

IN THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE PRESS

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHELLE STANISTREET

ON BEHALF OF

THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

MS1

Bullying

1. Investigative reporter Nick Davies told the Inquiry why it is vital the identity of journalists speaking out is protected. He said: "There is a culture of bullying in some Fleet Street news organisations. The fear is real."

A journalist of 30 years, with experience across the industry – in recent years working as a casual reporter on a number of national titles.

- 1.1. "I worked for the News of the World for over three years. There was tremendous pressure. Everyone talked about the byline count. Reporters had to do what they needed to do to get the story.
- 1.2. You'd be given impossible tasks. If you couldn't do them you were a failure, you didn't get a show in the paper. In a professional context it's mission impossible. Of course, if you've got people who are hacking phones and producing great stories, the honest reporter is thinking they're not in the same league, that something's wrong with them. I know some reporters felt that way. It was a very intimidating culture.
- 1.3. [REDACTED] was a nasty force through the paper. Junior executives and reporters were in fear of him. He was intimidating and would threaten to put you in a dead end job.

- 1.4. When things came to an end at the News of the World, it invariably came to an end badly. People lived in fear.

- 1.5. There's a real military chain of command. You do what you're told when you're told. People really need to understand what it was like. It takes a pretty brave person to take a stand. Your life would be made miserable and you'd quickly find yourself out of work. You're terrified if you do anything you'll not get any work in the rest of the industry. You grit your teeth and put up with it. You know it's wrong, but you don't want to be a Judas. If you want a career in the future you shut up and you keep quiet. There's a lot of that about at the moment.

- 1.6. The reality is that what happened at the News of the World is not an exception. The culture is macho, it pervades the industry. I worked at [REDACTED] - it's absolutely petrifying there. They work you like dogs. The expectations for a reporter are ridiculous. There are always unrealistic demands. The culture is such that you don't question it. You're continually being sent to talk to people who don't want to talk to you. You're left hanging around. It's an awful lot of hard work, under always immense pressure. When you don't get anywhere, you're made to feel like a failure. Of course for one in every ten hopeless tasks you might hit a result.

- 1.7. The culture is competitive, deliberately so. News editors throw reporters on to the same story, everyone's terrified of putting a foot wrong. People are so pressurised on the job and reporters are effectively encouraged to shaft each other. It's such a demoralising situation. Even when you think you've done a great job, there's no reward or appreciation.

- 1.8. I can't tell you how high the levels of paranoia and pressure were. It's an insidious environment to work in. During the time I worked there I kept my mouth shut like everyone else there. No-one wants to hear it. That applies to staff reporters as well. But as a freelance, you've no security at all. You worked long hours, you had to deliver, there was no mercy. The money's terrible: freelancers are expected to use their own laptop, mobile and car. It's impossible to even get your expenses repaid sometimes. You're denied even the most basic tools of the trade. You're expected to pull stories out of the bag just like the staffers. You couldn't say anything in fear of losing your work.

- 1.9. There's been this creation of a second, third class culture of journalists. People on staff contracts, sometimes doing next to nothing, then there's people working really hard, with no security or contract, getting paid next to nothing. You really do feel like a second class citizen. I'm experienced and skilled, but you're made to feel like you're on a such a low level. If you raise it with managing editors, they know how

little you're getting paid and how you're treated, but they just say it's the company, their hands are tied.

1.10. It's impossible to speak out. I'm a journalist, I need and want to keep working in the industry. Being pragmatic, there is that fear that if you do what Sean (Hoare) did or Paul McMullen, you don't work in the industry again. Their reputations have been trashed. But they were quite brave in doing what they did, in telling the truth. We've all been brutalised by that organisation but that doesn't mean we're not telling the truth.

1.11. What's striking is that there's nowhere to turn. I've always been a member of the NUJ but in [REDACTED], the union's not allowed in. There was no sense that there was anyone internally who'd help.

1.12. There's a real culture of journalists like myself feeling utterly betrayed at the moment, we've been vilified at Leveson, within the public domain. But we've also been betrayed by the newspaper management. You don't feel they're in it with you, they're just shifting the blame. I've seen reporters break down in tears in recent months. They're watching their career and their profession disintegrate. There's strong feelings amongst journalists at the moment."

Journalist with six years experience, who worked for [REDACTED].

1.13. "I'm still doing some freelance work but I've pretty much decided I just don't want to be a journalist anymore now, after what I've experienced. I need the freelance work to tide me over while I build a new career, I can't afford to put my experience on the record.

