



CARDIFF UNIVERSITY'S CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY JOURNALISM (C4CJ)



# ANNUAL REPORT 2019

LATEST INFORMATION ON THE  
WORK OF THE UK'S CENTRE OF  
EXCELLENCE FOR THE  
INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY  
NEWS SECTOR

**REPORT BY MATT ABBOTT**



# A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY JOURNALISM EMMA MEESE

As we draw closer to the end of the year it feels like a good time to reflect on the past twelve months.

Journalism has faced increasing challenges as this year has progressed. With the country divided over politics, it was alarming to see how the recent election campaigns tried using the media as a pawn in their games.

The aim of many political campaigners was to discredit journalists and news organisations, to undermine trust and increase confusion.

I could not be prouder of the work that members of the Independent Community News Network (ICNN) produced during these challenging times. They created and shared valuable content that would otherwise not have existed at a grassroots level, where trusted news and information matters most.

Our fledgling sector is coming of age and really proving its worth. It was a pleasure to see so many hustings created by ICNN members across all corners of the UK, taking journalism back to the heart of the communities they serve.

We are delighted to now have 115 members signed up to ICNN. They have all passed our strict entry criteria to be recognised as quality and reputable news publications.

Our most recent signing is a sports-based publication, plugging a gap in sports reporting in the Swansea area. I sincerely hope that this is the first of many community of interest publications we welcome into the network.

With each publication that joins we nudge a small step closer to filling the democratic deficit left behind by decades of job cuts in mainstream media.

As well as growing our network, we have been continuing to work with governments, unions and other organisations to increase knowledge and visibility of the independent community



news sector. Our aim is to get smaller news publications on a level playing field with legacy publications, something we are proud to say we are slowly achieving.

We still have a long way to go but must not let that detract us from how far we have come. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has worked with us towards achieving a brighter future for local journalism. It has been encouraging to see so much investment in the sector this year, in particular two big funds by both Welsh and UK Governments, which were available for independent journalists to apply for.

It has been a pleasure working closely with both funds to ensure smaller publishers were not excluded from applying. It will be exciting in the new year to see the projects and outcomes generated by these investments in local journalism.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us this year, we are a small team comprising of Matt Abbott, Cheryl Crook and myself, and we value all the interactions and partnerships we have with each and every one of you.

I'd like to extend, as always, a particularly big thank you to Cardiff University for continuing to fund us, without which none of our work would be possible.

We are on the cusp of launching our brand-new website and forum, so I urge you all to join us on that space over the coming year to chat, encourage and support each other.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and look forward to engaging with you in the New Year.



# 2019: THE HEADLINES

## EXCLUSIVES:

Partnered with Google News Initiative and Newsawards to deliver the very first UK-wide award for independent community news outlets, online and in print.

**The Independent Community News Network (ICNN) is now over 115 members strong**

Launched the Making News Toolkit for Schools, helping to equip primary school children with the skills to examine news and information, how to tell their own stories and become the next generation of news reporters.

Sat on the advisory boards of the Future News Pilot Fund and the Independent Community Journalism Fund - pots of money totalling £2.2m dedicated to local journalism

Launched the [\*Community Journalism Podcast\*](#)

**Trained over 1,000 people throughout the UK and Europe**

*Registered over 20 new independent community news outlets in 2019*

Partnered with First Draft News and gained access to Cross Check for small publishers during the General Election to help readers verify reputable news sources.





# THE STORY SO FAR...



The Centre for Community Journalism (C4CJ) is part of Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture. It developed out of our long history high-quality professional training and research, our commitment to local journalism, and our wish to support it in all its forms as it goes through major changes.

Cardiff University's Centre for Community Journalism (C4CJ) researches into this area of journalism and offers networking, information and training for hyperlocal and community journalists building on expertise developed at the leading School of Journalism, Media and Culture.

Independent community and hyperlocal news outlets are fulfilling the traditional role of the fourth estate in local civic society, complimenting the diverse range of news provision available. The growth of these new outlets represents a shift in attitudes towards news consumption. Audiences want local knowledge, intimacy, trust, connections; they want to know who their local journalist is; they want to be involved.

The Independent Community News Network (ICNN) was set up in January 2018 at Cardiff University's Building the Future of Community Journalism conference. ICNN was set up in response to the collective issues faced by the community news sector in the UK and the lack of a unified voice to speak on its behalf.

