

No to impunity



Closing the event on 2 November, we held up the names of colleagues killed in Gaza. Photo © Pennie Quinton

TO MARK the annual UNESCO day to end impunity for crimes against journalists, London Freelance Branch held a symposium in partnership with King's College London's digital cultures research group and the King's University College Union branch. The first speaker of the two-panel symposium was Tayeb Ali of Bindmans solicitors and founder of the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians.

Tayeb pointed out that "Gaza is not an anomaly but is the mirror in which every government's hypocrisy is reflected. From Mexico to the Philippines; from Russia to India; from Egypt to Brazil," he said, "the same story plays out; journalists are branded as enemies of the state, foreign agents, or terrorists, they are detained, they are tortured, exiled, or simply disappeared and this contagion has reached our democracies".

Tayeb proposed measures to end impunity for crimes against journalists: "Protection without accountability is meaningless." Domestic legislation should explicitly criminalise attacks on journalists; independent investigatory bodies should have the power to prosecute when states refuse to do so. We need "universal jurisdiction"; when local justice fails it must be sought abroad.

International sanctions should be imposed on states that systematically target the press, with funding of a protection mechanism for journalists, with safe channels for whistleblowers, relocation programmes, and digital security support. He concluded: "every journalist killed, detained, or tortured is a warning that democracy can die not with a coup, but with a cover story... When journalists are silenced, atrocities go unseen. When the press becomes a threat, justice becomes a target and when truth

itself becomes dangerous, law becomes a lie. The protection of journalists is not charity it's self-defence for our civilisation."

Tayeb was followed by LFB vice chair Grace Livingstone and freelance journalist Ali Rocha, the founder of *Brazil Matters*, in conversation about the killings of journalist Dom Phillips and indigenous rights campaigner Bruno Pereira, who were murdered on assignment in the Brazilian Amazon in 2022. Ali pointed out that because Dom was foreign more was done to find his killers while other journalists in the region remain at serious risk from criminal gangs operating in the Amazon.

On panel two we heard from John McDonnell, MP for Hayes and Harlington, in his capacity as secretary of the NUJ parliamentary group; broadcaster Sangita Myska; Neve Gordon, professor of human rights at Queen Mary law department; and Dr Moosa Qureshi of Health Workers for Palestine. Branch Chair Pennie Quinton opened the panel by asking the panelists to respond to 10 Downing Street's response to our letter demanding meaningful action after Israel's targeted killing of the two Al Jazeera teams and freelancers reporting from Nasser and al Shifa Hospitals in August 2025.

Sangita Myska said "whoever wrote that response really needs to go back to PR school, because from a journalistic perspective, that was just one dead cat thrown out after another... so what we're talking about here is the deliberate targeting of journalists during what has been a catastrophic conflict for Palestinian civilians. Of course, journalists are considered civilians under international law, and that's why we have the same protections as every other civilian. What we've seen over the last

few years, of course, is the Israeli government act with complete impunity and essentially the slow, un-resisted breakdown of every international framework we have had in the world since the establishment of the Geneva conventions post-World War II, with literally no one doing anything about it. It's extraordinary to me that our government chose to refer to Hezbollah and Hamas, and that is not what we were talking about."

The government is vulnerable

John McDonnell said that as a union we can continue the pressure through the parliamentary group. "I think many senior politicians are hoping this will just go away now some peace deal has been signed... I don't think the union will allow it to go away. We've seen the Israeli president come here, cabinet members photographed smiling next to the Israeli ambassador, who refuses to recognise even the two-state solution... The more they maintain that relationship, the more they can be accused of complicity. The government is vulnerable on this, politically, legally, and morally."

Professor Neve Gordon discussed the delegitimisation of Palestinian journalists' reporting in Gaza. He listed Israeli journalists who called for the complete eradication of Palestinians from Gaza. Particularly chilling were the words of Roy Sharon, a correspondent on Israel's Channel 11, who Neve quoted as saying: "I said that in order to finally eliminate the military capabilities of Hamas... we need a million bodies. Then let there be a million bodies." "Such statements," said Neve, "amount to direct and public incitement to commit genocide, an act punishable under Article III of the 1951

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The Rate for the Job

YOU NEED more colleagues to share what they have been paid for freelance work, to help you negotiate rates. They need you to submit rates too. In this case, solidarity is self-interest.

