

# **Further calls to Culture Secretary for a public interest journalism institute**

**Author Jen Stout, who wrote Night Train to Odesa, has raised again the need to revive the public interest journalism institute.**

The author and investigative journalist was speaking at the Wigtown Book Festival at the weekend. She said that there is an urgent need to reverse the decline in Scottish journalism and this is one way to do it. Pointing out that not one Scottish newspaper has a staff correspondent covering Ukraine, she said the institute would support the next generation of skilled independent journalists.

Ms Stout said: "Scotland's newspapers are some of the oldest, and were once among the most prestigious, in the world.

"But there are few foreign correspondents left. None of our newspapers have a staff correspondent covering Ukraine – a major war in Europe! – or a foreign correspondent on the staff at all.

"In an age rife with disinformation and lies, we desperately need this expertise and connection – a correspondent can't be replaced by rehashed agency copy.

"The foreign sections of our newspapers – or what's left of them – are starting to sound and look identical and impersonal. Imagine if there was a Scottish public interest journalism institute – supporting local, international and specialist journalism, but also acting as an advocate for the kind of strong, trusted reporting every citizen needs.

“I was lucky to have work commissioned often by the excellent Sunday Post while in Ukraine – and David Pratt’s coverage in other Scottish papers is obviously brilliant – but the fact remains that it’s freelancers doing this work, where once newspapers could send their own reporters off to cover big global stories.

“These days getting started in a journalism career is hugely expensive. People have to accept unpaid internships, half-funded opportunities plus the growing expectation that they have not just a degree but a postgraduate journalism qualification. That takes tens of thousands of pounds.

“A Public Interest Journalism Working Group was established in 2021 but there has been little progress, and it now falls to Culture Secretary Angus Robertson to push matters forward.

“This not just about how we understand foreign affairs and how we tackle misinformation, but about basic democracy functioning in Scotland.

“Hopefully MSPs and ministers understand that though journalists can be a pain in the arse for them, a news vacuum full of disinformation and conspiracy would be much worse.”

Ms Stout also spoke at the Scottish Beacon’s [Indie News Week’s event](#) when Richard Leonard, the former Scottish Labour leader, appealed to The Scottish Government to revive the idea.

Adrian Turpin, Wigtown Book Festival Artistic Director, said: “During my own career as a newspaper journalist in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK I witnessed an alarming decline in the number of specialist reporters and correspondents.

“Specialists like Jen Stout are vital if we are going to have a media that upholds democracy and freedom by bring us well-researched stories and by holding the powerful to account.

“And here at the festival some of the most compelling and popular events we hold each year are led by respected journalists who have spent decades getting to understand their beat – whether that’s as journalists covering war, overseas

events, politics, the environment, health, economics or any of the other forces that affect our world.  
“It’s of enormous importance that we find a way to ensure that high-quality journalism can flourish and guarantee that future generations have access to expert, independent journalism.”



Foreign Correspondent Jen Stout at Wigtown Book Festival PHOTO Colin Hattersley Photography





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