Since its inception, ICNN has grown to represent over 115 individual titles, both online and in print, and reaching as far north as the Shetland Islands, and as far south as Cornwall.

In 2019 we continued delivering the highest quality training, for free to community news publishers.

Our Social Media Roadshow Wales travelled across the country teaching journalists and organisations how to use Instagram effectively and looked at how to use it for news. We also delivered law refresher courses amongst others which would otherwise be inaccessible to many independent publishers.

At C4CJ we also partnered with First Draft News and gained access to Cross Check for small publishers who wanted to join and work alongside some of the largest news publishers in the UK.

During the past year we travelled to several international conferences, flying the flag for UK independent Media. These conferences both raise the profile of our sector in the UK and allow us to learn from other countries how small start up news organisations survive and thrive across the globe. We take these learnings and apply it to our work in the UK. This global knowledge exchange is vital to allow us to keep moving forward with our innovation and learning in the UK.

A lot of our time this year has been consumed with creating the foundations of our Google DNI funded project Value My News. In partnership with Omni Digital in Bristol and Clare Cook at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) we have been building a UK wide hyperlocal news platform, which will allow independent publishers to generate revenue for the stories they are already writing. This is a hugely exciting project which will be going into alpha testing, with a small sample of volunteer independent community news publishers, early in the New Year.

We also have a revamped website and brand new forum on the horizon, which we are excited to launch over the coming months.



# THE ICNN CHARTER



## **ICNN promotes and protects the shared interests of the community news sector in the UK by:**

- acting on behalf of community and hyperlocal news publications, from start-ups to established businesses; for profits and nonprofits; committed volunteers to entrepreneurs;
- to attain recognition and accreditation for the valuable contribution they provide to their respective communities and to the democratic process, and to advance the case for strong community journalism;
- by seeking to enhance and foster a dynamic and sustainable community and hyperlocal news sector through lobbying, advocacy, training, networking, research and monitoring;
- to ensure the success of our members' organisations through leveraging economic opportunities;
- to lead innovation and collaboration that serves and protects the aims and ambitions of the sector;
- to promote and help maintain the highest possible standards of journalism;
- to seize opportunities to strengthen job growth in the sector by researching and investing in models of good and effective practice and in technology-based solutions.

## **Members of ICNN submit to the following:**

- Member publications are independent of political, commercial, and religious interests;
- Are community-focussed and work to represent the views of their community;
- Are producing contemporaneous news or news-related content (that includes, but is not limited to breaking news, arts & culture, sports, news features, cultural and community entertainment events, campaigns, weather, transport, crime, local history and local business, and schools)
- Uphold high professional standards including accuracy, transparency, integrity, accountability and fairness.
- Without exception, all members of ICNN are committed to working within and adhering strictly to the guidelines of the Editors' Code of Practice and/or the Impress Standards Code.

**ICNN is run by members, for members, and is free at the point of entry.**



# OUR CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP

**We define a community and hyperlocal news publication as a news service that typically pertains to a specific geographic area such as a town, neighbourhood, village, county or even postcode. They can also be aimed at online communities of interest.**

There are multiple ways to define this sector, and publications use many different terms to describe themselves. The defining characteristic for us is that a publication is independent of political, commercial, and religious interests, is community-focused, and producing contemporaneous news content.

We have a relatively broad definition of news that includes breaking news, arts & culture, sports, news features, cultural and community entertainment events, campaigns, weather, transport, crime, local history, local business, and schools.

Publications must uphold high professional standards, including accuracy, transparency, integrity, accountability and fairness.

Publications must demonstrate this by having at least six months of active coverage.

Publications which sit on the fringes of this criteria will have their application referred to ICNN's Professional Standards & Admissions Committee.

Applications from publications representing communities of interest will also be referred to ICNN's Professional Standards & Admissions Committee.

ICNN reserves the right to refuse and/or revoke membership from any publication that does not meet or ceases to meet the criteria outlined above.

## Membership criteria

Membership cannot be granted to publications which are single-issue, or relating to a single topic. This includes, but is not limited to:

- an ongoing political campaign
- a specific political party
- a specific local issue or campaign
- an individual sport or team.

Publications must have a robust and prominently displayed complaints procedure.