If you submit rates we may soon be able to update the *Freelance Fees Guide* at www.londonfreelance.org/feesguide – we cannot do that without fresh Rates for the Job. Let

colleagues know what you have been paid, at www.londonfreelance.org/rates – or indeed let us know what rates you have turned down.

When you've got the client to name a price the Rate for the Job will help you start negotiating. Please treat all rates as minima, even the happy ☺ few; rates marked **X**, **XX** and so on are, in the editor's fallible opinion, variously below par.

Broadcasting: BBC World Service, report and produce 9-minute spot £1000 (£65 expenses paid); *Middle East Eye*, documentary video, shot and edited – unclear on length £300 **XXX**; *Middle East Eye*, day shooting and editing documentary video, £350 **X**.

Photography: Viory.video agency, package (extent unspecified) £300; BBC, probably a day £250 **X**; *Sun* online, photo £100 **X**; *Mirror* online, photo £100 **X**; Avalon.red image agency, one photo £88 **X**; *Mail* online, photo £50 **XX**.

Shifts: *The Mill*, subbing or editing day £160; *Scottish Sun*, sports sub-

editor day £107.91 **XX**.

Words, per 1000: *Telegraph*, feature £580 ☺; *Sunday Times*, feature £500; *Observer*, feature £400; *Sunday Times*, feature £400; *Guardian*, 1300 words @ £500 = £385 (£150 expenses paid); *i paper*, feature £330 or £250 **X**; *Independent*, feature £330; *Times*, feature £300 **X**; *Padel* magazine, £300; *DJ* magazine, £200; *African Business*, interview with businessperson, 1800 words @ £360 = £200; *Sun*, £75 **XXXX**; *Vive Le Rock*, 4000-word feature @ £150 = £37.50 **XXX**.

Words, other: hosting onstage interview events, promotional artist interviews live in front of an audience (often recorded for other media) €1000 fee doubled for film usage €1500 ☺; BBC online, 900 words plus photos (£65 expenses paid) £345; *Mojo*, re-use of old articles (the mag claims the right to use new ones for free) £50; *Express*, offered in compensation for feature lifted from the *Telegraph* and rewritten with AI £100 **XXXX**.



The Trireme

The Trireme is awarded for what one freelance called the “worst terms since I was last chained to the oars”. We award this issue's nomination to *DJ* magazine, offering just £37.50 per 1000 words for a feature. Insert your own pun about putting spin on it here, please.

Photo: **A member of the Trireme Trust**

Photographers – sign up now for DACS Payback 2026

DACS PAYBACK 2026 opens for claims on a date to be announced in mid-January 2026. DACS – originally the Design and Artists Copyright Society – distributes payments for, for example, copying of works by libraries to visual creators – including photographers and illustrators.

You will have one month to sub-

mit your “Part 1” or detailed “publication history” claim for photos appearing in books and magazines and online equivalents.

You will then have until April to submit your “Part 2” claim, giving general details and including TV programmes. Payments should arrive in early October.

If you are not registered with DACS, do it now at www.dacs.org.uk and to discover where the money comes from see www.londonfreelance.org/feesguide/GeRigCol.html

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• More useful links: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512dacs.html

Watch out for strike action at Mirror & STV

Journalists at the *Mirror* have voted for strike action in a dispute over job losses, unreasonable workloads, and the use of “artificial intelligence”. Minutes after the print edition went to press we had the results of a ballot at Scottish television station STV on action over cuts: 94% in favour of a strike and 98% for action short of strike on a turnout of 82%. Freelances have no right to strike in UK law, but they may find themselves unavailable if offered shifts on days when NUJ members are on strike. Any NUJ freelance who suffers a loss of income as a result of turning down shifts offered during a strike should contact the NUJ Chapel (workplace-based unit of NUJ organisation) for that media group. Watch for more news at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512stri.html

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Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Genocide. Article 25 of the 1998 Rome Statute provides that a person who directly and publicly incites others to commit genocide bears individual criminal responsibility.” Neve referenced the Nuremberg trial of Julius Streicher, found guilty of inciting the extermination of Jews in his newspaper *Der Stürmer* and events in 2003 when the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda convicted three media leaders for direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

He continued: “Despite Israel's attempt to cast Palestinian journalists as inciters to violence... it is time for each and every signatory to the Geneva Conventions and the Genocide Convention to ensure that those journalists and their media managers inciting genocide are held accountable by arresting them when they travel abroad, prosecuting them in national courts which have universal jurisdiction. What we have seen instead is numerous media outlets

undermining the credibility of those who bear witness to Israel's crime, while at times also facilitating the transformation of journalism into a vehicle that aids and abets genocide and crimes against humanity.”

