

Freelances versus the economic crisis

LFB's tips-and-information exchange

Apart from our expert guests whose names were publicised in advance, all speakers/questioners are identified by first name only in case they wished to say something they wouldn't want to be identified with to a wider online audience. Alistair Dabbs enters the fray from time to time although not a "speaker" – he's LFB secretary and, often, Zoom MC but also contributing here as a long-time pro freelance too...

And before we start, a lot of the things that participants mention about pay depend on you sharing the rates you have been paid with the Branch Rate for the Job service at www.londonfreelance.org/rates

Transcript prepared by **Phil Sutcliffe**

Speakers/"experts" (but every freelance is an expert...):

Chair **Phil Sutcliffe** (LFB co-membership secretary, 40-year freelance writer, sub etc):

A warm welcome to everyone. My name's Phil Sutcliffe, i'm job-share membership secretary of London Freelance, the NUJ branch which organised this evening's event. But we opened it up to all freelances in the union and even outside because all experiences and ideas are welcome – and we might even get a newcomer or two joining the union.

In the middle of this massive national and international economic crisis we wanted to give freelances a chance to talk together about *money*. It's something that's traditionally taboo in British culture, especially English maybe, but freelances have to do it all the time otherwise we don't eat and we don't have roofs over our heads.

Meanwhile present circumstances mean money is more on our minds than ever as we try to avoid the terrible rhyming question of the day: heat or eat. With sometimes a third option: heat or eat or end up on the street.

So, what lies behind everything we talk about tonight is getting cash value for our work. How to maximise our incomes.

We're self-employed people in a trade union. What can we do to help ourselves and help one another. Well, hopefully tonight is one small answer, you never know...

At which point, I'll turn to our speakers for no more than five minutes each, to introduce themselves and offer a few thoughts which we hope will chime with everyone here and encourage you to say your piece, whether your tale is of woe, or of lucrative new opportunities springing up, or a bit of both.

Andrew Wiard, who was going to be our first speaker, sent a message of apology for getting stuck on the Elizabeth line, which is apparently broken down, who'd have thunk... Anyway, no doubt it will be briskly repaired. And so Nika Talbot who was going to speak second? Could you go first after all?

Nika Talbot (LFB social media officer, freelance online resources and work-finding maestro, copywriting, starting your own newsletter-plus, building a community of female founders, upskilling...):

Yeah, that's fine. Phil, thank you for organizing this. Also, I think it's much needed right now. Everything that's going on. So yeah, I'm Nika. I'm a digital copywriter. That's the work that I'm doing mostly at the moment, digital copywriting, so social media, content marketing for companies, and I also do the social media for LFB.

I've got quite a varied background. I started out in freelance journalism. And just basically to cut a very long story short, struggled in London without much money in the bank, trying to make it as a freelance journalist with precarious work. I quite enjoyed, in my 20s, working in different advertising agencies in London. I've worked on some interesting campaigns at Saatchi for Diva magazine, and doing internal comms, I guess, corporate comms and press office stuff. Then I pivoted, a little bit. My background was health. I was doing quite a lot of health writing for different magazines. And I just found myself connecting with agencies, media agencies, and finding more advertising type copywriting work.

It kind of came to me, because I'd chosen to specialize in writing about one area, I ended up getting more work in that area. I focused on health for quite a long time and I set up my own platform for women's health, which was called Read Magazine. And then I just got more and more experienced, I think, in copywriting. As the years have gone on, I've picked up clients and work in content marketing also, and copywriting.

I've always been freelance pretty much, little stints away, but I've preferred to be freelance. And also, it's not always out of choice. I'm a lone parent, so I've

needed to work at home, I've needed remote work, I've needed flexible work. I haven't found the corporate world fitted my lifestyle that well. And I'm just annoying and independent and like to do my own thing a bit.

I focus on the future of work, remote work, content, entrepreneurship, which is quite a growing field at the moment: web three, tech, b2b, these are all things that I'm really interested in. I'm niching down into this field at the moment and just networking. Networking is key. And balancing – I'm balancing at the moment: keeping the client work rolling over along with trying to set up my own online platform for people who want to be content entrepreneurs. I'm focusing on that and building up my paid subscriptions on Substack – I may take that over to another platform. I'm not sure yet. But I'm just focusing on building audience – first strategy – and connecting other people who are doing similar things and interested.

I think it's good to have a service business – *and* something entrepreneurial on the side. If you can get the good work coming in, the steady work that pays you decently, then you've got a bit of time in the week to be creative, to work on things that are more long-term, they're not going to bring you much money straight away, but you're building for the future.

At the moment I've got paid subscriptions on my newsletter and I'm going to build in some more products – but I don't want to make products until I know what people want. It might be that I start with something a bit simpler like templates. And I'm just going to see what people are asking me for, what would be useful.

So yeah, I've had a good pivot. I've also written 13 books. So I've gone from freelance journalism, to publishing, 10-15 years mainly on women's health and sex – I wrote a lot for the adult industry, and specialized and got known in that field.

Now I'm just using the same skills again, but I'm interested in what's happening with Web3 [[Wikipedia explanation](#)] and Nitec [[nitec.com](#) – *which also says they're "hiring"...*]. I've also worked in PR, I've worked across corporate communications, I suppose portfolio worker, is how I would describe myself. I think it will work for people. Yeah, I'm deep diving into these areas. So if you're anyone interested or doing similar things, I'd love to connect and chat about, potential collaborations. So thank you for asking me to do this... it's great. *[See Nika's "Hello Copywriting Comrades!" doc [here](#) – advice on getting work and loads of further useful links to find out more about this field where work currently starts around £250 a day and heads skywards from there as you move on up – NUJ membership eligible too, no bother... the union never objected to journos making a quid or two!]*

Phil S: Nika, you know about lots of stuff that most of us don't, is the truth. So it's very nice that you're willing to share it. Vanguard new media, independent...

Nika T: Also like UX – user experience – is a big thing at the moment. So I have done some training in that as well, because I wanted to add to my digital skills. So I've done a UX writing course with Burghs. And I'm just I see that as where copywriting is going it's less about sales. It's more about conversations and community and helping and guiding people online. So, for me, it's less about the selling. The hard-sell copywriting days have gone really, we're not in that climate at the moment at all.

Phil S: A document that Nikka sent me today said that the average day's pay in copywriting is 387 pounds, which may be a bit more than people are used to for a day's journalism. So it has its attractions.

Next I'll go to Steven Mathieson. His byline is SA Mathieson should you seek him out any time, as a writer. He's a freelance data journalist, essentially. But he may be known to some of you as a very well-reviewed trainer for the NUJ's freelance courses, which are called First Steps In Freelancing and Winning And Negotiating Freelance Work, which is very apposite. And the courses are helpful, I think. Give them a go when you see them come round. As a professional data man, Steven also has a digital gift for you, which will be coming up very soon. Steven, if you would launch in please...

Steven Mathieson: To begin, I've got a few three ideas about helping on money, which are all present in the first steps in freelancing course in one way or another. This first one is about cash flow, which is vital to any business but particularly to small ones. And the way we can do that is basically by chasing up late payments. Hopefully you're all great at this. But in case you're not, there is a great guide to this on the London Freelance Branch website [www.londonfreelance.org – and [Freelance Fees Guide](#) page on [Late and problem payments](#)].

But broadly, it's this: invoice – with purchase order number if required – at the earliest opportunity. Don't wait until publication if you can possibly avoid it. Chase up if not paid after 30 days, if that's the agreed period, often with the commissioning editor who will usually try and sort things out. If that doesn't work, contact accounts receivable or whatever they call themselves – the people who are responsible for paying bills. Send them a statement of account

– what you’re owed. And then you can charge interest – legally you're entirely able to do this, the government even sets the rates, which is currently 11% a year plus a 40 pounds fee *[more for debts over £1000]*. I've done this a couple of times and the result was the organisation rapidly paid the amount originally due, and the interest, and the fee. *[There's a calculator at www.ondonfreelance.org/interest.html]*

A final step – for which the freelance should get NUJ freelance office advice – is the court process. There is actually a relatively cheap online process, the county court money claims system, I've luckily never had to do it myself. But don't leave payments behind basically – not without very good reason.

Second, quick one, which I'm sure many of you do know about, is secondary-use collecting societies. ALCS [\[www.alcs.co.uk\]](http://www.alcs.co.uk) is gonna be the one that applies to many of us who write for magazines and books. It's DACS [\[www.dacs.org.uk\]](http://www.dacs.org.uk) for images. PLR for library books [\[www.bl.uk/plr\]](http://www.bl.uk/plr).