1.14. During my time at the News of the World, I experienced pretty much constant bullying. My section editor would find fault with everything I did, making my life absolute hell. She sent emails behind my back, made comments about my weight. Just nasty stuff, really. It was the culture throughout the place. A woman reporter working for the newsdesk was sent sexually explicit text messages by someone senior to her. When she complained, she was just told not to make a fuss. The behaviour was all quite open, everyone joins in.

1.15. They'd make young reporters wear stupid costumes and parade around the office while people took pictures. It was basically just humiliating. One young female reporter had to go out dressed head to toe in meat for a Lady Gaga story. It's totally

sexist and degrading. A young male reporter was made to wear a cheerleader's outfit. Another was told to dress as a ballerina. Another reporter had to pose in his pants. You had to walk through town like that.

- 1.16. If you don't do it, you've not got a contract. You're existing on freelance shifts. You're on a weekly retainer and they can just sack you when the mood takes them. It's like walking on egg shells. The hours are long. Regularly I'd be there 'til 11 or 12 at night, waiting for head office to call back with the desk shouting at me. There was constant pressure to deliver. You'd have to tape all your conversations, but you weren't allowed to tell the people you were interviewing.
- 1.17. I'd be given work to do with unrealistic deadlines. When I'd say anything, I'd just get screamed and shouted at in front of everyone. There'd be no time to make calls and get things right. You'd be given a couple of hours to do a spread that should take a couple of days to properly research and write. There was when I had to make up a quote – it was only once. It was absolutely awful, I felt terrible. But I didn't have a choice and I had to get the piece done.
- 1.18. Everyone had anecdotes of terrible behaviour. The atmosphere was poisonous, it was unchecked bullying. When your boss said jump, it was a case of how high and where do you want me to jump from. I wasn't only me, there was talk of the "revolving seat" in the office.
- 1.19. There was no support. There's a staff association, NISA, but you weren't allowed to go along if you were a casual. And you couldn't raise stuff like bullying with them anyway, you know they're there to serve the company, not an individual journalist's interests. They didn't even let the NUJ into the building.
- 1.20. The whole experience has had a terrible impact on me. I lost my flat when I lost my job. I ended up having to go to the doctor for medication. In the end, I just didn't want to be in journalism anymore. I'd started off so passionate and interested in journalism, but my experience at the News of the World killed it for me and I'm trying to build a new career."

Stress

2. The inquiry has already heard from Matt Driscoll about impact of bullying and pressure at the News of the World, which caused his depression. He said: "Journalists work under incredible stress and pressure and you get used to that level of stress... it takes its toll. If

something isn't quite right, you can easily get tipped over the edge, you work at a certain level of stress but you are almost at saturation point." His career has been "finished" by his decision to take on his bosses.

A journalist of more than 15 years' experience who worked at [REDACTED].

- 2.1. "The News of the World was an incredibly tough and unforgiving workplace under [REDACTED]. Mistakes were not tolerated and there was a genuine sense of fear before morning conference if there weren't enough good stories. On more than one occasion, execs were kicked out of the editor's office and told to come back when they had some stories. The atmosphere as a result was incredibly tense and in the time I was at the paper three or four staff suffered physical collapses in the office, almost certainly to some extent as a result of the stress. On one occasion I suffered [REDACTED] from stress and ended up in A&E [REDACTED].

- 2.2. It's harder to point the finger at bullying. If you got the job done well, were enthusiastic and upbeat about everything and delivered good stories... the anger wouldn't fall on you. But there were people in the office who were apparently out of favour and the behaviour towards them would often verge on the bullying. The most obvious example to my mind was Clive Goodman, who enjoyed a high salary and big title as Royal Editor, and came in for a lot of flak from [REDACTED]. He'd be publicly lambasted for a lack of stories or ideas in conference, probably more than anyone. It could be embarrassing for everyone when it happened publicly, as it sometimes did, in news conference in front of 20-25 other people. People tended to stare hard at their lists and avoid eye contact as much as possible. I am not suggesting this excuses his later actions, far from it, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was under intense pressure to deliver.

- 2.3. In my opinion, having independent trade union representation at News International might well have affected the culture at the News of the World. I am not convinced staff felt they would be properly supported if they raised concerns. As it was, if you had a problem, you sorted things out yourself with your line manager. NISA was there to negotiate pay deals, and support staff in the event of redundancy. Otherwise, you were on your own. Having the NUJ represented would have given staff more confidence in their dealings with management and, almost certainly, fostered a greater sense of openness."

