Easier transcribing

HOW TO get those spoken words into a text file? What transcription hacks do we know? And, for younger, readers, what is shorthand? These questions came before LFB’s September meeting.

Lizzy Millar is a freelance minute-taker, reporter and shorthand tutor for the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and through www.shorthand-tutor.co.uk – and she opened by pointing to Branch co-secretary Nick Renaud-Komiya: “I taught him shorthand”. How did it go?

“In a former life,” Nick responded, “I was a staff reporter at the Health Service Journal. I had done some courses... Lizzy came in to give us some tuition on practical applications. Shorthand has proven incredibly useful. It’s a skill that you need to keep alive – not that I manage to practise an hour a week. It never runs out of batteries, for a start.” As Lizzy says, “You don’t need to carry any kit.”

Lizzy observed that the people on her courses are students on NCTJ courses; people fed up with transcribing recordings; and those who might want to pass through airports and security checks. In this era of mass digital surveillance, one advantage of shorthand “on paper rather than in electronic form” is that it can’t be hacked or intercepted.

Academic studies demonstrate that when you write by hand you absorb more of the meaning. You can edit shorthand on the page with a highlighter. If you’re transcribing you have to get everything down and then edit. And have you ever met anyone who’s regretted learning a new language or an instrument?

Lizzy understands there is a place for transcription. She would recommend a recording as a backup – especially if you’re reporting a long meeting. But technology can let you down. She recalls a time when someone tapping nervously on the table wrecked an audio recording.

Angus Batey has “never learned shorthand and I’ve been doing this for 30 years”. He is a music journalist who has now moved to cover defence. He long ago decided he needed complete transcripts. But transcription is the bane of your life. In his work, an interview of two hours is not uncommon.

Recently, he’s been working on a magazine that appears daily during major air shows, reporting on conferences he’d have to write up for the next day. An editor suggested Angus try an online transcription service called rev.com to save time.

The editor would pay for the service: “It would free me up to be more productive... and save him quite a bit of cash overall.” That cost is US$0.10 a minute. Its accuracy is “not that great” but it’s turned a “tedious task into a potential time-saver”.

As the NUJ’s national organiser for Scotland, I note that we were told by Thompsons Solicitors, and we thank them for their sound advice and representation.

© John Toner
National Organiser, Scotland

NUJ wins member £8360 back pay

WHEN is a contract not a contract? When the clauses do not reflect the reality of the working relationship.

This was the decision of an employment tribunal when it ruled that NUJ member David Walsh was a “worker” despite what his contract tried to say.

David had worked shifts on a casual basis for The Scotsman for several years. He had asked for holiday pay on a number of occasions but was refused on the grounds that he was self-employed.

The company’s stance depended on its standard freelance contract, which states that the freelance is self-employed and an independent contractor.

The tribunal ruled that the reality was different; that David met the statutory definition of “worker”; and that he was entitled to paid leave. As he was not afforded this right during his engagement, Mr Walsh was awarded £8360 in compensation.

The case was made unusually complicated by the fact that the company in question, Johnston Press, is now in administration. Compensation must be recovered from the National Insurance Fund.

As the NUJ’s national organiser for Scotland, I note that we were always confident that Mr Walsh was a “worker”, and that the wording of the agreement did not get around this basic fact. The agreement in question is still in use by JPI Media, and the judgment could have implications for other freelances.

The best way for any company to avoid legal action would be to negotiate freelance contracts with the National Union of Journalists.

David Walsh was represented by Thompsons Solicitors, and we thank them for their sound advice and representation.

© Mike Holderness

An 1800-word version is online.
The Rate for the Job

THIS MONTH’S Rates for the Job include some from the BBC New Rate Card. There’s a glossary of its jargon at www.londonfreelance.org/rates – please give not only the basic rate (e.g. for First British Serial rights) but extra payments negotiated for extra uses, like the Web. These are shown as (eg) £400+100. Rates marked X are, in the editor’s fallible opinion, below par. Treat all rates as minima, even perhaps the happy ♦ zero.