Moosa Qureshi described how the barring of foreign journalists from Gaza has led top surgeons such as Nick Maynard, Khaled Dawas and Victoria Rose to adopt a reporting role – as the few foreigners being allowed into Gaza. That presented them with a stark ethical choice: to remain silent to be able to continue to deliver life-saving surgery, or to speak out.

Nick Maynard had worked in Palestine for many years and has numerous close friends in Gaza. Although he knew Israel would bar him from re-entering Gaza, he spoke to the UK Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, at the United Nations, to US Senators and to senior White House officials. Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta, one of the world's leading experts on traumatic war injuries, decided to act as a truth teller and

was arrested when he attempted to travel to Germany.

Please read the full contributions from each of our excellent panelists, whose work demonstrates the world is facing a crisis of accountability for crimes committed against civilians in war – and that journalists, though they are also civilians, are targets because of their ability to report and document what gets politicians like Milošević and soldiers like Mladic prosecuted at the International Criminal Court – on www.londonfreelance.org

© Pennie Quinton

• LFB thanks Dr Pete Chonka and Dr Ashwin Mathew of Global Digital Cultures at King's College London for partnering with LFB to mark the UNESCO day and for the courage of KCL UCU branch in balloting its members on local industrial action over academic free speech and the right of academics to refuse to take part in research activities or teaching that could make them complicit in war crimes.

Keeping public trust and our sanity

HARRIET MEYER told the October London Freelance Branch meeting about her workshops teaching how to apply “artificial intelligence” – AI – ethically and effectively. Harriet regularly runs workshops on AI for Women in Journalism (WIJ) and has written about finance for most of her career.

She “started in journalism back in 2002, when it was all about the newspaper and online journalism didn’t even exist.”

When ChatGPT landed, “I was on an editorial team, and I was tasked with learning about AI and how it could help us do our jobs. Having seen the digital revolution, moving from papers to online, I had a sense of the need to get on top of this – because it was going to change our industry. So, I started putting three to four hours every day into learning about AI.”

Harriet was recently named by LinkedIn as one of the top 12 “voices” on AI in Europe to follow, and offers a newsletter for media professionals, aimed at overcoming AI hype, cutting through the jargon – what, she told us, “I’ve done for my entire career as a financial journalist”.

“My aim is to really empower you, because we’re up against the tech giants and the fear that comes with this, which I’ve felt very much as well. So, I train news content and PR teams on how to use AI. It’s not about relying on AI to do your job; it’s about how it can help you enhance what you already do and not take away your skills.”

Every journalist faces a choice: “you can ignore AI, which I feel people are doing at the moment, and risk irrelevance in your career; or you can engage with it, using a journalist’s critical mindset,” she said.

Mind the pitfalls

“There are so many pitfalls and ethical questions around this technology. You can’t use it without being aware of these.”

First, there’s accuracy. AI models are renowned for their “hallucinations”. About a year ago they made stuff up about 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the time. “That is very dangerous for journalism. I think it’s getting better as the models improve,” Harriet said.

“But you have to verify the facts. This is where you bring your judgement to it. You really must be aware of those ‘hallucinations’ – and of bias. These AI models are trained on vast amounts of data, including reddit, com comments and Facebook posts. The training data reflects human bi-

ases. So, it’s full of misinformation. If journalists used AI for first drafts of articles, for me that would be quite terrifying.”

Harriet has “been freelance for a lot of my career – and I feel strongly that freelancers are left out in the cold when it comes to policies, like: How are we meant to be using these tools? What’s allowed? I haven’t been sent an AI policy by anyone I work for. We need to push for them.”

