INTERVIEW

Freelance Networks, Trade Unions and Below-the-Line Solidarity in Regional Film and Television Clusters: An Interview with the Bristol Editors Network

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Introduction

The following transcript is a composite of several in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted during summer 2017 with members of the Bristol Editors' Network (BEN), an organisation established in May 2015 to support the large community of editors that work in and around Bristol and the South West of England. The interview transcript is significant for several reasons. First and foremost, it provides a rich account of what it is like to freelance within the third-largest film and television production cluster in the UK, after London and Manchester (Spicer and Presence 2017). In doing so, the transcript also offers an insight into the sometimes fraught state of contemporary industrial relations between the region's employers – comprised of the BBC and around 130 independent production and post-production companies – and its largely freelance workforce. Moreover, the transcript provides an account of how, by establishing BEN, Bristol editors are working to defend themselves against exploitative practices in the cluster, fostering a mutually supportive freelance community and contributing to a more effective, equitable production culture in the city.

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Understanding labour relations within film and television clusters is essential given the increasing centrality of 'creative clusters' within UK creative industries policy. For example, following several advisory reports on the advantages of clustering in the creative industries (DCMS 1998, 2001; Chapain et al. 2010; Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi 2016; BEIS 2017), the British Film Institute (BFI) in 2017 declared regional film and television clusters a key priority in its new five-year plan and promised to allocate 25 per cent of its production budget to regional clusters by 2022 (BFI 2017). Later that year, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) announced an unprecedented investment of £80 million in eight research and development partnerships between industry and groups of universities to support creative clusters in their regions and the 'challenges' they face (AHRC 2017). The exploitation of freelance labour is undoubtedly one such challenge in Bristol. If creative clusters are to occupy such a prominent place within creative industries policy, and to receive correspondingly large levels of public funding as a result, then we must also consider the kinds of labour relations that funding facilitates.

Yet despite the policy emphasis on creative clusters, knowledge of contemporary film and television clusters, at least, is limited. While notable exceptions include the recent study of Bristol and an updated study of Manchester (Spicer and Presence 2017; Johns 2016, 2010), the handful of others that exist – notably Ivan Turok's (2003) work on film and television in Glasgow and Basset et al.'s (2002) research on natural history film-making in Bristol – are now out of date. This is especially so given the rapid pace of company churn in the creative industries and a series of major policy changes – including significant alterations to the terms of trade and the widespread use of tax relief to support production – that have dramatically altered the UK's film and television industries since 2003 (Presence 2017: 251–9).

By contrast, the body of research documenting the exploitation of freelance labour in the creative industries is voluminous (see, for instance, Ursell 2000; Gill and Pratt 2008; Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Randle 2015). The exploitative strategies and tactics used by some employers in the Bristol cluster are therefore not surprising – nor are the high levels of stress and anxiety suffered by freelancers as a result. However, this research is often divorced from the context of the specific region, industry and cluster in which it takes place. As Johns has argued, regional clusters are 'embedded in different cultural, institutional, locational and historical contexts' (2010: 1061). Therefore, while it is important to understand the overarching national situation, industrial relations within regional clusters are also inevitably tied to their local contexts as much as they are

influenced by national policy, law and regulation. Indeed, the culture of freelance employment in Bristol is inextricable from, for example, the history of the BBC in the city and its influence on Bristol's independent production and post-production companies. Of course, the exploitation of freelance labour in Bristol does not stem solely from the BBC, nor is it perpetrated by all – or even most – employers in the region, and neither is it the predominant feature of the cluster. Nevertheless, exploitation is clearly a major challenge faced by freelancers in the Bristol region (as elsewhere), and the transcript below is an important record of how exploitative strategies operate in practice, how they are perceived by those subject to them, and their consequences for the production culture in which they exist.

As noted, the transcript also provides a valuable account of freelancers' self-organisation. As Saundry et al. (2006) suggest, these networks of freelancers – though still relatively rare – represent a potential threat to trade unions as the traditional representatives of collective labour power. However, while relationships between networks and unions are complex and can be strained, they can also be mutually beneficial, with networks able to deliver some outcomes more effectively than can unions, while providing the latter with access to new constituencies of freelancers and the opportunity to 'demonstrate their relevance on specific issues and to establish a broader legitimacy within the industry' (ibid.: 389).