Publications must adhere to either Ipsos's Editor's Code of Practice or the Impress Standards Code and the National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct.

Demonstrate a clear and transparent management/ownership structure.

Demonstrate a commitment to producing journalism to high standards – no aggregation sites or 'churnalism' setups which cut and paste all content from press releases.

Demonstrate a competent use of grammar and sentence construction.

Publications must be fully inclusive of all ethnicities and backgrounds and be non-discriminatory.

Special thanks to John Baron (West Leeds Dispatch), Fiona Davidson (the ferret) and Keith Magnum (Hackney Citizen) for developing this.



# ICNN MEMBERS

\*Click on the image to visit the webpage of each title.\*

A grid of logos for various local news and community websites. The logos are arranged in several rows and columns. Some logos include text like 'Dispatch', 'Wrexham.COM', 'Bude & Beyond', 'Waltham Forest Echo', 'Richmondshire TODAY', 'LOVE WAPPING', 'Wythenshawe Reporter', 'The Guildford Dragon NEWS', 'Nailed', 'the LINCOLNITE', 'My Turriff', '@OYLIFE', 'SouthLeedsLife', 'my welshpool .CO.UK', 'Derby News', 'YOUR HARLOW', 'Llanelli Online', 'YOUR THURROCK', 'The Charlton Champion', 'Rochdale Online', 'InsideCroydon', 'Wokingham TODAY', 'Londonse1', 'HUI2 ONLINE', 'View/digital', 'UckfieldNews', 'Hackney Citizen', 'Star & Crescent', 'My Cardiff North', 'Caerphilly Observer', 'Spurtle', 'Eastleigh News', 'The Ferret.scot', 'Bittern Park', 'The Gosport Globe', 'Shetland News', 'The Lewisham Ledger', 'Brighton & Hove News', 'Inksplott', 'Journal', 'LymeOnline', 'The Edinburgh Reporter', 'The Dulwich Diverter', 'Newry.IE', 'WYRE LIFE', 'The Wotton Times', 'THORNE TIMES', 'The Edinburgh Reporter', 'The Canterbury Journal', 'YORK', 'BU', 'ENFIELD DISPATCH', 'OGGY BLOGGY OGWR', 'TELFORD LIVE', 'SENEDD HOME', 'islandecho', 'Down News', 'BIRMINGHAM UPDATES', 'BEDFORD INDEPENDENT', 'EastDevon News', '7DaySport', 'Exeter Observer'.



# MEMBER BENEFITS



**In May 2019, we partnered with SpeechKit to help our members turn their articles into audio files using artificial intelligence.**

SpeechKit turns news stories into audio clips using natural sounding AI voices in over 20 languages and dialects that have been specifically enhanced for written news content.

The audio takes seconds to produce using a WordPress plugin, and once it's ready readers can use the audio player that sits beneath the headline to listen to a news story. Publishers may also take advantage of an audio API and an HTML iframe product.

And exclusive to ICNN members, SpeechKit is offering a 30 per cent discount on all their packages. No need for expensive production equipment or technical wizardry.

SpeechKit instantly creates audio versions as they are published in real-time and serves them to your audience wherever they are.

SpeechKit also allows publishers to automate content to Amazon Alexa by building an 'Alexa Skill'.

Founders, Patrick and James, have been working towards a vision for audio available on every article, where news can be accessed anywhere, anytime, and offers new opportunities for publishers and their readers.

"It's been a privilege working with a couple of the members of the ICNN already and we look forward to this partnership with independent community news publishers. We are happy that we can provide ICNN members with a 30 per cent discount on all our packages."

Director of ICNN Emma Meese said: "At ICNN we are always looking for new ways to help our members and when we heard about SpeechKit and saw it in action, we knew it would be a huge benefit to our members and help them expand their audiences even further."

Oli Hills, CEO of Updates Media - Birmingham Updates, said: "It's fantastic that SpeechKit and ICNN have joined forces to offer members such a fantastic offer."

"Birmingham Updates have used SpeechKit since November 2018 and we've seen huge uptake and usage by our audience."

"Firstly, it's perfect for accessibility purposes for our audience with visual impairments but has also opened up new ways that we can connect with and engage our audience with our content, such as launching our very own Alexa Skill."

