HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Communications and Digital

Corrected oral evidence: The future of journalism

Tuesday 2 June 2020

4.10 pm

Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Bull; Baroness Buscombe; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Grender; Lord McInnes of Kilwinning; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Meyer; Baroness Quin; Lord Storey; The Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 11 Virtual Proceeding Questions 93 - 98

Witnesses

I: Anna Codrea-Rado, freelance journalist and campaigner; William Cook, freelance journalist and art and travel writer.

Examination of witnesses

Andrea Codrea-Rado and William Cook.

Q93 **The Chair:** Thank you very much to our next set of witnesses, Anna Codrea-Rado and William Cook. Thank you for coming to give evidence to our inquiry into the future of journalism. We have just had a session, which you may have seen part of, where we talked a lot about skills, training, the impact of technology on the skills journalists need and how news organisations are dealing with that. We have two further witnesses with huge and relevant experience, largely from a freelance background, so it will be very interesting hearing what you have to say. I will ask Anna and William to introduce themselves very briefly. In your introduction, give us a brief overview of the work you do and your perceptions about the future of journalism and your industry.

Anna Codrea-Rado: I have been working as a journalist for over 10 years now. The last three of those I have been freelance. I cover business, technology and culture for a number of publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Wired* and many others. I also run the Professional Freelancer, which is a reader-funded publication and online community for over 8,000 freelance writers.

As part of that, in February 2019 I launched the #FairPayForFreelancers campaign, which calls upon the media to pay its freelancers fairer, better and faster. The three asks I made in that campaign are an end to payment on publication, an update to not-fit-for-purpose payment systems and a respect of late payment fees. Those three issues encompass my overall feelings about the largest problems that freelance journalists face working today in the media.

When it comes to my perspective on the future of journalism, despite what I may have just said, I am actually very hopeful for it. I believe that we are at a really crucial point right now where emerging technology is giving us a massive opportunity to build a more inclusive media. However, the only way we are going to be able to realise this potential is by addressing the major structural problems we have within the media industry. If we want a more diverse and robust press that fulfils its duty in keeping Government to account and informing citizens, we need to start by taking urgent action about the inequality that we find within the industry itself.

When it comes to technology, I believe that we have these big opportunities, in terms of being able to deliver more robust media directly to the readers, and we can engage with readers as a result of technology. From a career perspective for journalists as well, particularly freelancers, tech provides us a way to lower the barriers to entry for journalists, particularly those coming from diverse backgrounds to enter the industry. That is my viewpoint, where I am coming from and my work in this field.

The Chair: We may well come back to a number of those issues, including entry to the industry and the issues around inclusion that you

mentioned.

William Cook: I have been a journalist, freelance most of the time, for about 30 years. I spent some time at the BBC, some time at the *Mail on Sunday* and some time contracted to the *Guardian*, but basically I have been freelance. At the moment I am writing mainly for the *Independent*, the *Oldie* and the *Spectator*, among others. I have written a number of books as well, mainly biographies of cultural figures such as Peter Cook and Dudley Moore and Morecambe and Wise. I did a collection of Auberon Waugh's work a few years ago.

With regard to my journalism, most of it has been art, travel, culture and some politics tangentially, through the culture side of things. My father's family are German originally, so I have done quite a lot of reporting from the German-speaking part of Europe, Benelux and the Baltic states as well.

With regard to the future of journalism, where we are now and freelancers in particular, it is the best of times and the worst of times, as your previous witness was saying. New technology has really opened journalism up. It is like the wild west. There are some people striking gold, other people not striking gold and everything is up for grabs, which is both an exciting thing and a disturbing thing.

Q94 **Baroness Quin:** Earlier on, we had a very interesting discussion about skills and what the most important skills that are needed by journalists at the moment are and how those have changed and are changing. I would like comments on this from both contributors. In replying, include also what you feel the value of university degrees is, including journalism degrees for journalists, and whether those skills that you get on a degree course are important, or whether there is a risk, which seemed to be implied in our earlier discussions, that you get a certain sameness of people who have gone through similar backgrounds and therefore perhaps do not have the diverse range of skills that ideally you would like in a newsroom, or even the diverse range of backgrounds and life experience that is also very useful for journalism. If I could have comments from both of you on these issues, that would be great.