Hacking and the Dark Arts

3. Matt Driscoll told the Inquiry "At the time I felt uneasy about such methods [blagging]. However, I knew that I could not bring up my concerns on the editorial floor for fear of being seen as a troublemaker. Any writer who questioned the morality of these methods would have been a marked man."

4. [REDACTED].

A journalist with over 32 years experience, in local and regional newspapers, before moving on titles, broadsheet and tabloid, across Fleet Street, and then into broadcasting.

- 4.1. "While I have never engaged in any unlawful newsgathering while in my current employ, I do not believe any disclosures of past activities will improve my professional security or any possible advancement. As a consequence I have decided to submit my evidence anonymously through the offices of Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists.

- 4.2. I first became aware of certain journalistic practices while working for [REDACTED] during the 1980s. I learned through conversations with colleagues that one particular journalist regularly employed the services of a private investigator based in a resort town on the South Coast of England. I later came to work closely with this journalist, who was several years senior to me and he shared many of his earlier exploits with me. I eventually met the private investigator and worked with him on at least two stories.

- 4.3. I learned first-hand that he was able to provide surveillance services which involved the bugging of homes and business premises as well as recordings from landline telephones (this being before widespread mobile use). I never saw the actual insertion of bugging equipment but listened to the subsequent results which were tape recorded and which I then collected from him at a number of meetings in pubs and restaurants. He was always paid cash delivered in envelopes and invariably disguised in a rolled up newspaper. I saw the senior journalist carrying the cash but never witnessed the actual handing over which either happened on my blind side or else when I was not present.

- 4.4. A variety of targets were eavesdropped, including a senior diplomat for a foreign country, who was resident in Central London. He was a businessman suspected of fraud and the entire proceedings of a preliminary criminal court hearing, which were held in camera, were tape recorded by means of a recorder fitted inside a specially-adapted briefcase which had been left behind unnoticed in the courtroom. The investigator had provided the briefcase for a fee saying that the recording equipment

was enhanced over and above that which was commercially available. Judging from the clarity of the recording I had no reason to disbelieve his claim. The material recorded was never published but was used to establish our journalistic credentials with both the police officers in the case and a lawyer involved who became a useful source of regular confidential information.

- 4.5. The same private investigator was also able to furnish us with Police National Computer checks when we sought to learn about criminal convictions and cautions of individuals we were interested in. More helpfully, from a journalistic point of view, he was also able to access Social Security records and could frequently provide the most up to date home addresses for people we were seeking to pose questions. This was invaluable if legitimate searches – telephone directories, companies house searches failed to find them.
- 4.6. He was always paid cash. Reporters would obtain the necessary amounts from petty cash disbursements or from expense claims. Invariably it was recorded as 'research costs' or drinks with contacts. These had to be signed off by senior executives and I was never asked detailed questions about them. The only occasion I became aware of them, questioning a reporter about payments, was when one particular reporter's claims seemed disproportionate to his productivity and I understood him to be under suspicion of fraud. No disciplinary action was ever taken against him to my knowledge.
- 4.7. When lawyers for the paper examined stories for defamation and sought to learn about the veracity and provenance of information I understood there to be a pattern of phraseology which was understood by all parties to indicate the lawyer should not explore the matter in too much detail. In my experience it never was.
- 4.8. Initially, the use of such techniques was not widespread in the newsroom but instead restricted to a few older journalists with an 'investigative' bent. This was also the situation in other Fleet Street newsroom that I have worked in. It was known by all the staff reporters and some of the regular freelances or shift reporters which journalist had the wherewithal to obtain things like ex-directory telephone numbers, PNC details and or medical records.
- 4.9. It was made clear to me, when I was recruited by [REDACTED], that my perceived ability to access such material quickly from a variety of sources, including former and serving police officers, and after a decade of experience of a veritable circus of private investigators, was among the reasons I was their preferred candidate. When I arrived there, I realised that there were between half a dozen and a dozen senior

reporters who possessed equally capable skills and in some cases, far superior ones, particularly in their ability to access vital information even faster than I could.