Be aware that when you’re using a free AI tool, “you are effectively paying them with the data you’re giving them. So don’t give them anything sensitive: no confidential documents that you wouldn’t be happy to be in the public domain.” You can tell ChatGPT not to use your data for training. “But I would say: do not put anything into a free AI model that you wouldn’t want to come out somewhere else.”

Everything’s been stolen

Copyright is obviously a massive issue, particularly for journalists. The *New York Times* case against OpenAI rumbles on. “The general consensus is that the papers will win these cases. Everything’s been stolen from authors, photographers, artists, graphic designers, everyone.” The companies claim that they can use this material to train their models under so-called “fair use” in US law.

Then there are issues like AI-generated actors or influencers and images that look very real even to a trained journalist eye. “We need to question what we see, what we hear, what we read and to be sceptical. All this is based on stolen material that is essentially regurgitated in a different form – so there are a lot of ethical debates around this.”

“The *New York Times* is likely to win that court case.” Then there are deals being struck. “Perplexity AI, for example, said recently that it was setting aside \$42 million to pay publishers when articles appeared in the model’s search results.

“There are so many battles that we have to fight. But I remain optimistic: truth-telling is fundamental. Hopefully the big publishing houses will be able to get financial backing from the tech giants.”

But how can you start to actually use AI tools in a way that you might feel comfortable with? “Take hallucinations. In my courses I used to train journalists on really strong prompting techniques to [try to] get rid of the hallucinations.” That is, how to instruct them in a way that means they are much less likely to make stuff up. The big “large language

models” – ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Copilot – are very similar.

“There is for example something called ‘retrieval augmented generation’. Essentially you tell an AI to go first to information you give it. You might give it an interview, or a table of data, to give it a context to work in, before it goes searching for stuff and potentially making stuff up.”

You may have seen stories around fake news and fake “experts”. What to watch out for? “It’s about education, so people can spot the signs of fake news and do their due diligence around who these ‘people’ are.”

Trying it out

If you haven’t experimented already, Harriet “would definitely have a go with Perplexity,” she said. “As a journalist, you’re often trying to write about a topic that maybe you’re not already an expert in, or you’re having to find out a lot of information very quickly. I see Perplexity as like Google on steroids.”

You could use Google Notebook LM to brainstorm. Ask it, “what are the themes across all these documents? What are the five most common issues that people are having with this particular topic?”

“Frankly,” Harriet said, “the tech giants are not going anywhere, so let’s get on board with trying to use AIs in a way that helps. They become your intelligent research assistant, to pull out threads that you might have missed.

“The future of journalism is human-led and AI-assisted. And using our scepticism to steer how we use it. It’s not stopping it: we’re not going to get very far with that. But it’s about keeping the public trust and our sanity in the process.”

Freelance editor Mike Holderness noted: “I’ve been talking to researchers and philosophers about the possibility of AI for over 30 years now. This isn’t it, which is why I insist on calling what we are discussing ‘machine learning’. What it’s doing is ‘confabulating’ – like someone with dementia – even when it gets the answer right.”

Harriet concurred that AI is “very good at faking, at sounding human, but it’s not”.

Mike continued: “And one thing that frightens me is so-called AI replacing search. So, I get the output from it, and use a search engine to help me check it. But if the search engine is a machine learning system it will be confabulating...”

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• More: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512harriet-meyer.html



© Harriet Meyer



Online exclusive: Mark Rylance on war and law

Actor Mark Rylance delivered a message to editors and an open letter – that as far as we can tell no others chose to publish – at the National Alternative Remembrance Service in London’s Tavistock Square on 11 November (above). What would his well-known character in *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to King Henry VIII, advise, he asked himself, in our present situation as a nation? “For me, the first cornerstone that comes to mind, with which Cromwell would surely agree, is that children should not be harmed by adults.” We publish his letter, and his biting note to editors on white poppies, at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2511mark-rylance.html

Photo © Pennie Quinton

'A privilege to pay tax'

ACCOUNTANT Eric Longley – to us, “accountant to the stars”, because he once did Paul McCartney – came to the November London Freelance Branch meeting to tell us how to hang on to whatever you earn as much as is sensible. Financial adviser Ion Tsakalis discussed investing your well-gotten gains.

