

## LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH MEETINGS

# On not being bamboozled

AT THE LONDON Freelance Branch meeting on **Monday 9 September** we will look at on how to avoid being bamboozled by figures, and how to avoid bamboozling your readers on matters numerical.

Our speaker is David Schley of the Pirbright Institute – which was formerly called the Institute for Animal Health, and has a particular need to communicate difficult issues clearly when it comes to, for example, foot-and-mouth disease. David is a mathematician, and a British Science Association Media Fellow, and will be taking for a spin the communications training he did, with the involvement of the Royal Statistical Society.

The Society has had cause to criticise the way the government presents numbers – for example in February declaring of proposals to change the way that the number of children in poverty are counted that “an apparently technical exer-

cise may be being used to bring in changes that are political in nature”.

This would not be the only time that government has sought to obfuscate a contentious policy by wrapping it in a baffling presentation of figures. And of course companies like to hide bad news in strangely-presented numbers and embellish the good – when they aren't fibbing outright.

So: what are the basic tips for spotting an attempt to do this? What rules of thumb help you unmask it and tell readers what's really happening? How, in other words, can you avoid filing a story that is grist to the mill of our own Mike Holderness, who from time to time entertains the readers of a well-known science publication with examples of absurd reportage?

The subject for the meeting on **Monday 14 October** is not yet fixed. Watch [\[londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html\]\(http://londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html\) and \[http://twitter.com/NUJ\\\_LFB\]\(http://twitter.com/NUJ\_LFB\) for details of the meeting's topic and our speaker or speakers.](http://www.londonfree-</a></p>
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This issue went to press on **6 August**. The deadline for the October-November print edition is **5 October**.

LFB meetings are from 7pm to 9pm at Friends House, Euston Road, NW1 (opposite Euston Station), which is accessible to people who use wheelchairs.

If you need the Branch to pay for care for a child or dependent so you can attend a meeting, call a Branch officer. For updates on meetings see the Branch calendar page at [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html). Minute-takers are needed for LFB meetings for the rest of the year. For details of NUJ London Photographers' Branch meetings, see [londonphotographers.org](http://londonphotographers.org).

**FREELANCE**

Branch contacts: [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb)  
Online Freelance contents: [www.londonfreelance.org/fl](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl)

## MOTION for 9 September

This meeting of London Freelance Branch votes to allocate out of branch funds £1000 – or whatever lesser sum is needed – to pay an NUJ member to telephone all members of LFB who are on the next warning of lapsing list for non-payment of subscriptions in order to persuade them to remain in membership of the NUJ.

**Proposed: Mike Holderness**

## LETTER

### Worse than useless

Former *Journalist* editor Tim Gopsill hit the nail on the head when he told the May London Freelance Branch meeting that the current Press Complaints Commission (PCC) actually makes things worse than anything the NUJ has proposed (June Freelance). As Tim said, the Commission defends editors from criticism and removes editors from having to deal with the public.

Both the Commission and the previous Press Council decline to deal with the two biggest sources

of complaints: claims made in leader columns; and refusal by editors to print readers' letters.

Most editors of Murdoch titles were *not* consulted over the company's predictable opposition to changes proposed by the Leveson Inquiry – yet both they and the Commission are strangely silent over the fact that all UK-produced titles sold in the Republic of Ireland are subject to the very rules they claim they are against!

Yours fraternally

**Bro. Chris Youett,**

NUJ rep on TUC Midlands

## Your Branch needs you!

LONDON Freelance Branch currently has vacancies for a Branch Secretary and for a Membership Secretary.

The work of the Branch Secretary includes writing up and circulating the minutes of meetings (usually taken by somebody else, see below), following up on matters arising and liaising with the venue management on hiring a space for meetings.

The Membership Secretary's responsibilities include welcoming new members in the brief new members' spot immediately before meetings. There's also some admin on membership applications and input into organising occasional New Members' Meetings.

We expect Committee members to commit to turning up to most LFB Committee meetings, which are from 6.30-8.30 at the NUJ King's Cross HQ on the third Monday of each month.

Jobshares in both the Branch Secretary and Membership Secretary roles are encouraged. If you are considering standing for one of these roles, get in touch a member of the Committee. There's a list of LFB Committee members online (with vacancies) at [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/contact.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/contact.html).

Elections for vacant posts will be held at the September LFB meeting on **Monday 9 September**.

Geraldine Hackett is kindly handling minute-taking at Branch meetings, but we need more volunteer minute-takers. LFB can arrange a free course in minute-taking.

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**DON'T GET IT RIGHT – GET IT WRITTEN!** Most people don't want to write a book – they want to have finished it. Frances Coombes 5th non-fiction Motivation book published by Hodder due September. Details: [admin@francescoombes.com](mailto:admin@francescoombes.com)

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