- 4.10. While working there, I actually learned a raft of new skills and sources of information particularly as [REDACTED]. Inducements to informants were much more generous than I had experienced at [REDACTED], which meant that, together with its perceived respectability – before I arrived I knew first hand that it was called ‘[REDACTED]’ – made obtaining difficult confidential information so much easier.
- 4.11. I have no reason to think this has changed since I left their employ and many of the very best practitioners of the so-called ‘dark arts’ continue to work there.
- 4.12. The other contrast with [REDACTED] was the extent to which the newsdesk and other senior editorial executives (not the editor to my knowledge) spoke openly about the use of such methods to obtain information. It was a much more open secret and regularly spoken about. Junior reporters were frequently put under pressure to resort to whatever methods worked to obtain vital information that would scoop rivals.
- 4.13. Those who objected were routinely abused verbally publicly. Humiliation was the most minor punishment for failure. Dismissal or relegation to the least favourable shifts, was much more common. A deliberate climate of fear and tension was created by management to improve performance. The only unwritten rule for those subjected to it were never complain publicly and never refuse an order. This included when being ordered to do something illegal, such as steal documents from a car, which I witnessed on one occasion. Another reporter was encouraged to steal a report from a civil servant’s brief case after getting him drunk in a bar. This latter event I did not witness, but I watched as the order was given over the telephone and later read the said report in the office.
- 4.14. If and when requests got too ridiculous, even to an experienced reporter, nobody ever to my knowledge refused or declined it but simply invented reasons, often fictitious, why they were unable to.
- 4.15. A small but significant number of those reporters responsible for creating that climate or carrying out ‘dark arts’ have subsequently been promoted both within [REDACTED] and some to the most senior editorial positions in newspapers elsewhere in Fleet Street.

4.16. I readily admit that I stole, bribed and cheated to obtain information. But it was the indiscriminate way this was carried out, as well as for what I felt were increasingly spurious 'public interest' justifications, that fuelled my disillusionment and prompted me to leave and freelance. During this period I worked for [REDACTED] and found that in common with [REDACTED], they too had small coteries of reporters who could and were expected to practice the 'dark arts.'

4.17. At a newspaper like [REDACTED], reporters who lacked the means to obtain ex-directory numbers or other confidential information were referred to those that did, or were given the telephone number of the tame private investigator used by all and sundry. Frequently I saw senior news executives hand the number out with little or no thought. I found this indiscreet use of PIs troubling as I was always aware that what was taking place was unlawful. Little or no trust could be established and it frequently amounted to a mercenary business relationship which made the reporters incredibly lazy, all too often paying for information that was publicly available. By working in different newsrooms I also came to realise that some PIs would trade information obtained for one reporter to another in order to financially benefit twice from the single piece of work.

4.18. While freelancing I learned from serving police officers about a technique used to help convict paedophiles which involved placing a computer programme into a computer in order to discover what was being stored on the hard drive. I quickly realised its potential for news gathering and over a period of about six months acquired the ability from computer programmers how to construct a Trojan computer programme. After a period of trial and error I found I could obtain confidential information from this method better than from bugging, hacking or theft and bribery. I only ever targeted people who worked abroad in the hope that this would deter any official police investigation from pursuing me should the operation be discovered. The targeting was always done carefully and always with a strong public interest justification guiding the activity. The use and abuse of public office and or funds were uppermost amongst the reasons. I know from direct experience that [REDACTED] have also used Trojan programmes and I have it from good first-hand information that the News of the World also utilised such techniques.

Journalist of more than 25 years experience, across many national newspaper titles including many years at the News of the World.

4.19. "There was a systematic regime of bullying at the News of the World, starting from [REDACTED]. There couldn't have been more cruel and nasty executives at the [REDACTED] than those people.

