In news we trust

HOW CAN NEWS organisations win back the trust of readers in this era of the “fake news cycle”? April’s London Freelance Branch meeting heard from one initiative that is attempting to do just that. Our speakers were Ann Gripper, executive editor (digital) at Mirror Online and Jack Lahart, assistant community editor at The Economist.

The Trust Project was developed under the leadership of Sally Lehman at Santa Clara University’s Markkula Centre for Applied Ethics. International partners include the Washington Post and other big titles in the US. Italian titles Repubblica and La Stampa have just joined – see La Stampa’s message to LFB on page 3.

The Trust Project proclaims that it “aims to improve opinion of media”. How can it do that? Says Ann of the readers, “I can’t make them trust us, I can only give them information… they can make their own judgements.” News organisations that sign up to the Trust Project (by invitation only) can choose to have a capital “T” logo on their webpages that links to “Trust Indicators”.

Trust Indicators are about transparency: “being honest with our readers”. There is information on the ethics of the newspaper, its ownership, its journalists and their backgrounds. The Trust Project has transformed Mirror Online’s “About us” page, now linked via a Trust Project logo. This now reveals that the Mirror campaigned for more lifeboats after the Titanic sank and that it’s “backed the Labour Party at every election since 1945”. It now has a list of editors and explains it’s a plc and part of a network of local titles. Other Trust Indicators are “what type of work” an article is. Category headings now appear clearly alongside articles – labelled as opinion, analysis, background, satire or reviews.

Bylines now link to brief biographies – for staffers only for now, but Ann says the Mirror would be happy to provide a page “that presented your credentials” for those who freelance regularly for them, particularly from abroad.

Mirror Online implement all these Trust Indicators “for the readers” but expects ultimately to benefit from more traffic coming to Trust Project partners’ websites as there’s more trust in their content. The plan is that eventually Google, Facebook and Twitter will – in Jack’s words – “reward” trusted news organisations for their trustworthy content. Identifiable metadata would drive “trustworthy” news providers up the search rankings.

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 grabs. “It is time to resist” was the resolution of a lively meeting convened by the NUJ on 14 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 are and to collect payment on publication.”

© Matt Salusbury

Ann Gripper (right) and Jack Lahart Photo: © Hazel Dunlop
The Rate for the Job

THIS MONTH we include many rates for shifts of all kinds and some for “sleb” features for the nationals and for big circulation weeklies.

Thinking about work for a company you’ve not dealt with before? Look at the Rate for the Job to find out what companies in similar niches have paid. Then aim higher. You can submit rates online at www.lon-donfreelance.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 ☺ few.

Broadcasting: Sky news: presenting shift £350; editing/reporting/newsreading day £160; papers review £150; punditry, pre-recorded £150.

Photography: The Economist, three images £450; Daily Mail video (10 sec) plus article £270.

Shifts: LexisNexis book editing per hour £24; transcribing music journalists’ interviews per minute of interview £1; book editing for pres-tigious publisher, per day – manage project, client handling, commissioning, subbing, taxed at source, £250 + some exes; Vouge online, 8am-1pm day covering Fashion Week from home via server, £250; UCL Medi-cal School, half-day shift £150; Dazed per 7-hour day chief-subbing, £130 X; Evening Standard sports subbing day 7-4 with lunch-hour, £130; book editing, unnamed publisher, per day £120 XX; book editing, ditto, per day £50 XXXX.

Words, per 1000: Think Publishing 1200-words + 300-word side-bar @ £835 = £557; Guardian How I Spend It, 650 words @ £250 = £385; Sunday Times Celebrity Q+A 1200 words @ 400 £333; Mail on Sunday Celebrity Q+ A 1400 words @ £450 = £321; British Medical Journal 1300-word feature @ £395 = £304; The Week, 600 words @ 175 = £292; Independent feature £100 XX; Spectato-r blog £50 XX; Novara Media £50 XX.

