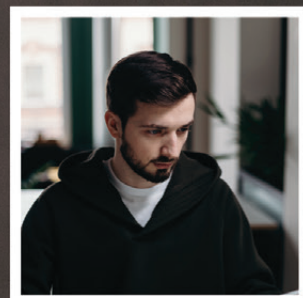


# Diversity in Journalism

An update on the characteristics of journalists



**REPORT COMMISSIONED BY THE  
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE  
TRAINING OF JOURNALISTS**

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**nctj**  
National Council for the  
Training of Journalists

**“Our research programme, including reports like this, are vital to present the facts, highlight the real issues and measure progress. It is also important that we all take action.”**





## Foreword

This report provides a fascinating insight into the characteristics of UK journalists. Now an annual report, it is designed to help us monitor progress and change. We hope you will find the results as interesting as we do and will enjoy the challenges of analysing and interpreting the data.

The continuing increase in the number of journalists working in the UK is particularly interesting. It suggests that journalism remains a positive choice for a career in terms of the availability of opportunities and competition for talent. The growth mirrors reports in some parts of the media that it is harder to fill vacancies with sought after NCTJ-qualified graduates, particularly those who have achieved the 'gold standard'.

It is heartening that there is good progress with gender balance, including at senior editorial levels where there had been concerns that there may be gender disparity.

Progress has also been made with the employment of journalists with disabilities and health issues.

To some extent, there has been an improvement in ethnicity representation although there is still more work to be done. What is worrying is that there are clearly issues associated with promoting those from non-white ethnic groups into more senior editorial roles.

There are also ongoing issues with social class which need to be addressed as a priority. This is linked to journalism being a 'graduate-level' occupation with most new entrants being selected from a highly educated graduate pool. As those in higher education are not representative of the wider population, then (without specific targeting) neither will those who are recruited into journalism from university.

## What does this mean for the NCTJ? How are we playing our part to tackle these issues?

Our research programme, including reports like this, are vital to present the facts, highlight the real issues and measure progress. It is also important that we all take action.

These are some of the key features of our current equality, diversity and inclusion action plan. We are:

- Working with universities to increase the proportion of their students from outside the higher social class backgrounds, for example, by promoting journalism careers and accredited courses, using outreach and by relaxing some of the entry requirements and customs that are barriers to inclusion.
- Encouraging employers to examine their recruitment and career development practices to address issues of unconscious bias and seek out new entrants from middle and lower-social classes.
- Increasing the number and expanding the scope of our successful projects and partnerships, notably the Journalism Diversity Fund, the Community News Project and the Journalism Skills Academy.
- Facilitating the take up of non-graduate entry routes into journalism, by the expansion of apprenticeships and our Certificate in Foundation Journalism as well as other initiatives for school leavers and those who want to change careers.

We know we need to do more and that is what we are currently debating at the NCTJ and with our partners. Expect to see greater investment and the introduction of more interventions designed to make a difference.

Please let us know what you think and share your ideas – we would love to hear from you!



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# Diversity in Journalism

## 1. Background

This research report updates the NCTJ's analysis of journalists' diversity characteristics to 2021<sup>1</sup>. This will now become an annual report, using the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey data<sup>2</sup>, so that the NCTJ and industry can measure progress each year. It can be read in conjunction with the NCTJ's Diversity in Journalism report, published in 2017, and Journalists at Work, published in 2018.

The main 'data-related' development is the introduction of the new 2020 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). This has improved the level of detail available relating to journalists, in that it has replaced the single SOC code (journalists, newspaper and periodical editors) with two codes, with a divide based on experience and seniority. The new SOC codes are:

- **SOC 2491: Editors, who evaluate, manage and oversee the editorial direction for the style and content of features and stories for broadcasting and for newspapers, magazines, news websites and periodicals; and**
- **SOC 2492: Journalists and reporters, who investigate, write up and tell stories and features for broadcasting and for newspapers, magazines, news websites and other periodicals.**

Those working in these journalism occupations work across the whole economy, including publishing (both newspaper and magazine publishing), broadcasting (TV and radio), public relations and communication activities and other sectors.

This is the first analysis of the LFS data on these new occupational classifications and so in the analysis below we show the data for both these new occupations separately and then also combine them into a single 'all-journalists' grouping.

<sup>1</sup> See the 2021 report '*Diversity in Journalism: An update on the characteristics of journalists*' May 2021 at [Diversity in journalism 2021.pdf \(nctj.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is run by the Office for National Statistics. It is the main UK data source for regular individual key labour market statistics. It provides data at a level of precision not matched by any other regular survey. It is a household-based survey, interviewing about 60,000 households, comprising 150,000 people, each quarter.

## 2. Journalism employment compared to all UK employment

The table below compares characteristics of all in employment in the UK with those of journalists. This data covers all working, employed and self-employed, those working full-time and part-time.

Perhaps the most striking element of the journalism data does not relate to diversity at all, but to the number of journalists identified as working in the data which, in 2021, is estimated at 108,000 (the highest level of journalism employment ever recorded in the LFS).