- 4.20. They created immense pressure to come up with world exclusive stories. It was relentless. They wanted to bask in the glory of major exclusives and the pressure was always on to come up with the next one. [REDACTED] was dogged in piling on the pressure. It was absolutely the worst place ever to work, absolutely miserable.
- 4.21. The approach was always: "That's not good enough, that's fucking not good enough." The way the paper was run was totally dysfunctional. The biggest rival of the news team was the features department. If news would bid on a story, features would outbid them. After the features department, the biggest rival to news was The Sun – not the [Other Titles]. [REDACTED] was desperate to outdo [REDACTED]. This the regime that Murdoch created. It's dog eat dog. It's not normal. In other papers there's not this internal rivalry with colleagues shafting each other. This was encouraged by [REDACTED]. They enjoyed this fighting amongst colleague; they would think it was funny. I've worked in a wide range of newspapers but never known anything like this. They'd set us off like wild dogs against each other. They thought it was all a great game to keep everyone on their toes. They'd light the touch paper, sit back and watch them kill each other. It was relentless, you could never rest.
- 4.22. [REDACTED]. He'd humiliate people in conference. He'd just start swearing. "What the fuck are you doing? How dare you put that fucking shit on the list? Where are the stories, where are the fucking stories?" People would start to list stories and he'd interrupt and say "Next". Then you'd have to sit there squirming, feeling completely and absolutely hung out to dry. Then he'd get [REDACTED] to come over after conference to tell you how crap you are. Classic bullyboy tactics. You'd dread Saturdays [the day the News of the World went to press]. It was constant ritual humiliation. I wish I'd taped some of those conferences; it'd be dynamite now.
- 4.23. If [REDACTED] rang you up, you'd speak and he'd just be silent. Total silence until he'd say "This isn't good enough. I'll see you when I get in." He'd leave you sweating, then just ignore you. It was nasty mind games all the time.
- 4.24. [REDACTED] used to rant and rave all the time. He would encourage [REDACTED] to take people into his office and "give them a good kicking." The whole office could hear him shouting, ranting and swearing at the top of his voice. He was a sociopath, an out and out bully. I saw three people, including a male journalist reduced to tears by him. Another person, a freelance who was just doing their best, trying to please [REDACTED], was completely reduced to tears, made to feel useless and hopeless. He'd go through things with a red pen, rip things up and tell people to do it all over again, just to flex his muscles. These were good journalists, experienced writers.

- 4.25. It was all about who could shout the loudest, who could make the most noise. The most unpleasant place to work and lots of people left because of the constant bullying. Morale was at rock bottom, I'd never known anything like it.
- 4.26. You'd get calls on a Saturday night, to say get on a plane at 7am the next morning. When one girl complained of all the calls she was getting out of hours, she got more calls, every single week. It drove her out, she was incredibly upset. I know people thought about complaining to HR, but it would have made it worse. At least four people left who couldn't take the bullying anymore. The in house staff association, NISA, they're nice people but what are they going to do if you complain about your boss bullying you? He'd have denied it. They'd pay you off, you lose your job. Where do you go? There aren't that many jobs in Fleet Street anymore.
- 4.27. [REDACTED] was incredibly hands on. He was always searching, wanting, demanding the great exclusives. I can't tell you the number of fake stories that went into the News of the World – lots. I never made stuff up but the pressure on people was enormous.
- 4.28. The things that have emerged about hacking and everything are the tip of the iceberg. The problems are endemic in the industry. [REDACTED] is one of the highest users of private detectives. The use of them and everything else was widespread. If there was a scandal with a celebrity, they could obtain the numbers the celebs had phoned prior, during and after the scandal broke.
- 4.29. [REDACTED].
- 4.30. [REDACTED].
- 4.31. People don't realise it was incredibly stressful. You'd get phone on a Sunday morning – not even a hello, how are you? Just, "Why did you fuck up on this story?" You'd go back in on a Tuesday and the humiliation would start again. The personal cost is huge. You become a different person, just so stressed, you're always working and your home life is ruined.

4.32. The News of the World had a great reputation with massive financial backing, but people got to know how miserable it was there, it made recruiting incredibly difficult. No-one wanted to join and everyone wanted to leave.

4.33. I wouldn't speak out publicly and I totally understand why other journalists won't either. Anyone who wants to carry on in journalism or PR, if they start giving damaging evidence at this inquiry, they know there will be consequences. Just look at the reaction to those people who have spoken out. Sean Hoare set this whole thing off when he spoke to the New York Times. [REDACTED].

Freelance photographer of over 15 years experience, who works for a range of outlets including national newspapers

4.34. "A few years back I was doing shift work for an agency and ended up sitting in a car with a journalist from the News of the World. We were working on a story about homeless ex-soldiers. One homeless man we interviewed gave us a mobile number as a point of contact. The journalist took it and then, when he had gone, reached into her bag and retrieved a piece of paper with a phone number on it.

4.35. She said: "This can't go through the office and I don't keep the number on my phone." She called the number and clearly knew the person on the other end of the line. She gave them the mobile number that the homeless man had just given her – 15minutes later someone called back and gave the name and address of a woman who the phone was registered to. She could only have got this information from – a policeman or someone working for a mobile phone company. This is unlikely as she never asked the homeless man which network he was on.

4.36. She then started bragging about how News of the World had the edge over other Sunday newspapers by their ability to trace both phone numbers and car number plates at a moment's notice."