William Cook: I did an English and History degree at Keele University about 30 years ago—quite a long time ago—and I did a certificate in education as well. I had some plans to be a teacher; I never quite got around to it. I would say that both of those qualifications were very useful, not in a direct way but in an indirect way and trying to make you think independently and juggle different points of view and sources. I thought it was pretty good.

I never did a specific journalism qualification. I never decided not to do it; I just never quite got around to it, in that I got into journalism a little bit accidentally and the work never stopped coming in. I do not want to sound complacent about that. I never made much money out of it, but there was always something else that I needed to finish off before I thought about doing a journalism qualification, so it never quite happened for me. I cannot speak about how useful those journalism

qualifications are. I have met people who have done them who said there were good and bad things about them. I am conscious that I did not develop those particular skills, but also I did some learning on the job that was pretty invaluable.

With regard to skills in the new media environment, I am a bit of a luddite, in a way. The biggest danger is not so much people not being able to learn new skills. Everybody seems to get around computers, smartphones, the internet, Twitter and Instagram stuff pretty well, or at least people younger than me, who are coming into the industry, seem to manage it pretty well. I do not think that is the problem. It is more to do with the erosion of the old skills. That is the biggest problem.

This was something I touched on in a lecture I gave at Leeds University to postgraduate media and culture MA students. It was interesting in that the majority of those students were Chinese. I was having to explain how Fleet Street, for want of a better phrase, had changed over the last 30 years since I have been doing it. The thing that I touched as my biggest worry was the erosion of reporting. By "reporting" I mean actually getting off your backside, getting away from the computer, going out and meeting people face to face, for better or worse, in places outside your home, not doing it on the phone or the internet, and having that face-to-face contact, with the travelling. The awkwardness of encounters is how I would put it.

Reporting makes journalists change their minds. That is why reporting is so important. You start off with a very clear idea and, in my view, a good article is about what happened to you along the way that made you change your mind and come to a different point of view than the one you started off with. That is why reporting is important. Why is it being eroded? It is partly because it can be. It is partly because, with all these gizmos we are using today, it is possible to put a piece together without reporting, which you literally could not do a while ago. It is not the same piece and it creates the illusion of an article, rather than an article that is based on reporting.

The other thing is financial. As your other witness was saying with this stuff about money as the bottom line, there is more and more pressure on freelance journalists in particular to turn things around quickly and economically. There is more and more work out there and less and less money changing hands, and reporting is expensive. It takes time and money, and so more and more people are under pressure, either directly or indirectly, not to do it. I hope that is some help.

The Chair: Before we move on, it is quite interesting that you said part of the job is to change people's mind, or at least to write in such a way that you are challenging people.

William Cook: Specifically, it is about the reporter changing their mind. You start off at your desk with a clear idea about what is right and wrong and good and bad. You then go out into the street and find people that confound that. My journey in each article is about me changing my mind. I do not have a plan to change other people's minds. It is about me wrestling with this. I do not write to tell you what I think. I write to find

out what I think, and the only way to find out sensibly is to step outside of this room and listen to what other people have to say.

The Chair: Do you think that is the way most journalists go about a story, with a totally open mind, at the end of which they report what they have discovered?

William Cook: An open mind is obviously a high ideal. It is something to aim for. We start off with prejudices and try to confront and confound those prejudices. That is the idea, as far as I am concerned. One of the worries with the new media is that it rewards polemic, very black-and-white opinion and so on and so forth. The more people you speak to when you are doing a piece, the more complicated it gets and the harder it gets to write something that is dynamic and fair, but the best pieces are both dynamic and fair. That is the truth.