The annual deadline for ALCS is the 30th of November. You can register anything published in the past three years. £26.8 million was sent out to 98,000 ALCS members in March, 2022. That's an average of £273 for just filling in a few online forms through the year. That's gonna vary a lot depending on what you've written and so on. But it's worth doing, good systems, very friendly. You could get hundreds, you might get a few thousand pounds each year. If you looked at it in the past and thought “Oh, that's only for print titles”, it now covers any online title in the UK with a UK ISSN registration number. It was extended a few years ago.

Final one, I found an upside to inflation, I think – which is that when inflation is quite high, it's easier to persuade people to give you a rate rise based on inflation. For many years, the *Guardian's* minimum rate was stuck at 310 pounds 68 pence per 1000 words. 2012-2021 it stayed like that. Inflation was going up, but only 2% a year... Now it's leapt up because the NUJ has managed to negotiate that up twice in the last couple of years. The minimum is now £344.15 per thousand, though still below where it should be for inflation. Earlier this year, I went to all my main clients basically saying inflation is quite high isn't it? Can I have a rise my rates based on that? The least helpful response I had was, “We can't increase your rates, but we will increase your word lengths”. And that was the worst offer I got. From some I got a bit less than inflation, from some I got roughly the level of inflation, some actually gave me more than that. So this can work. No one said, “We hate you now, go away. Stop bothering us. How dare you ask for a rise?!”

Phil S: What was the best percentage you got, Steven?

Steven M: I think it was a 12 and a half percent. That might have been based on more than one year though, but there was certainly one where I got a bit more than inflation. Not much more, but one rounded it up to the nearest 10 pounds, something like that. Yeah, it can happen. And if you don't ask you don't get, as we all know.

What I put together, which we can pass on, I think via Zoom is little spreadsheets, which you can use to put in any rate you want, and then when you last negotiated it, or agreed it – and it will at one show you what that rate should be now based on the preferred rates of inflation, CPIH. So, worth giving it a go – it just gives you an idea of what you can try shooting for. Of course, just because you're just asking for an inflation increase, it's not going to automatically, get you on. It's a negotiating tactic. It gives you a good reason, but it's not guaranteed, obviously. I don't think it'll get you into any trouble, but it may get you that bit more. As I recall, when I was little baby freelancer taking one of Phil's courses, you can always ask for more. And basically, the inflation thing is a way to give you *a reason* to ask for more. That's why I'm passing on the spreadsheet. I hope that hope that works, and like I say, this year it had decent results from my point of view.

Phil S: Excellent. Thanks for that Steven, the both the nuts and bolts details and the encouragement on so many fronts where you can actually make things better for yourself. Now, I'd like to move to our next speaker. Oh, Andrew Wiard is here. Have you got your breath? I'll go Andrew, and then David. Well, I should give you a grander introduction. Andrew has been a professional news photographer, for I think I can say some decades now. What he says as a photographer still, in many respects, applies to all journalists. And essentially, he's never said die. I don't think he's about to. And now he will explain why.

Andrew Wiard: Okay, this is aimed specifically at photographers and it's very short and very simple. I'm afraid what I'm about to say is my simple theory for dealing with surviving catastrophe, which is what the pandemic was for me and probably many others. For two years, I lost almost my entire work and I'm now having to start again. So all I'm concerned with really is getting work and getting paid – the rest we can deal with maybe in questions. What I'm saying is really very obvious, I'm sorry if it's obvious to those present, you can always ask for your money back, but I think it needs stating.

There are essentially three ways of selling pictures. You can sell to nationals as a freelance on spec or on shifts; you can work on commission; or you

can spend your time putting pictures into stock libraries like Alamy and hoping to get repro fees in.

And I would like to say that of the three right now, the only one that is *sure* to work is commissioned work. The other ways are actually in many ways more interesting, more adventurous and of more lasting significance – maybe it's why you became a photographer. But if you want to survive for the next few months, for as long as this crisis lasts, commissioned work is the only reliable, sure way of getting paid.

Why is this? Well, what if I was to go on commission to, say, an event outside Parliament? It might well be attended by someone freelancing for the nationals – if on shift they're getting paid but probably half what I get paid working in commission. If it's attended by someone working on spec – and it might be – there's a chance they get paid, there's a chance they don't get paid. They put pics out through Alamy, Live News, through Getty, whatever or they can sell direct to nationals and they hope of course to bring some money in now.

Like as not, it won't earn you more than a few 100 quid – which is fine if you're doing it on the side, real money, why not. And I wouldn't want to suggest that there aren't people, there *are* people who are quite capable of spending all day long all week long, working on spec, sending pictures to nationals and surviving. It's very difficult and I wouldn't recommend it at a time like this. If I'm there doing the same job, I can still get interesting pictures, news pictures, but *I'm* there because the client wants me to take a specific picture, which nobody else is the slightest bit interested in. And that is now how I'm making my living. Working for clients who need to rely on a photographer being there, where they will not be someone from nationals, there will not be a photographer working on spec, because nobody else is really interested in what they're doing – it's just for the commissioner's own particular world, which they're *very* interested in, and they will make great use of the pictures.

I've done all kinds of jobs over the last month. For instance, I did an awards ceremony linked to a conference; the organisations there will be using the pictures for their own websites, leaflets, maybe sending them to a local paper – and also giving pictures to the award winners. But hardly anybody in the world knows this event took place, it would not have been reported anywhere else except in their own particular magazines, leaflets, websites. That was a good day's work and good money. I've done similar jobs, which again, no one else is interested in. I did a portrait shot. That was a good job. And I have, as I said, done jobs outside Parliament, some of which make the news next day –

not through me, but they do, some of which pass by without anyone looking twice.

The key to it all is reliability, dependability. I need reliability right now. I can forget great pictures for next year's Newspaper Photographer of the Year awards, I won't be taking those. I need reliability. And the thing is, it could be and it should be a win-win deal. Clients do actually need reliability. People organising a conference, press conference, an event, a demonstration, or a reception and award ceremony. Anything like that. They need to know that a reliable photographer will be there on the day. There's only one way to do that. They can't get the pictures from Alamy, they can't get the pictures from ???line news, they can't get the pictures from Getty; the only way they can be sure getting a photograph is to commission a photographer! So they require reliability, I require reliability. And that's the formula for surviving over the next few months.

I can be sure of one thing – in a year's time, I will still be here. Because, boring though it may be, this works. It really does work. And all I can do is recommend it to anybody who wants to know how on Earth to get back to regular work after a pandemic and then an economic crisis. There are lots of other things I could talk about – how you use a photographer's website, how you use metadata in your pictures, but it might get too techie. The one thing I want to say – very short, very simple – is if you do as I say, do as I do, you won't go far wrong. If however, you think that's not for me, I would like to go away and take some interesting pictures and do my best to sell them where I can, that's fine. All I can do is offer you my formula for survival, which for me works. That's it.

Phil S: Thank you, Andrew – certainty in an uncertain world. I think everyone could see the virtue of that. And I'd say freelance careers are so naturally a mixture. Strategically, anyone can decide, "I'll set aside two or three days a week for certainty and another couple of days for adventure". It'll depend on the field you work in, on your age, your responsibilities... Sorry, was that you, Andrew?

Andrew W: Could I just add one more thing. The work is definitely out there. After two years – organisations need to come back. They need to hold events they haven't held for two years. They need to get back in touch with people that haven't been in touch with for two years. The work is definitely out there. It's there for the taking.

Phil S: Isn't that a nice thought?! Let's not be a gloomy... Next speaker is David Matthews from Barbados, and Balham, he told me today. It's a good combo. He calls himself a storyteller, which is, I think, a good approach to almost any kind of journalism. He has 25 years plus of regular freelance feature writing for national papers. He developed his work from there into writing non-fiction books – not as many as Nika – but quite a few, and he's made several major broadcast documentaries. The most startling thing I've learned about his career is that, for a story about the world of boxing, he trained up to be a fighter himself, and even made his pro debut and *won*, before he decided to save his brain cells for the keyboard. Anyway, David, give us a clue about like a making a living from storytelling.

David Matthews: That was a very flattering intro – although I must make objection to one point, that final point. Sadly, you're wrong about the result of the fight. I didn't win, unfortunately. I shan't give a spoiler because, of course, I'm here to sell *product*. I'm a great believer in “show, don't tell”. I say that not to be facetious or sarcastic. But, Barbados notwithstanding... my family's actually from Guyana, which, of course, the only English-speaking nation in South America, south of here. So my parents emigrated to London in 1962. I was born in London in 1967.