Unethical practice

5. [REDACTED].

6. [REDACTED].

7. [REDACTED].

Journalist of [REDACTED] years standing who worked as [REDACTED]

- 7.1. "I worked as a [REDACTED] reporter for [REDACTED] years. I eventually quit because I was deeply unhappy at the newspaper's continued negative coverage of Islam and its xenophobic agenda.

- 7.2. During my time at the group, I was sent out and instructed to find "a black or Asian person" to pose with a British Jobs for British Workers poster – the editor wanted an "ethnic minority poster boy" and cover against the accusations that there was a racist agenda. I did as I was instructed, but was deeply unhappy with what I saw as an extremely odious task, and felt I'd misled the eventual 'victim' into posing for a photograph when he may not have fully understood what he was being asked to represent. I realized this was not the kind of newspaper I respected or wanted to work for. However, to my detriment – and it is something that has haunted me ever since, and will continue to do so – I felt pressured to remain in situ because of the unending competition for shifts on national newspapers and the struggles faced by so many journalists. I comforted myself with the idea that if someone like me – with principles and deeply differing views to the editors across the group, could at least put up a fairer fight in the newsroom, and actively argue about the injustice, then that was better than someone who agreed with the paper's agenda subscribing to it and making the situation worse.

- 7.3. I made my dissatisfaction with the continued anti-Islam agenda within the pages very clear. On numerous occasions I spoke to the news editors about the way in which my articles were altered to remove any sense of 'balance'; I asked for my byline to be removed from articles that had had balanced or counter-arguments removed from them in the final edit; I also argued publicly many times about what I saw – and still see – as the systemic peddling of anti-Muslim hatred and bitterness. However, rather than trying to present a balanced argument and portrayal of fact to counter many of its readers' potential prejudices, the editorial choices seek to reinforce those negative perceptions by actively setting an anti-Muslim news agenda, thus whipping readers into a frenzy.

- 7.4. Reporters are tasked with writing stories that follow a set agenda laid out by the news editors. Often the news editor on duty would come over to the reporters' desk to give a brief on a certain story on the wires or via an agency and instruct the chosen reporter to write it in a distinct way. This would be done via verbal command,

whereby the news editor would 'speak aloud' the desired opening three paragraphs of the story – and the reporter would be expected to stick to the particular tone.

- 7.5. This would often involve the 'rewriting' of stories chosen from the news wires according to a distinct anti-Muslim bias. To give just one example, I was tasked with writing a story about two Muslim students who were attending a UK university open day. They were asked to remove their headscarves, or hijabs, and refused - to do so, I imagine, would have caused them great distress. I wrote the story with the more sympathetic line: "A British university forced two Muslim students to remove their headscarves before allowing them to attend an open day" - which, although I don't think the final story made it into the paper, was changed to: "Muslims refused to remove their headscarves, causing a security scare".

- 7.6. On numerous occasions, knowing all too well that whatever balance or neutrality I incorporated into my stories would be changed or removed, I asked the news editors to remove my byline from the final piece. This earned me the reputation and nickname of the 'token leftie' in the newsroom - and in what was often portrayed as a 'joke', solely for the amusement of the news editors and reporters, I was targeted to produce the highest number of anti-Muslim stories. Not once did I put a story of this ilk forward of my own accord - yet each time the news editors came to the reporters' desk to hand out cuts from other papers, or to instruct us to follow up something from the news wires that was anti-Islam, it was prefaced with: "Right, we'll give this story to our most right-wing reporter...make sure you make it as right-wing as you can." This didn't stop, even when I was in tears because I hated what I was being forced to do so passionately. This I regard, quite simply as bullying.

- 7.7. There was a culture of fear fostered in the newsroom – and a sheer lack of respect for those who work there; particularly females. Reporters are told they can only take lunch at quiet periods, yet are regularly called back to the office after just five or ten minutes have passed. One woman who was called back after just eight minutes, and complained it was unreasonable, was told to just "fuck off and find another job then" in an extremely aggressive manner. She was in tears, it was just humiliating.

- 7.8. My resignation came at a time when I felt under extreme pressure after being responsible for the majority of the paper's racist and xenophobic stories – again, not because I put those stories forward, but because I was actively targeted to take on any re-write or to follow up any story with that agenda.