Words, other: Sunday Mirror Real Life, two-page spread £1500, page £750; Take a Break two-page spread £700, page lead £350; Sun on Sunday page lead £500; Fabulous Real Life piece £350; Observer Celeb-rity Q+ A £250; Notebook Celebrity Q+ A £250; The i Paper sports: small sports page exclusive £130, feature 900 words, £110, match report 800 words, £100.

Self-funded training off-tax: give your views

There’s a consultation underway by HMRC (the tax people) into tax reliefs for self-funded work-related training – an essential part of being a freelance journalist these days. We get these reliefs as “self-employed”.

Under current rules, self-employed people can deduct the costs of training incurred “wholly and exclusively” for their business and where it maintains or updates existing skills – but not when it introduced es new skills. In these times, though, acquiring new skills is necessary for us freelances.

An estimated half a million self-employed folks did self-fund some kind of work-related training in 2016, which would probably have included some of us freelances. A set of not-particularly-well-worded questions is at https://tinyurl.com/y7php9vh and you should answer them before 7 June.

Copyright is a bit eventful

THE BIZARRE effects of thought-less contracts dealing with copyright were illustrated by booking service EventBrite, which in April claimed the right to attend all events using the service, to film them and to make unlimited use of the footage. After some problems were pointed out – for example, what about the rights of the audience and the performers at the event? – they did a swift reverse.

The importance of reading – and challenging – the small print in contracts is hereby illustrated.

And see the report on the #use-it-payforit campaign on page 5 for publishers claiming that they can “embed” people’s images without permission. That was a tale of a freel ance successfully striking back – but there are worrying developments at the Court of Justice of the European Union, which is drifting toward find ing that such “borrowing” of content from other websites is not an infringement of copyright. The European Federation of Journalists (EJF) is keeping a close eye on this.

Meanwhile, the process of the EU Parliament and the Council of the Ministers of the member states nego tiating a new Directive on copy right in the Digital Single Market trundles on. The vote in the EU Par liament’s Legal Committee has been postponed and postponed, and is now expected in June.

The thousand-odd amendments talked are being whittled down. The EJF continues to press for a strong right of all authors and performers – including you – to be informed of what use is made of your work and to challenge certain unfair contracts, and to resist a reduction in income from educational use of your work.

The delay reduces the chance that the Directive will apply to the UK – but who knows?

© Mike Holderness
Precarious work – give your views

THIS SPRING the government opened a total of four consultations on changes to employment law aimed to strengthen the rights of (some) people in precarious work. The proposals under consultation have been described by Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary, Arnold Lobel, as “a baby step”. They were in response to the disappointing Taylor Review into Modern Employment Practices (see the August 2017 Freelance) and a subsequent report by two Parliamentary Committees (December 2017).

Proposals include improvements to the enforcement of holiday pay and statutory sick pay entitlements, more enforcement of rules on “umbrella companies” and some limited improvements to awards at Employment Tribunal.

Also planned is a right for all workers from “day one” (the day they start work) to be given detailed written statements about pay, conditions and deductions. There are also proposals on removing the legal loophole that allows employers to pay agency workers far less than permanent staff doing the exact same job. Ministers are also consulting on the enforcement of employment rights and on the complex tests of whether someone is engaged as genuinely self-employed.

For details and how to give your views see www.londonfreelance.org/ft/1804gig.html

TUC Women’s Conference 2018

REVELATIONS of pandemic sexual harassment and yawning gender pay gaps this year brought an especially solemn significance to the TUC Women’s conference. While celebrating 100 years since some women gained the vote, and 150 years of the TUC, the annual conference was a compelling reminder that equal treatment at work, at home, and within unions demands continuous campaigning.

“These are hard times, but they are exciting times,” said Frances O’Grady, TUC general secretary: “We have to stand up for issues that matter most for women workers.”