This coheres with the situation in Bristol, in which almost 60 per cent of freelancers surveyed in 2016 belonged neither to a union nor any other professional association (Spicer and Presence 2017: 52). In this context, the narrower, craft-based focus of networks like BEN can appeal to those uninterested in or intimidated by the broader political concerns of trade unionism, or who perceive union membership as detrimental to career aspirations. Rather than focus on its work dealing with negative issues in the sector, BEN foregrounds the positive aspects of its work: the diary service it offers to connect production companies with editors in the city; the networking events it organises; and its aim to promote and celebrate editing as 'the best job in the world'. In this sense, part of what makes BEN successful is that it does not operate as a trade union.

However, this is also a key weakness. BEN's members clearly require an organisation that is capable of collective bargaining, and while BEN does engage in disputes, it is also limited in this regard in several key ways. First, freelance networks are often not recognised by employers and therefore are simply unable to negotiate on their members' behalf (Saundry et al. 2006: 383). Second, networks' ability to negotiate can be compromised because they are comprised of

freelancers that work in the industry, not professional negotiators free to act as representatives. As noted by Saundry et al. in relation to the Bristol-based International Association of Wildlife Film-makers (IAWF): 'It was problematic for IAWF members to raise critical issues at meetings with managers who the following day would be deciding whether or not to hire them for a production' (ibid.).

Third, because of the narrower, craft-based remit of freelancer networks, they are less able to coordinate with other freelancers in the sector and, with a smaller membership base on which to draw, potentially lack unions' stability and longevity. This is demonstrated by those BEN members interviewed being unaware of the IAWF (which, founded in 1982, is one of the longest-standing freelancer networks in the country), and by the fact that the Northern Freelance Network (also analysed by Saundry et al.) no longer exists. Moreover, freelancers often have neither the skills nor the inclination to negotiate with employers effectively, and lack the organisational capacity required 'to deliver hard industrial relations outcomes' (Saundry et al. 2006: 388). This also coheres with the situation in Bristol. As the BEN members acknowledge below, BEN developed as a 'halfway house' to bring the community together before turning to the union when necessary, since it has 'the standing, the experience and the knowledge about how to negotiate en bloc with a corporation like the Beeb.' Thus networks such as BEN are better understood as complementary to trade unions and as effective tools for engendering solidarity among fragmented, below-the-line workers.

The importance of such networks and their relationships with trade unions is only going to increase as the policy drive to support creative clusters takes root. It is therefore essential to consider the industrial relations fostered by such policies and how these play out across the many regional and local contexts of the creative industries. This interview transcript provides a richly textured account of freelance life, exploitation and resistance in one of the UK's major regional film and television clusters. It thus provides a valuable record of the issues facing contemporary creative clusters and the ways in which workers are organising to address them. For reasons which will be obvious, names of individuals and most companies have been omitted.

Bristol Editor (BE): The view from the freelance side, particularly from the editors' point of view, is that all is not rosy between freelancers and production companies. And there's a lot of change coming to Bristol irrespective of the regionalisation of Channel 4. A lot of London indies are setting up offices here and editing here. None of us in the

editing community really know how that will play. On the one hand it's great, because there's more stuff coming here. But although there's more work, there's also more competition for it, so potentially some of the people who live and work here now will struggle. The situation in Bristol is changing, basically, and that's exciting and broadly positive but also daunting, too. Another big question, which is basically at the forefront of the mind of pretty much every editor out there, is how will these changes affect our rates?

Steve Presence (SP): *Okay. Before we talk about rates, can you tell me a little bit about the kind of work you do now, and how you get it?*

BE: Sure. I do a mixture of natural history stuff and factual entertainment. Natural history was not part of my *oeuvre* at all, originally. And I don't do the blue-chip stuff. There are a few editors who do that and kind of keep doing that, so certain groups of editors get segmented off, and I think you find that around the business. It's the same with a lot of the adventure stuff that gets done here. There's a few editors in that group that really know the content, they know the concept, they know the channel, they know the [production] companies, so they tend to stick to that kind of work.