Broadcasting: Channel 5 website, digital producer day (content for Big Brother website) and social media (£185.00; BBC new rate card: Action Rant / Show & Tell, with own kit £153.00; Dynamic Junction £46.00; Meet and Greet guests £31.00.

Photography: private school, one day location PR, FBS, exes £120, £800.00; Leicester City FC, camera operator day £390.00; Guardian, 18-photo Uganda story, £350.00; PR agency, one-hour, FBS, exes £40, £200.00; Daily Mail, print use of 1 photo £160.00; small online retailer, one-hour studio shoot, 12 shots, web only £150.00; PR agency, one-month licence for use of image on a trade exhibition stand £150.00; Guardian...

In addition to the NUJ professional training courses on offer in London, there are also numerous professional training courses run by NUJ Training Scotland – see www.nujtrainingscotland.com and NUJ Training Wales, for more information on which see www.nujtrainingwales.org.

FEU Training – the training arm of the Federation of Entertainers’ Unions, of which the NUJ is a part, offer free courses to NUJ members on the business side of being self-employed. Upcoming FEU courses (in London, Bristol and Birmingham) include cash flow, pitching and digital marketing.

To see what courses are available and to register for any of the courses, see www.feutraining.org – you’ll need your NUJ membership number at the ready (it’s on your membership card or Press Card).

But the funding of FEU Training is in peril. FEU Training needs to meet targets to ensure its continued funding, including members completing short online quizzes to assess their skills in English, maths and IT.

Please take a moment to fill out this quizzes online at Skillcheck – go to www.unionlearn.org/skill-check and choose the “non-union-learn” and then “NUJ” menus.

Following summer a pilot, LFB has launched a new survey into members’ training needs. If you have ideas for courses you would be interested in, see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1910trai.html © Matt Salusbury
The excitement of video

WE HAD a full house at the launch of Video Consortium’s newest chapter, hosted by London Freelance Branch at NUJ headquarters on 4 September. Over 60 filmmakers and friends joined us.

We began the night with a bit of networking and then officially kicked off the event with two videos: Enter Toledo, the Spanish City of Swords and I Live Alone in an Island Paradise from Jacob Harrell, a producer with the Great Big Story company. Jacob described the funny and perilous way in which he found one of his interviewees, and why editing is his favourite part of film-making.

We then saw an advance screening of a short Guardian piece: Teranga, Life in the Waiting Room. Co-directors Lou Marillier, Sophia Seymour and Daisy Squires explained the beauty behind being able to equally share the responsibilities of co-directing a documentary. They discussed when and why they decide to turn the camera off and put the subject’s needs first.

The night concluded with another Guardian documentary, Sam and the Plant Next Door, by director Ómer Sami, who joined us by online video call. He described the ways in which he found such dynamic characters and how he gained their trust.

The co-directors of the Video Consortium in London – Dobriyana Tropankeva, Jenny Marc and Chloe Mamelok – were excited by the positive response to the event.

Two of the night’s most popular questions were “Why hasn’t this happened in London before?” and “When will the next event like this be held?” The next event will again be hosted by London Freelance Branch in November, so keep an eye on www.londonfreelance.org to find out more.

© Nicci Talbot

Freelances matter at Trades Union Congress

LONDON Freelance Chair Brannk Penny Quinlon was one of the National Union of Journalists’ representatives to the Trades Union Congress gathering in Brighton from 8 to 11 September. She spoke in support of Motion 29 from the Musicians’ Union, which calls on the UK trade union movement to recognise that in campaigning for improved terms and conditions for the “false” self-employed it is important to remember that many truly self-employed workers, particularly musicians and performers, are keen to maintain their self-employed status whilst still needing union representation. Comrades, President – I am Chair of London Freelance Branch of the National Union of Journalists – the largest Branch in the NUJ, with 3000 members. We find that within the trade union movement freelance work is often seen as an option of last resort.

This is not the case for many of our members, for whom the freedom of freelancing is a choice giving autonomy and control over our lives. However, our members, like any other workers, need the support of their union – to tackle late payments, low pay and poor working conditions.

