Abstract.** The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has supported media industry workers since 1907. It classifies an increasingly wide range of activities as ‘journalism’ and its membership profile has changed accordingly. The proportion of freelances to staff continues to rise, reaching 30% of nearly 27, 000 members (over 40% of new members since 2013). Freelances need to know their rights when negotiating contracts, including clauses covering copyright, rates of pay and getting paid on time. The NUJ provides training, support and advice on such issues. It is also committed to Equal Opportunities to enable fair representation and attention to diverse needs. Power reports an analysis of the composition of the London Freelance Branch (LFB) membership, noting patterns of change. The work is a contribution to ensuring appropriate support of BAME, disabled and women members. LFB alone comprises almost 4000 members, from London, SE England, the rest of UK, Europe and worldwide.

**Keywords:** *freelance; journalism; inequality; trade union*

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*“Pay? We usually don't do that, it's your honour” to be published at all.’<sup>1</sup>*

A ‘New members’ panel’ held at the London Freelance Branch of the National Union of Journalists on April 11<sup>th</sup> this year, raised the key issue of work being expected for free, whether for interning, moderating websites on a ‘no contract’ basis, or being told ‘it’s your honour’ by editors.

### **Introduction**

Participatory action research is perhaps what you would expect within a union, a glimpse of which is reported here. The National Union of Journalists comprises numerous branches of members, and appoints a handful of paid officers. Branches elect their committees every year, and members take on voluntary roles, such as chair, secretary, treasurer, equality and training officers. The London Freelance Branch (LFB) committee has been discussing how to ‘refresh the branch’, partly to encourage new members to join and to retain existing members.

Maintaining and increasing membership has been an important issue across all trade unions since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Within LFB, a discussion about this had gone on face to face and in email between committee members and the paid Freelance Organisers, John Toner and Pamela Morton, for some years (2011-2015). One idea had been to design a survey which would encourage engagement by members, getting more people actively involved. Unfortunately one of the key survey design team left the branch, and the design was not completed. In February 2015, committee member Richenda Power volunteered to take a look at that to see whether and what of it could be resurrected, with reference to the record of the discussion. This article results from that starting point, and should be seen as a snapshot of a wider involvement of many people in a constantly developing organisation. Many are making substantial contributions that are actively changing the picture. Every new member who joins is welcomed as another contributor to active participation in the union.

Firstly some key definitions are provided, and a brief outline is given of some of the ways in which the Freelance Organisers have been supporting

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<sup>1</sup> M. Salusbury, *What new members want*, in *The Freelance*, 2016, May [online] Available from <http://media.gn.apc.org/fl/1605want.html> (accessed 30 May 2016).

members. Then a snapshot of the branch is explored together with a report of some of the activities ensuing. Discussion points arise during exploration of the data, on which other union members are already taking action.

Who are journalists? The NUJ website displays the following statement:

The NUJ rules state that "[t]he union shall consist of journalists, including photographers, creative artists working editorially in newspapers, magazines, books, broadcasting, public relations and information, and electronic media; as advertising and fashion photographers, advertising copywriters, editorial computer systems workers [...]

The NUJ represents journalists working in a broader variety of roles than those listed in the Office of National Statistics (ONS) category - our members also include photographers, producers, presenters, website managers, content providers, advertising copywriters, designers, social media officers, bloggers, podcasters, press officers, communications officers, photo and video journalists. Some of our members working in magazines, books, Public Relations (PR) and communications don't call themselves journalists but they are still members of our union.<sup>2</sup>

This difference in categorisation makes it difficult to contextualise statistics from the union against ONS figures for patterns in gender, ethnicity and self-employment, for example. Nor is it possible to write comparatively about patterns in membership figures together with findings from such surveys as those of the National Council for the Training of Journalists whose 'nature of communication of the[ir] survey... was (mainly) via employers'<sup>3</sup>, and whose definition of a 'journalist' may also differ. Similar caution should be applied to Thurman et al.'s survey<sup>4</sup> as their sample is taken from Gorkhana, which may operate on a different baseline definition. Also, figures would need to include the

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<sup>2</sup> National Union of Journalists, *Welcome to the NUJ*, *The National Union of Journalists website*, 2016 [online] Available from <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/> (accessed 29 August 2016).