Lord Allen of Kensington: You have made a really important point, because it is the polemic. It is different points of view and that is what journalism is. That is what we try to do; I chair a media company. That just brings out a different perspective. Well done. "Awkwardness" was a great word; it was my favourite word of the day. That is what journalists do. It is awkward.

Anna Codrea-Rado: I am going to start with skills. To echo William's point, I completely agree that the most important skills remain reporting skills, so the ability to find a story, to know how to corroborate it, how to interview sources, how to find the supporting statistics and then how to present all that reporting in a clear and concise copy, all the while maintaining ethical and legal guidelines. Those remain the paramount skills that all journalists need.

I do not think that need has changed. If anything, that need has only become greater right now, as we find ourselves in a more divided society and with the rise of fake news. We need this ability of reporters to be able to identify their sources and do really thorough and robust reporting. The tools available to assist with that reporting have changed. They are, by and large, technology tools. We have these tools available to us: data, which enables an investigative reporter to mine databases in order to uncover local government corruption, and social media, which enables a news reporter to access eye witness reports in real time in a breaking-news situation. In many ways, we have only scratched the surface of what technology can do to help journalists do their jobs more effectively. The point that we are now at, as William has alluded to, is that these tools are not being used to their best ability. They are being used to cut corners and to remove the need for reporters to go out and do their jobs properly.

I do not believe that technology in and of itself poses an existential threat to the profession of journalism, in the sense that I am not worried that the robots are coming to take my job. What I am concerned about, and where the threat lies, is the executive level, in terms of how decisions are made about the business models for the media industry itself and the way in which the media interacts and collaborates with tech

giants. That intersection of technology and journalism is where we need really urgent attention.

I have very mixed feelings about the value of university degrees for journalists, particularly the journalism degrees. I studied English literature at Durham in 2009. By and large, I would not say that the most value that I got from that course in terms of my career as a journalist came from the course itself. It more came from the fact that I joined the student paper while I was at university, and then it was during that time that I decided I wanted to pursue a career in journalism.

I graduated in 2009, so right into the middle of the financial recession, and I found myself in a Catch-22, where the traditional routes into journalism, which were either to find a graduate scheme on a national or to go and work on a regional, were not available because those schemes had been frozen or those papers had shut down. I found myself in a Catch-22 of not having the experience to get the job and not being able to get the job to get the experience, so I ended up doing a very expensive postgraduate degree.

I went to America to do a journalism master's at Columbia University. Although I still use everything that I learned in that degree—particularly the reporting and ethics skills—in my career right now, if I am being totally honest, I am quite embarrassed by the fact that I have such an expensive degree behind me and I am not sure if I will make back the cost of it over the course of my career. When we rely on university degrees to plug that training gap, it just leaves us in a situation where we just have much of the same types of people from the same background and from the same small group of elite universities entering the industry. I count myself in that group. That is a huge problem on the diversity front.

In terms of solutions, journalism is a profession that was made for on-the-job training. While there is a whole separate conversation to be had about how we do not value apprenticeships as much as we should do, when it comes to journalism they make so much sense. Ultimately, you will not learn how to be a journalist through reading a textbook. You learn how to be a journalist on the job when you are sent out to report. If that is going to happen, that needs to happen actually in the field and it needs to happen in some kind of training scheme.

I know that at least in the degree that I did and from the students that I talk to, freelancing is not really built into a lot of these degrees, even the postgraduate degrees. I was not even taught how to pitch a story to a magazine on my university degree, and that is the bread and butter of what I need to do now as a freelance, not to mention that there is no talk of what bookkeeping looks like for a freelancer and what the basic business skills are that you need to operate as a self-employed journalist.

When it comes to the question of how we make freelance journalism more accessible to recent graduates or what the alternative to not doing a university degree for freelancers is, that is a lot trickier. Although you can go and do an apprenticeship if you wanted to enter a newsroom,

what would that look like for a freelancer? One of the issues that I hear so many freelancers lament is that there is no school for freelancing; maybe now there should be one. Maybe we need some kind of industry standard, where there are training schemes specifically designed for young journalists who want to pursue a self-employed career.