The NUJ delegation proposed motions on the gender pay gap and on equal maternity pay for self-employed people at the conference, held at the TUC’s headquarters, Congress House in London, on 7-9 March.

BBC worker Cath Saunt called for current rules requiring companies with 250 or more employees to publish their gender pay gaps to be extended to those with 50 or more employees. “It’s a hundred years since women first got the right to vote and yet we are still fighting for pay parity,” she said.

“The BBC’s record, bravely high-lighted by former China bureau chief, Carrie Gracie, is a gender pay gap of 9.3 per cent.” Dawn Butler, shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, added her support at the conference, committing to “holding the government to account” on addressing the gender pay gap.

Meanwhile, London Freelance Branch co-equities officer Magda Ibrahim called for a lobby to address discrepancies in maternity pay between self-employed and employed women. The difference in statutory maternity pay for employed workers, and maternity allowance – which is a set rate for the self-employed – can mean at least a third less money when calculated based on minimum wage rates.

“Maternity pay has long been a bone of contention in the UK – let’s take this opportunity to lobby to close the gap in maternity pay for employed and self-employed workers and support women in whatever type of work they are doing,” she urged. Fellow deleagte and NUJ Disabled Members’ Council chair Ann Galpin called for solidarity with hunger strikers at Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedford.

The conference was a chance for more than 260 delegates from 35 unions – as well as representatives from trades councils – to debate issues including flexible working, Brexit, the menopause at work, discrimination against older workers, and how to organise women in the gig economy within the union movement. Of the 44 motions discussed during the event, one was selected by ballot to be presented to TUC Congress, which takes place in Manchester on 9-12 September. The chosen topic is sexual harassment, with a motion observing that “staff on precarious contracts can be particularly vulnerable because of dependence upon white male structures for promotion or work”. Mary Bousted, TUC vice president, added: “More than 50 per cent of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment at work... the trade union movement is not immune from it. We must not be ashamed to say ‘it has happened to me’.”

© Magda Ibrahim

La Stampa and the Trust Project

THE TRUST Project has developed tools to identify and certify reliable contents for online newspapers with a sort of digital label, a bit like those for tracing food products, recognizable by search engine algorithms which in this way can enhance them. I have worked with conviction to identify its indicators and to publish the Code of Ethics for La Stampa to which all the employees and collaborators are required to conform. I have also participated in the development of the ethical rules of journalists. Their implementation is a different matter.

Thanks to a platform developed for this purpose, the biographies of journalists who want to join the project are online so that the articles published with the Trust Project logo have clickable authors, in order to know who they are and see their profile, their face, the summary of their CV, their social accounts or their email address to be able to contact them.

But editorial work must also be transparent: who is the journalist who edited the article, what are the documents and the sources of reference? And the corrections must also be transparent, and include their date and time.

The usability of this model needs to be publicised more, in order to help readers to report errors.

We believe that increasing transparency and dialogue with the public makes us more credible and helps us win readers’ trust.

All this takes time because a deep cultural change is needed in news-rooms, where – in a time of crisis of newspapers – there is still the need to be clear to win back the trust of the public by every single person and the whole company.

© Anna Masera.

Public Editor, La Stampa; translation © Francesca Marchese
NUJ member takes Brexit to task

MORE DETAIL is emerging on Brexit and how it will affect the NUJ’s members who are EU nationals in the UK and our UK national members in the EU. An NUJ member in the Netherlands has gone to court to get yet more clarity. The European Commission has agreed a timetable for the implementation of “transitional arrangements” after the UK formally leaves the EU (on March 29 2019). The transitional arrangements will end on 31 December 2020, the end of the EU’s budgetary period, ending speculation that they might last a few months longer.