<sup>3</sup> National Council for the Training of Journalists, *Journalists at work. Their views on training, recruitment and conditions*, 2013, National Council for the Training of Journalists, [online] available from [http://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/jaw\\_final\\_higher\\_2.pdf](http://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/jaw_final_higher_2.pdf) (accessed 29 August 2016).

<sup>4</sup> N.Thurman, A. Cornia and J. Kunert, *Journalists in the UK*, Oxford, Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 2016, University of Oxford. [Online] available from <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/journalists-uk> (accessed 29 August 2016).

Republic of Ireland, as the NUJ, formed prior to the division, includes journalists working and based there.

A basic distinction is drawn between those journalists who are employed (often referred to as ‘staff’), and those who are ‘freelance’, although some freelances may have regular freelance contracts with certain news outlets. No distinction is maintained between those with or without training.

A history of the first century of The National Union of Journalists was published to mark this, in 2007. In their conclusion, Gopsill and Neale wrote: ‘The union has been coming to terms with a period of technological change as drastic as any it had to weather during the previous century...’ arguing that ‘the need for a union is as strong as ever, to maintain both decent conditions and decent standards of work. It is important that our community remains independent, autonomous and democratic – not just for journalists, but for the whole of society’<sup>5</sup>. Those words seem even more important today. Beyond ‘technological change’, many challenges to press freedom and freedom of expression in general, as well as to workers’ solidarity in trade unions, continue and have to be fought.

### **Freedom and Freelance Work**

There are benefits and constraints or challenges to being self-employed as a journalist. On the plus side there are several freedoms: the journalist can choose when, where and how to work, on what topic, at what rate and to preserve freedom of expression.

On the other hand, freedom may also be lonely, and result in isolation, poverty, lack of representation and insufficient work (all factors which can be inter-related). In some contexts, using the right to freedom of expression can result in being arrested, imprisoned and fined, or worse.

Challenges to that freedom mean freelances need to know how to negotiate appropriate commissions and get sufficient pay for those (not a ‘zero’, nor an unpaid internship), from commissioning editors, who do not think the ‘honour’ of being published is enough reward or that an unpaid internship is worth it purely for the experience. Even once commissioned, freelances need their contracts honoured so they do not have to wait for months or years to be paid. They should not give their

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<sup>5</sup> T. Gopsill and G. Neale, *Journalists. 100 years of the NUJ*, Profile Books, London, 2007, 330-331.



copyright away or have their work sold on without their knowledge or permission, and should not sign to accept personal responsibility rendering them vulnerable to legal action for their contributions. (Some challenges require legal representation, which may be provided through the union's solicitors.)

Managing such challenges is vastly helped by joining the National Union of Journalists. Then individuals become part of a collectivity of voices and experience of over a century, and gain access to expertise on negotiating contracts, 'rates for the job' (compiled regularly from members' actual reports), copyright, keeping safe from surveillance and accusations of libel, and more.

Being in the union is not just about gaining access to advice, legal services and training, but about making change collectively, to pose challenges to under-representation of diverse voices in the media, to interrogate and expose upcoming legislation that attempts to impose unfair contracts or undermine copyright or to extend the surveillance of the state so that investigative journalism would become impossible. And, to actively and continually take a stand for press freedom.

### **A 'Free for All'?**

The union does not include those who have been called 'citizen journalists', as membership requires demonstration of earning a living from journalism. Nevertheless, there is a tension between those, such as 'citizen journalists', who supply material 'for free', and those who are working as journalists. For example, the free large scale supply of readers' photographs to national newspapers has inevitably had an impact on freelance photographers in terms of the availability of commissions.

In the past there had been conflict between 'staff' and 'freelance' journalists, as sometimes 'staff' took on 'freelance' work and were seen as reducing the available work opportunities for freelances. The union stepped in to address these matters in the past, but this has not been at issue in recent years.

More significant now is an expectation that journalists can supply material in all formats, i.e. 'multimedia'. A 'Robohack' was invented as a model in 1993: 'a prophetic fantasy to illustrate the multi-skilled journalist of the future, ... created for the *Journalist* by photographer/montage artist John

Harris'.<sup>6</sup> 'Robohack' has a satellite dish sprouting from the back, a laptop balanced on the right forearm, an old-fashioned reporter's notebook slung round the neck, a mobile phone in the left hand, a mike attached to the left shoulder, and a cine camera to the right eye. Five years earlier the union's General Secretary, Conroy, had made just such predictions. 'It was not appreciated then that one device might perform all these functions, but the point that multiskilled work would blur traditional craft distinctions was spot on' according to Gopsill and Neale<sup>7</sup> in their report of Conroy's attempts to merge several unions at that time.