This also dovetails with a larger issue that we have in the education system, which is that self-employment, by and large, is not really presented as a career choice. At least when I went through the education system, it was talked about like it was a plan B. There were definitely no freelancing career booths at any of the careers fairs that I attended; maybe we need some of those. That is my perspective on the skills and the university degrees.

Q95 **Lord Storey:** I found that really fascinating. I very much agree with the points that both of you made, but particularly Anna. I can recall a time when, if somebody wanted to go into journalism, the route was they joined a local newspaper as a cub reporter, they went off and did the courts, the local parish fete or the local council meeting, and gradually they built up their soft skills, the interpersonal relationship skills and a passion for the community. They either then stayed with the paper and worked their way up on a pretty poor salary, or they went into local commercial radio and then sometimes into television. If you look at some of our prominent journalists on television now, that was the route many of them took. That route has gone for most journalists and that is a shame. I think that the route of high-level apprenticeships would be a much better way of training journalists than doing a full-time university degree would be, and I wondered what both of you felt about that.

Anna Codrea-Rado: I completely agree. Apprenticeships make the most sense as an alternative to university degrees, particularly for journalism. There is no longer a clear route into journalism. You can go and do a university degree and a lot of the universities, particularly the London ones, have their connections to the London news organisations. That is one way in, but that is an expensive way in and that is a way in for only a certain demographic of people.

Another route in, which I see happening a lot and which is quite concerning, is that young journalists are encouraged by online media organisations to write first-person narratives, particularly about their traumas and their struggles. They are putting out online very personal essays in order to, essentially, raise a profile for themselves and to grow their name, essentially to get the attention of editors with the hope of an elusive job that may or may not materialise.

The other route in, which is essentially what happened to me, is that, curiously, there is an abundance of editor roles that media organisations hire. They seem to be reluctant to hire that many reporters but they are very happy to hire editors, because, by and large, an editor job at the moment, in this situation that we find ourselves in, is really someone who is curating the editorial schedule, assigning stories and running the desk. There are a lot of junior editors who are employed fairly early in

their careers, and that is another route, which also raises various problems.

Apprenticeships seem like the way forward, because you get the on-the-job training. It is an actual job; it is not an internship and you are being paid. It just opens up that access to so many more people from so many more backgrounds. It just levels the playing field, so I would be very for apprenticeships to be normalised and culturally accepted, as that is how you become a successful journalist now.

William Cook: I agree with pretty much all of that. I do not want to be too doom and gloom about this. We are in a place where there is a lot of incredibly exciting, literate and adventurous journalism going on. I have been consuming British journalism avidly as a reader and grabbing stuff anywhere I could find it for the sheer fun of it, as well as the chance to inform myself. We have a very vibrant print media, which has defied the internet, in a way. The circulations of magazines such as the *Spectator* are unprecedented, whether people are reading in print, online, on the computer or on their phones. We are living through a very exciting time for journalism.

I entirely agree that apprenticeships are a great thing. As somebody with German citizenship as well, I travel to Germany as often as I can. It is immediately apparent when you talk to German people that the idea that the brightest people go to university and the not so academically gifted people go and do an apprenticeship instead just does not exist. It is not just Germany. I remember doing a piece about watchmaking in Switzerland. There were some very bright people who were apprentice watchmakers, who had been standout students at school. That is a cultural bias. I do not know how we get rid of that.

On the plus side, I created an apprenticeship of my own. I had a stab at getting a steady job on various papers and did not get much beyond the front door, so I started pitching things to editors—stories that I was interested in and stories that I had found. An apprenticeship happened to me, rather than the other way around, so that is still possible.

One thing that is exciting about the internet is that people have things they want to write. They may not get paid for it, but I believe in the market in terms of journalism. The market decides and will find exciting young journalists, just as it will find exciting young footballers, because it is in the market's interest to do so. It is a pretty good way of working out what is good and what is not so good. If people do not have a hunger and a passion for journalism, to drive them on to do it for next to nothing initially, just because they want to write, report and investigate, good for them, because they will be a lot better without having that itch they want to scratch, but it is the people with the itch they want to scratch who are going to get out there and do it.