In March the EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier said these arrangements were conditional on the UK “accepting the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and continuing to allow free movement of people to settle and work until the end of the period”. It has been confirmed that “new arrivals” from the EU, settling in the UK for the first time during the transition period ending in late 2020, will enjoy the same rights as EU citizens already in the UK. This is helpful to those EU nationals already in the UK who need to travel back and forth to other EU countries and who might not have much by way of evidence of their original arrival. (They didn’t need any when they did arrive.) Barnier’s statement aimed to reassure “the 4.5 million citizens, British and European, who are concerned about and worried by Brexit. Citizens, since day one, have been our priority”. He also reminded the UK that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. That means that the EU could still reject a final Brexit deal with the UK over EU citizens’ rights. The European Parliament has already pledged to “continue fighting” for the rights of EU nationals and UK nationals in Europe. It still threatens to veto the deal in an expected early 2019 vote.

A judge at a court in Amsterdam has referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union a case brought by five UK national expatriates living in the Netherlands – including Guy Thornton, a member of NUJ Netherlands Branch. They asked the court to rule on whether “Brexit would mean they automatically lose their rights as European citizens or whether they would retain them and, if so, under what circumstances.”

The Amsterdam court asked the CJEU (commonly called the European Court of Justice) for an opinion. The CJEU has not yet announced whether it has decided to give one. If there is a ruling on this – which may not be for a couple of years – it will have implications for EU nationals everywhere, since the Court’s judgments will affect UK jurisprudence until 2027 at least.

Free advice services for EU nationals in the UK – linked from www.londonfreelance.org/ft/1804brex.html – are starting up. The Facebook group UKCEN allows members to post questions to immigration lawyers for free. The Here for Good service offers free advice for EU nationals in the UK.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has proposed setting up a web portal for Londoners who are EU nationals to access help on getting “settled status” in the UK. See page 6 for details of a related LFB meeting in June.

A member-led union goes through the motions

SOUTHPORT, Lancashire, was again the venue for the NUJ’s festival of democracy and assertion that we are a member-led union – Delegate Meeting (DM). This happens every second year.

The biggest upset was that DM narrowly failed to give the required two-thirds majority to increase members’ subscriptions, causing some concern among those who have to work out how to pay for services to members.

Probably the most heated debate on a call for the union to ballot members on setting up a “political screen” for an ambition to get the NUJ “accepted into the electoral system” and thus allow members to “decide whether to support or affiliate to political parties”. A speaker from South Yorkshire Branch attracted heckling on asking “does anyone here believe the BBC is impartial?” The amendment they were promoting, proposing that a fund would indeed allow members to “decide whether to support or affiliate to political parties”, was defeated: the motion was sent to the National Executive Committee (NEC).

There was also some controversy over a substantial pay rise negotiated in collective bargaining for the General Secretary, which served to correct a situation in which a female general secretary was being paid less than a male assistant general secretary. The NEC produced an explanation to DM – Nottingham Branch suggested that it could perhaps have emailed such a document to all members at the time; and another member wished they hadn’t first read of it in Private Eye. The Head Office staff chapel urged that the motion be “remitted” – sent to the NEC for its consideration without a vote at DM – but NEC could not accept that because it had already decided to oppose the motion criticizing the move, which was defeated.

All the motions that London Freelance Branch put forward were passed. They covered: clarifying dealings between Head Office and lay activists’ initiatives; opposing the calamitous effects of government “universal credit” policies on low-paid members and those with disabilities; nuclear disarmament (we’re for it); work following up on our conference on precarious workers; work on copyright and unfair contracts; contacting members who lapse; supporting members who suffer trauma at work; ensuring that training is available for those working in hazardous environments; and work to support members threatened by the UK leaving the EU.

Watch for data protection update

As you may have noticed, the General Data Protection Regulation comes into force on 25 May. In a nutshell: your obligations concerning your work as a journalist are much as they were, but they have sharper teeth.

Watch for updates to www.londonfreelance.org/fl/dataprot.html as we get answers to questions raised by members.
Where are the women cartoonists?