For information on pricing structures, visit [speechkit.io](http://speechkit.io), or contact [james@speechkit.io](mailto:james@speechkit.io) to inquire.





## LEGAL ADVICE

**Public interest journalism is a vital community good. As the decline in local journalism continues apace, communities are increasingly looking toward the independent community news sector to deliver and inform on a whole host of relevant issues such as council meetings, community events, profiles, planning applications, schools, transport, local crime and magistrates court hearings.**

But covering stories like these on a daily basis has its obstacles, and chief among them is accuracy.

Public meetings often get very heated. Individuals rarely respond positively to negative publicity,

As individuals or small teams, these publishers can't afford to be wrong. A defamation case could put a news outlet out of business.

So, when we launched ICNN in 2018, one thing we knew we wanted to offer our members was free legal advice.

In the nearly two years since ICNN has been officially representing the independent community news sector in the UK, our media law advisor and co-author of the 20th edition of McNae's Essential Law for Journalists, David Banks has answered over 50 legal queries from our members, helping them publish with confidence and accuracy.

David also wrote a piece for us on public meetings and qualified privilege, which was one of the most common issues people came to us with.

image credit: <https://www.tutorversal.com/australia/media-law-assignment-help.html>

**We would not be able to respond to legal threats at all without the Centre's support. I cannot tell you what a difference it makes to be able to work with a legal expert.**

Sarah Cheverton, Editor of the *Star and Crescent*

**“The service was very helpful and we definitely intend to use it again. Colleagues at The Ferret were delighted. This could save us thousands of pounds in legal fees.**

Billy Briggs, Freelance Journalist, Co-Founder of The Ferret



# FUNDING

2019 has been an exciting year for the independent community news sector. With the launch of two funds that both have a keen focus on innovation and sustainability at the local news level, the sector is being recognised for its outstanding and essential contribution to the news media in the UK.

## Independent Community Journalism Fund

The Independent Community Journalism Fund was launched following the Welsh Assembly's inquiry into the state of local news in Wales. A £200,000 boost that promises to have a great impact on local journalism, local enterprise and social cohesion across the country. The report that informed the fund was co-written by C4CJ and Red Box Research.

C4CJ are also expert advisors to the fund

At the time of the launch, Director of Community Journalism at Cardiff University, Emma Meese said: "We are delighted to be working with Welsh Government to ensure the Independent Community Journalism Fund rewards innovation in the sector and is accessible to those which are most deserving in order to help the sustainability, development and growth of their publication.

"We are also immensely proud of the impact our work has made, and that ICNN membership has been recognised as a trust mark of quality journalism."

Since its launch, four projects have been funded with another half a dozen more being drawn up. Despite its success, we were disappointed that it was unable to help those whose primary concern related to capital expenditure - an issue that comes up time and again for this sector - however, the successful projects promise some exciting innovations for the future.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## The Future News Pilot Fund

The Future News Pilot Fund was launched following the Cairncross Review which was tasked to look at the sustainability of high quality journalism in the UK. The purpose of the review was to examine and make recommendations relating to: the overall state of the UK news market, threats to financial sustainability of the UK news industry, the role and impact of digital search engines and social media platforms, and the role of digital advertising.

The fund, which is now closed for applications, is administered by Nesta: the Innovation Foundation. In 2015 Nesta ran the Destination Local project which looked into ways of supporting the hyperlocal news sector, and so they understand that financial support at the community level is needed now more than ever.

The £2m fund (split into pots of up £100K) will look at ways to give local public interest news a shot in the arm.

Director of Community Journalism at Cardiff University Emma Meese sits on the advisory board of the fund. While C4CJ and ICNN are unable to put forward a bid, we have been able to direct and inform the process to ensure that independent community journalism outlets can access the fund and that they have had enough information and resources to put together their own applications.





# RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION

## PRESS CARDS AND AWARDS

Over the last two years we have been holding discussions with the National Union of Journalists to scope out ways in which our two organisations can work together for the benefit of the independent community news sector.

Our primary goal in all of these discussions has always been an increase in recognition of our members.

We were delighted that at last year's NUJ Delegates Meeting, our work with hyperlocals was applauded. The NUJ was then instructed to explore the many ways it can support C4CJ and ICNN nationally and locally.