Being a 'RoboHack' is an expectation so normative now that one of our committee members, David Wilkins, 'a journalist with visual and hearing disabilities [was recently told] on a training course... :

"If you can't do video (or social media) you can't be a journalist any more."<sup>8</sup>

Clearly the training provider's expectation needs scrutiny and challenge for its ablist, but also for its assumption that every journalist can be appropriately trained to perform well across all media.

There are divisions between interest groups in the union over the provision of trainings for 'everything you can do on an iPhone' for example. The photographers' branch in particular has been fighting such provision, seeing it as undermining their own expertise and knowledge.

So, to summarise, there are threats to survival for professional journalists, both from outside the profession, from 'citizen journalists', and from within, in terms of challenges to ownership and use of specific sorts of production, such as words, photographs or film.

### **A 'Collective Ethos in Freelances'**

Fiona O'Cleirigh, current chair of the London Freelance Branch of the NUJ, wrote last year on the 'challenges of encouraging a collective ethos in freelances' while citing a number of recent initiatives to support freelances, such as conferences on "New ways to make journalism pay" ... [and] Freelance Salon, a series of networking and training events...<sup>9</sup>

Judging by the increasing proportion of new member applications by freelances to the NUJ in the last few years (more than 40%), it would

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<sup>6</sup> Gopsill and Neale, *op. cit.*, 190.

<sup>7</sup> Gopsill and Neale, *op. cit.*, 190.

<sup>8</sup> Salusbury, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> F. O'Cleirigh, *We're all in this together*, *The Journalist*, 2015, July/August, 12-13.

seem that the value of that 'collective ethos' is being appreciated, although O'Cleirigh points out that people may join for two different reasons: 'to participate in the wider trade union movement...[or for the union's]... role as a professional association'. However, while 'the conflation of the two might lead to confusion over objectives at times, ... both approaches focus on the strength of the collective'.<sup>10</sup>

Freelance Organiser, John Toner, presented a paper on 'Freelance Futures' in 2012, which noted the increasing proportion of freelance journalists in the union, as well as drawing attention to changes in the way freelances work, based on his observations. He proposed that a detailed discussion of the type of services the union provides should occur as 'more freelances will follow the entrepreneur model of running a business' rather than working for one client, say a newspaper, as a 'casual'.<sup>11</sup> There are implications for organisation as well as the consideration of the extent to which a union should assist members in relation to their business.

In the past, the phrase 'Servants without masters', with its negative connotations, was one way of describing freelance workers. It was used as a subtitle by Gopsill and Neale, above an account of NUJ freelances opening 'an email discussion group called "CatHerds"' because '[t]rying to organise individual self-employed journalists into a trade union, it was felt, was like trying to herd cats'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the attempt to 'organis[e] the unorganised' has not been confined to freelances, nor to our union, as Heery reported: 'It has been argued widely that if trade unions are to experience renewal then they must invest in [this] and align their strategies of interest representation with the needs of women and those in atypical employment'.<sup>13</sup>

And it is the members flowing in that refresh and renew trade unions, bringing in new perspectives and additional value.

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<sup>10</sup> F. O'Cleirigh, *op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> J. Toner, *Freelance Futures*, discussion paper, National Union of Journalists, London, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Gopsill and Neale, *op. cit.*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> E. Heery, *Sources of change in trade unions*, in *Work, employment and society*, 2005, vol. 19, no. 1, 91-106.

### Refreshing the Branch

The note of optimism on which Gopsill and Neale closed their history, claiming the union was growing ('rose to 41,000 in 2006'<sup>14</sup>) is sad reading retrospectively, since the global recession of 2008, through which membership of most unions shrank considerably. By 2014, overall NUJ membership was down to about 30,000<sup>15</sup> and multiple decisions had been taken to reduce overheads. Discussion about refreshing and renewing the branch took place in this context.