And the significance of that is, without going into too much of the snakes and ladders of the immigrant experience, which in the Caribbean context, of course, we now refer to as the Windrush generation... I was actually brought up under that aegis, no one ever spoke about that, and it's apropos of what we're talking about here, because the Windrush generation is, in some ways, a kind of a product, if you like, or an overarching *brand* that's come out of, or has been generated by *news*, actually. You know, we journalists love a bit of shorthand, don't we, and “Windrush generation” sums that up neatly.

But again the significance of that, is a simplified complexity, which also relates to how we work and despite the way that I ramble... I think one of the reasons I write is I can express myself far more clearly on the page or in moving images than in speaking. But again, coming back to the cynicism, the complexity, the snakes and ladders of my background, an immigrant growing up in working-class, East London meant that from a personal perspective, and despite where I could have been academically in phase one of my education I left school quite early, I got an apprenticeship – sparks [*electrician*] – with Hackney Council which in those days for a working-class black kid was a really good job. It wasn't really what I wanted to do, but it satisfied a particular need it at that time.

But after four years of an apprenticeship, three years “on the tools”, yada yada, I then get into journalism in the mid-‘90s – with a newspaper called *Caribbean Times*. A sadly defunct weekly expat newspaper which was aimed at my parents generation – also around at the time were *The Voice*, *New Nation*. Of course, as we’ve seen with a lot of niche local and regional publications in the UK, sadly, they’re no more. And that's a great loss – not least from a professional point of view, because those local or regional niche publications, trade publications, you know, the stuff that people don't think is the sexy and the press gets a lot of young journalists straight into the game.

The challenge for freelancers – and for me, because, a year/18 months as a kind of deskbound hack. I could segue out of that, because I did the NCTJ thing [*National Council For The Training Of Journalists*], and having gone to university, I took a sabbatical and immersed myself in the whole culture of journalism, its working practice. And by that I don't mean four-hour liquid lunches, on the lash now, because obviously it had moved on by that point. What I mean by the culture of journalism is actually being interested in journalism as a craft. In a way, going through the weekly print thing, and then feeling, “I gotta get out of this”, feeling frustrated... it's important for freelancers, and anyone who's working outside of the confines of the nine to five grind that you've got a lot of time on your hands, or flexibility in terms of time to actually find out what's happening out there, you can get ahead of the curve...

Phil S: David, could I stop you there – with plenty of chance to come back later. And I think the stuff you're saying now about moving from one line of work to another is very helpful and sort of thing that people here will be wanting to use or are doing naturally anyway. I'd like to hear a lot from the other freelancers who are in the room. I'm sure we can get some really good dialogue going. Our speakers have such a wide such a wide range of experience. But I'm sure everyone else in the room does too. Our final expert is Owen Holdaway who is a photographer, news events shooter, news reporter who gets about a hell of a lot. Owen...?

Owen Holdaway: I'm talking to you from Istanbul, I'll give you a brief background about me because it'll feed into how I've managed to sustain it. I'm started in journalism very young, I started pretty much at the BBC, on World News America as producer and broadcast assistant and developed that way. And then I essentially went freelance producing – shift work at the BBC and in Australia.

Then I progressively moved to what is termed stringing, where you sell per piece. “Stringer” is a broad term and it's often used a bit vacuously because it really does depend on how you can finance that. I attempted to do it in South Sudan and sell more video, but quite frankly, the demand was not there and I found it unsustainable, so I came back to producing in newsrooms.

When I really managed to make it – and I wouldn't advise anyone to do this, it's just the way I've done it – was when I went out to Iraq in 2015. I very much specialise now on the Middle East region... although Ukraine has obviously dominated the news agenda, quite frankly, to the extent that that the Middle East is no longer really within that sphere...

I agree a lot with what Andrew has been saying, you know, if you can you get a commission... although I would add on to that, because I'm not purely a photographer, I also do videography including a lot of front-of-camera stuff – you can leverage that at certain points where you can actually bring in quite a lot of money, like I did in Ukraine, I've done it in Iraq. It's a very, transient existence, but you *can* do it. And ironically, for me, the pandemic was not the be-all and end-all – they needed work from freelancers like me.

I think what I found is progressively going forward is the multi-dimensional bit, I mean being able to do stuff with a phone, with , a little bit of print, you can really maximise what you can market. What I've done through different clients... it's really dependent on the situation, but the print ones, I'll be honest, have sort of failed for me. I still do them. But in terms of the willingness to commit, the willingness to actually throw up the money for potential assignments, particularly for expenses on foreign newsgathering assignments, that's gone very much down. It was okay at the start, particularly the Daily Mail, they were very good on that front. But that's depressingly gone down...

The situation now is very difficult because of the inflation, my costs are rising. So dealing with that, getting control of that... Now, where I think the unique element for freelancers are, and I think we have an ability of flexibility, and ability to jump around and move. Whereas what I found with big organisations is often they're procedurally going through a lot of hoops. I'm not saying you really beat the wires, but if you're there, and a client wants to market you as their guy, you can really make some okay money.

And I've always put it that sometimes it goes extremely bad. I've had awful months. But as long as you're in the game... what I've found is that sometimes you can build a very good relationship is key with certain editors and that can be key. Like, they really do support you! And often it's the ones who don't so much follow the news cycle. There are ones who will phone you up whenever and say, “Where are you blah, blah, blah?” and, touch wood, the regions I

cover have always been high on the news agenda. But those editors, those valuable ones, you really want to keep. They're the ones who will be like, "I know it's a slow month, I'm going to help you out". The story is not that interesting... but those editors are complete lifelines.

So it's a mixture. In this environment it's extremely difficult, but I think keeping control of your expenses and also knowing that, as a freelancer, you have the flexibility... It's quite an unstable existence sometimes. But you can you can get in positions to earn money and survive quite well.

Phil S: It's extraordinarily different, the stuff we do as our speakers show. Something to ponder, I think, and realise how we are part of a body of, I think, extraordinary people.

Owen H: If I can add one other thing I think it's just that I really do support the NUJ and I really do support other freelancers. I think there is a difficult boat that all of us sail in and I think supporting each other is... like I have certain freelancers in Iraq or who I work *with* genuinely. Okay, we're all journalists in competition, but we all need to make money. And I think that element is really really key. You know, "We're both going to the same place – let's split costs..." I think sometimes, as journalists, we can be a little bit too territorial and a little bit too ego-driven. Freelancers, we need to help each other out. Because it's always been a bit of a struggle, quite frankly.

Phil S: Yes. And I found often when people join the union, they say, "Oh, it must be a real dogfight between you freelances. How come there's a freelance branch where you get together?" And the answer is "Well, having worked at this for donkey's years, the answer is, actually, everybody gets on and tries to help each other." It's bleeding difficult this, you know. So the instinct is to... I don't mean exactly hold hands, but metaphorically, at least...

Okay. I'm opening up to the meeting, and might well be we can hear from almost everybody in the Zoom Room, please, let's start in a relatively random way. And I'd just like to invite whomever, apart from our experts, to say whatever piece you've come to say. And then I'll try to pull things together a bit thematically around our basic thing, which is, of course, money and work and putting the two together in a satisfactory fashion. Who wants to start? You declare your intention to speak by sticking up the "raise hand" thing – Jenny...

Jenny: Just briefly, I was at the ALCS [*Authors' Licensing And Collecting Society* – www.alcs.co.uk] annual general meeting today, which was preceded by a dis-

cussion about income, mainly in book publishing. One: ALCS is not just for magazines – in fact, a lot of book writers get far more money from ALCS than anywhere else. Another thing, but in brackets, PLR [*Public Lending Right* www.bl.uk/plr] is great for books, because you don't even have to own the copyright – a lot of book publishers in educational publishing particularly will insist on taking a copyright.

But the main thing that I wanted to say – I haven't found it yet, I don't think it's actually been published – is that ALCS have done a survey of writers incomes, which by all accounts is really depressing. And the other depressing thing that came up a lot in the meeting was the fact that book publishers expect book writers to do far more than they used to. The days when they took your manuscript and some nice copy editor made sure you spelled everything right and then they accepted it they gave you an advance and you could be JK Rowling in five minutes is absolutely no longer true. Most people were saying, if you want to write books *do something else as well*. There is no way that most people can make any money from writing books, which is very depressing. But there you go.