Smaller craft unions such as the NUJ and the Musicians’ Union and Equity have a wealth of experience in representing creative workers. We ask that the TUC utilise this body of knowledge in developing collective bargaining arrangements for our sector – for unless authors and performers are paid fairly for the skilled work that we do there is little hope of a vibrant and diverse cultural and news industry representing the voices of a diverse world that is not just pale, male and stately.

Our members are often told that because they love their work publicity is “sufficient recompense.” Try telling your telephone provider that you will Tweet your gratitude for their services and that good publicity is enough!

TUC: we need you! This is not just a battle for freelance workers. We in the NUJ have with the International and European Federations of Journalists – placing the creative rights of workers at the heart of the global trade union agenda.

The motion was passed. A motion from the actors’ union Equity calling on the UK government to implement the recent EU copyright directive fully into UK law was also passed.

Other members of the delegation were general secretary Michelle Stanisstreet, NUJ president Galen Jones, and NEC members Steve Bird and Chris Frost. The NUJ proposed two motions, calling for strengthening of the International Labour Organization and for campaign for government to fully fund free TV licences for over-75s and for the creation of a sustainable funding model for the BBC. Both were passed.

Policing matters

Members of the NUJ’s Photographers’ Council continue to meet with police to press the case that journalists must be allowed to report without interference. They are extending discussions to cover private security guards, who are increasingly seen “stewarding” street events. They have the impression that there is an increase in interference by police. To report all kinds of interactions between police and your journalism, please use the form at www.londonfreelance.org/policing.

You’re nicked

Freelance photographer Guy Smallman was arrested while covering a planned drone protest at Heathrow on 18 September. Doubtless coincidentally, soon after Branch Chair Penny Quinnlon Tweeted to @metpoliceuk “for avoidance of any doubt here are stories his images were used on in the past week…” Guy was released, after more than nine hours at Wandsworth police station. Assistant Freelance Organiser David Ayrton told the Morning Star that the union was “disturbed and concerned” that a member was arrested while working; the NUJ will be discussing with Guy the possibility of legal action.

Undercover cops and trade unions

THERE’s an important conference on Undercover Policing and Trade Unions on Saturday 16 November. Co-hosted by groups including the Blacklist Support Group and Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (COPS), it will bring together trade unionists and activists to share information on undercover policing in trade unions and protest groups. Unionised workers in the construction industry are known to have been the subject of a blacklist maintained by firms such as the Consulting Organisation. Some data on that list could only have come from undercover police, according to former undercover officer Peter Francis. Journalists with press cards covering demonstrations and actions – in particular the coaches travelling to Fairford bomber base to protest the 2003 Iraq War – are known to be among those detained as a result of intelligence from “ undercover”. The ongoing Undercover Policing Inquiry – not now expected to conclude before 2023 – includes NUJ members who may have come into contact with undercover in the course of reporting.

The Branch passed a motion at its September meeting encouraging members to attend the conference, from 10.15 to 5.30 at the University of Greenwich, 30 Park Row, London SE10 9LS. For details and to register see www.bit.ly/FL-COPS
Opposing the normalisation of lies

RECURRING themes at the Byline Festival of journalism in August were crime, corruption, misinformation, dark money and lies, lies, lies.

A session led by City, University of London’s Dr Paul Lashmar noted that Nick Davies and Carole Cadwalladr’s revelations about phone hacking and dark money around the EU referendum haven’t brought about the changes we would have hoped. But they’ve certainly inspired “a new generation of journalists” arriving in journalism schools. Such investigations have created “ripples… they inspire people”.

We heard from Alistair Morgan about the murder of his brother Daniel – a private investigator killed with an axe in the unlit car park of the Golden Lion pub in Sydenham 32 years ago. Alistair became a journalist in an attempt to untangle the “dirty mess” of his brother’s death.

Five prosecutions and collapsed proceedings later, a new inquiry is in its seventh year. We’re no closer to the truth. Within months of Daniel’s death his company, Southern Investigations, become the go-to for Fleet Street phone hacking. Alistair concluded that just as organised crime has its contacts among corrupt police officers, so organised crime and corrupt police officers also cultivate contacts in the media.