I am not optimistic about the career structure or the job prospects, but when you look at the actual journalism that is getting generated, a lot of it is pretty good. As somebody who has a great admiration for a lot of things on the continent, I still feel our press is a lot livelier than theirs.

The Chair: You mentioned the *Spectator* as a recent success story. It seems to me that its success is driven by the quality of, and its investment in, writing.

William Cook: Yes, absolutely. The *New Statesman* is pretty much an exact parallel as well; it is not a partisan thing here, and I have written for the *New Statesman* in the past. This is one thing that has been very encouraging recently. I am old enough to remember that, when the internet first came in, a lot of people thought that these weekly magazines were finished. Why would you spend a fiver on a magazine when you can get it all for free online? Actually, in terms of that kind of long-form reporting, there is the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman*, the *Oldie* or *Prospect* and half a dozen others that have sprung up since the internet started. More people are reading and more people are writing than ever before. The only thing that has broken down is the old business model.

Q96 **Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** Anna started to address some of these issues, but I wanted to explore and pursue William's analogy of the wild west and finding the gold that a freelancer needs to find. I wanted to ask you both, first, what additional skills you think a freelancer needs. Secondly, in terms of the scope of freelancing, I wanted to ask about the ability to network and be one of a community of freelancers. What sort of peer support is there for freelancers? Secondly, what additional training could be provided for freelancers to ensure that people have the best motivations and skills that they require?

William Cook: That is a very good point. The wild west analogy is a reasonable one, both good and bad. New technologies throw up new ways of doing things, and the generation coming through now, younger than me, is going to use those new tools more efficiently, both in finding stories and in networking with other journalists.

When you say about skills, it is hard. It is a bit analogous to teaching in a way. In a way, life skills are good journalistic skills. I have made mistakes. I have done things I have regretted, and those things have informed me and made me want to do it better next time. Without sounding too pious, you need to suffer a little bit and you need to realise what a complex and fragile place the world is. You can only do that by going out into that and learning on the job, hopefully not doing so much damage while you are doing it, and finding that mixture of confidence and humility that makes a good read.

Anna Codrea-Rado: All journalists need the reporting skills, but when it comes to the additional skills that freelancers specifically need, they all come under the business skills umbrella, of which there are hard skills and soft skills, both of which are equally important.

Specifically for hard skills, freelancers need to know at the very least some basic bookkeeping, even just to understand what cash flow means and to be able to, in a very simplistic way, put together a profit-and-loss statement, either in some budget bookkeeping software that you can get for free, like I use, or a very simple Excel spreadsheet. Freelancers also

need marketing skills, in the sense of knowing what your skillset is and how to sell it. By and large, that means social media skills, because most marketing that journalists will do will be on social media.

Also, to a large extent, you need sales skills, in the sense that you need to be able to talk about money confidently, know how to negotiate a rate and know the selling aspect of freelancing, because, ultimately, I truly believe that the only way to be a successful freelancer is if you treat it like a small business. You are a company of one and, to use the newsroom analogy, yes, you are the reporter, but you are also the editor-in-chief, the chief executive, the HR person and the finance department.

Also in terms of hard skills, you may need a little bit of web design, but very basic stuff—the ability to know how to put together your own website on one of these premade packages, like Squarespace or WordPress. Also, you need some skills around some very basic business know-how, so the ability to sit down, maybe once a year, to write out some business goals and possibly a business plan, and understand what it means to have a diverse income and how to make sure your business is resilient.

In terms of soft skills, it is things such as time management, adaptability, flexibility and communication. By "communication", I mean not necessarily with your sources and when you are doing your story, but communicating with the people who are hiring you as a freelancer, so the editors and the media organisations.