I'm one of those who kind of just bobs around. I'm starting [a major prime-time format] next week. I did [the same show] last year. I did a lot of arts and history stuff, which I love doing for the BBC. I've done some stuff for [production company], like [a major factual-entertainment series], which is a big success, and their new adventure series. I'm currently on my fourth series working for a company called [xxxx], doing [international broadcaster] things.

So, I do lots of different work, and have to edit my CV differently each time someone offers a job. If someone's asking for a natural history job, I have to change my CV to that. Natural history at the top, and then you go down to the other stuff. If it's more documentary, then I can tailor it to that. I'm pretty lucky like that, I think.

SP: *So how do you usually find work? How difficult is it to access the top-end work, like the blue-chip natural history shows?*

BE: It's a struggle. I don't think editors put the barriers up against anyone else coming in – they're not the ones who have the say. You just get a reputation. It comes out of one department within the BBC, and people work there for years. If they've worked with an editor once and have done well and won awards, then that's how they do it the next time. So, to answer your question, it's all pretty much word of mouth.

That's great if you're good, because word gets out and you get work. You get the calls and that's great. You know you're doing something right. But it does fence off diversity, which is something we've discussed in the network. It becomes, not 'a job for the boys', but you just see the same faces in the same places. That's how it is. You want to work in the team, in a stressful environment, so you go to the people who you know you can do it with.

SP: *Are you discussing these issues in the network?*

BE: Yes, absolutely. BEN was borne partly out of a sense that, though the union exists, few of us are in it. There was a summer drinks event organised by some of the people who are part of the main BEN admin team now, and from that event emerged the kind of thing the network would do. Some people were particularly enthusiastic about the diary service, others were interested in talking about rates and terms and conditions – though for various reasons 75 per cent of the editors in the room weren't part of the union and didn't want to be. So BEN developed as a kind of halfway house, really. A community for us all to voice concerns, to highlight companies that aren't paying on time, or are treating editors unfairly, in our opinion, in terms of conditions. So, it was a kind of catch-all place: a resource where we could share jobs and connect production companies to editing talent in the city, and a forum where we could all get together and discuss the issues that we felt were out there and which we were being confronted with.

SP: *How many editors are part of it?*

BE: One hundred and seventy, which is pretty much all the editors and assistant editors in Bristol. There are some who don't want to know and that's fine. They might not have time for it or maybe don't see the point because they're doing okay. They're getting the rate they want, or they feel they're in a good place. That's fair enough. But 170 is pretty much every editor in Bristol.

SP: *Could you tell me a bit about how you organise?*

BE: Sure. Well, there are eight of us [that coordinate BEN], and although we share responsibility for the network overall we've also separated off job-wise. Some of us maintain the website and oversee that – not just the technical infrastructure but also writing articles, circulating resources and links – others take responsibility for the financial management side of things now that we're charging a membership fee. Other people are more on the union side of things:

working conditions, terms, rates and so on. We kind of promote issues related to that.

Then around once every three months we'll have a get together upstairs at a local pub and we'll invite all the members. We'd normally get about 40 who turn up, though not the same people every time. There's probably a hard-core of fifteen who are always there, but the rest are just different which is good. One of us will chair it and there will usually be a presentational element to it where someone speaks about a particular issue – but there's a big social element to the meetings, too.

SP: *Are you working with any other similar groups, in Bristol or elsewhere?*

BE: No. There are none that I know of that operate as a kind of union and combine that with the diary/job service. There's the North West Editors Guild up north around Manchester, and I think there's a similar group in Sydney in Australia, but they're slightly different in that they focus on finding editors work. BEN does both – members can discuss the issues facing them and organise themselves, but we also share job alerts, and PMs [production managers] and indies can and do go through our site to hire editors.

SP: *What is the relationship between the network and the union?*

BE: Our relationship with BECTU [Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union]? It's a good one. I wish BEN didn't have to exist and that everything was done through the union. They have the standing, the experience and the knowledge about how to negotiate en bloc with a corporation like the Beeb.

