



FREELANCE WELLBEING

A trade union issue

WHEN everything is going well, freelance working can be immensely satisfying and enjoyable. As freelancers, we can benefit from opportunities for more flexible working and from the pleasure of being our own bosses.

However, this way of life can also have its downside. Achieving a successful balance between work and the rest of our lives can be hard. Sometimes, we can feel that the battle between these commitments is running away from us, out of control.

Such difficulties can be reinforced if our workplaces are our homes. "Traditional" views can make this worse for women, making some feel as if they are trapped.

Freelancers working alone, away from the contact which comes from being in workplaces with colleagues, can experience isolation, insecurity and feelings of lack of self-worth. Stress and depression are dangers too.

There may be risks of taking refuge in drinking too much, smoking too much, over-doing the coffee and tea or even, for some, turning to other drugs.

Some of us may be affected the longer we remain freelancers, as we strive to find ways to develop our careers

outside the "structures" available to some staffers.

For those of us who sometimes feel that the freelance way of life and way of working is getting us down, then take heart – such problems or difficulties are not our "fault" and we should not have to deal with them alone.

There are well-known occupational health risks in the ways freelance workers operate and from the ways that our industry is structured to make use of freelancing. A major report from the TUC published in May confirmed this as a trade union concern.

Freelance well-being is an important objective, both for each of us as individuals and for all of us collectively within the union. The idea of working to support each other through the union was first raised at the freelance sector conference before the start of the NUJ's 2004 annual delegate meeting in Liverpool. The Freelance Industrial Council then appointed a working party to take the work forward. This questionnaire is the first stage of an initiative to do more.

The results and recommendations will be presented at a Freelance Conference in Manchester in November 2004.

How to fill in this questionnaire

Please contribute any anecdotal or narrative contributions and any positive ways you have found of improving life as a freelance. These can be added by hand on the reverse of this questionnaire, word processed and a print-out enclosed with any mailed responses or – preferably – submitted by e-mail to nujwellbeing@btinternet.com

- Please circle either the answer you want to give or tick the appropriate box.

CONFIDENTIALITY: No identifying details will be retained. Responses submitted by e-mail will be separated from any "electronic headers" which may identify respondents.

Please return completed questionnaires to: Wellbeing Initiative, Freelance Office, NUJ, Headland House, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP – by **Friday July 16th, 2004.**

A "read-only" pdf version of this questionnaire is also available from the London Freelance Branch website – at www.londonfreelance.org/wellness

Extra pdf versions are also available on request from nujwellbeing@btinternet.com.

Please return only one completed questionnaire per person.

2 • NUJ Freelance Wellbeing: A trade union issue

1. About you and your household

Are you Female Male

How old are you? _____

Do you live in an city/town or rural area? City Town Rural

Are you single or partnered? S P

How many pre-school or school-age children do you have at home?

Ages	1	2	3	4+

Approximately what percentage of your household income comes from your freelancing?

_____ %

Does another income come into the household? Yes No

Do you feel you have money worries?
 Lots Some A few None

Do you feel freelancing contributes to your money worries?
 Often Sometimes Occasionally Never

2. Your work

What proportion of your income comes from work that is:

- Commissioned _____
- Stories sold "on spec" _____
- Shifts _____
- Other (please describe) _____

TOTAL: 100%

3a. Going freelance

Have you always been freelance? Yes No

How long have you been freelance? _____ years

Did you work as a staffer before going freelance? Yes No

If yes, for how long? _____ years

Do you enjoy being freelance?

Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Did you go freelance primarily because you chose to or there was no alternative? Chose to No alternative

Have you ever regretted going freelance?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Is/was having young children a reason for choosing to be freelance? Yes No

Does your journalism cover a major interest/hobby? Yes No

Is variety of work an important part of being freelance for you?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

3b. Your career

Do you regret not having a career progression route that might be open to a staff journalist?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Do you have a "career plan"? Yes No

Do you intend to still be freelance in five years' time?
 Yes No

Are you actively seeking to leave freelancing? Yes No

Are you actively seeking to leave journalism or related work?
 Yes No

Would you take a staff job?
 Part-time Full-time Possibly

4. Working from home

How much time do you spend working from home? _____ %

Do you have an office outside your home? Yes No

If you work at home, is there another adult there during your working time? Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Do you regard isolation as being a problem?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

5. Work/life balance

How often do you work in the evening/at weekends?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Is this: (please tick all that apply)

By choice

The only time the work is available

Because the pay is better

As a result of poor work planning

Other: _____

Do you feel you adequately separate your work and "home life"?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Do you feel that you are in control of your working time?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

6. Your health

How do you rate your physical health? Good "OK" Bad

Do you try to take physical exercise? Lots Some Little

Do you think you eat well/sensibly?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Do you think you get enough sleep?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Have you experienced depression while in a staff job?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Have you ever experienced depression while freelancing?
 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

If yes, have you:

- ever sought medical help for depression? Yes No

- been prescribed anti-depressants? Yes No

- sought counselling for depression? Yes No

If you have been depressed, how much was this directly related to:

- being a freelance? Lots Some None

- a particular client/piece of work?
 Lots Some None

- a result of lack of work?
 Lots Some None

- feeling isolated? Lots Some None

Have you ever felt you were smoking or drinking "too much"?

 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

How much was this caused by freelance work pressures?

 Much Some None

To what extent do you feel/have you felt dependent on alcohol, tobacco, coffee/tea, medications or other "substances"?

 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

7. How you feel

As a freelance do you ever experience a loss of self-esteem?

 Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Which of the following, if any, help to boost your morale?
 Lots Some None

Being in the NUJ

Having a press card

Seeing your by-line?

Seeing your work published?

Having ideas accepted/commissioned?

Being paid for your work?

Praise from clients/colleagues?

Praise from readers/listeners/viewers?

Producing high-quality work?

Other journalists' positive attitudes?

Being recommended for work?

Being listed in directories/on websites?

Being cited/quoted/"Googled"?

Being asked for copies of your work?

Other: _____

• Which of the following may undermine your morale?

 Lots Some None

No response from commissioning editors?

Having ideas/work rejected?

Lack of contact with staff journalists?

Lack of contact with NUJ chapels?

Poor contact with NUJ branches/other parts of the union?

Phone calls and e-mails not returned?

Other journalists' negative attitudes?

No one to talk to during the working day?

Letting you pitch when there is no budget?

Having your ideas stolen?

Competing with others for the same piece of work?

Others? _____

4 • NUJ Freelance Wellbeing: A trade union issue

HAVE YOUR SAY: Please use this space to tell us more about your experience(s) as a freelance – or suggest ways in which the NUJ could support you more. Please write clearly or attach a word-processed print-out. Alternatively, please send your comments and thoughts by e-mail to nujwellbeing@btinternet.com (To ensure confidentiality, all identifying headers will be removed from messages before the information is saved.) Please continue on another sheet or use e-mail – nujwellbeing@btinternet.com – if you want more space. We would be most grateful if you would comment on some or all of the following points:

- **Problems and benefits of working from home**
- **Problems that, specifically, women have working fromhome, such as reinforcement of “traditional” roles**
- **Problems and benefits associated with age and being a parent**
- **Do you have any ideas about how the NUJ could assist freelance members achieve greater wellbeing?**
- **Are there any “coping strategies” you have found that you would pass on to others?**
- **What do you enjoy/appreciate (most) about freelancing?**

- **If you would be willing to help more, please provide you name, telephone number and e-mail address:**