The most important soft skill that freelancers need is resilience, because there is what I can only describe as an emotional tax that freelancers face. You are faced with constant rejections or silence, with pitches going unanswered, a lack of support and a lack of a network, having to talk about money on daily basis, which for most people is not comfortable and is not something that they were taught how to do, and having to fight for your right to get payment that is due to you. All of these things take a huge emotional toll and they are, to be quite frank, just incredibly exhausting. You need resilience in order to get through that.

In answer to your question about networking, this is a really interesting one, because in the last few years I have seen a rise in peer-to-peer training, networking and community groups. This might be partly to do with the fact that there has been a rise in freelancers, but also my personal theory is that there have been a lot of freelancers who have come to freelancing, like myself, as a result of redundancy. Maybe historically where a freelancer might have seen their fellow freelancer as the "competition", now there is a much more collaborative approach to engaging with the freelance community. I am seeing communities of freelancers popping up left, right and centre. That is exactly how the publication that I run, the Professional Freelancer, started.

I was made redundant in 2017. I went into work on Friday and was told not to come back. I did not know where to turn to find the resources and support that I needed to figure out how to be a freelancer, so I started writing a weekly email newsletter, where I was chronicling my journey as

a freelance journalist and sharing the things that I was learning along the way. Cut to where we are now and that has turned into a publication in its own right, which attracts over 50,000 monthly page views. That in and of itself shows the great need for these kinds of spaces and these resources.

There is a particular value in peer-to-peer learning. You are essentially forming the equivalent of what in an office would be your group of work friends. They are not just your colleagues but your work friends—the people to whom you turn to ask for advice when you are having a difficult situation with a boss. In a newsroom context, it is the person who you can turn to and say, "What is the word for that thing? I cannot think of the word", and you are bouncing ideas off that person. It is that kind of level of collaboration and collegiate atmosphere.

The problem with this is about how you find these networks, especially if you are new to freelancing and have not entered freelancing like I did; I was mid-career, from a fairly well-connected place, had already been working in-house and already knew who the editors were. I had the university degree behind me. I have the confidence to put myself out there because I am from, quite frankly, a well-educated and privileged background and I have those skills and abilities to put myself out there. If you do not have that, how do you find these networks? In short, it is really hard to find them. Yes, you can look on social media, but having that confidence to be able to approach someone is a whole different story.

To keep going with this analogy of the wild west, there has been this explosion in online resources and courses specifically aimed at freelancers. Some are specifically aimed at freelance journalists and others at freelancers more generally. You can find a course now for every single thing under the sun. Some of them are amazing value and you are learning from very brilliant instructors, but others are just utter garbage. How do you know how to vet them? Again, you do not.

One way I see this potentially being improved is if there was some kind of certification programme. It is similar to what I was touching on with how we need specific training for freelancers. We have the National Council for the Training of Journalists, which accredits university courses. Do we need something similar that accredits these peer-to-peer courses, or do we need some specific courses that are aimed at journalists? How do we support networking? Ultimately, that is a really key part to all of this.

I agree that a core skill of a freelancer is the ability to go out and find stories, and I loved what William said about the awkwardness of encounters and how journalists are awkward by nature. What is really fascinating for me is that, when it comes to finding stories and sources, that awkwardness works so well in your favour, but when it comes to building your professional network, it really works against you.

It is really important that we support the grassroot peer-to-peer organisations that are springing up off their own backs, through grants or some kind of support in that way. The established organisations, such

as the NUJ, the National Council for the Training of Journalists and Women in Journalism, also need to be taking a particular look at how they support freelancers in particular, because, as outlined with everything we have been discussing today, there are these specific issues to freelancers that are a distinct set of issues.

Q97 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** Thank you very much indeed for those extremely interesting contributions. I will declare an interest. I am a freelancer myself. I am a series producer, making content for Netflix and the Smithsonian Channel at the moment. I would like to hear from both of you, but, Anna, you have written about the financial challenges facing freelancers and what the industry and public policy could do about it. In your open letter on fair pay for freelancers, you asked for an end to payment on publication, respect for late payment fees and an update to the not-fit-for-purpose payment systems. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that and how we in the Committee should engage with those problems?