WHY ARE THERE so few women political cartoonists? Branch Chair Pennie Quinton described setting up the meeting. She was getting annoyed that the Guardian had used Kate Evan’s work once and every other cartoonist she could see appeared to be male.

She’d approached Jackie Fleming who said no, you don’t want me, you want Blue Lou and Nicola Streeten – they have been working on this.

So our speakers were Dr Nicola Streeten, co-editor of The Inking Woman: 250 Years of Women Cartoon and Comic Artists in Britain, and Blue Lou. Blue Lou has drawn cartoonists for the Morning Star, the Guardian and New Statesman, and now works for Tribune.

Nicola recalled being in the audience back at the 2009 London Comic Con where the panel was all men, and asking “Where are the women?”

She is author of Billy, Me & You, a memoir in graphic novel format, recounting bereavement and recovery. She co-founded Laydeez do Comics – it’s a space for cartoonists and comic artists (women and men) whose work “focuses on the drama of the everyday”.

It’s hard for commissioning editors to find documentary evidence of the work of women cartoonists, let alone contact them. In 2014, for example, Nicola’s own work was in “Comics Unmasked, Art & Anarchy in the UK”, the British Library’s exhibition on comics – but it didn’t make it into the catalogue.

Why the invisibility of women cartoonists? There are narrow definitions of what a cartoon or comic is. Comics are supposed to be “sequential”, telling a story. Cartoonists are supposed to tell their story in just one frame. Then there’s the argument about whether you’re a “political cartoonist” or not. Award-winning Leeds-based cartoonist Jackie Fleming “doesn’t count”, as she doesn’t cover party politics, but the politics of the everyday. Jackie’s best-known cartoon dealt with women’s self-defence when serial rapist Peter Sutcliffe, the “Yorkshire Ripper” was at large. “Surely that’s political,” Nicola says.

In feminist history archives Nicola found that women’s magazines all had cartoons. Every copy of the influential feminist magazine Spare Rib (1972-1993) had cartoons and comics. We should “start documenting” women cartoonists, says Nicola.

Blue Lou opened by noting how “Saudi Arabia had a recognised political cartoonist before this country did.” Blue does “short-form single-panel” cartoons, “a hybrid between journalism and art”. She has to content with a “very small gallery system” controlled mostly by men acting as gatekeepers to editors.

As a lone parent, Blue has encountered difficulties networking. She recalled being “up for one of the best-paid jobs with a national newspaper” and being taken for an evening drink along with other candidates, including a twentiesomething man based in London. Blue had to leave early to return to Bristol and parenting. Guess who got the cartooning gig?

Narrow definitions of what’s a political cartoonist don’t help the career progression of women. The Political Cartoon Society’s President Dr Tim Benson, for example, writes on the organisation’s website, “The Morning Star has female cartoonists, but… with a tiny circulation of 10,000, it cannot be considered a national newspaper.” This is despite the Morning Star being a well-known career progression route into the bigger nationals – one of its cartoonists went on to work for the Telegraph. It’s almost as if the definition of a political cartoonist has been tweaked to exclude women.

Blue described the political cartoon gallery scene as mostly a closed circle, a weirdly male-dominated world of “editors and journalists and MPs”. Women cartoonists are increasingly finding work online, where there are fewer gatekeepers. Blue “could never have done this without the internet”.

THE NUJ’s #useitpayforit campaign has taken a life of its own. It aims to raise awareness of the issue of publishers using images for free with amateur photographers and videographers – who, by giving their work away for nothing, “are undermining professional photographers and the worth of good photographs and videos” as it says at http://useitpayforit.info

Every few days, it seems, someone reports on Twitter that a newspaper has asked to use their photo or video – usually generously offering “a credit” – and that when they said “no” the paper sometimes went ahead anyway. Some argue that if they “embed” an image online – hoicking it off the Twitter server, for example, not copying it onto their own machine – copyright is not invoked. Freelance journalist @GemmaFra-ser10 got just this treatment from the Independent and Women’s Health, both wanting to “follow up” a piece she did for Take a Break magazine on her daughter’s health. Both wanted photos. When she mentioned cash, they went ahead and embedded social media images. What neither had realised was that she could change the image captions to include the #useitpayforit hashtag – which she did, leaving their websites displaying her carefully-crafted complaint about their unlicensed use of her images. She was rewarded with a writeup in Private Eye.