When looking at the LFB committee discussion report and the part-worked survey questionnaire, the first questions arising were to do with the aims of the survey enquiry, e.g.:

- What sort of knowledge is wanted, from whom, why, and to what end?
- Could some of this knowledge be accessed from existing records?
- Could some questions, in future, be asked of new applicants for membership?
- Do we want to target members who never attend branch meetings and find out what their interests are?

These sorts of questions needed answering before deciding on the kind of research design appropriate. Targeting members who don't attend meetings was certainly one hope. However these very members might also be people who don't have time or the inclination to answer standard survey questions that can be analysed statistically. In general, response rates to surveys have been falling, perhaps partly because of the increasing frequency with which surveys are being used online every day. There had been talk of possibly buying in an independent survey company to design one for the branch. However, it can waste time, energy and resources to ask questions that could be answered from analysing existing records, such as:

- a) Membership applications, information from which comprises the database.
- b) LFB branch meeting and training day attendance records.
- c) Branch and Freelance Organiser records of requests for help.
- d) New members lists.

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<sup>14</sup> Gopsill and Neale, *op. cit.*, 331.

<sup>15</sup> M. Stanistreet, *General Secretary's report*, in *National Union of Journalists. Report to Delegate Meeting, 2014. Eastbourne*. 2014, 10.1

e) Lapsing subscriptions that can trigger contact.

(Use of these resources is reported below.)

a) LFB committee gave the go-ahead to look at what is already regularly analysed, so an interview with Bernard Roche, head of finance and membership for the union, was arranged. This was instructive, as the nature of the records is clearly arranged for tracking membership subscriptions rather than allowing any analyses which might attempt to look at intersectional issues, relating, say, gender and low income, or ethnic minority status and access to training resources. Nor is it possible to conduct comparative analyses across time within that database, as it only displays what is current. (Data protection law applies, so access to the database is restricted to finance and membership personnel.) Regular quarterly statistical analyses are provided by Roche for the union as a whole, and data from ethnicity, gender and disability questions are passed to the Equalities Office for monitoring. The membership application form poses standard questions about ethnicity, and asks 'Do you consider yourself disabled?'. Only very recently has the 'gender' question (M or F?) been altered to include Transgender. That and sexuality questions now accompany the ethnicity and disability questions on monitoring forms used at meetings and training sessions.

b) LFB branch meeting and training day attendance records have not so far been analysed, but could be.

c) Freelance Office records of the main sorts of requests received for help from members were provided, ranked in order from most frequent to least, in descending order of frequency:

Non-payment

Copyright infringement

Contractual advice

Employment rights

Contractual disagreements

Copyright advice

Obtaining a Press Card

Insurance

The right to photograph

Defamation

Non-payment is the issue the new members' panel quoted above highlighted: a perennial issue, for which union clout can make a serious difference. Contract, copyright and defamation law have been topics for branch meetings and frequent articles in *The Freelance*, whose editors are LFB committee members, Mike Holderness and Matt Salusbury. Further information is available on the London Freelance website<sup>16</sup>. Training in numerous aspects of journalism as well as in trade union work is also available. In 'Freelance Futures'<sup>17</sup>, Toner asked whether the range of services should be broadened, for example, to cater for members who self-publish, pointing out that this moves 'away from traditional trade union issues, including the most fundamental of all: representing workers to their employers/clients'.

d) New members' names are read out at each branch meeting, of which there are 11 a year (not August). Since Fiona O'Cleirigh became chair in 2015, she has invited new members at the meeting to speak briefly about their work so this has helped all present to get to know them. Also, since autumn 2015, new members who would like to can have their photograph taken by Hazel Dunlop for publication in *The Freelance* online. This is an additional way of welcoming them and another opportunity to announce their line of work.

e) 'Lapsing' members' information is provided to the officers of the branches once three monthly subscriptions have been missed, so this is an opportunity to speak with a member, and ascertain their reasons for leaving, if that is their intention. Mainly, in the most recent follow up of 'lapsing' members, it turned out that contact details had not been kept up to date, but, of the minority who were contactable, most wanted to stay in the union, which was reassuring. Contacting members can be useful in terms of gathering information about challenges and constraints people are facing, such as not being able to get childcare to come to evening meetings, or difficulties with maintaining income, in which case advice to request a lower rate of membership can be provided, or welfare officer referral, or pointing to training opportunities.

