

Ideas fire Paris members

WHEN NUJ Paris branch discussed training, all members agreed what was wanted: some ideas to help freelance members get work. With input from our members, a programme was set up with speakers talking about the nature of media in France, the scope for investigative reporting, how to organise your life to be a freelance and trends in social media.

Some telling insights into the nature of the press in France were outlined by Jean-Pierre Tailleur, me-



Mark Lee Hunter

dia lecturer from Montpellier. "The level of original reporting, particularly in regional press, is quite low. And there is a high level of sycophancy to those in power."

Mark Lee Hunter teaches journalism at INSEAD graduate school and insists there will continue to be opportunities for investigative reporting. The solution, he argues, is "engaged" journalism, such as within campaigning organisations or as an "embedded" reporter following a single issue over a long period of time. Contrary to perceptions, the printed word is not on its way out, Hunter insists. Examples of successful paid-for press based on good journalistic research include *The Economist* and *Le Canard Enchaîné* (roughly *Private Eye*), he suggests.

Travel writer Nick Inman is an NUJ stalwart and was keen to share his hard-worn experience as a self-employed writer. "You have to be ready to lose clients... and find new ones," he warns. In the relationship with commissioning editors, fears should be set aside: "Try to get that extra 10 per cent. The extra money often is there, I know this from my experience" he asserts. Inman says it is essential to avoid under-charging, and to be well-organised in schedul-



ing of your personal time.

The presentation on social media by Alice Antheaune of Science Po college sparked an enthusiastic debate about the value of Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and other networks. We discovered that most of the networks include dedicated sections for journalists, which can be useful in getting work. (LFB's March meeting is – provisionally – on LinkedIn for journalists.)

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Alice Antheaune of the *Institut d'études politiques de Paris*, called *Sciences Po*

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Freelancing au continent

THE NUJ has about 550 members based on mainland Europe and the vast majority are freelances. During the current year, all the continental branches – in Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris – have elected new chairs.

The largest branch is Paris (www.nujcec.org/paris) with around 300 members, two-thirds of whom are freelance. According to chair James Overton, freelances tend to work in radio, TV or press newsrooms – primarily in Paris-based France 24, RFI radio, or at the AFP news agency – or writing, from home. In the former, Overton stresses it helps to be "young and enthusiastic" while on the writing side, opportunities exist in many areas with aerospace and defence industries being a favoured field. He sees fewer opportunities in the UK and Irish press as London is not far away and it's easy to cover stories from base.

Brussels Branch chair Sara Lewis says it's been a tough few years for freelances with a meagre amount of work available. It's picking up, but fees are not. Brussels branch (www.nujcec.org/Brussels) has about 100 members, most of whom are freelance, many work in the trade and specialised press. There used to be a good living to be had edit-

ing reports and writing newsletters for European Commission publications – but much of that work has gone to the army of accredited consultancies and public affairs offices.

The Netherlands branch chair Tony Sheldon says many branch members have joint membership with the *Nederlands Vereniging van Journalisten (NVJ)* and can seek help there if they have problem with Dutch media organisations. With no chapels to speak of, Sheldon sees the branch (nuj-netherlands.nl) as having an increasingly important and challenging task as the first stop for almost the exclusively freelance NUJ members working in the Netherlands. Staffers are rare in the small branch of just over 50 members and legal advice is offered to ex-staffers now working as freelances.

A recent NVJ freelance members' survey suggested one-third do not work freelance by choice. Sheldon added that hourly rates for writers, after adjusting for inflation, have dropped by 18 per cent in the last decade. In Brussels, Lewis feels that many Brussels freelancers are being paid the same or less than three or four years ago, while running costs have shot up.

In all three branches, freelances



make ends meet by also doing "corporate work" that could involve brochure-writing and translation. Brussels is a hub for conferences and freelance members often work at such events as rapporteurs. Overall, opportunities are shrinking and Overton says the continental Europe Grapevine email list (www.nujcec.org/brussels/index.php/activities/grapevine) is an essential resource providing information about job opportunities as well as details of the various branch social and union activities.

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Probably the most famous Brussels-based journalist is "the boy reporter" Tintin, celebrated on this mural which greets new arrivals at Brussels South station.

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