#useitpayforit and revenge on those who don’t

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More online…

There are more complete versions of many of these articles online. Also go to www.londonfreelance.org/ fl to read:

• Updated advice on catching up on your National Insurance contributions;
• Publishers pay out for online use 17 years after the claim was laid, and advice on tax on US payments;
• Branch member Tim Dawson reflects on his two years as President of the NUJ;
• The annual report from the Equalities Officers (and other London Freelance Branch officers).
LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH MEETINGS

Brexit update, tbc, August Branch holidays

WHAT WILL happen to our many EU national colleagues after the UK leaves the European Union just over ten months from now, and after the end of the “transitional arrangements” – currently scheduled to cease at the end of 2020? What fate awaits our UK national colleagues living and working in EU countries?

This is of particular concern to the self-employed, whose long-term residency status is usually more precarious than those in employment.

That’s the topic of the LFB meeting on Monday 11 June – roughly around the second anniversary of the EU referendum.

Our speakers will be Claudia Delpero and Adrian Berry.

Claudia, a former European Parliament press officer, founded the Europe Street News website, which covers “everything related to being European citizens” and “the relationship between the UK and the EU.”

Adrian, a barrister at Garden Court Chambers, specialises in freedom of movement, migration and citizenship. He chairs the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association.

Watch this space for details of speakers and a theme – yet to be determined as we go to press – for the LFB gathering on Monday 9 July.

There is additionally a meeting for members new to LFB, or recently joined, on Thursday 26 July. See below on this page for details.

There is no meeting of London Freelance Branch in August.

This went to press on 2 May. Your deadline for the June online-only issue is 28 May.

LFB meetings are always on the second Monday of the month, from 7pm to 9pm 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, call 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 guidance on etiquette on recording or live-tweeting from LFB meetings, see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1805film.html

WELCOME back Penny Quin ton as LFB Chair, re-elected to this office in January having served in the role as a jobshare for 2017. She is our first female solo Chair since the 1990s at least. Our vice-chairs, Arjum Wajid and Pierre Alloezi, are standing in to chair Branch meetings when Penny is away working outside the UK.

The Committee includes “Members at Large”, who deal with matters as they arise. In March, Elizabeth Chappell and new Committee member Laura Laker were elected to this role as a jobshare. For more on Committee posts and what they entail, see www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/jobs.html and to contact Committee members see www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/contact.html

The full Committee is:

Chair Penny Quin ton; Vice-chairs Pierre Alloezie & Arjum Wajid; Secretary (jobshare) Tim Gopsill & Phil Sutcliffe; Treasurer Jenny Vaughan; Freelance Editor Mike Holderness; Deputy Editor Matt Salusbury; Social Media Officer Nicci Talbot; Membership & New Members Francesca Marchese; Welfare Officers Arjum Wajid & David Wilkins; Training officer Federica Tedeschi; Negotiations officer Tamara Mincer; Equalities officer Magda Ibrahim & Safiullah Tazib.

Members at large: Francesca Albini, Michael Butcher, Elizabeth Chappell, Larry Herman, Laura Laker, Tony Levene, Josiah Mortimer & Nick Renaud-Komiya.

THERE’S AN NUJ course on “Winning and negotiating” for freelances on Friday 8 June. The tutor is SA Mathieson. It’s £70 for NUJ members, it’s at the NUJ HQ – Headland House, 72 Acton Street, London WC1X 9NB. See www.nuj.org.uk/events/winning-and-negotiating-freelance-work

The Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU, which includes the NUJ), offer FREE training to NUJ members. Coming up is Mobile Video (23 May, London) and Run a social media campaign (22 May, London; 25 May, Manchester). See www.feutraining.org/training-events/.