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<sup>16</sup> London Freelance Branch, National Union of Journalists, home page [online] available at <http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/index.html> (accessed 29 August 2016)

<sup>17</sup> J. Toner, *op. cit.*

### The London Freelance Branch

LFB committee suggested requesting a regular breakdown of the branch's statistics, showing how many people are in each of the categories that the application form provides. The first one of these 'snapshots' was provided in August 2015, another in February 2016. A basic descriptive analysis of the August statistics was presented to the branch committee meeting in September 2015, generating a good amount of discussion. A presentation to the Freelance Industrial Council followed in October, particularly to encourage better representation of and support to Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) members within the union against a background of information coming from published reports about disproportionate numbers of BAME journalists leaving the industry. A summary report of the initial analysis was provided to all LFB members at the Annual General Meeting in January 2016. One of the benefits of talking about this basic statistical information is that it provides a picture of the constitution of the membership and gets people talking about meeting diverse needs.

The 'August snapshot' data enabled us to start with a clearer sense of who our members are. Then we could start to look at how well the committee represents the membership and how relevant are topics and speakers at meetings, for example, in considering diversity issues. The representation of women, BAME, and members with disabilities on committee appears to have increased over the last three years. We could do better in terms of diversity in terms of speakers, which may result from the 'unconscious bias' of people's contacts, such as those Harris and Ogbonna unearthed in their study of shopfloor 'ethnic gatekeeping'<sup>18</sup>.

Total LFB membership last August was 3665, **60%** based in London, **32%** in South East England, the rest across Britain, the republic of Ireland and continental Europe. Freelances are usually allocated to LFB by the NUJ Membership team, although members can choose to be in, or attend other branches according to their interests e.g. Book or Magazine branch. The geographical composition means it is not possible to compare LFB patterns to general London-only statistics. The equality questions on the membership application form provided the following data:

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<sup>18</sup> L. Harris and E. Ogbonna, *Ethnic gatekeeping on the shopfloor: a study of bases, motives and approaches*, in *Work, employment and society*, 2015, vol. 30, no. 1, 59-76.

**ETHNICITY:** 78% all ‘White’ categories; 12% did not answer; 10% all other categories put together, e.g. Asian (of which, 4 categories); Black (3 categories); Chinese (3 categories) and so on, mainly based on the 2011 Census categories (see Appendix 2 for more details). This is lower than expected when compared to the ONS analysis of the 2011 census material on ethnicity and the labour market, which stated that around ‘one in five people (19.5% of the population overall) identified with an ethnic minority group’.<sup>19</sup>

**DISABILITY:** Only 0.9 % answered ‘Yes’ to the question: ‘Do you consider yourself to be disabled?’

This is extremely low at 0.9%. Members may have become disabled since joining, yet have not updated the union, and may not have been advised to do so. In the general population, 16% of working age adults, increasing to 45% of adults of over State Pension age, have some form of disability according to the Office of Disability Issues and the Department of Work and Pensions.<sup>20</sup>

Also, question wording can in itself affect answers. One member said that they did not consider their condition to affect their journalism, for example. 1.6% did not answer the question; 97% answered ‘No’; 0.5% put ‘Rather not say’.

Knowing about particular requirements is essential to successful participation in, for example, branch meetings. Members with visual difficulties need the agenda sent electronically; those with hearing difficulties need induction loops, and speakers need to use microphones consistently; space needs to be kept for wheelchair access and lifts need to work; rest breaks may be necessary for those with ‘invisible disabilities’. As the information is not passed to branches, we need to seek this from members in order to be inclusive.

It may be worth revising the way that some questions are asked on the membership application form, as well as reminding members that they

<sup>19</sup> Office of National Statistics, *2011 Census: Ethnicity and the labour market, England and Wales*, 2014, 2 [online] available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/ethnicity-and-the-labour-market/rpt-ethnicity-and-the-labour-market-2011-census--england-and-wales.html> (accessed 29 August 2016)

<sup>20</sup> Office of Disability Issues and the Department of Work and Pensions, *Disability facts and figures*, 2014 [online] available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/disability-facts-and-figures> (Accessed 30 May 2016).



can update their data with the membership department. Another issue is that there are interest and campaigning groups within the union such as '60+', 'Black Members Council', which members can join, but may not realise that this has to be done actively, as the answers to questions on the membership application are only used for monitoring purposes, not for allocating members to such groups. Opportunities to remind members about these matters could be taken at branch meetings, in emails to members and in publications online and in print.