How can we save the BBC, asked festival co-instigator Peter Jukes. The panel concluded that while most BBC journalists are excellent, some showing extraordinarily bravery, there are let down by “craven” management. The BBC charter’s requirement for “balance” doesn’t work anymore: “You can’t balance people who know stuff with people who don’t know stuff,” as is the case in “debates” on climate change.

One of many discussions on “the normalisation of lies” was led by Gavin Esler, author of Brexit without the Bullshit. He compared the “facts” most people had picked up going into the 2016 EU referendum with the 35-page explanatory booklet delivered to every home in Northern Ireland in the run-up to the referendum there on the Good Friday Agreement.

Analysing Trump lies has become an industry in the US: the Washington Post clocked 10,600 demonstrable lies by the President Trump up to this June – 12 a day, including weekends. But there hasn’t quite been the same forensic investigation of serial lying in recent UK politics, with a startling lack of mainstream UK media interest in the Cambridge Analytica affair.

Compare today’s serial liar politicians getting away with it to the trouble President George Bush (Senior) got into after breaking his “Read my lips, no new taxes” promise back in 1988. President Clinton’s second term was mostly about the fallout from his claim “I did not have sex with that woman.”

But by 2016 former Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, campaigning for Trump’s nomination, could say of the fall in crime nationally that “there may be some liberal statistics about how crime is going down, but that’s not how people feel.”

Security advice from Mark Spy Blog included: don’t all switch your phones off at once just before you go into your secret meeting. To security forces or industrial spies monitoring you, it screams “secret meeting!” Switch off your phones on the way to the meeting. Security folk going by train to Cheltenham for meetings at GCHQ apparently have written instructions to start switching off their phones at Paddington station.

All this and Pussy Riot too, who unfortunately took so long to set up for their gig that they pushed the programme past its strict 2am bedtime. Rapper Lowkey also performed, getting the audience to sing along: “Rap’s not dead! It’s at Byline!”

No-deal Brexit looms – again

HIGH DRAMA struck as we were editing this Freelance: the UK Supreme Court ruled that the government’s “prorogation” of Parliament was unlawful and void. Nothing is clear about what the raved Parliament will do: but one effect may be that it can revisit the 99 pages of changes to immigration laws “laid before Parliament” just before it was unlawfully shut down.

These would allow the Home Office to revoke the Settled Status of an EU national after Brexit. Reasons for revoking could include knowingly providing false information.

UK immigration acts from the 1970s, still in force, require the government to lay any changes to immigration laws before Parliament. Theoretically, an MP or Lord could organise parliamentarians to “pray against” such secondary legislation, but they’ve rarely been able to organise this.

Now some newly-emboldened Opposition MPs, now effectively running Parliament, have called for a formal debate and a vote. And a House of Commons Select Committee may now hear evidence on problems around the EU Settlement Scheme. Earlier plans by Home Secretary Priti Patel to end freedom of movement for EU nationals immediately with effect from the latest planned date for Brexit – 31 October 2019 – were shelved, apparently after legal advice make it clear that to do so would be unlawful.

As the time of writing, a no-deal Brexit on 31 October is still a distinct possibility. If you’re travelling into or out of the UK around that time, whether you’re a UK national or an “other EU” national, you are advised to check you still have six months validity on your passport or ID card.

NUJ members who are UK nationals living in the EU or EU nationals living in the UK should contact their embassies for advice on what to do in the event of a Brexit. The most recent advice to the NUJ is at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1903brex.html.

A no-deal Brexit would mean EU nationals have until 31 December 2020 to apply for EU Settled Status. In the event of a deal, the deadline will likely be 31 June 2021.

© Matt Salusbury
A podcasting renaissance

PODCASTING is back! Speaking at the July LFB meeting was Lily Ames (@LilyAmes), who earns a living podcasting. She set up the UK Audio Network email list for those working in audio – podcasting in particular. The podcasting industry has become “huge… this year it’s exploded,” reports Lily. The New York Times podcast The Daily is the newspaper group’s biggest single revenue stream. Now 85 per cent of advertising agencies have podcast in their strategy. Netflix has just announced a stream of podcasts of directors’ commentary to join its existing podcast strands.

