Resist a payment-on-publication nightmare

FOR TOO LONG, freelance journalists have endured publishers dictating insulting terms, from payment months after work is undertaken to unlawful kill fees and abusive rights grab. “It is time to resist” was the resolution of a lively meeting convened by the NUJ on 12 April.

The angry freelances were inspired to act by Eugene Costello’s Press Gazette article about “payment on publication”, a practice which impoverishes hard-working journalists.

It generated a massive social media reaction, provoked scores of positive responses and led to a spontaneous crowd-funding of over £500 to cover his costs.

The meeting agreed a strategy to insist on the kind of basic entitlements that sole traders in virtually every other sector take for granted: payment of fees as agreed; remuneration within 30 days of invoice; and respect for authors’ rights.

Some travelled over 100 miles to attend and many more sent messages of support. “I have been overwhelmed by the reaction”, Eugene Costello told those there. “Freelances are clearly angry. It’s great to see that so many people are willing to try and change things”.

Costello added: “How is it that every other person involved in putting together a story, from photographer to hair and make-up, stylist, commissioning editor and subeditor can count on being paid at the end of the month, while the writer who came up with the idea, made sure that the story came together and was responsible for writing it up has to wait months – sometimes even years – before being paid? It is patently unfair and discriminatory, and it is high time this abusive practice was consigned to history.”

One attendee who regularly works for national tabloids had several times been unable to keep up payments on her mortgage because of late payments for work. Another told of his shame at relying on his partner’s income to survive.

There were also inspiring accounts of freelances who stood up for their rights and were rewarded with better terms.

Among the resolutions was a plan to publish a page on demanding better terms on the NUJ website, and surveying freelances to investigate how widespread are abusive abusive publisher practices and are to collect...