Student support, rates of pay – and no pay

WHAT DO London Freelance Branch members, especially new members, want? At April’s LFB meeting a panel of recently-joined Branch members described their experiences of coming into journalism and into the Union, with suggestions on what the Branch and the Union could work on. The panel was instigated by Elizabeth Ingrams, LFB’s Membership and New Members officer, herself a member for just two years.

David Wilkins and Zaki Dogliani are recent graduates of journalism courses. David reported from South Africa and for BBC Lincolnshire before starting an NCTJ course at a small college in Brighton. Zaki is a recent University of Bristol journalism graduate who’s since worked for outlets including BBC Country File.

David experienced severe difficulties as a journalist with visual and hearing disabilities on a training course. After “employers like the BBC bent over backwards” to help, David joined his course only to be told “if you can’t do video (or social media) you can’t be a journalist anymore.” Big names like Gary O’Donoghue (the BBC’s blind Washington DC correspondent) were “last year’s journalist.”

Zaki is now active with the Student Publications Association, and in talks with an NUJ official about training for them. He says journalists on student newspapers are “threatened with expulsion or funding being cut for exposing the truth.” He suggested established NUJ members giving impartial one-to-one advice to students on journalism courses: we need to ensure that “students aren’t pressured into taking expensive postgrad courses unnecessarily.”

Yousif Nur has been with LFB for just 18 months, and writes about music and “a bit of tech.” He’s not the only panelist to admit joining the NUJ “looking for revenge” after a national daily’s website hired him as a moderator on the “basis of no contract” and then sacked him for being too thorough. Since joining, Jusuf’s “skills, prospects, even my confidence has shot up.”

Francesca Marchese, writing in English and Italian, set up Giornalisti Italiani a Londra (see page 6). Dan Davies, broadcaster and playwright, identified “pay structure issues in social media.” The Canary... supported Corbyn when no one else did”, yet “underlying it is the most neo-liberal model imaginable... you get 50 per cent of the clicks generated from your story.”

This is, says Dan, “the Uberisation of journalism... You’re asking people to take the risk of an entrepreneur... for, if you’re lucky, £180-200.” There was support for reviving the Union’s Cashback for Interns campaign: see www.londonfreelance.org/interns

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#isitfair – contracts blitz

ORGANISATIONS IN and around the Creators’ Rights Alliance (CRA), including the NUJ, are launching a campaign on unfair contracts at www.fairtermsforcreators.org around the acronym C.R.E.A.T.O.R.

Clearer contracts, including written contracts which set out the exact scope of the rights granted;

Fair Remuneration. Equitable and unwaivable remuneration for all forms of exploitation, to include bestseller clauses so if a work does far better than expected the creator shares in its success even if copyright was assigned;

An obligation of Exploitation for each mode of exploitation. Also known as the “use it or lose it” Clause. This is the French model;

Fair, understandable and proper Accounting clauses;

Term. Reasonable and limited contract terms and regular reviews to take into account new forms of exploitation;

Ownership. Authors, including illustrators and translators, should be appropriately credited for all uses of their work and moral rights should be unwaivable;

All other clauses be subject to a general test of Reasonableness.

The campaign seeks your testimony on the impact of unfair contracts – please visit the website.

Google gains, authors lose

AS THE FREELANCE was going to press the US Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal by the Authors Guild (USA) against a ruling that Google was allowed to scan tens of millions of books without permission. That held that the unauthorised copying was “fair use” not least because of “hundreds of millions scanning works on paper. It helps feed the corporation’s attempt to make translators redundant. But is that “transformative”? The massive publicity gained for its “Deep Learning” system beating a master of the game Go may provide a clue. It wants to learn from the books – probably, to start with, to understand what we write and, to start with, throw more money at the problem...”

The Freelance has long wondered why Google is so keen to spend millions scanning works on paper. It helps feed the corporation’s attempt to make translators redundant. But is that “transformative”? The massive publicity gained for its “Deep Learning” system beating a master of the game Go may provide a clue. It wants to learn from the books – probably, to start with, to understand what we write and, to start with, throw more money at the problem...

NUJ Freelance Organiser John Toner commented: “We commend the Authors Guild for pursuing this and share their outrage. The job of getting authors a share of the massive profits tax-avoiding corporations make from our work now falls to lawmakers, not least in Europe.”

Council of Europe seeks protection for journalists

The European Federation of Journalists is pleased to announce that it has had positive input into extensive guidance on protection for journalists issues by the Council of Europe. The Council – not to be confused with the European Union – is the body that convenes the European Court of Human Rights. The guidelines contain specific measures to be taken by states to prevent violations of media freedom – including physical violence against journalists – to effectively protect journalism and journalists, and to prosecute crimes committed against them. For details see bit.ly/EFJ-CoE

New members speak: left to right – Brian Belle-Fortune, Francesca Marchese, Zaki Dogliani (speaking), Elizabeth Ingrams, Rashmee Roshan Lall, Dan Davies, Yousif Nur, David Wilkins.

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