University departments are entering podcasting, observed LFB Chair Pennie Quinton. They see podcasts as an effective way of sharing the impact of their research to generate more funding.

Lily worked for Canadian broadcaster CBC until a “huge round of cuts”. Making use of her British passport, she came to London. While North America has a strong culture of email discussion, none existed when Lily arrived in London. “Frank conversations about money” for audio work were particularly lacking.

So from “my own need to get paid and to grow the industry,” Lily set up UK Audio Network. It’s “not just for freelancers”: it’s also “for commissioners, big outlets like Audible and Spotify,” together in one email network. It now has over 1000 people.

UK Audio Network rules include no pitching, please. It tries really hard to get commissioning editors to be clear about how to pitch to them, says Lily. If people offer just £75 for a job, other list users will tell them, “you shouldn’t do that.”

Much of the work coming the way of freelancers at short notice via UK Audio Network is along these lines: “Is anybody available to do a tape synch at London Fields tomorrow?” Suji “tape synch” is the “unsexiest” category of audio work – “interview one guest, just hold the recorder.”

There are so many tape-synch gigs because podcasting is “very story-driven”: interviewees tell their stories in their homes or wherever they feel comfortable, not in a studio. Lily says you can survive on tape synch gigs – but that’s not a career.

Voice-activated speakers in the home, such as Amazon’s Alexa, will change audio and podcast work significantly, although it’s still hard to say how. Some are already asking whether journalists can play a role in providing content for distribution in the home via a smart speaker. And what about training? Lily recommends approaching someone who’s already producing podcasts and collaborating with them. The Transom website for podcasters includes a podcast on podcasting.

UK Audio Network’s recent rates card shows typical day rates are around £150. There’s more money to be had in consulting, finding a big client whose hand needs holding through the whole podcasting process – a university or a household name gallery, for example.

Success and profit in Dublin

The autumn 2019 Dublin Freelance Forum is on Monday 21 October and this year has the theme “the freelance’s guide to success and profit.” Topics include getting commissions, payment, copyright, licensing, pitching ideas, negotiating rates, setting up an office, marketing, IT, developing your business and taking care of your health. It costs a tax-deductible €10: to book, see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1908diff.html

Subs rise needed to secure our union’s future

THE NUJ faces a significant challenge at our next Delegate Meeting in April 2020. By then, subscription rates will not have risen for six years. In that period, inflation has pushed up costs by approximately 2 per cent each year – about 10 per cent in total.

As a result of regulatory change beyond the union’s control, the cost of the now-closed staff pension scheme could rise by £150,000 per annum.

Balancing the NUJ’s £4.7m annual budget won’t be possible after this year, unless subs rise. We don’t have reserves on which we can fall back.

A paper adopted by the National Executive Committee at its last meeting explains the background, and proposes a solution.

We must raise subscriptions by 15 per cent in 2020 and a further 10 per cent in 2021.

Of course discounts will continue for those on lower incomes, and we plan to do more to publicise these – see www.londonfreelance.org/FAQ

The alternatives are stark. Without a significant increase in subs, the union will have to reduce the size of our already hard-pressed staff and consider the future of one or more of the offices outside London. The result would be a reduction in services to members.

If subs income were static, even staff cuts would probably only delay the need for a protective merger with a larger union. Were that to happen, I believe the industrial organisation of journalists in the UK would take a blow, recovery from which is hard to imagine.

The NEC is keen that as many members as possible consider these options and contribute to discussion. The plans are not set in stone and the more members who contribute ideas and views, the better.

The NEC paper is available at www.bit.ly/FinancePaper and the London Freelance Committee asks you to send your views to us at future@londonfreelance.org

More online

Do keep checking www.londonfreelance.org/fl for up-dates and expanded reports, including:

• Don’t fall for urban legends about Facebook and copyright;
• Afghanistan Media for Democracy conference report;
• NUJ condemns misleading government ads at TUC Disabled Workers’ Conference;
• Photographers warned not to sign unfair contracts for covering Ariana Grande concerts;
• Updates on the new EU copyright law and Google’s moves to undermine it.