Soon after BEN was set-up, a few of the first members organised a kind of 'meet the union' event, which I attended. It was quite informal, and not by any means a heavy-handed push to get everyone to join. Anyway, as part of that event, two BECTU members came down and gave a talk about the benefits of trade unions. There was a chap from Wales who had been an NUM [National Union of Mineworkers] leader during the [1984–5] strike. The guy was steeped in unionism. They were brilliant. They gave examples of other BECTU groups they had worked with and explained the process: 'This is how we organised. These are the rates we got. These are the hours we got. If companies start actively going below that to our members, our members can refuse. It was that sense of establishing a threshold that you won't go beneath. Then you uphold those standards.

But nobody signed up. I was sitting there thinking, how can anyone walk out of this? This guy is basically saying, if enough people sign up, then straight away you can give us the top three things you want to

discuss with [the employers] and we will negotiate them on your behalf. None of you get tarred with 'he's a troublemaker, she's a troublemaker'. It's all done through the union. As soon as you do that, you get the respect of [the employers] and they have to negotiate. But no one wanted to do it. It was incredible. I found it really quite surprising. That's when I decided to get involved with BEN, when I realised that we were going to have to do something ourselves.

SP: *Is it partly because you're all freelance? Is that what's preventing a sense of solidarity emerging?*

BE: Probably. I've been freelance for 20-odd years. There is definitely a mindset of: 'I've got to look after myself. It's my rate. They're my hours.' But I think people have that perspective because they've never been in a union. I don't think they've ever understood what a union can do. Young editors have grown up in an era where unionism is just seen as what the mad working classes do. It's not seen as something that an editor would be involved with. And maybe it's also to do with the class of people involved – some people might think 'unionism' is a dirty word. I'm sure that holds true with a percentage of the workforce.

But we would prefer it if they joined the union. We don't want to see ourselves as a union. If we were all in the union, it would do an enormous amount for us. If we all worked as one, it would be incredible. We wouldn't have to negotiate on an individual basis. One of the biggest complaints is that every time we get a job and discuss rates of pay, it's the same argument over and over again. It's like pulling teeth.

SP: *Can you talk me through that process? When you come to get a contract, how does the negotiation process work?*

BE: How does it work? Sure. From word of mouth, you'll get a call saying, are you free for these dates? It's X person, generally the production manager. You'll say: 'Yes'. He'll say: 'Fine'. Normally it's well in advance.

SP: *Like six months?*

BE: Six months. Could be a year. Could be three months. There's no set timetable. With some jobs, it will be a couple of weeks. It could be a really quick turnaround for whatever reason. Also, we finish off other jobs or edits that have run over, where editors have had to leave and they need someone to finish it off. That's another growing issue.

Mostly, if you're doing a job from beginning to end, it will be four, five, six months before. You'll get the call, or an email, normally. 'Are

you free?' 'Yes'. 'What are your rates?' 'X'. 'Right, we can't afford that. That's not in our budget. Last time you worked for us, you did it for this'. 'Okay, that was two years ago. Things have moved on since then.'

It's the same ploy over and over again. 'This is what you charged us two years ago. This is what you charged us last year. This is what the last rate was.' 'When was that?' 'Three years ago.' 'Three years ago. I've done other things since then.'

This is a personal recollection, but I'll guarantee you that any editor in Bristol would tell you exactly the same thing. Then you say: 'Well, this is what I now charge.' 'I can't afford that. None of the editors that we pay is on that.' 'That's not my problem. This is what I'm charging. This is what I'm charging other companies. This is what they are paying.' Then you eventually find a compromise that's acceptable.

SP: *Do you usually have to take a bit off?*

BE: Yes. That's the usual merry-go-round. Everyone does that. I had a job literally two weeks ago where I had been booked to do it for six months, since the turn of the year. It's a returning series that I've done. It's been a success for them and it's been great. It's the same team.

Finally, we get down to talking about rates. I said: 'Right, this is my rate now.' They said: 'That's X amount more than what you charged last year.' I said: 'Yes because last year I was knocking down because you didn't want to pay that. Now I'm charging this.'

We finally got to this figure, and she goes: 'That's good, that's what we had in the budget anyway.' Okay, so you've been asking to go below what you had in the budget. What kind of message is that sending?