Anna Codrea-Rado: Yes. I will start with payment on publication. It is an industry standard that for many publications they will only process invoices and issue payments once a piece has been published. To use a live example, that means you will pitch a story, you will get the assignment, you will go out, you will do all the work, you will do all the reporting, you will file the story, it will go through the edit, it gets accepted, and only once it is actually published or slated to be published will they start to process the payment for it.

That leaves freelancers in a very vulnerable position for a number of reasons. First, which is also particularly pertinent right now, it creates a big cash-flow problem, because it means that you are doing lots of up-front work and you are not seeing any payment for it before you have not just completed the work but the publication is then using your work and is actually using the end product.

This is especially an issue right now, because the problem is you have a moving target. Publications will move the publication date all the time. The way the news cycle works is you will write a fairly evergreen story and then a huge news event will come and it will push the story out by days, weeks or months, which is very commonplace. You cannot plan for your cash flow and you do not know when you are going to get paid.

Depending on whether you are paid by the word or by the piece, you also in some cases do not even know the amount that you are going to get paid. You might get commissioned for a certain number of words, but again, depending on the terms of the publication's payment policies, they may only pay you on the words that end up in the finished piece. I am a huge nerd about my cash flow and my payments. I am tracking everything all the time and I pride myself on being really on top of my finances, but with some publications I basically do not know how much I am going to get paid or when I am going to get paid until it appears in my bank account.

Another point on that is not only is this a huge issue in terms of cash flow, but in situations where there is a lot of upfront work and a lot of reporting that needs to go into a piece, for example for a longer magazine feature, all these problems become amplified. If there is any foreign reporting involved, this then becomes a safety issue, because you are sending people out into the field and they are not going to see any of the money until they finish the work. It presents you with a safety issue, as well as putting you in a financially vulnerable situation.

The late payment issue is related to payment on publication. The Late Payment of Commercial Debts Act 1998 entitles not just journalists but all freelancers and self-employed people to a late payment fee once their invoices become overdue. However, many publications treat this piece of legislation as advisory. You can follow the guidelines as laid out in the legislation, you can invoice a publication with your late payment fee and all that really happens is the publication will then just pay the outstanding balance and they will ignore the late payment fee.

This has happened to me. I issue late payment fees the day that a payment becomes late. I have never in my time been paid a late payment fee. I know that some people have, but it is quite rare for it to happen. It comes down to the fact that you have this imbalance of power, in which you, the freelancer, are just one small person and you are coming up against a large publication.

I have seen emails from one publication that frequently tells freelancers that it is company policy for them not to pay late payment fees, so it is really taking this piece of law just as advisory and is not respecting the law. The problem is that there is very little recourse that freelancers can take. Most freelancers do not want to go to the small claims court. The recourse you have at the moment is, if you are part of a union, the union may be able to help you out. You can go to the small claims court, which most freelancers do not want to do because it is quite bureaucratic and, to be honest, a lot of them do not even know how to do it. Also, for the amount of money it is going to cost you to go through the small claims court, it is not worth the time that you are going to lose in doing that procedure. There is also the Small Business Commissioner, but at the moment that office just does not have enough power to enforce this legislation. That is all on the legal side of things.

William Cook: Those comments of Anna's are very helpful and I should take some lessons from her, because she is much better at chasing up loose cash than I am. I am a bit of a pussycat. It is true that these things need to be enforced from the outside, because you can make yourself very unpopular chasing people for cash; it is a phenomenon of "win the argument, lose the sale" sometimes. It is difficult if the person who is doing the writing is also the person chasing money. The NUJ is a help and exists for people, but it does not solve all the problems.

There are a lot of downsides to the way that this whole industry has fragmented over recent years, but you have some power as a freelancer if somebody is not treating you right. You can go down the road and find somebody who will give you a better deal. This is where freelancers can

club together and, even on an informal level, exchange information and just buoy each other up and give each other confidence.