LFB is planning a training event for exiled journalists who’ve been forced to leave their countries and are starting up again here in the UK.

COMMITTEE NEWS

FreeLance Unclassified are FREE to members for non-commercial purposes. To non-members and for commercial purposes, £10 for this much. Acceptance does not imply endorsement. Comments on any purpose, £10 for this much. Acceptance does not imply endorsement. Comments on any

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Blogging cooperation: Stuart Forster, the travel journalist and blogger behind Go Eat Do (www.go-eat-do.com) is looking to cooperate with fellow bloggers to build traffic and reach. Contact stuart.forster@gmail.com

Want to try your hand at writing fiction? Courses at The Groucho Club in Soho will inspire you, teach you the tricks of the trade and help you develop and polish your work. Our tutors are mainstream published authors. Our next term starts in January – for details go to www.writingcourses.org.uk

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Training

There’s a meeting for members new to London Freelance Branch, or who have recently joined, on Thursday 26 July. It’s a chance to meet other new members, to hear about the mission of the Union and to discuss work issues. More experienced journalists who are also members of LFB will also be on hand to offer advice. It’s at The Camera Museum, Museum St, London WC1A 1LY from 6.30pm and the nearest Tube’s Holborn.

These new members’ meetings are held on the last Thursday of every third month.

For a flavour of a previous LFB new members meeting see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1706newm.html

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National Insurance: check records and fill gaps for a better pension

NATIONAL INSURANCE, paid by most employees and freelances with profits above £6025 in the tax year ending 5 April 2018, is now almost entirely about what you will get as a state pension. The more qualifying years you have – a minimum of 10 and a current maximum of 35 – the higher your retirement pay from the government.

The rules are complex – there are four basic national insurance classes and lots more including esoteric versions for trawler workers. Most freelances pay Class 2 contributions – formerly collected by monthly direct debit but now taken alongside income tax self-assessment payments. Class 2 costs £2.85 a week and was due to be abolished from 6 April 2018 – now it has been extended for a further year although the price will rise to £2.95 from April. This is good news for those with lower profitability.

Many also pay class 4 – that’s 9 per cent of earnings between £8164 and £45,000 with 2 per cent above that. Currently, class 4 does not count towards any benefits – it’s an extra tax on the self-employed and those in partnerships. You don’t pay any national insurance in the tax year after you reach state pension age.

Freelances especially can find themselves approaching retirement with contribution record gaps. These can occur because:
- you have spent time abroad;
- you spent time not working or with profits (earnings less expenses) below the payment threshold (currently £6025);
- you worked for an employer but for less than a complete year and may not have qualified for a full year on your record; and/or
- you should have paid Class 2 but did not – at around £130 a year, HMRC did not find it worthwhile to pursue non-payers, a reason for the move away from direct debits.

The first move is to check your contribution record. Start at www.gov.uk/check-national-insurance-record – this will tell you if you have gaps. These can be filled with “voluntary contributions”. If, as a freelance, you have gaps between between 6 April 2006 and 5 April 2011, it will cost £2.65 a week to complete your record. Those with more recent gaps will generally pay the rate applicable in the missing period. Payments must be made before 6 April 2023.

This is usually worthwhile to boost future pension earnings. But if the gaps are due to responsibilities – as a parent or carer – then you can apply for national insurance credits – formerly known as Home Responsibilities Protection.

Class 2 is to be replaced by a new form of Class 4 for the self-employed – this time counting towards the state pension. But there is a lack of clarity from the government on how this will pan out.

However, with Class 2 surviving another year, it is a good time to dig out your record and fill in gaps in case the payment goes up to Class 3 level – £14.65 a week in the 2018-19 tax year.

Always take advice before paying. In some cases, it may not be worthwhile.