Phil S: Other people may have other views, and... I see a hand wave from Barbados. But meanwhile, I'll take Alistair and Melanie and then come back to David Matthews.

Alistair D: Okay, I'll be very quick. Apologies if you've heard this before, but it's something that our colleague Matt says a lot, which is *"Always have a side-hustle"*. There's bound to be something you do that isn't journalism... or it could be related to journalism, but it's something else you're interested in, that somehow you could turn into a money-making venture. It could be something you know about that someone else would like to learn. Do you know how to play a musical instrument? Can you start teaching it? A lot of us found over the pandemic months that actually we ended up doing training of things we never imagined we would and earning money from it!

Phil S: Melanie and then David, please...

Melanie: I want to follow up from what Jenny was saying, actually, because I've done a bit of journalism in the past, but I've mainly done book-editing, but I now train people to be copy-editors and proofreaders as well. Training is always a very useful sideline to go into. But also I see a lot of journalists who've done subediting move over into copy-editing books.

Well, I just want to highlight that the two take slightly different skillsets. So it is a good idea to get a bit of training [*for example well-regarded training from NUJ colleagues the UK Society Of Editors & Proofreaders: training.cochrane.org/resource/uk-society-editors-and-proofreaders-workshops*], because dealing with authors who are very, very sensitive or companies who are extremely concerned about how, you know, how many capital letters they have in their documents, things like that. Whereas if you're working in a newspaper as a sub, it's just house style, we're doing it like this. So getting a bit of extra training is always a good idea.

If you want to work as a book editor, I'm just going to warn you that the pay from publishers is absolutely pants. If you're lucky, you can get the decent suggested rate from the NUJ [Freelance Fees Guide](#) [*editing rates [here](#)*]. But there is definitely money to be made in working for companies who want corporate books written or for organizations that do annual reports and so on. It crosses over with copywriting. And basically, that's where I've had my entire career. I hardly ever work for book publishers. I work for government bodies, quangos, international organizations, that kind of thing, sometimes editing and sometimes writing, because they often need that kind of support. So that's another string to your bow that you can fit in with doing your more interesting journalism projects.

Phil S: Thank you very much. So, David then Steven...

David M: I agree totally with what Melanie's just said there – having written and published 12 or 13 books, half of which are authored and half ghosted, I've seen a marked decline in terms of advances... also the way that advances are split has changed. My first couple of books, you got advances in three tranches. Now they're paid in four. That can mess around with your scheduling. Also with ghosting and the budget end of book publishing, it's like a moon landing, you've got one time to land it this thing. This is particularly the case with ghostees – your subjects are idiosyncratic and they're working to their own timeline, and if that doesn't work for you it can be problematic.

But having said that, the great thing about the storytelling ecosystem is that there are lots of side-hustles, as Nika said about the portfolio career. Sometimes it's worth taking on certain things, not in not in an on-spec way, which Andrew is quite right in saying you should avoid like the plague. But if you get commissioned for a book and there's not a lot of money in it per se, it maybe you can see ahead how you could tie the book in to a TV documentary, and/or can you get a series of newspaper features off the bat, you know, if it

works, if you're not getting a lot for it, but there's a cord that you're going to feed off this eight LCS, and have a role to possibly down the line? Sometimes you've got to take a little bit of a risk. But all in all, I'd say, yeah, book publishing is a tough gig at the moment.

Phil S: There's a thing – the spin-off. Using the material you gather for a book can be spun off into other media. Diversify a project and diversify your career at the same time. Steven would like to speak next, then I'll raise a possible theme and see where we go with that. Steven...

Steven M: Responding to Melanie on what we've been calling “side hustles”. For me I think that's corporate work – stuff that looks like journalism, but it's being done for organizations, whether it's newsletters or reports or whatever else. The big reason is the money is generally good. But actually it's often quite enjoyable. Often the organisations concerned know what they want and work in a fairly stable, sensible way which can actually be quite satisfying – not all of them by any means, but you know, there are some you can work for who it can actually be quite satisfying to work for. One specific thing is, you may get access to talk to people who, frankly, we are never, ever allowed anywhere near with real journalism, and they can be interesting people to want to talk to. I mean, it is what it is, it's very controlled.

And the money being good, it can be that regular bedrock income, which several people have talked about, which means you've then got the security to go and do other more adventurous, more speculative work. But this kind of work is quite hard to find in the first place. You need some sort of network, then follow leads – it's not as if it all gets advertised on some helpful web portal that I can send you a URL for. But, yeah, it has some upsides beyond the pound signs.

Phil S: Thank you, Steven. And before I redirect, I'll go to Sarah who would like to speak...

Sarah: A quick note really to say, alongside corporate editing and corporate work, you might also want to think about writing case studies – it could be for manufacturers, it could be corporates, different industry sectors. Normally, they're great. It might entail you doing a telephone interview, or going to visit a company and interviewing various people there. But there's a huge appetite for content in marketing departments these days, content from case studies they can use for social media, they can use on websites, and newsletters... So there's

another source of income to consider from industry sectors that you're interested in.

Phil S: Thank you. You don't have to answer this, but can you name any figures that might be of interest to this audience? Good money – what sort of thing are you talking about?

Sarah: Well, you could negotiate a rate if it involves you, for example, having to spend a day going travelling down to see a company, and doing interviews, then you basically negotiate a daily rate. And then of course, there's an extra fee to actually transcribe the interviews and write the article. So it could be anything from a few hundred quid up. And it's really up to you to decide how you do that. It's interesting work, I think. You can also learn a lot doing it, the companies are surprising with the people you meet and the things that they tell you. It's another it's another avenue. If you're a journalist and comfortable chatting to people and writing, it's a nice way to increase your revenue a bit.

Phil S: Thank you for that whole new concept you brought to me – I mean that in that world, you can negotiate different fees for different parts of the job: travelling and doing the interview, that's a fee, actually writing the thing, that's an additional fee. Well, well. And so you can multiply your profits...

I see in the chat here we have several offers of alternatives to the word “hustle”, which upsets some people. So there are alternatives to “hustle”, but there's no alternative to actually doing the hustling, I would say, whatever you call it. We have to get stuck in. Alistair, I'd like to do a poll now just to focus minds. Could we run the question about “have your actual fees risen or fallen during 2022?” So now, here it is...

Alistair D: Folks, if you could just tick those boxes, we're hardly a huge sample here. But let's see what has happened to us.

Phil S: Alistair will crunch the numbers. And we'll see what's happened to us.

Alistair D: Okay, so I've ended the poll. I'm now going to share the results... Yeah, people are saying remain the same. Because of inflation they're effectively saying “gone down”.

Phil S: Yeah. Has the *actual* figure gone up. Now. So for 24% of people, it went up? Well, that's the best news. Let's start with the best news. People who have

got an increase? Could you pitch in, please wave your raised hand? And say, is that because you asked for an increase? Or is that because it was offered? Could anyone who's had an increase, please say. I'll come to you in a sec, David, trying to get other people from the floor to say... nobody wants to say? Owen, go on...

Owen H: I wouldn't advise what I what I do because it's very much pegged to what's going on in the news. I've been in situations where, you know, I've managed to massively increase the rates. Key is *when* you negotiate – if somebody's very desperate, you know, as was the case at certain points in Ukraine. And then they standardise that out afterwards on other jobs. Also, I think there's a general acknowledgement of the inflationary environment that we are in and I've managed to sort increases.

I think you sort of know when a client when you have a very strong negotiating position, and you can say, “Look, this is it, do you want this?” and “This is my new rate.” Generally I’ve found that rates are increasing. You really find the value of certain clients in that situation. My news experience may not be applicable to everybody. But one thing for sure – know when you have the power in your court. Then you can push.

Phil S: Yes, freelances often have trouble recognising their power, because we tend to undervalue ourselves so much. I'm going to come to David and to Steven, but in the chat, Penny, you have said you thought it was time to increase your rates. So would you care to enlarge on that to everyone?

Penny: Just that really, like a lot of you, I had quite a bad couple of years over the pandemic. And I was scraping around for work and then, end of last year/beginning of this year, a lot of my old clients came back and went, “Oh, we’ve got some work for you”. At which point I thought, “I need to tell them – I haven't put my rates up for two years and it's about time I did”. So I started. I didn't put them up very much, though. Just enough to make the point really, but I think the point about inflation means I'm going to have to do it again.