We're talking about £5 a day, £10 a day. Tiny figures. It's not like people are asking for £300, £400 extra a week. We're talking about people asking for £50 extra a week. The impression is they will do anything to shave a quid off your fee.

That was remarkable. The fact that she actually openly admitted: 'That's what we had in the budget.' I've never heard that before. So, she's gone to a broadcaster and said: 'This is the budget breakdown.' Then she's gone to the three editors who she's worked with for years, and she's cheated them out of a tiny amount of money. It's incredible, just incredible.

SP: *Some argue that production companies are being forced into behaving like that because broadcasters are making cuts to their production budgets. What would you say to that?*

BE: Budgets may well have been cut, but cameramen got a deal with BECTU at the BBC that increased their rate. That gave them increases

every year, and got deals on overtime. BBC staff are getting pay rises. Independents were getting pay rises. There didn't seem to be a lack of money for other areas, like buying kit or getting four different cameras to go and shoot something.

There always seems to money for that stuff, but as soon as an editor asks for £25 a week extra, it's like: 'We can't afford it.' It's outrageous. 'But can you still work 60 hours?' 'Certainly.'

SP: *What is the perception of the BBC? Are the independents a bit more cut-throat than the BBC?*

BE: No, it's the other way around. You wouldn't think it, would you? But it is. All the PCs [production coordinators] and PMs who work at the BBC pay lower rates. Then eventually those production managers leave and go to independents, and they take the same attitude to those independents. When it used to be a BBC issue, you could go to an independent and get a higher rate. Now suddenly they're all doing the same thing. And they've crossed fertilised into most genres of work.

So, from my point of view, certainly the BBC are seen as the ones that originated and adhere to a policy of: 'We're not giving them anything. Why should they have a rate rise? We don't pay anyone this.' Even when you know full well that they do.

That's where this issue about honesty, truth and trust relations comes from. Experience shows that they will lie to you about the actual situation. The evidence proves it. They tell you: 'We're not paying any other editor in your group who is working on the series more than that. Can you accept parity?' I'll accept parity, that's fine. We're all doing the same job, we'll do that. Then you talk to the other editor and they say: 'No, I'm getting £50 more a week.'

It happened to me personally. It's like, what's the mindset? Things like that, issues like that, make editors think: 'Who are we dealing with here? What kind of production culture are we dealing with?' If they're prepared to do that, then they're probably prepared to abuse my working life in other ways as well.

SP: *What are the other issues you've come up against?*

BE: The first few BEN meetings were very vocal. People were really sounding off about terms and conditions and rates. All the female editors who were there were talking about the pressure of being mothers and not being able to apply for jobs because they knew they wouldn't be able to do the hours. Feeling they couldn't leave at 5.30 p.m. or 5 p.m. for childcare, that they couldn't charge a rate

similar to a male editor because they'd have to leave a couple of times at 5 o'clock during the week.

I don't know how you prove this, but female editors would say: 'We are £65 a week lower than a man of equivalent standing on the same production.' They seem to think that's what it is and it's probably true because everywhere else in the professional world there is a pay gap, so I wouldn't be surprised by that – though to me it's remarkable that a pay gap still exists in the twenty-first century. But it's hard to prove because rates are so variable.

SP: *Can you tell me about the different rates? Are people guarded about the rates they charge?*

BE: The only way to break that down is to be upfront. I am certainly upfront with it. There are a few others, certainly the more experienced editors, who are not afraid to say: 'This is what I'm charging because my experience demands it. I get hired because I'm good at what I do, so I want recompense for that. I want to be paid well for my skills in the context of the business, the industry.'

The ones who are maybe only five or ten years into their career are a little bit more reticent to talk about it. There's a BECTU rate card which is meant to set the minimum, but no one in Bristol makes it. Or at least, it's often unattainable in Bristol or at best a maximum for many editors. The blue-chip [natural history] editors probably just about make it, but it's certainly not the norm. This is for primetime, massive success, millions watched, millions sold, BBC. Hardly anyone in Bristol gets anywhere near that.