Eric commented on then-current speculation about the Chancellor of the Exchequer: “I’m very disappointed with Rachel from Accounts, because she had the chance to get rid of the ‘non-doms’ tax dodge and she didn’t, it’s just been slightly altered.

“When she got into office, she knew she had to get some more money. So she asked the civil servants: what have you got? And she chose the winter fuel allowance. Then she chose to attack benefits. So my constant cry, as a Labour Party member to my Labour MP, is: ‘You’re not listening to the Labour Party. You’re not listening to Labour supporters. You’re not listening to the working people of this country. There is more money out there.’

“There are those who get a paltry £250,000 salary plus dividends and live offshore.” It’s a legal tax dodge.

“There’s nothing wrong with stuff that’s legal,” said Eric. “What I find is that it is immoral, because the business is here in the UK and they won’t help pay for things they should be paying for. If the UK government only said, as the Americans do to US citizens: no matter where you go, you pay our tax (and you get a credit for foreign tax paid).”

But what’s new for us? They’re Making Tax Digital. From 6 April 2026 if you’re earning over £50,000, and the year after over £30,000, and the year after that over £20,000 – you have to report quarterly on your income. It means we all have to do more work.

Accountants will get more business, “but it’s not good business. It’s appalling that the professional associations have not resisted this,” said Eric. “Our big discussion at work at the moment is, for smaller clients,

how do we make it less consuming of their time? How do we make it cheaper for them?”

Probably the thing we most wanted to know about, he thought, was deductions: money on which we do not pay tax. “The rule is very simple.” You put all your gross income in and from that you deduct the expenses that are “wholly and exclusively” for the purposes of your trade.

You may say “I have to get a child-minder to look after my kids so I can go to work, so that’s for the purposes of the trade. Isn’t it?” No, Eric said: that payment is for the purpose of looking after the children. “The motive is to go to work, but the purpose of the payments to look after the children.”

Do not forget to claim for your laptop and your phones – but not for the portion of their cost that is for private use.

Ion Tsakalis advises clients on their investments and their retirement planning: “I’ve done that for 30 years.” He has “two sons who are 18 and 20. When I think about their long-term prospects... Property markets have stagnated. I thought we would see more initiatives for growth” from government,

“We are,” Ion noted, “in a period when we’ve had a massive inflation of assets for a long time. People have been talking about inflation for three or four years because of the things that we pay every month, like our shopping and utility bills. But actually, we’ve had massive inflation since at least 2008 – in terms of property going up, a lot of very wealthy people have got even wealthier.”

Since 2000 governments worldwide “have just created money and given it to banks. I suppose it reached its peak during lockdown with furlough, with bounce back loans and all... We’re now reaping the result in terms of higher inflation and higher taxation. It’s all coming home to roost.”

What about keeping savings in cash? “Especially if you’re a freelance, you’ve got to have some money for



emergencies. You get periods where cash can be a good long-term proposition. But at the moment we’re in a period where you’ve got relatively high inflation and it’s probably going to stay that way for some time.”

You need to be thinking about how much you set aside for longer-term investing. “Certainly we want something that will grow at a rate faster than inflation over the longer term. That could be property; it could be shares,” Ion suggested.

“If I were investing for the long term, I would be thinking about shares, because that’s where you are going to get the long-term growth.”

Some older people may be thinking of accessing their pension funds “to buy an annuity or something... It’s not an area where you can expect the property market to get us out of gaol in the long term.”

You’ve got to be saving – “from as young an age as possible. Do that as efficiently as possible and use your ISA allowances and use pensions. A pension stacks up as a very tax-efficient way to save.”

Eric observed that “It’s a privilege to pay tax. It means you’re earning money. It also means you’re helping other people.”

On the spot the Chair invited Eric and Ion to our planned “making freelancing pay” event in the Spring, and Eric immediately accepted.

