



**Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture,  
Arts, Sport & Media**

**Opening statement by Séamus Dooley,  
Assistant General Secretary/Irish Secretary**

**24<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**Introduction:** Cathaoirleach, members of the Committee. The NUJ welcomes the decision of the committee to have a discussion on the Future Business model plans and long-term vision for the media sector (Radio & Print Media and Journalism).

I had not expected to be back so soon. I am accompanied by my colleague, Ian McGuinness, Irish Organiser.

Many of the issues relevant to this debate were raised by members at your meeting on the proposed European Media Freedom Act on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

The issue of low pay, precarious employment and the concentration of ownership, notably in the regional press sector, are also factors which shape the media landscape in Ireland and in my opening statement I want to emphasise that journalism in Ireland is in crisis.

It is an irony that at a time when the need for professional, authoritative journalism has been widely recognised, journalism is becoming an unattractive and unaffordable profession. Print journalism, in particular has seen an exodus and the NUJ is deeply concerned at the loss of experienced journalists and specialist correspondents.

This is a function of low wages and the merger of roles and in some cases titles, in print and online.

In Ireland, the Irish Executive Council has hosted a number of events under the banner: Journalism: Not Just Business and that philosophy informs our approach to your timely discussion

On May 3, 2020, World Press Freedom Day, the NUJ published a news recovery plan for Ireland, part of the unions overall plan across the UK and Ireland. That plan formed the cornerstone of our submission to the Future of Media Commission and stands the test of time.

“From Health Crisis to Good News: A recovery plan for the news industry in Ireland” is predicated on the principle that journalism is a public good and not just an economic activity.

In our plan we called for a Government-led strategic plan to rescue the media. We called for a reimagining of the State's role in facilitating a diverse, vibrant and independent media, in enabling public interest journalism and in looking at imaginative solutions to secure employment in the industry.

In setting out our vision for the media in Ireland we believe that there must be recognition that public interest journalism is a public good which must be protected in a healthy democracy. That requires commitment from government and from all stakeholders in the media industry.

That means bold, imaginative policies, including specific measures to protect the regional press and specialist publications, across all platforms.

We welcome the report of the Commission of the Future of Media and many of the initiatives announced by the government in Budget 2022.

We have already noted before this Committee our grave disappointment at the decision not to implement the recommendations in respect of public service broadcasting.

As previously noted, while welcoming the Future of Media Commission report and the budget measures in respect of funding for public interest journalism, the NUJ believes that the creation of an all-powerful Media Commission with vast powers in respect of regulation and licencing, standards, safety, training, development, aspects of competition and ownership and the promotion of diversity and inclusion is untenable and grants too much power to one agency appointed by government.

In our submission to the Future of Media Commission the NUJ proposed the creation of a training and development agency for the media sector and this important separation of roles and responsibilities should be considered

While piecemeal measures such as those contained in the budget are to be welcomed we are concerned at the lack of detail around funding mechanism, the criteria used for allocation of funds and the absence of consultation with industry representatives, including the NUJ.

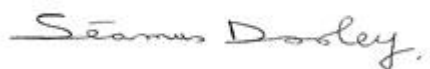
We favour a State backed News recovery plan but that would be contingent on a clear and transparent system of funding.

- No public money for firms making compulsory redundancies, cutting pay, giving executive bonuses or blocking trade union organisation. The NUJ is proposing the criteria already set out in competition legislation be used as a template for assessing applications for funding under the schemes announced in the budget.
- These criteria are set out in the Media Merger Guidelines, May 2015 and set out factors to be considered in the public interest in determining approval of media mergers, having regard to media plurality and diversity and include editorial independence and regard to regulatory compliance and engagement with the industrial relations machinery of the .
- Confer "asset of community value" status on local newspapers ensuring that titles are preserved for potential community ownership. The concept of "community status" is new in the Republic of Ireland but is common in other jurisdictions.
- Training that opens up access to journalism, including apprentices for school-leavers.

We note and welcome the 0% VAT rate for newspapers introduced in Budget 2022.

However, we note with concern that “News Periodicals” are not included in the same category as newspapers because they are defined as periodicals.

This is an unfairness not just to news periodicals but to the magazine sector, which continues to play an important role in the Irish media and provides work for staff and freelances.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Séamus Dooley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the first name.

**Séamus Dooley**  
**NUJ Irish Secretary/Assistant General Secretary**

**November 2022**