One of the challenges of our online world is that we have never been more connected and we have never been more isolated. Whereas a lot of reporting and networking used to happen in the pub, now it happens online. I wonder whether it is happening at all, in a way. It is sort of happening at a virtual level, but journalists need to get together too.

I would say that it is also difficult to legislate with regard to journalism, because journalists are mavericks. They always have been. If you go back to Samuel Johnson and so forth, these are people who are on the edge of society, or at least that is how it ought to be.

My grandfather was a picture editor at the *Daily Express* and he was on Fleet Street in the glory days of the 1950s and 1960s. In those days, very few journalists had university degrees. They were a little bit below the salt in some ways. When I started to get into it, it had become this head boys' thing to do. It was terribly glamorous and to get a job at the *Times* or the *Guardian* was the best thing you could possibly get.

One of the upsides about the whole thing taking a clobbering financially in recent years is that it has become a little below the salt again. I wonder whether that is not altogether bad. In some ways, journalists should be not disreputable but slightly marginal figures. We should not be driving this process. We are the eavesdroppers. We are not the grandees, and long should it remain so.

Q98 **Baroness Bull:** We have had some suggestions from both of you along the way: accreditation of courses, industry standards and so on. What would you each like this inquiry to find and recommend, in terms of policy asks that could genuinely make a difference to the challenges that you have been addressing?

Anna Codrea-Rado: I would really like to see an end to payment on publication, because all of the problems that freelancers face all come back to money and a power imbalance. Ending payment on publication is one step in the right direction to start to dismantle some of those structural challenges that are really throttling freelancers.

I have touched on other stuff as well, but I would really like to see publications hiring some kind of freelance liaison officer to have a dedicated member of staff who deals with freelancers and has oversight on payments and the treatment of the freelancers who are employed by the company.

There is also the kind of cultural change that needs to happen. As I have said before, all of these things come down to a power imbalance between freelancers and large organisations. As clichéd as it is, it really is a David and Goliath situation. There needs to be some cultural change, through which freelancers are treated with the respect that they deserve. They are the backbone of the UK press. They make up such a significant portion of the industry and yet they are treated like second-class workers. There needs to be some significant cultural change.

This is not necessarily specific to freelancing, but extended powers need to be given to the Small Business Commissioner, because that is the office that regulates the late payment fees and the bad actors in this space who are paying late. That is not necessarily specific to journalism.

William Cook: I would endorse all of that. The one thing I would add to that is the thing about kill fees and expenses. In an ideal world, this is something a writer should thrash out with an editor right at the start. In the good old days I remember a kill fee, i.e. a fee if you got commissioned for a piece, you wrote it and the editor did not feel it worked out for one reason or another. The rule of thumb was you would get 50% of the original fee just to kill the piece and say, "It did not work this time. Let's do it next time". That was a good industry standard and some people still adhere to it, but that is going by the wayside a little bit as budgets get cut.

With regard to expenses, if you are a very successful or powerful writer I am sure you can negotiate this with ease, but if you are just starting out, it is very hard to pin an editor down and say, "This is going to cost me X amount of money to do this piece. Can we build this in, regardless of whether it gets published or not?"

The big challenge here is one of restoring that sense of Fleet Street in our fragmented world. It would be great if there were more places where journalists could come together and create a conversation. If we are all sat at home in front of our computers and our computer algorithms are just finding us the stories we agree with already, it is going to become a much more polarised landscape. In among all the good things that have happened with the deregulation of the journalism market, this is the big worry, is it not? We all seem to be scampering to opposite ends of the political spectrum and the middle ground is vanishing. I have no easy answers about how to solve that problem, but I would say that is the biggest worry and the biggest issue.

The Chair: I agree with that. We had better wrap up there. It has been a very interesting session. You have given us a lot of your time and plenty to think about. We are really grateful to you for that and for joining us this afternoon. Good luck.