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• See members’ questions answered at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512finance.html

Branch Treasurer Phil Sutcliffe with Ion Tsakalis and Eric Longley
Photo © Pennie Quinton

Remember to file your tax return

The deadline to file your UK tax return is **31 January 2026** and there are automatic penalties for missing it. And, as Eric Longley noted (right), if your “qualifying income” is over £50,000 you are now hit by the Making Tax Digital rules: see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2507mtd.html

File your claim for books against Anthropic AI

A reminder that you have until **30 March 2026** to file a claim against Anthropic AI for work it has scraped from books. Details: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2510ai-anthropic.html



'It has been invigorating'

Brian Pelan told the September Branch meeting about the experience of founding VIEW magazine. Read about it in his own words at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512brian-pelan.html
Photo © Kevin Cooper

Tax researcher may face a SLAPP SLAPP

IT HAD to happen, but it’s still grimly surreal. Researcher Dan Neidle of Tax Policy Associates has been hit with a lawsuit for defamation.

One of the grounds set out in a summary of the the claim against him is that in his earlier reporting he alleged that “his legal claim against the Defendants is abusive and intended to suppress scrutiny”. In other words, he is being sued for saying

that his being sued is... bad. A SLAPP is a “strategic lawsuit against public participation” – a legal action whose purpose is to shut down reporting or commentary, for example. If Dan is being sued for complaining that a lawsuit against him is a SLAPP, that would make this claim a SLAPP SLAPP – or a “meta-SLAPP” if you prefer Greek prefixes.

Interestingly, we have failed to find

a part of the formal particulars of claim that deals with allegations of action “intended to suppress scrutiny”. On 24 October Dan wrote on BlueSky “Lots of people asked, but I won’t be crowdfunding this because I expect to win.”

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• A tale of how anti-SLAPP law may backfire: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2511slapp.html

Defend Adil Raja!

PAKISTAN'S government is stepping up pressure on the UK to extradite NUJ member, former soldier and YouTuber Adil Raja – having convicted him at a court martial in his absence of inciting sedition, with a sentence of 14 years in prison.

DropSite News reports that when its Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met British High Commissioner Jane Marriott in Islamabad on 4 December he said Pakistan would take in people convicted as members of “grooming gangs” in the UK – in exchange for Adil and former prime minister’s aide Mirza Shahzad Akbar.

Naqvi arrived in London on 6 December, apparently representing the Pakistan Cricket Board. The Interior Ministry confirmed that the Islamabad meeting “also discussed the return of Pakistanis illegally residing in the UK”.

Extraditing Adil and Mirza would contravene international law such as the European Convention on Hu-

man Rights and likely the United Nations Convention against Torture.

While seeking safety in the UK Adil has been subjected to what he describes as a SLAPP lawsuit. In October he was ordered by the High Court to pay £50,000, with costs yet to be determined, in defamation damages to Rashid Naseer, who when he filed the claim was a sector commander and head of the intelligence command of the Pakistan Army’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Punjab.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said: “The NUJ is very concerned at the attempt to extradite member Adil Raja and would urge the UK government to resist the relentless pressure from the government of Pakistan. We would be gravely concerned for the welfare of our member were the request to be granted. The government has a duty not to co-operate with such a clear attempt to violate



Adil Raja on his YouTube channel

Image © Adil Raja

the human rights of a journalist and whistle blower.”

Branch chair Pennie Quinton “urges the UK government to continue its protection of our member Adil Raja. Should Adil be forcibly returned to Pakistan his life would be in great danger.”

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• Watch for updates at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512adil-raja.html

Latest threat to copyright is ‘AI’ rewrites

THE EXPRESS has offered a freelance journalist compensation for lifting a feature from the *Telegraph*. The first twist is that the offer was a mere £100. The second is that the *Press Gazette* reports that the *Express* very likely used an “artificial intelligence” tool to rewrite it.

Daniel Puddicombe’s 1300-word feature “The Mexican coast-to-coast train that costs just £25 – and is run by marines” was published in the *Telegraph* on 12 October. On 18 October the *Express* published 715 words under the headline “The incredible 188 mile train journey connecting 2 seaside cities in gorgeous country”.

As Daniel told the *Press Gazette*, he is “the first and only non-Mexican journalist who travelled on that railway line and to have been in contact with the military and the Navy... There is absolutely no chance that anybody else could have done that.”

The *Press Gazette* fed both stories into AI text-detector Pangram, which claims “up to 99% accuracy”. The system said it had high confidence the *Telegraph* piece was human-written, and high confidence the *Express* piece was written by AI.