Phil S: So you put your fees up and it worked. They paid you...

Penny: Having said that, I've had one client that's just had their budget cut because of the cost of living crisis. So, I thought we'd bounced back from the pandemic, but who knows where it's going now?

Phil S: Any other experiences in the line of Penny's? OK we'll hear from David and Simon now...

David M: I had one – an independent production company I work with regularly, development work essentially, and then in the field, producing. I would say there are a number of technical, structural, financial things, inflation... economic issues that you can help to bump your rates up.

But there are two other things, I think, which are slightly more psychological – just be more assertive, more aggressive. We're mercenaries ultimately and I've actually found I've managed to hit some points [*percentages*] up from being based in Barbados – because the clients assume it's not a cheap place to live in. Whereas it is, really.

As Owen was saying, if they want you bad enough... and you're in any field, that's kind of niche and you've got the expertise, you can push harder. Ultimately, all they can say is no... I think we have to be quite aggressive in terms of getting paid what we're worth. I say to a lot of people, "Learn the power of 'No'". Sometimes it's just not worth undercutting yourself to do something that's going to eat up time when you could be doing quality work – and then you get a reputation for being cheap.

Owen H: I'd agree with that. They can say "This is the rate", but you bring in a certain value. If they actually had to do the job themselves through staff work, it probably would cost them a lot more than they're willing to admit. You have the contacts, the context, and the experience. For instance, I did a piece on the offensive in Kherson, Ukraine, and the price was probably a bit higher than the normal for print. Sometimes freelancers undersell everything they bring to the table, especially when it's a lot more cost effective for them to hire you on maybe a higher rate than actually do it in-house/

Phil S: Owen and David you've spoken of increases broadly, but what percentages are you talking about?

Owen H: It was it was hefty on the TV. At least 60 or 70 per cent for the Ukraine work back then a few months ago – depends on what I was doing but in terms of packages that's what it was. I would say I'm down to about 20 per cent increases now for other non-Ukraine work.

Phil S: And David? It's good to have actual figures out there...

David M: I'd say 20 per cent average. Oddly enough, news-wise the Caribbean is not well-served by British media. But, for instance, the *Mail* has a real Jones for Barbados stories and they haven't got anyone else here so... location *can* help.

Owen H: And that's a ditto for me for Iraq, because of the experience I had there. Sometimes – I did this in the past, not so much recently – but I'd get a day rate for fixing for other journalists, because I knew the base level context. So I think if you can build up your experience level, like we're not within necessarily a country but in any area of work, you can really leverage that. "Okay, you want my experience, you have to pay a higher rate." Because, like I said, doing it inhouse will probably cost them more.

Phil S: And of course, all of these things can be translated into local applications, you might say, for us who may well just stay in UK – where the location location we're selling is Bristol or Brighton so the fee levels may not be as high as for a conflict zone! But do think of the percentages being mentioned, think how people are saying the work is out there... Steven, did you want to pitch in?

Steven M: Talking about do you have to ask for more? I think, almost always, yes. You've got to ask – the chances of freelances just being told "We just like to put the rate up by 10%... because it's a sunny day..." If only! No, that's vanishingly rare. You've got to actually do something to make it happen

I think David was saying about it being partly a psychological and self-belief thing. I like the idea of trying to be your own agent and just *remove* your self from the discussion, not take it too personally, see it as business. Try and imagine if you had yourself as a client how strongly can you argue for how great you are? Well do that a bit anyway, That can be a helpful way of think of approaching negotiation?

I mean, what we all we all offer is valuable professional services. And we do tend to undervalue them, I think. Even if you if you don't necessarily have absolute self-belief, you can pretend when you're asking for more money or asking for a strong rate in the first place. But yeah, I think you've got to ask, I think the chances of freelances just being, you know, being constant say, well, we just like to put the rate up by 10%. Because it's a sunny day, if only that happens, but no, I think you've got to actually do something to make it happen.

Owen H: Just one little add to that is, for me this pandemic and the current inflation have really showed the value of certain clients. For example, a relation-

ship I had with a commissioning editor at the *Mail* at one point. I could actually raise with him, “How are you going to sustain me through this lower period?” He’s not been paying me base level, okay, but then sometimes I would take a lower rate when the story wasn’t so hot... those relationships are invaluable as a freelancer.

Phil S: Can I ask people who, if there's anyone no willing to talk about experience of their rates or fees being cut? But in the poll I think 12 per cent of our group said they've had rate cuts. And this was ignoring inflation. So the rate cut is actually whatever it was plus inflation. Would anyone out there be willing to just say what they experienced? Did you eat it so to speak? Or did you fight it? Anyone out there who's willing to chat on that one?

Alistair D: Well, I had a bit of both. So I had people during the pandemic, say, “Can we have a rate cut?” And if I liked them, and the work was regular, and they could offer me more I said, “Okay”. And the other ones [*where the work wasn't regular/no more work offered/didn't like them*], I said, “No, thank you. Goodbye.” The ones I said “No, I’m not interested” came back to me and said, “Actually, you can have the same rate” – not straightaway, but a few weeks later, they said, “Oh, actually, we've freed up some budget”.

Phil S: Again, shows the value of your work to the client company. That prompts me to give you a story from Spitalfields greengrocery market. I did a school project on it when I was 15. The greengrocer who took me down there at 3am, he was bargaining with the wholesalers of course and I remember a crucial box of Brussels sprouts. It was this offer, that offer, back and forth. And finally my greengrocer said, “No mate, that’s too much”. He turned his back, and he walked away with me, and while we walked away he muttered to me, “Now watch what happens”. And the bloke called him back and gave him the sprouts for the lower price. So it's always potentially like Spitalfields. We're playing the same game. Nothing to do with hustles at all. No, no, no. But certainly we are selling.

Okay. Anyone else want to pitch in on this one? Or shall I lead you up another garden path? Ah, Nica...

Nika T: I echo what was the other saying about them, the regular client thing. The balance is, the higher paid work, some contract work, can often be quite stressful. Because there's lots of people involved. And also you're very disposable. So if you're doing contract work you need to protect yourself with your

notice period – I've encountered a “budget problem” twice recently, where I've where I've had a longer contract, which has been cut short. Budgets, “priorities” have changed. You realise you are actually quite vulnerable as a freelancer.

So I would never take another contract where I only have a one week notice period, or something short like that. Another aspect of it is, if you've got these other regular clients, bread and butter stuff, who might not pay you as much, but they treat you quite well and you get on with them as people, you enjoy working with them. It's that balancing – wanting to be earning more, but also valuing existing relationships, more long-term thing... and also it's work I can do in my sleep!

I just find that balancing a struggle, I still haven't quite got that right. But I have put my rates up. And I'm asking for more. And just seeing what I can negotiate really. Sometimes saying, “If you can't pay me a bigger fee, can you do fewer hours in the week, maybe three days instead of four, say.

But often, with agencies, they have a set rate so there's not always room for negotiation... With a lot of clients though, I'll look at the market rates – what other people are charging – then go up a bit from there. Worth trying isn't it? They can only say no.

Phil S: This is all part of our being business people selling journalism. Let me switch to topic slightly. Alistair, can we have another poll please? The one about have you successfully pitched – how we're doing on getting new work in 2022. Have you successfully pitched to one or more new clients? No science but a matter of curiosity...

Alistair D: Okay, the votes are coming in. I feel like it like that bloke who sits behind the panel of Junior Eurovision.

Phil S: We do conclude with songs and well coordinated mass dancing actually. Busby Berkeley style... Ah, so half of this audience has pitched for new work successfully. That's very good. Can we hear from one or two of you successful pitchers, who the new client was... Lisa would like to speak, thanks Lisa...

Lisa: I'm actually quite new to freelancing. And I put out a couple of pitches. I think I've done three pitches since I actually started in September. One to Derbyshire Times, which is a local newspaper, where I'm from; one to *Reflections* magazine, which is based in Chesterfield. And the *Derby Telegraph* editor. I didn't hear anything back from the editor at the *Derby Telegraph*.

Derbyshire Times editor said he loved my pitch, but he said they didn't have a budget for freelance commissioning at the moment. But he said, "Could you get back in January". So I'm gonna send him an email in January and remind him that I'm around.

But *Reflections* magazine, he liked the pitch and he said, you know, we don't actually cover that area of Derbyshire – but he was interested in a vacuum-cleaner museum and he says, "How would you like to cover some of the more quirky museums throughout Derbyshire?" We do have quite a few. And, yeah, it kind of went from there. I need to get everything into him by the 25th of January. That's my deadline. So he rejected my original pitch, but offered me something else instead.