This summer, we took part in a consultation with Tim Dawson, who served as the union's president between 2016 and 2018. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the accreditation of hyperlocal journalists.

The NUJ's proposal is to create a distinct 'Community Press' card to form an addition to the newly revised suite of NUJ membership cards.

The NUJ have also proposed working with ICNN to promote the card as the accreditation of a bona fide news gatherer and campaign to ensure that all journalists, whatever their membership status, had appropriate access to public events.

The proposal is supported by ICNN's Advisory Board as a positive first step on the way to further discussions.



This year ICNN and the Google News Initiative joined forces to create an exciting new category for newsawards 2020.

The Independent Community News Network (ICNN) Newspaper of the Year Awards, sponsored by the Google News Initiative, are aimed at the 300-plus independent community news publications in the UK and Ireland.

There are two awards in this category - print and online.

The ICNN Awards will go to a publication/website targeting a specific geographic area such as a town, neighbourhood, village, county or even a single postcode sector.

Director of ICNN Emma Meese says: "This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the incredible work being done by independent community journalists in the UK.

"The announcement of these awards recognises the change in attitudes across the industry towards independent news providers.

"That they are a vital and indispensable part of the news media ecosystem has been clear for some time - these awards underline that, and we are proud to give our organisation's name to them."

The complete judging criteria for the two ICNN awards are available from <http://www.newsawards.co.uk/entry-form/>.

Closing date for entries is 31 January 2020.

The winners of all the newsawards 2020 categories will be announced on 6 May next year at the Royal Lancaster London Hotel in front of around 500 industry sponsors and guests.



# A TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS

## TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS

**A comprehensive journalism resource for teachers, aimed at nurturing media literacy and creating engaged citizens of the future, launched in November.**

'Making News Toolkit for Schools' is an online resource, created in collaboration between the Centre for Community Journalism (C4CJ) and National Education Union (NEU) Cymru.

The toolkit is a train-the-trainer pack comprising of 10 hands-on sessions, which aims to equip school pupils with the basics of news reporting.

Journalism has been reported as being in crisis for a long time, this toolkit teaches the next generation of citizens to examine news and information, rather than growing up as passive consumers.

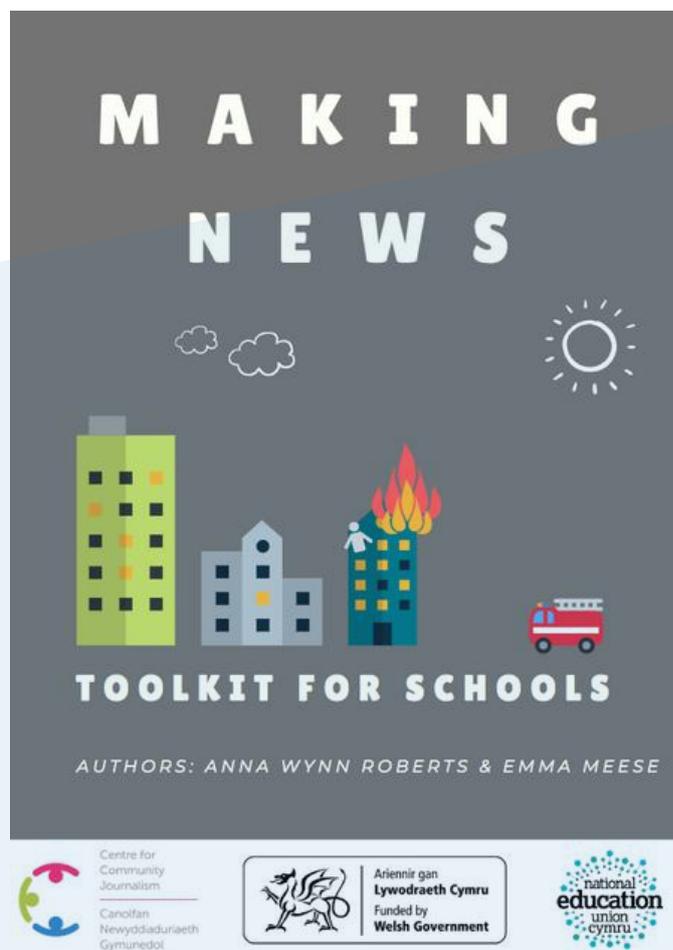
It will help combat the spread of so called 'fake news' as children will grow into adults equipped with the skills to question and verify any information they are given.