Daniel declined the £100 offer, describing it as an “insult” and as “less than one third” of what he was paid per article. The *Freelance* is attempting to contact him about what happens next.

In cases other than Daniel’s, robot rewrites may lead to some brain-melting issues in copyright law. Con-

sider that parts of this article are a human rewrite of a *Press Gazette* report, with credit. There is no copyright in the facts. There is copyright in their expression, and this is a different expression, by a human, and as a human author I hold copyright in it.

But, for example, does a robot doing a rewrite emit any kind of expression? It cannot claim copyright in its (re-)expression. Neither, probably, can its owner. Is its output a straight-up violation of copyright, for want of any other status?

Meanwhile in Whitehall...

The UK government is tight-lipped about its plans to permit the owners of so-called “artificial intelligences” to scrape your words and images. In July it responded to powerful protests against its plan to give our work to robots by announcing reports on the effects of its proposals. It is in the process of setting up “technical working groups” to examine those effects.

In a consultative meeting with the British Copyright Council in representatives of the government’s Intellectual Property Office were tight-lipped – or, as civil servants prefer to say, “in listening mode”.

...and a random courts sample

Court cases against “AI” companies proceed apace. Image library Getty lost its copyright claims in the UK: see details online. In Germany on 11 November the Munich regional court ruled that ChatGPT

infringed songwriters’ copyright by ingesting their lyrics.

In Canada an Ontario court ruled on 7 November that a case brought by a group of Canadian media companies can proceed there; the defendant, ChatGPT owner OpenAI, wanted it moved to the US.

Deals continue too. For example AI-powered news platform Particle on 27 October announced that the *Observer* – which Tortoise Media notoriously took over early in the year – as its first UK partner to “innovate news consumption”.

And on 29 October Universal Music announced that it had settled a claim against artificial music generator Udio and would “collaborate on an innovative, new commercial music creation, consumption and streaming experience... trained on authorized and licensed music”. The announcement implies, but does not specify, that artists will be paid.

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Tell the NUJ your views on licensing work to ‘AI’

THE NUJ is still seeking freelance members’ views on how it should protect their rights as authors (including photographers’ copyright) and whether to seek compensation for secondary forms of digital use, outside of individual agreements or contracts that cover your work, including use for training “AI”. This will inform the union’s involvement with SCOOP, an initiative with collecting societies that aims to develop mutually beneficial collective agreements between the representatives of freelance journalists and technology companies. We estimate that filling out the survey will take five minutes or less. Go to www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2507ai-survey.html

‘AI’ image below probably not © Mike Holderness



LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Come to our Annual General Meeting!

THE LONDON Freelance Branch meeting on **Monday 12 January 2026** will be our Annual General Meeting. This is where we elect the Branch Committee for the year. We encourage *full members* to step forward to help run the Branch for the next year. See www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/jobs.html for an outline of what is involved in each post. This is also the meeting at which we can amend our Branch rules, and elect representatives to bodies such as Trades Councils.

On **Monday 9 February** we hope to have a speaker from another Creators' Rights Alliance member

union on its campaign for fair contracts for freelancers.

Monday 9 March follows International Women's Day and are inviting a representative of the "Pregnant Then Screwed" group to speak.

The Branch Committee welcomes suggestions for meeting topics and speakers: please contact us via www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/contact.html

Normal Branch meetings are on the second Monday of each month at **6:30pm** – for details of future meetings visit www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html

These meetings will be hybrid – so

that you can meet other members at the NUJ headquarters, Headland House, **72 Acton Street WC1X 9NB**, or attend online. Check online for confirmation.

We will send Branch members an email over the weekend before each meeting with Zoom details. We have had issues with gmail.com hiding these. If you are not getting alerts about meetings please contact us at list@londonfreelance.org

This edition went to press on **8 December**. Your deadline to submit a motion or online article is **Saturday 3 January**.

AN ACTIVE YEAR FOR OUR BRANCH

Chair's report 2025

FIRST – thanks to the many London Freelance Branch members who have attended meetings and raised points for discussion. This has been a deadly year for journalists and I am proud of how our members stood in solidarity with their fellow journalists: when their equipment was seized under spurious applications of UK anti-terror legislation; or when their jobs were on the line at the *Observer* or around the cuts to freelance contracts at the BBC.