SP: *What are the issues concerning terms and conditions?*

BE: The biggest issue, apart from not getting paid what people feel they should be, is that I have no idea how many hours I'm going to work this week. If I have organised X, Y and Z and it all goes mad at work, then I've got to give up X, Y and Z. The stress on family life or relationships is huge. I think people would accept, not a stagnant rate, but a much smaller rate increase, if there were set hours per week. Instead, companies often won't even negotiate recompense for overtime, which we know we're going to do, because they want buyouts.

SP: *What's a buyout?*

BE: A buyout is basically where you work as many hours as it takes, with no extra fee. You could be doing 40 hours, but you could be doing 80 hours. In fairness, it's very rare that you will get a production

that says you have to work 90 hours this week, or 80 hours or 75, or a weekend, for free.

They will generally allow overruns, where the editing process overruns the time allocated to it. If they give you seven weeks to cut a job, they'll be continuing for a week or two extra as standard. We all think overruns are just built into projects these days. Partly, this is because of the process now, where you can change anything whenever you want. So people think: 'It doesn't matter, we can go back and change it.' But because you can always change it, it then always changes, so productions hardly ever hit their deadlines.

As a result, you often get a phone call a week or even a day before production ends. I had last month off, and I was getting a call on Friday afternoon to start a job on the Monday for four weeks. They were overrunning, and they were over seriously.

A lot of editors get work that way. It's great if you just want to work a couple of big jobs a year, and then just fill it out with bits and bobs, because there's always stuff getting finished off. But it's also awful, because you never know what is coming up next and it causes a lot of stress. It causes a lot of anxiety.

SP: *Okay, we've spoken about hours and rates, what about holiday and sick pay?*

BE: It depends if you're a sole trader or a limited company. If you're a sole trader, you should be able to charge holiday and sick pay, but most editors won't do that. They just get told that the job isn't long enough. The three days over a nine-week period, you're going to be working those days. You don't get holiday pay per se. I don't, but I am a limited company, so I don't charge it anyway. The argument is, if you're not going to get the days off, you should increase your rate to cover the fact that you're not getting holiday pay. But no one does that. I don't know anyone who charges holiday pay. Then again, production companies would no doubt argue that holiday is included in the negotiated rate they pay – so it's all rolled into one.

SP: *How can BEN mitigate against some of these issues? How are you organised, and have you had any successes in terms of negotiating now that you've formed the network?*

BE: Some, yes. We've been involved with several different disputes so far, supporting editors who have had problems with productions or with post houses, or dealing with late payers. Our role has been to act as mediators, or certainly started out with us saying: 'What are your

issues?' Write them all down. Get them to discuss as a group, as editors, about how would they like to proceed. Do they want us to be involved? This is what we propose. Go and speak to them about this. We basically just give them a way to have somebody to bounce back off. Otherwise the editors feel very alone when something starts going wrong.

SP: *How many editors are we talking about?*

BE: Well, in one dispute, you're talking about 25 editors. It's a year-round series, a highly successful one, but the edits are two or three days at a time. Or even just a single day. So, you had lots of different editors who have worked on it and they're all facing the same problems.

SP: *So, they come to you and you talk to them and then agree a way forward? Do you approach the firm on their behalf?*

BE: We approach the post house if we have a good relationship with it. In terms of the production company, we asked if there were two members from the group who wanted to lead proceedings. If they didn't, then we would do it for them. Just basically as a way of preserving their anonymity and not making them feel like they were standing above the crowd line. But, in the end, they were happy to. They'd been working for them for a decade and felt very comfortable to say: 'These are the issues that we're facing. We need to start solving some of these, because it's hindering the job.' It all ended pretty well. They got most of the things they wanted.

SP: *Can you talk about what the issues were?*

BE: It was complicated, but basically it was to do with some very tough conditions of employment: it was rates, terms and schedule of payment, issues with hire-and-fire; it was the removing of the overtime they were facing. It was the cancellation of jobs the day before a job – often through an innocent mistake in the bookings process – but then not forking out the cancellation fees. It was the sense that there was a complete lack of communication between [the production company] and the post house and the editor. The editors were getting constant cross messages and felt no one was telling anyone the same story.