- 7.9. I wasn't the only journalist to be unhappy with the unethical approach. Others told me they "hated" having to continually fulfil the anti-Islam objectives passed down in

daily news conference by the editor yet they accepted that they “had a job to do” and a perceived demand to meet.

7.10. The expectation in the newsroom is that you can 'make any story stand up'. Time and time again, when I was faced with a dubious story, or one that was proving difficult to substantiate, I was instructed to "just put in some bystander quotes". Again, we received verbal commands on the way in which the story should run... to the extent of: "Put in, 'an onlooker said they saw XXX' in the third par". There was no such onlooker and no direct quotes. Eyewitness accounts, it was often implied/instructed, could be freely made up; as long as it was kept quiet. While I never, and was never, instructed to 'make up a story' from scratch, I did add substantiating quotes, either under direct instruction from the news editor or just to 'sensationalise' the story as per instruction – and these were often entirely made up. I was by no means the only person doing so – and, often, if I did not incorporate any 'sexier' substantiating quotes, I found they had magically 'appeared' in my article by the final edit.

7.11. In my opinion, this is not journalism. Moreover, it is extremely dangerous and damaging to the industry as a whole – and is brought about by the continued pressures on news editors to work with a skeleton staff of reporters due to staff and budget cutbacks. On regular occasions, particularly on Sundays, I was one of a total of just three reporters on the desk responsible for putting together the editorial news content for the entire newspaper. Perhaps it's no surprise that under these extremely stretched conditions, the news editors would rather take liberties with the accuracy of reporting than to spare staff to go out into the field to seek the truth.

7.12. It would, I imagine, be easy for outsiders to condemn the fact that I, and many others who had similar objections, continued to work there for so long. I condemn myself for it, also. Yet it was, I still maintain, borne out of both necessity and fear – a belief that 'any job on a national newspaper is better than none', combined with the vague hope that "perhaps I can bring about a change for the better". Sadly, that now seems impossible."

Journalist with over [REDACTED] years experience, including several years at [REDACTED]

7.13. “Where I worked, it was impossible to report on immigration and asylum in a neutral, even-handed way, the way the BBC might. That was not what the job

required. I knew that my editors expected me to produce stories with a particular slant.

- 7.14. That slant was that asylum seekers and illegal immigrants were a major problem for, and even a great danger to, people in the UK. Furthermore, went the slant, the Government was failing to deal with the problem. The headlines on my stories, the language of my stories, the people quoted in my stories and the sequence in which the quotes appeared, with the most outspoken first – all tended to sensationalise whatever it was we were saying. The selection of stories the paper chose to print was also selective. We were far more likely to print asylum-bashing stories than we were to print ones which reflected well on asylum seekers and refugees.
- 7.15. I felt very troubled by what I was doing and feared that I and my newspaper were spreading xenophobia, racial tension and racial hatred. With rare exceptions we were demonising a whole group of people who were already vulnerable, for instance because they were fleeing persecution or simply because they were obviously foreign and facing the sort of prejudices stoked by my articles and my employer. It felt highly irresponsible but, presumably, it sold newspapers or we would have done things differently.
- 7.16. I knew that in order to keep my job, I had to find stories which fitted the newspaper's particular view of asylum and immigration – and write them in a suitably critical way. It was either do that or leave. One journalist can't change their newspaper's unwritten 'policy' on a particular topic. There were plenty of other journalists who would have taken my place.
- 7.17. I tried to prevent outright factual inaccuracies and the very worst excesses getting into the paper, by trying to explain to colleagues why they were wrong or should not be used. Sometimes they took notice, sometimes they didn't. Eventually I left the job because I felt so uncomfortable with the asylum and immigration part of it. Whilst there certainly were and probably still are serious problems with the UK's immigration system, the hysterical way I went about reporting them was irresponsible and harmful.
- 7.18. The NUJ Chapel passed resolutions condemning the newspaper's coverage of immigration and asylum and the union's involvement made it harder for the paper to carry on in the way it was. But perhaps the editors and proprietors of newspapers are so familiar with public criticism that they only take notice if they are hurt financially.”

Journalist of over 20 years experience, working across a number of national newspapers

- 7.19. "Broadly speaking, [REDACTED], more openly than any other proprietor I know, cared little for journalistic ethics. He expected reporters to write stories that suited him when it suited him - eg negative stories on [REDACTED] on demand or anti-asylum stories and headlines whenever it suited.
- 7.20. His intervention made it virtually impossible for anybody to resist him individually and when as a union we did this and went to the PCC it was useless.
- 7.21. I'm not sure that his editorial interference was/is any greater than some others; he was just very brazen about it. Often he came up to my desk and demanded a particular angle on something, or else he did it through the editor."