Phil S: That's not an uncommon event. I think most freelancers would confirm you make a decent pitch, you sound like you know what you're doing, and they pick up on that. It's all part of valuing yourself. So that's good moving. Lisa. Anyone want to comment on what Lisa say, as someone who is a newcomer to the bears in general? David, fire away...

David M: I think, Lisa, you make a really interesting point there. And actually, one thing that I've learned over, you know, 25 years of journalism is to construct pitches that go beyond the story that you're actually pitching – because within that, what you're selling as well as the capability to do other stuff. Maybe the subject isn't quite right for the outlet right now, but if you're getting key words in there that show that you're an expert, that you're well located, that you've got the contacts there, then they've got you in mind.

Anyone who's worked for the BBC will be familiar with that – the amount of times you pitch something to them – and other broadcasters... In fact – they're not interested in that thing, but then they'll tap you up... "We're interested in your take on X, why don't you do a story about Y?" You're selling the story but you're selling yourself at the same time. Get yourself front and centre of editor's mind. You're interested in that, well how about this?

Lisa: Yeah, thank you. It was actually on the freelance course, at the beginning of the year with Steve. I don't know if you remember me, Steve, but I used some of your tips for my pitching. And before that when I was doing pitches, I wasn't getting anywhere. So yeah, thank you for the advice that you gave on the course. Because it gave me the confidence that I didn't have at the time.

Phil S: It's lovely to hear that the course works, and lovely to hear you're getting confidence and getting going Lisa and starting to do this tricky thing. Probably the business is more difficult than the journalism – we're all probably have some kind of natural gift or inclination for the journalism, but most of us don't have a natural inclination to do the business of freelancing, which is why in this kind of gathering we're talking about work and money – and how the journalism can't survive without us kind of people making a living for Christ's sake. You know, it's, it's a social service if you like.

One thing struck me looking at the screen, Lisa and Miffy are both in Derbyshire. You know each other, I hope?

Lisa and Miffy: Yeah. We do...

Phil S: The networking is good. They become support systems in all sorts of ways. So I'm glad to hear you're in touch. Okay, anyone else? Who pitched to a new client and succeeded? Could you tell us this the circumstances? Or even, if you're up for it, pitch to a new client and didn't make it? Lisa did mention failures too...

Lisa: I was gonna say, I did actually try and phone the editor of the Derby Telegraph as well. I didn't hear anything back from her, even when I'd left a voicemail. I find it a little bit disparaging when an editor... I know that they get thousands of pitches, but it would be nice, if they could acknowledge you when you've tried to contact them a few times.

Phil S: Yes. But we can never expect that, Lisa – regrettably, we've got to wade through the rudeness of the being ignored – render ourselves bulletproof to keep on going for the good moments that you've already started to experience.

Fiona has her hand up, Fiona, what would you like to say?

Fiona: Just a thought in terms of commissioning editors... I'm about to go freelance, again. I've not been freelance for about 10 years, and in the past work came to me by word of mouth. And yes, you know, I did end up doing a magazine that would pay – this was 10 years ago – 80 pounds per article, which was really pitiful. If you got two or three in a day and managed to do them, you know, it built up.

But now so many people are working out of office, that I imagine getting hold of commissioning editors could be really difficult. Phone numbers may not even be applicable any more...

And then the other thing while I've got the microphone: when Andrew was talking about going out to get photographs and saying, yes, it's a different kind of work to go for. So do you have to go just knock on doors and say, "You're a big company. Have you thought about having a photographer?"

Andrew W: What I should have gone on to say when I was talking about commissioned work is one of the advantages is, you do develop loyalty from clients who can rely on you. And over a period of time, I found that most of my new clients come through recommendations from those loyal clients. So I'm not that great at knocking on doors and saying, Have you ever thought about hiring a photographer? But I do find that if you work consistently for clients over a period of years... doors closed when there are changes, yes, but doors open when somebody who knows you moves on to another organization and says, "Oh, we need a photographer". So I'd say most of my new work comes by way of recommendation.

Owen H: Andrew I'd add that commissioned work is great when you get it, but also there are... quasi terms... it's not on spec, but it's sort of wink-wink nod-nod and that can lead to a really good relationship or at least I've found that in the past on certain things I've done. So I don't see it as quite black and white...

Phil S: Can I ask – with regard to what Lisa's told us, starting out with a load of guts and increasing confidence, at some point I think you have to go for clients who are going to pay you better than local media ever will. Anyone here got any experience that might be helpful in that regard. Anyone? David...

David M: Yeah, that book on boxing I mentioned was my big calling card. I had worked for a weekly for over a year And I thought, I'm not gonna get lucky in this industry, given some... obvious things. And I don't want to get too much into that, because I do think that there's a sweet irony of being an outlier. But for me, I had to make a decision. "Well, how am I going to get on to the dailies? How am I going to get into television? How am I going to get into the big leagues. Because it ain't gonna happen at the *Caribbean Times*. And, by chance, I came up with the idea to become a professional fighter and write a book about that. So bang. Big calling card. Now, not everyone can do that. But it's surprising how many people have got something in them that just says, "Whoa!" You know – makes you stand out from the crowd. That's how I did it. I don't think I had the network or, you know, to be able to incrementally and or-

ganically move up at the time when I wanted to, I had to do something bold and daring and that's what I did.

Phil S: You had a magic idea. The thinking again, of Lisa, one thing that struck me about her and the museums theme – imagine being in a setting where one part of Derbyshire says another part of Derbyshire is not of interest as that editor told her. And yet... could you sell that same story nationally? Could you sell it to one of the arts programs on BBC Four, say, could you sell it to an arts programme *and* the national papers? Anyway, all I'm meaning is think around the story, whether you've already pitched it or not, Attaching the story market to a market or markets is key to freelancing – well, grannies, eggs etc. Sorry. Vikki, you'd like to speak?

Vikki: Hi everyone. Um, so I'm a photographer based in Edinburgh, up in Scotland, and the vast majority of my work now is in film and TV. It's much better paid, it's relatively easier to find work. I started in the film industry as a location scout, which means that I would get paid to go out and find locations for people that shoot here. Then over the years, I've built on that. And now I work as a fixer for international productions – like what Owen touched on there – and I'm also moving up into production services and becoming a producer.

The main reason for that is not *purely* financial, but just in terms of actually getting work in, it seems to be a lot easier.... which brings me on to an idea that... because I do miss the creativity of doing photography and I would still like to keep my hand in – I had the idea a while ago of having a group, whether based on Facebook or something else, for clients and NUJ members to come together to share work and have job offers and be able to apply for work. I don't know if that's something that people here would kind of think as a good idea. Perhaps via the NUJ website there could be a sort of Portal for clients to put through job inquiries, and maybe that could be sent around members. So they're just two ideas that I had recently of, you know, just how things might work a little bit better in terms of being able to get work.

Phil S: Vicki, and I exchanged emails earlier in the day, and I'm hoping she's gonna pitch into LFB. With that kind of thinking. And you know, there are a lot of freelancers thinking more widely than their own working lives as well, about how we can make things better for one another, we need to pull that together better than we do much better than we do.

Vicki: What I wanted to add was the reason for mentioning this quite recently was I saw another LFB member – on the journalist side – posting on Twitter for someone to come and do her headshots, which I just thought was terrible. You know, it'd be really nice if we could encourage us to stay within ourselves to try and share our services.

Phil S: Steven would like to say something more.

Steven M: On moving up and getting a better paid... one thing that I think works well is looking at what you're being asked for which you can't actually quite do yet. That feels like a strong indication of what the market's asking for.

Another one, say if you're starting to write about a specialist subject like museums – look at trade titles, websites... they may be a bit obscure, no one's heard of them, apart from possibly being made fun of on *Have I Got News For You*. But there can be significant money there. So look beyond where you are based...

Phil S: Excellent. Okay. I just like to create another diversion here with a poll. Alistair, could you find the one about, have you started your own business empire? This comes from Nika really, have you started your own media business venture during 2022? Not necessarily an empire... But something you started independently yourself, as opposed to selling your work to The Man – or The Woman indeed. If you could fill in the yes or no on the survey...

Alistair D: I can't vote but my answer is a yes... So we turn to Norway, can we have your votes please... I'll end the poll.