Lily Ames (right) in conversation with LFB Membership Officer Francesca Marchese

© Matt Salusbury

Francesca Marchese

© Mike Holderness

© Matt Salusbury
REPORTING religion is the theme of the LFB meeting on Monday 11 November. Our speakers will include Ruth Peacock, Launch Director and Trustee of the Religion Media Centre (www.religionmedia-centre.org.uk) has a mission to help “journalists and other media professionals to cover religion”. We also expect in this meeting to vote on some proposed motions from the Branch to go before the NUJ’s Delegate Meeting (DM, its conference every two years). The next one’s in April in Southport. Please see the “meetings” page (link below) for details.

The LFB gathering on Monday 9 December is a festive end-of-year party for freelances whose existence is often overlooked at such corporate Xmas gatherings for staffers. It starts at the usual time (below) but it’s a different venue – it’s at St Anne’s, 55 Dean St, W1D 6AF: nearest Tube Piccadilly Circus. There will be free food and some free drink.

On Monday 13 January LFB has its Annual General Meeting (AGM) during which it elects new members of its Committee. See www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/jobs.html for Committee posts (some are paid) and what each of them entails.

This went to press on 30 September. Your deadline for the November online-only issue is 30 October.

LFB meetings (except for new members’ meetings) are always on the second Monday of the month, from 6.45pm to 8.45pm in the basement of the NUJ’s HQ at Headland House, 72 Acton Street, London WC1X 9NB, accessible to people who use wheelchairs. The nearest Tube is King’s Cross or Chancery Lane. If you need the Branch to pay for care for a child or dependent so you can attend a meeting, contact a Branch Officer.

For updates on meetings and for confirmation of themes and speakers for forthcoming meetings, see the Branch calendar web page www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html and LFB’s Twitter feed www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB

Can members who have difficulty reading the agenda on paper please contact us to get the agenda in electronic form ahead of the meeting?

We draw members’ attention to the microphone that will be passed to you if you indicate you wish to speak at a meeting. This is so that our members with hearing problems can hear you via the induction loop.

For updated guidance on etiquette on recording or live-tweeting from LFB meetings, see our policy at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1507film.html

Even in the event of a no-deal Brexit, LFB’s new members meeting will go ahead on Thursday 31 October.

Yes, for added excitement, the next new members meeting will be a few hours before the UK is (or was – maybe – at the time of writing) scheduled to leave the EU. As usual, this free event is a chance to meet other members new to LFB. On hand will be also some veteran journalists who’ve been with LFB for absolutely ages, who can share their experience of freelancing and give advice. Halloween masks and costumes are strictly optional.

New members’ meetings are always on the last Thursday of every third month (regardless of whether or not it’s an “Exiting the EU” day).

The October event is, as ever, at The Camera Museum, Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY on Thursday 27 July 2017 from 6pm. The nearest Tube is Holborn.

The nearest Tube is Holborn.

A successful LFB new members’ meeting in July: image © Francesca Marchese

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STRUGGLING with time management and procrastination? Experienced and qualified coach with background in journalism will help you draw up and implement a plan of action to get organized. Email Sara Dewar at sara@saradewar.co.uk

The Branch welcomes you

There is a vacancy for a Welfare Officer for London Freelance Branch, to support members in trouble. Some of the work of the Branch Welfare Officers involves making applications to the NUJ charity, NUJ Extra, on behalf of members in need. There are some problems members get into that no amount of money can solve, so other tasks include listening to members, advising them and counselling them. This may include home visits or meeting up with members to discuss their issues.

LFB has two Welfare Officers – where possible one male and one female. Currently Tim Dawson is our male Welfare Officer – see his guide to what a Welfare Officer does at www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/welfare.html – and we have a vacancy for a female Welfare Officer. If you are interested in standing, come to a Branch meeting or contact a member of the Branch Committee: www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/contact.html

The Branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 13 January 2020 will elect a new Committee and also the delegation to the Union’s Delegate Meeting (conference) in Southport on 24-26 April. For the Committee posts and what they entail, see www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/jobs.html and for more on standing as a delegate see our advice ahead of the previous DM at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1711dm.html

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