Apart from monthly Branch meetings recorded in these pages, we had multiple high-profile events in 2025. In early April I was privileged to lead our delegation to the NUJ Delegate Meeting in Blackpool where all LFB motions were approved by the delegates, apart from one motion which

we agreed to remit to the NEC.

Also, in April John McDonnell MP asked a question in the House of Commons about the arrest and administrative detention of veteran journalist Ali Samoudi by Israeli forces. Ali remains held without charge.

On Monday 7 July the Branch held its annual meeting in parliament, sponsored by John McDonnell MP the secretary of the NUJ parliamentary group, as a teach-in on "How to report the Gaza genocide".

In August shock waves went through our profession on 11 August when Israeli forces deployed an airstrike on the press tent outside al-Shifa hospital, assassinating six journalists. We called an emergency committee meeting to discuss our response, joined by John McDonnell

and Peter Osborne, and we organised a vigil for Wednesday 13 August, opposite Downing Street.

On 25 August Israeli forces killed yet another five journalists in a "double tap" strike on Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis. On 27 August the Branch delivered its letter to the Prime Minister, with an addendum on those most recent killings, co-signed by seven other NUJ bodies. Once more we gathered in grief opposite Downing Street with the Branch banner.

In early September I attended Trades Union Congress as an elected delegate representing the NUJ: I spoke in support of motions calling for measures to address low pay and poor conditions for freelancers.

Sunday 2 November was the UNESCO day that calls for the end of impunity for crimes against journalists' LFB partnered with the King's College London UCU branch for a two-panel symposium (see page 1).

And at LFB's seasonal social soirée we celebrated the life of Branch member Duncan Campbell.

© **Pennie Quinton**

● Full report at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/2512chair.html

NEW MEMBERS MEET

ARE YOU new to freelancing? Are you starting in journalism as a freelance, or have you been "liberated" from a staff post? Would it help to meet other new members and more experienced freelance journalists who can offer advice?

At the online event on 27 November six new members discussed how to pitch work to new outlets,

and how to negotiate rates for that work, with experienced Committee members Phil Sutcliffe, Nika Talbot and Mike Holderness.

Join the next Branch new members' meeting – likely in person – on **Thursday 26 February**. Please check the Branch calendar at www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings.html for details.

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EXPERIENCED podcast editor, audio and video London based. Reasonable rates. Contact enginh@gmail.com

I HOST a weekly Writers' Café every Thursday 3-5 pm – folks can subscribe via the calendar here: lu.ma/WritersCafe Nika Talbot.

CITY St George's, University of London: A new 10-week longform nonfiction course, delivered fortnightly, from the research and enterprise department. Open to all levels across different genres (reportage, memoir, essays, travel and food writing, biography). We will discuss readings; workshop each other's work; and you will receive detailed edits from the course director. Starts 21 January 2026, on fortnightly Wednesday evenings, 6:30 to 8:30pm: registration deadline 14 January 2026. Cost £395; one scholarship available to an 18-to-25-year-old writer from an under-represented background or facing financial difficulty. Sign up at bit.ly/LFBstorytelling

FREELANCE

Branch contacts: www.londonfreelance.org/lfb
Online Freelance contents: www.londonfreelance.org/fl

PRESS CARDS

The NUJ has introduced a simplified process for administering the issuing of press cards through the UK Press Card Authority. London Freelance Branch advises any freelance who has had difficulty obtaining a press card to apply again.

THE GALLERY

Freelance NUJ members: showcase your photographs on The London Freelance Branch Gallery (in memory of Dave Rotchelle). Check submission details at www.londonfreelance.org/gallery – and freelance members can promote published books of which they are the author (or an author) on the London Freelance Bookshelf, at www.londonfreelance.org/bookshelf

CONTACTS

Freelance office

David Ayrton & Tim Dawson, via 020 7843 3700
Membership via switchboard 020 7843 3700
email freelanceoffice@nuj.org.uk
post 72 Acton Street, London WC1X 9NB

Legal helpline for NUJ members in emergency only:

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland .0800 587 7530

Freelance editors

Mike Holderness
Pennie Quinton
email: editor@londonfreelance.org

Follow us on BlueSky: [@nujflb.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/nujflb.bsky.social)
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