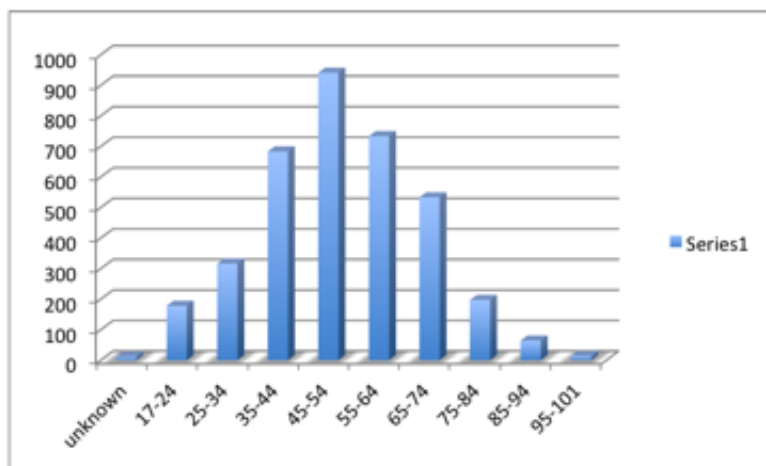
**AGE RANGE:** Age bands have been displayed in age ranges so as to look at any pattern graphically.

Student members may account for most of the members of age 17 to 24. We want to ensure they become full members, and provide well for the needs of those under 40. This is a continuing discussion within the union. Within LFB discussion is being conducted by members who have recently joined since graduating, for example, our vice chair Zaki Dogliani, who is actively involved with the Student Publications Association.

It is possible to wonder whether the proportion of journalists continuing to work beyond the age of 64 is relatively larger than that for the working population as a whole. It could be that journalism is a profession that keeps some people mentally active, healthy and earning. Or it could be that without adequate pensions, they have no choice.

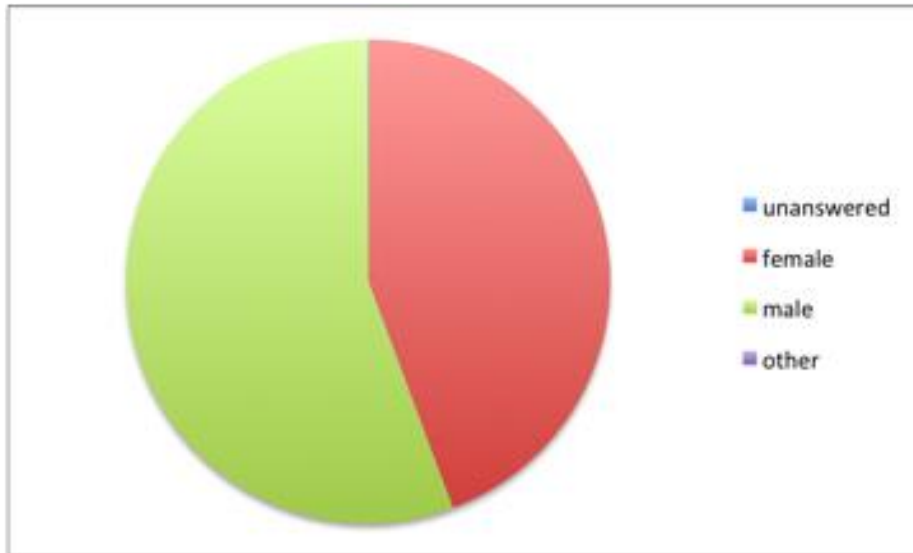
It could be useful to look at the intersection of gender and age patterns in membership, as it might be that people come into the freelance branch when they manage caring in the family, often a female responsibility.

Table 1. London Freelance Branch members, age ranges, August 2015 (n=3665)



## Gender

Table 2. London Freelance Branch, a pie chart representing nearly 56% identifying male, 44% female.