Journalist of 20 years, working as a freelance and staffer in national and regional newspapers, [REDACTED]

- 7.22. "I was never involved in investigative methods which might contravene the NUJ ethical standards. However I witnessed a worrying erosion of those standards in almost every newsroom. This ranged from a growing diet of crime, showbiz and sport at [REDACTED], with stories like the [REDACTED] and heavy promotion of [REDACTED] stories even when no British [REDACTED] or manufacturer was newsworthy. This raised a potential conflict between impartial reporting and commercial ties to [REDACTED], which had [REDACTED].
- 7.23. When I attempted to report the plight of the Ogoni people in Nigeria for [REDACTED], my editor rejected the story on the grounds that "[REDACTED] might sue us". I later discovered that [REDACTED] broadcasting section held a lucrative contract for producing corporate videos for [REDACTED]. I also learned that a previous version of my own story had been prepared by another journalist, only to be mysteriously dropped from the running order at a late stage and never run.

- 7.24. There was a general lack of resources or appetite for investigating and reporting stories. Dead-end investigations should not be seen as failures; scrutiny is essential in a functioning democracy.
- 7.25. In Scotland the Johnston Press has a monopoly of main local newspapers in the east, while Gannett owns the western titles. This means there is no outlet for opposing views or analysis, for example on the Forth replacement crossing, where both groups support road-building projects generally and will not carry stories critical of government policy. (One local Johnston paper even boasted "we don't pay for news stories" after reporting a reader's letter as a news story.)
- 7.26. In the current controversy about phone-hacking, the most important aspect is being sidelined: the influence that high-circulation newspapers have on voters' political decisions. So we have David Mellor admitting that his government felt they had no alternative but to curry favour with the Murdoch press in order to win elections. The extent of this favour can be seen in relaxation of media ownership rules to help his business interests.
- 7.27. This is in my view the most important aspect of the crisis, and the shameful official and social connections between media organisations and legislators must be ended."

Casualisation

Freelance journalist of 25 years, working across the local and national press and magazine sectors.

- 7.28. "When I refused to do a biased piece a features editor on a [redacted] wanted me to do, I was told that I'd never get another commission again – not on that title or any others in the group. And I never did, not for that editor anyway.

7.29. Being freelance is a constant challenge and can be quite stressful at times. The work's unpredictable and getting paid is often fraught with delays. It used to be that freelancers chose to work that way, now many staff journalists I know who've lost their jobs are trying to eke out a living. Newspapers have really taken advantage, the rates of pay are dire.

7.30. I think there's a real link between this constant pressure and lack of ethics. The vast majority of journalists work professionally – but we're doing that increasingly from the position of being totally under the cosh."

Journalist of 4 years, working on two national titles doing casual shifts.

7.31. "What people don't realise is that the culture in most newsrooms can be really intimidating – especially if you're a young journalist trying to make an impression, desperate to get a contract. I've been shifting for years now. I get holiday, just statutory. I do the same job as other reporters here but I'm paid peanuts. I drag myself into work even when I'm really sick – partly because I don't get paid for being off sick, but mainly because I don't want anyone to think I'm skiving and that I'm not committed because that'll go against me if a contract comes up.

7.32. The bullying that goes on has to be seen to be believed. A lot of the time it's shouting and swearing, being humiliated and made to feel really stupid. I've been so tempted to just walk out so many times, but I just bite my tongue and put up with it. I can barely make ends meet as it is. I can't afford to lose my job. The other problem is the huge number of new journalists working for free on internships – it's incredibly competitive to get a foot in the door, so once you're there you're desperate not to blow it. I think that makes it even easier for editors to treat you like dirt. But I've seen other people being treated much worse than me – literally reduced to tears - and in a way that makes me feel worse because I've not intervened to stop it. I used to work in the corporate sector before retraining and to be honest I never expected newspapers to be like this, not in this day and age.

7.33. I've not hacked phones, although there's someone in every newsroom who can turn around ex-directory numbers or come up with addresses and medical record checks. I've asked colleagues for this myself, on the advice of the news editor. But I've seen the pressure people come under to break stories and to curry favour with the editor. And there's no resources, no time to do things properly, you're just supposed to pull the rabbit out of a hat. It's hardly a big surprise that shortcuts are taken."

ENDS