In a digital age, the lessons in the toolkit are essential life skills for engaged citizens of the future. It also, crucially, teaches all children in Wales their voice matters and gives them the skills to tell their own stories.

On 12th September, 2016, Education Minister for Wales, Kirsty Williams, told staff at Cardiff University: "The referendum showed that our notions of togetherness and bonds between communities are perhaps weaker than we imagined. Welsh Universities, as civic and international institutions, have a responsibility as stewards of community, city and country."

She continued by saying: "I ask you to re-capture and re-invent that civic mission, realised and relevant for our contemporary challenges".

From that challenge rose the idea of this project, which is part of Cardiff University's wider key strategy to work with educational partners and



all schools in Wales to support teachers to work towards improved educational attainment.

Emma Meese, Cardiff University's Director of Community Journalism, said: "This project is very close to my heart. We ran a pilot three years ago in two primary schools in Merthyr and I'm overjoyed, that by working with the NEU, we can now roll out this vital resource as a train-the-trainer programme to all schools across Wales."

The digital learning pack will sit on the C4CJ website and is available to all schools across the UK to download and use. It is also a valuable asset for any other news organisation working with volunteers who would benefit from a comprehensive entry level guide to journalism.



# NETWORKING

Our website, social media channels and newsletter provide daily, weekly and monthly discussion on the community news sector. This year we have covered a range of issues from the birthday of the oldest hyperlocal to a new syndication deal between Welsh independents; from the challenges of running a rural hyperlocal to advice and general information about how to cover an election.

We also launched the first episode of our new podcast: The Community Journalism Podcast. The first episode covered the Future News Fund and we were able to sit down with Nesta's Director of Development Valerie Mocker to discuss the impact of the fund on the independent community journalism sector. We plan to deliver more episodes in the new year,



# MEDIA COVERAGE

The Centre for Community Journalism and the Independent Community News Network has received considerable coverage in the trade press this year, including an article in the Guardian about how local papers' decline is starving communities of news. We featured in an article in the online magazine InPublishing about the rise of hyperlocals; on the Journalism.co.uk website about our Google-funded project Value My News, and numerous times on Hold the Front Page, arguing the case for a distinction between citizen journalism and community journalism; for fair access to the Future News Pilot Fund, and in our renewed call for the industry to address the imbalance of current statutory public notice legislation.



# KEY STATISTICS



Nearly 7,000 Twitter followers and 60,500 impressions on average per month



20+ blog posts published throughout the year from community journalists, academics and supporting organisations



# HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

## FIND YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS PROVIDER

Discover what's going on in your area by locating your community news service using our map, or register your own site.

**Visit:** [www.communityjournalism.co.uk/find-a-hyperlocal](http://www.communityjournalism.co.uk/find-a-hyperlocal)

**Email:** [Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk)

## SHARE YOUR STORY

If you have advice or a community journalism success story to share, make your voice heard by writing a guest blog post.

**Email:** [Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk/blog](http://communityjournalism.co.uk/blog)

## GET TRAINED BY US

Find out more about our free training for community journalists and our bespoke commercial training for organisations and institutions.

**Email:** [meesee@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:meesee@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk/training](http://communityjournalism.co.uk/training)

## PARTNER WITH US

Have a partnership or collaboration opportunity you think we should know about? Get in touch.

**Email:** [meesee@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:meesee@cardiff.ac.uk)

## RESEARCH THIS GROWING SECTOR

We work with some of the leading UK researchers in this sector, as well as generating our own rich data and insights. Find out more.

**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk/research](http://communityjournalism.co.uk/research)

## DISCOVER THE LATEST NEWS, ADVICE AND OPINION ON COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

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**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk](http://communityjournalism.co.uk)

## VIEW ALL MEMBERS OF ICNN ON AN INTERACTIVE MAP

**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk/icnn/interactive-map-of-icnn-member-publications](http://communityjournalism.co.uk/icnn/interactive-map-of-icnn-member-publications)

## BECOME A MEMBER OF ICNN

**Visit:** [communityjournalism.co.uk/icnn/membership-criteria](http://communityjournalism.co.uk/icnn/membership-criteria)

**Email:** [Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Abbottm2@cardiff.ac.uk)