Phil S: And we have yes from 17 per cent. Well, that's a few people in this room. Could we have one of those people speaking about the venture they've started? I know Nika might well be one, but is there anyone else? No. OK Nika you might have to do it yourself... No, hang on, we have Marcus, thank you. What have you launched into.

Marcus: So I had to set up a special purpose vehicle as a production company to make an independent 90-minute TV documentary. I did that back in 2016, after I spent 18 months trying to get funding to do it. It's a steep, steep, steep learning curve. Great to have a certain amount of independence, the danger is you get drawn in by the business side and then you don't have so much time on the on the editorial side – unless you've got plenty of reinforcements [other

people working with you], which don't tend to happen at the early stages of independent documentaries. I'm not sure how useful and transferable that is for the collective...

Phil S: Well, for one thing, employing other people is a big responsibility...

Marcus: Yes, a big operation to employ people in that world. There are people who will contract as an executive producer and editor, an associate producer who's the kind of journalist and filmmaker abroad where the film's focused, and a production manager – but most of it involved exploiting myself for supposedly a reasonable amount to start off with. Then when you work out the hours spent, then I probably need to go in the corner and sort of kick myself to make myself pay better in future.

Phil S: And will you pay yourself more? What arguments will you make when you negotiate with yourself?

Marcus: Well, it's about getting more funding basically. The first time you do a project independently, what you're likely to do is establish your reputation – the likelihood of making much money out of it, if any, is not huge. And, when you've made it, whether it gets on TV is a matter of leaping over another set of hurdles or hidden gremlins to get to the distribution stage... remains to be seen. It's a personal-growth experience – like all trauma!

Phil S: I bet wealth. Looks like you're handling it so far. So well done. What an adventure! I'd also mention in this context people who are doing independent documentaries in podcast form – i.e. audio, essentially radio docs by another name and with different potential outlets – and coming up with some spectacular stories.

But Nika can I ask you just to talk about your venture? Because I understand that's a smaller-scale thing that doesn't involve all the employing people and so on– the aspects that saw Marcus getting into big budgets and everything that entails...

Nika T: Not employing people but I am working with other creatives and freelancers. It's a small “mastermind group” of other people who want to be content entrepreneurs and it's a bit of a trend at the moment. There's a new publication called [The Tilt](#). Basically, the guy Joe Pulizzi who coined the term content marketing has now turned his attention to content entrepreneurship.

There's growth in this field, which is connected to the creative economy and everything that's going on there at the moment.

Social media, obviously, is enabling all this – people can have a platform... Substack obviously has driven a huge amount of this. People can set up their own platforms and charge for paid subscriptions. Substack have expanded that hugely now. So it's not just newsletters – you can do podcasts, you can do video, they've introduced chat recently, they're trying to take on WhatsApp. So you can have your own little media empire within there if you wish and charge per founding membership or paid subscription. You can use it as a tool for marketing and have a free list. It's very much what *you* want to do with it. There are some big names on there, earning very good money – especially if you come to it with an audience already.

I'm having fun with it. It was a lockdown project that I started and I've been doing it for three years now. I've built up a nice little audience. And I'm using it for both, you know, I actually want to make some money from it, but my main focus is helping, building audience and building community. I think audience-first strategy is the way to go, then you can look at products and whatnot later on. But yeah, focusing on being down there in the trenches, I guess, as in learning it all myself and building in public and sharing what I know to help other people who want to do things this way – and exploring the future of work, remote work trends, digital-nomad stuff.

Phil S: Any clues you can offer as to the sort of income that might result from this kind of activity?

Nika T: Obviously, it depends how many subscribers you've got what you're charging per month. If you're doing a business publication, that's where you're going to make the money. So if you're focusing on tech or business, and you're doing it b2b [*business-to-business*]... or one of the big techie outlets – it's very much about the niche that you go into, really, but that's where the money is gonna be. Yeah, there are people who are charging \$10 a month, and they probably got a good number of subscribers...

Phil S: It in a way, it's almost like selling a magazine, you've got a small unit fee – selling price – and...

Nika T: Well, you're building a loyal audience, aren't you? Thinking of pitches, if your idea doesn't get published you can publish it on your own platform. And then you can run ads, you can do sponsorships, affiliate marketing, you can ask

for sponsors – many different ways that you can earn a bit of money from it. And you're not relying on some narrow funnel where there's only X amount of space for you to get published because you're competing with everybody else . It's like why not create your own thing and build that up, and then build your name up from that and then see what opportunities come from that.

Phil S: So that's two very different independent ventures launched by Marcus and Nika, but in the absence of one of our LFB active members who couldn't be here tonight I'd like to raise briefly what he's done in the podcast field. He was a 30-year BBC radio staffer went into using his skills as a freelance, didn't know how to make money at it, but he is finding that you can sell podcasts now and/or get commissioned to make them. Oddly enough, Lisa, one of the types of organisation or institution he sells podcasts to is museums. They've all got stories to tell and they can use online, on their own websites to boost themselves or as commercial features or on your own website etc. So that's, you've just got to really look around to find out what work you can do that somebody or some lot of people might pay you some cash for...

We have 10 minutes to go on the proposed duration of the session. So I want to open it up to people again, be great to hear from people we haven't heard from before. NUJ officials here as well, they might want to pitch in. Yes indeed, Andy Smith, freelance organiser would like to speak. But anyone else if you've got other thoughts, I guess in particular on "What can we do to help one another?" Through the union, but also to boost each other up individually and collectively so that the freelance journo world will survive and not get chucked out on the street for not paying its rent. Andy?

Andy S: (NUJ Freelance Organiser, with David Ayrton): Thanks. I find this absolutely fascinating, it's been really useful for me to listen to. A very brief introduction to me: I'm a long-term member, now a member of staff for the NUJ, covering freelance and some of our staff members in newspapers, and in PR and comms. So, like you'd many of yourselves, I have quite a diverse portfolio.

I wanted to pick up on a couple of themes that I've heard running through this. For me, the most important one I've heard coming out is the importance of relationships, that when you're dealing with clients, you're dealing with human beings. By and large, those aren't necessarily the human beings that set budgets, but they have considerable influence. And if you're going to get increases in rates, it's likely to be through them that you do it. And they are the ones that are likely to be pitching on your behalf to say, if we want

decent quality work, we need to pay for it. Well, I think it was Steven, earlier, who said, if you want a pay rise just ask. The sky will not fall in. The worst is you might get a no, that's all.

And that takes me on to the second thing, which is to value your own worth. That doesn't mean necessarily turning stuff down, because it's a low rate. But you would need to justify to yourself why you're taking that job. We've heard this evening really good reasons for taking work which are not necessarily linked to the rate. But even so I think you need to be really clear-headed about why you're doing a particular piece of work – because you have value. Ultimately, it would be fantastic if all of you were in a position of being able to say to one of your clients, “Unless my rates are increased, it's not worth my time to do what I'm doing for the rate you're offering”.

The only other thing I would pick up on – and I think it might have been Steve as well who mentioned the *Guardian*. As a union, we have a foothold in very few workplaces where we are even able to start conversations about freelance rates. You've heard this evening, the breadth of clients that we're talking about, even among this tiny group of people, is huge. And we have a union relationships with very few of those clients. So providing you with the sort of tools discussed at this meeting and you using them for yourselves is by far and away the more effective way of getting rates to rise.

Many of these clients won't even be talking to other similar businesses about what they're paying, you know, there's an awful lot of guesswork and finger-in-the-air stuff in terms of what they're willing to pay you for doing the job that you do. But if you don't ask for increases, you won't get them by and large. And if you do ask, particularly if you have a bottom line where you're willing to say, “Actually I am willing to lose the work if there is no improvement in fees”. All of these client companies will be increasing their prices and charges to their customers. And your business is no different from their businesses in this respect. And you should be expecting an increase given the way inflation is going right now.

And finally, if there's anybody on the call that works for Reach as a freelance I would [love to hear from you individually](#). Yes, inflation is one argument that's really good right now; the other argument that is really good is if you have been working for a title for a long time and they have not put up their rates, *you* probably have a better idea about how long that's been than some of the people commissioning you. To be able to say to somebody did you know you haven't put your rates up in eight years, it's an argument I'm now putting together, particularly for Reach because, as many of you will be aware, we had industrial action, we had a commitment from the company as part of

that to look into their freelance rates. Now, when they made that commitment, between you and me I don't think they even had any idea group-wide what the different parts of the group pay, whether they have set rates. So I'm just looking to discuss this with as many freelancers who do work from Reach as possible. I'll put my email in the chat (Andy Smith <andys@nuj.org.uk>).