Source: LFB, August 2015

We can ask what this proportion means compared to that in the working population at large, but also we could look at patterns within the freelance sector compared to the rest of the union. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) looked at employment patterns and gender and found that women were less likely to be in self-employment than men, so our sector may be an exception. However, we don't have data about earnings (with the exception that some members will be on lower subscriptions if they request this, but not all will, where gender inequalities are in evidence nationally:<sup>21</sup> this would be worth looking into.

LFB data was again provided in February 2016, showing an overall increase in membership, from 3665 to 3861. Comparing August with February, the highest proportion of new members by region was from

<sup>21</sup> Office of National Statistics, *Self employed workers in the UK, 2014* [online] available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/self-employed-workers-in-the-uk/2014/rep-self-employed-workers-in-the-uk-2014.html> (accessed 29 August 2016).

Continental Europe at 16%, but this only relates to 4 members more than a previous 25. Both London and the South East of England saw a 5.4% increase, but South West England had a 9.6% increase (from 83, to 91). London based members still form almost 60% of the total, and the South East proportion remains just below 32%.

However, some other changes may be worth noting: of those members classifying themselves as Black (this may be of 'Black/Black British of African origin', or 'Black/Black British of Caribbean origin', or 'Black/Black British of any other origin'), there has been almost a 30% increase on the previous total (77 in August to 100 in February), a 23% rise of those identifying within the 'Asian' categories, and 14% within the 'Mixed race' categories. Whether this is evidence of shifts in the industry from 'staff' roles to freelance status, or possibly from graduates who have been unable to secure employment, is not possible to say. It would be necessary to make enquiry of these members, which could be done. It could also be useful to compare the London Freelance Branch picture with that of London-based 'staff' membership.

Comparing those who placed themselves within the 'White English' category: there was a decrease of 33 cases, from 2095 in August to 2062 in February, a percentage points change of 1.5%, although still the majority (57% of the total branch membership in August 2015, 53% in February 2016). Again, interpreting this is difficult, as it could be that more people are now choosing to use other White categories, which show increases, such as 'White ...of British origin', '... of Irish...', or ' ... of Scottish' (NB all except 'Welsh' showed increases). Naturally some 'lapsing' occurs because of death, and it could be that a detailed analysis could be done of the intersection of age and ethnic category, which might be predicted to show a greater proportion of 'White English' with age, in line with the changing picture in the general population.

Certainly, Elizabeth Ingrams, LFB's Membership and New Members' Officer, reports that in terms of who comes to 'New members' meetings, held in a café every three months, youth and diversity of all kinds appear. One might contrast this picture with the hackneyed old white male middle class model of a journalist.

But whether the branch is meeting everyone's needs is a continuing issue. It is good to have a union statement on commitment to equality, but on the ground, detailed enquiry into how things work in practice is essential, within the union as much as within the industry as a whole. As Tunde Ogunbesan, Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Succession at the BBC, put

it, on the issue of unconscious bias training: 'Many people who think they get racism and diversity, don't. They need help'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Freelances Reporting Inequality**

(this section is by Magda Ibrahim)

The NUJ's London Freelance Branch equality officers, Magda Ibrahim and Safiullah Tazib have launched a long-term survey into the issues affecting members as part of a drive to define what equality means for journalists in the age of freelancing.

The survey – which is currently running online and as a printed handout questionnaire distributed to members at branch meetings – launched on 14 March 2016, has a mix of defined and open-ended questions to allow members to share their views and experiences of their freelance work.<sup>23</sup>

We are asking respondents to let us know in which areas they may experience discrimination, such as gender, race, religion, sexuality, disability, age or any other area, as well as to describe their experiences and how the NUJ may work towards overcoming the challenges they face. Overwhelmingly, the responses so far have identified two main areas in which members feel they have experienced discrimination: gender and age, although disability and sexuality have also been highlighted.

Comments include:

There is a severe lack of women being promoted in my immediate workplace. (female freelance journalist working primarily in the offices of ... [a national] newspaper)

I've experienced sexism in many places - men being paid more and promoted more, men being patronising.

The high cost of childcare in London means that unless you are able to alter working patterns and hours, pay may not even cover the costs.

Suspect that difficulty of finding work may be related to being considered too old to need work - not so! Old people must eat, too.