So, as an editor, you're there thinking: 'I'm getting cancelled. Why am I getting cancelled?' They're giving you two different stories. As that person, you're thinking: 'Well, what the hell have I done? What the fuck's going on here?' Most of the people who worked on it were people who wanted to work part-time. So, a lot of them were mothers – or fathers, for that matter – who wanted to do two or three days a week.

Or, four days over a two-week period. It was really important for them to get it sorted out.

That was the main issue. It was lack of communication. It was the cancellation of jobs, completely last minute. It was actually going into the edit, turning up and then finding out someone else was doing it. There was just no communication and it was awful, it was really terrible. We've also had problems with one or two editors not getting payment. But more generally, we've been contacted by members about all sorts of issues, from rates and payment to contracting and overtime.

SP: *Presumably you have to police your membership quite carefully, to make sure it's a private, safe space for editors to speak freely? People might not want to speak up if they felt there was companies listening in, for example.*

BE: Absolutely. Production managers, not because they want to spy – well I hope it's not because they want to spy – they've asked to join BEN because they see that it's a great place to put job alerts. And they get access to all these CVs of people they might not have seen before. It really is beneficial for them, too, so they just asked to join. But we said: 'Listen, it's just for editors', and that's it really.

SP: *What about editors from elsewhere?*

BE: No, we're Bristol editors. It's the Bristol Editors' Network, it's not for London editors, it's not for Manchester editors, it's not even … I mean, Bath editors, yes, if they're working in Bristol, of course. There is a wider diaspora in the West Country for us to tap into, though anyone who is living anywhere near Bristol will be editing in Bristol. And this isn't because we hate London editors, but we're trying to look after the community of editors in and around Bristol and we want to serve our community – I guess it comes down to that kind of unionised mentality again. To do that, you do have to check out the people who want to join; there have been so many who are nothing to do with Bristol.

SP: *Okay. Just to finish off, can you tell me a bit about where you would like to see things go from here? How do you plan to move forward?*

BE: There's a question! The only way that I can personally see is to be open about where we are. Hopefully it creates an environment where editors can be saying: 'This is happening at this production company. This is the conversation I've just had with a production manager. This is what they've told me, is this true?'

It's just happened with me, on the job. I just discussed my rate with [a major prime-time entertainment format]. They told me a pack of lies, I found out, about the rates they're offering to other editors. I got a rate I actually wanted from London. I'm working in London first, then Bristol. I got two separate rates, both of them higher than last year. Brilliant.

I get there, speak to the other editors and find out they're getting paid less than me. So, I told them what I'm getting paid and said: 'You deserve the same. We're doing the same production, working the same hours. There is no reason why you should be on less than me.' I said to them: 'Don't tell them you're talking to us. Don't tell them we're talking between ourselves. That could create an issue. Just say: "This is my rate."' They went back to the production manager and said: 'This is the rate I want' and that's what they got. They got the same.

But the thing is, they got the rate without any argument. That's the odd thing. You can argue for days going backwards and forwards about these piddling little sums. Then you get it and it's like: 'Okay we'll give it to you. We know what you're doing.' Getting them to change is so difficult.

So yes, we'd like to have a better relationship. We want to make the relationship between workers and employees much more positive and engaged, and to have a better connection with production companies and PMs – which I think we're building. We also want to stage more events and talks to celebrate the value of the craft of editing – to shine a light on it. One suggestion that came out of the meeting yesterday when I mentioned I was coming to talk to you was that we'd love to have an open evening. With editors there, PMs there, series producers there from independents. If we're all together, and we're all talking, then surely it's going to create a better working environment. We're all trying to do the same thing to the best of our abilities.

There's definitely been a move with editors and freelancers in that direction, talking more about issues they are facing. We all know the same issues. Before, you might have had a chat in a café and sound off, and that would be the end of it. Now there's a forum. Now there's a place where people can go. Lots of people chime in with advice or a similar experience with the same people at the same place. Suddenly there's a picture being drawn about a company or a certain production. It says: 'If you're going to go there, fine, but this is how they are behaving. This is where they're paying late. These are the excuses they give. This is the rate they say they're not going to pay, but they have done.' We want to help editors to go in armed with those tools, and that's happening, which is brilliant.

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