Phil S: Thank you very much, Andy. We do it have a few of these agreements which cover freelances and help to lift rates. I would add we've heard of some very good increases this evening. Also some increases that are below the current mad inflation rate. But a little light on the horizon is that the pundits say the inflation will drop during the year... And, as Andy said, after your rate has stood still for a while do ask for more. Every year is a good one to for chasing up established clients. Sara would like another word.

Sarah: Just one last idea for possible sources of work. Quite an unusual source. I don't know if anyone's considered printers. Printers have had bad time during the pandemic, but they have looked sometimes at producing their own publications for which they need journalists to provide content. In the past, I've been approached by printers and asked if I can provide content for publications, edit publications, and so on, that they were pushing out. Generally it's b2b...

Phil S: b2b often comes up. If, for instance, you want to strategise your work, so that you're, you might say, defensively doing two or three days a week for an ace payer, or even one day a week, that's a direction in which to look. And then your, you might say, passion journalism, well, you need to get the best price you can for that, but perhaps well-paid commercial work like that can be a pillar for your personal mixed economy. Just a couple minutes to go... back to Jenny...

Jenny: It's something *you* always say, which is trying to get the potential client to mention the rate or the fee first, rather than simply answering when they ask, "How much do you charge?" Because there is absolutely nothing more depressing than when you tell them a rate and you hear actually hear a sigh of relief!

Phil S: Yeah, as Jenny knows, I used to co-teach negotiation courses called Pitch and Deal. What we devised was this way to go about it. Have this question in mind to start the negotiation with a client about money: "How much are you

offering?” Really, really try and get them to say a figure first – then go up! Don't you say a figure first and then, as Jenny says, end up thinking “Oh, crikey, I could have asked for much more than that” – because they accept *your* offer so quickly.

Then if they know the game to that extent and they just won't give you a number to start from– so much per thousand words, so much per day, or a total figure for the job – well, you've got to have a high figure ready, a *really* high figure to set the ball rolling – because they'll probably come back with something lower.

And you know, you can negotiate immense differences. I was freelance for 40 years, my biggest increase on first offer was 150% for a job, but ever since then, I've always had loads of 50% and 100% increases. You box, you box, you box, and what you're trying to get to is the most they are willing to pay you for that job, then you say yes or no. Anyway, I'm probably preaching to the converted here...

We're not at the witching hour of 8.30. So I'm going to say tremendous thanks for all our official experts for coming and doing their very, very best for everyone here. Thank you all for coming.

Further ideas and contributions mailed in before or after the event:

Vikki Mccraw (expanding on what she said above):

Following on, I had a look at Slack, which I think for job posting is a little clunky. It's more of a discussion forum is that right? I'm not sure it would work for regions too... e.g. if someone was looking for a photographer at a gig in Fife, would they post that on Slack...? Slack is no doubt useful for longer term networking though, and planting seeds for future collabs.

Clients often post work last-minute, and can be filled in hours... I'm a photographer, though I still work in film & TV most of the time as it's relatively easy to find work via FB groups etc. It seems photography is one of the sectors jobs aren't readily advertised - or perhaps I don't know the right people which is entirely possible... To be in with a chance, people need the ability to have jobs either pop into their inbox in real-time, or have FB alerts set up so they can respond quickly. Rather than logging into Slack to see what's been happening.

My recommendation would be a standalone jobs facility to easily connect clients with the freelancers who can do their job, either as a FB group,

or as, e.g. a form on the website. Or maybe both? I don't think it would take much to set up, just needs an admin or 2 from each region?

If not via FB, then something like a e-bulletin going out to members via a form on the website that clients can complete. Focal International do this for archive work, and I get 2-3 enquiries per week from them. Each time a client completes the form, it auto-sends to every member. Fab! This is the web form at Focal International - <https://focalint.org/skills-and-services-finder>

...and I've enclosed an example of how the form looks when received at my end, and also a few examples of FB job posts. The posts are all from clients - what makes it work is that clients can reach out directly to the crew network.

We could really do with a safe space for people to post work, and for NUJ photographers to be able to apply. I guess regional groups may work best, as posts for London jobs wouldn't make much sense for us up here in Scotland. The group(s) could soon become known as a reliable source for both clients and members, and perhaps even encourage new members to sign up. I don't know how it works for writers, but they could have their own groups too.

NUJ is obvs great at standing up for rights etc. Something like this would really help members make contacts and keep working (and therefore paying their subs!)

Word of mouth and cold calling still very relevant of course - if the pitching & dealing course still runs I'd be interested as I'm fairly rubbish at that, ha!

Andrew Brassleay: (on individual negotiations – of conditions as well as pay...) I'm currently freelancing. I've just had to turn down my third potential client in a matter of a couple of weeks due to their insistence in keeping their wording in the indemnification clause in their contracts. One was for a sub-editing role and the other two written, but all would leave the journalist open to very expensive litigation, including spurious or vexatious cases. This all might be a coincidence, but since going freelance in 2016, I've only ever had one other client who refused to at least budge on the wording, which makes me think publishers are getting emboldened to keep them in as an increasing number of freelancers, are unaware of the dangers. So I think it's time to fight back.

To get a sense of the scale of the problem, one place I pushed back on, which ultimately refused to budge, informed me that I was the first person to query *any* part of their contract. Their indemnity clause included a section that meant any freelancer could first ruinous legal costs on spurious or vexatious grounds. Their lawyer said that more than *600 journalists had signed up to this*. Clearly, the message must go out to union members about these dangers,

because from that evidence, it hasn't been received by the wider journalistic community yet.

I already have managed to get one contact agree to wholesale changes I suggested on their contract to make it much more freelancer friendly. So, clearly, it is do-able to present an argument that it is in publisher's interests and get the changes we desperately need. But it needs the will from the union, a united front and a good chunk of freelancers signed up to turn the tide.

Would it be possible to have a chat about a campaign promoting the following aims:

- Developing 'contract literacy' among freelancers – perhaps a starter toolkit to promote
- Ditching indemnification clauses
- Ownership and property: Ensuring improved IP rights for writers
- A guarantee of flexible working and choice of WFH or hybrid work
- Stronger protections for freelancers in regards to clauses on publisher obligations/equality assurances/health and safety safeguardings
- A guarantee of payment within 30 days of invoicing
- Contracts by role, not one-size-fits-all (including advertising, which means sometimes contracts state you can't work for a 'competitor' within six months etc)
- Promoting 'ethical' publishers who sign up to these minimum standards
- Shoring up the minimum shift rate/word rate etc – we've ended up in the situation where we've seemingly accepted the US work for hire model without the improved pay rates (e.g., I get quoted more than double for US jobs than UK ones – and that shows there's much more room to push the rates up)

Ideas to help develop/spread/enforce these policies

- Developing, with the NUJ Freelance team and chapel, a team of NUJ member freelancers, and those who specialise in contract law) already campaigning on this issue to develop ideas through roundtables etc (I do have some initial ideas, but don't know if they are members)
- A sign-me-up campaign page so members can hear of progress and successes
- A standardised freelancers contract – one WE give to publishers to sign, rather than the other way round – and explore ideas how this can be enforced

- Contacting influential sympathetic NUJ freelancers to help spread the word through their contacts
- Contact freelance job newsletter writers to see if they are willing to promote the minimum standards and potentially give priority to those publishers who sign up to minimum standards
- Build on the existing freelance charter with publication of a minimum standards charter to be an ethical publisher for freelancers
- Name and shame: Similar to the pay rates on NUJ's websites, a database of publishers who have, and refuse to budge on, exploitative contract clauses – and praise for those that do not. Potentially crowd-source rates anonymously on freelancer Facebook groups
- Allowing 'ethical' publishers who sign up to minimum standards to advertise for free to NUJ members through website log-in/magazine etc
- A signed member charter to refuse work from places that do not sign up to minimum standards

Also, some good initial ideas here:

<https://twitter.com/JewishCurrents/status/1559940569102798851>

<https://defector.com/freelancer-policies/> – particularly on IP

If the right, well-connected, enthusiastic campaigner can be found to co-ordinate it too, that could really be a big plus.

[In further email dialogue with Andrew, Phil S did point out that the majority of these solid policies/actions etc he proposes are already part of current NUJ approaches and activity, but arguing that, despite this, we could do more and better on all these fronts, given member and staff cooperation and activity – also urging Andrew to get stuck in and kick appropriate ass!]