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<sup>22</sup> R. Power, *Putting diversity into journalism*, in *The Freelance*, 2016, May [online] Available from [http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1605vine.html?i=flindex&d=2016\\_05](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1605vine.html?i=flindex&d=2016_05) (Accessed 31 May 2016)

<sup>23</sup> Equality in the age of freelancing – a survey for NUJ London Freelance Branch members?: <http://goo.gl/forms/bp7479nZS5>

Some clients think that freelancers should be grateful for the work they commission. I was asked to provide an exclusive story I had pitched to one client for free as a "gesture of goodwill" for all the work they give me!

[In my case it is with] gender (F), disability... and age that I notice discrimination in the sense of: not always being adequately listened to; suggestions I make not being taken up, or being not noticed or instantly dismissed; meetings being held at places or times that don't suit my capacities.

We plan to run the survey as a year-long project, including the online responses and face-to-face interviews, with the aim of identifying challenges and finding practical ways the NUJ's London Freelance Branch may be able to help overcome the issues.

## Conclusion

It is an exciting time to be involved in journalism, especially with the freedom that being freelance affords, in the ever-broadening field of opportunities that technological change has enabled. At the same time, the potential for feeling isolated and powerless is very great, which is why union membership is essential. To have the privilege of access to the moving picture of LFB membership statistics is an honour. Although far more detailed analysis and contextualisation could be done, it is hoped that a flavour of possibilities and ensuing questions for discussion, reflection and action within the branch has been provided here. Some opportunities to encourage greater involvement of members have been identified:

- altering questions on the membership application form;
- informing members at meetings, by email and in *The Freelance* in print and online about the need to keep details up to date within the membership database (e.g. contact details; disabilities);
- informing members that although they provided information on the application form, they have to actively join groups such as the Black Members Council, the 60+ group, and so on.

Face to face in depth interviewing is time-consuming work necessary to gather the richly detailed information that will help ensure that the branch fulfils its promise to support all freelancers, and this is an example of how union members in voluntary office, Magda Ibrahim and Safiullah Tazib,

the LFB equality officers, are participating in enquiry and action. Other initiatives being explored by the committee, for discussion within the branch meetings, are unconscious bias training, and having a facilitated five-year strategy planning session.

This article provides an example of how volunteers working alongside union staff are participating in cycles of inquiry, action, review and further inquiry. It is to be hoped that these very activities, and the reporting of them, here and within union settings and publications may encourage the expression of 'voice' from those who may have felt unsupported and silenced before. It is likely that the very people who may have been inclined to remove themselves from branch or committee involvement, or even union membership, may in fact have most to give in terms of a richer range of perspectives and experiences, to the union itself and to journalism. To reiterate Gopsill and Neale's statement: 'It is important that our community remains independent, autonomous and democratic – not just for journalists, but for the whole of society'.<sup>24</sup> We need only look at current mainstream discourse on the movement of people in and around 'Europe' to see how very necessary this is.

## Appendices

1. The UK standard classification code published by the Office of National Statistics lists a series of roles defined as journalistic. These form the single occupational group of "journalist, newspaper and periodical editors" and include:

- art editor
- broadcast journalist
- columnist
- commentator
- communications officer
- copy editor
- court reporter
- critic
- diarist
- editorial director
- editor
- editorial manager

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<sup>24</sup> T. Gopsill and G. Neale, *op. cit.*, 331.

- feature writer
- freelance writer
- journalist
- listings editor
- leader writer
- foreign correspondent
- newspaper correspondent
- newspaper editor
- news editor
- news writer
- picture editor
- political correspondent
- production editor
- press representative
- publications officer
- radio journalist
- reporter
- sub-editor
- sports writer
- technical
- correspondent
- turf correspondent
- writer

2. NUJ Membership by Ethnicity

categories used on the membership database, from the application form:

Any Other Origin
Asian / Asian British of Any Other Origin
Asian / Asian British of Bangladeshi Origin
Asian / Asian British of Indian Origin
Asian / Asian British of Pakistan Origin
Black / Black British of African Origin
Black / Black British of Any Other Origin
Black / Black British of Caribbean Origin
Chinese
Chinese British
Chinese Other
Middle Eastern or North African
Mixed Race of Any Other Origin

Mixed Race of White & Asian
Mixed Race of White & Black African
Mixed Race of White & Black Caribbean
Not Known
White English
White of Any Other Origin
White of British Origin
White of Irish Origin
White of Scottish Origin
White of Welsh Origin



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