### Relating more specifically to diversity, the data shows:

- **sex:** the proportion of journalists who are women is broadly similar to the proportion of women working across all the economy (47 per cent compared to 48 per cent). The proportion of women in senior journalism roles (SOC 2491) is actually higher (at 49 per cent) than in the more junior roles (46 per cent);
- **age:** the age distribution of journalists is broadly similar to that of all in employment. About one in ten are under the age of 25 (11 per cent of all-employment, nine per cent of journalists), and around a third are aged 50 and over (32 per cent of all in employment, 35 per cent of journalists). As would be expected, there is a distinction between the two separate journalism roles, with there being a lower proportion of younger journalists in the senior journalism roles (SOC2491) than in the more junior roles (SOC2492): 11 per cent of editors are aged below the age of 30 compared to 25 per cent of journalists and reporters;
- **ethnicity:** 87 per cent of journalists come from white ethnic groups, the same proportion as across all UK workers (87 per cent)<sup>3</sup>. However, a higher proportion of journalists and reporters (SOC 2492) are from other ethnic groups (14 per cent) compared to 10 per cent of editors. This would suggest that there are some issues with diversity in more senior levels of journalism;
- **nationality:** 91 per cent of journalists were born in the UK, with five per cent from the EU27 and four per cent from the rest of the world. This is a lower proportion from the EU than for all UK workers (five per cent compared to seven per cent), perhaps because of English language barriers. Again, we see a variation between the two grades of journalists, with 16 per cent of the more senior editorial roles (SOC2491) being non-UK compared to five per cent of the more junior journalist and reporter roles (SOC 2492);
- **health and disability:** 19 per cent of journalists report having a work-limiting health problem or disability, slightly higher than the level for all UK workers (17 per cent);
- **religion:** 67 per cent of journalists report as having no religion compared to 49 per cent of all UK workers. 28 per cent of journalists state that they are Christian, lower than the 43 per cent for all UK workers. Five per cent of journalists identify as having some other religion, compared to eight per cent of all in UK-employment. More journalists and reporters (SOC 2492) are more likely to state that they have no religion compared to editors (SOC 2491) at 71 per cent compared to 60 per cent;
- **qualification level:** journalists are highly qualified. 89 per cent have a degree-level (level 4) or higher-level qualification, compared to 49 per cent of the workforce as a whole. Only six per cent have low level, or no, qualifications (i.e. level 2 or below) compared to 33 per cent of all UK workers. Perhaps counterintuitively, the more junior journalists and reporters (SOC 2492) are more highly qualified than the more senior editors (SOC 2491) with 36 per cent qualified to level 5 (postgraduate level) compared to 23 per cent – though this may reflect the changing entry requirements for more recent entrants and the increase in university participation;

<sup>3</sup> Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is available for a range of ethnic groups including 'White', 'Asian', 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British', 'Chinese', 'Mixed' and 'Other'. However, sample size restrictions within the LFS means that we cannot show this data at this level and so have gathered the data for these other 'non-white' groups into a single group. There is a debate on what to call this collective group, including suggestions of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups. However, the phrase 'minority' can sometimes (without intentional purpose) invoke feelings that they are groups that are subordinate, or lacking power in society. We have decided that throughout this report we will use the term 'Other ethnic groups'.

- **social class:** journalists are more likely to come from households where a parent works/worked in a higher-level occupation, one of the key determinants of social class. 80 per cent of journalists had a parent in one of the three highest occupational groups, compared to 42 per cent of all UK workers. Only two per cent have a parent in the lowest two occupational groups compared to 20 per cent of all workers. It is also notable the relative low proportion of journalists who have parents in the skilled trades occupations<sup>4</sup> at five per cent compared to 21 per cent for all those in work. Again, it is the more junior journalists and reporters (SOC 2492) who appear to be less diverse than the more senior editors (SOC 2491), with 84 per cent having a parent in high-level occupations compared to 73 per cent. This is driven by fewer journalists having parents coming from the middle-level occupations.

<sup>4</sup> Which includes electrical trades, construction and building trades, etc



**Table 1:** Diversity data, journalists and all-in work compared, UK, 2021

	All in work (UK)	Journalists		
	%	All journalists %	2491: Editors %	2492: Journalists & reporters %
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	52	53	51	54
Female	48	47	49	46
<b>Age</b>				
Under 25	11	9	3	11
25-29	11	12	8	14
30-39	24	24	26	23
40-49	22	20	29	16
50 and over	32	35	33	36
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	87	87	90	86
Other ethnic groups	13	13	10	14
<b>Nationality</b>				
UK	88	91	84	94
EU27	7	5	8	3
Rest of world	5	4	8	2
<b>Health/disability</b>				
Have work limiting health problem/disability	17	19	20	19
No work limiting health problem/disability	83	80	80	81
<b>Religion</b>				
No religion	49	67	60	71
Christian (all denominations)	43	28	35	25
Other religions	8	5	5	4
<b>Highest qualification</b>				
Level 5	15	32	23	36
Level 4	34	57	61	55
Level 3	18	5	8	3
Level 2 and below	33	6	8	5
<b>Social class/occupation of parent</b>				
Managers, directors & senior officials	12	17	6	22
Professional occupations	21	48	54	46
Associate professional & technical occupations	9	15	13	16
Administrative & secretarial occupations	7	7	10	6
Skilled trades occupations	21	5	8	4
Caring, leisure & other service occupations	4	4	10	1
Sales & customer service occupations	5	2	*	3
Process, plant & machine operatives	10	1	*	1
Elementary occupations	10	1	*	1
<b>All (n)</b>	<b>32,212,000</b>	<b>108,000</b>	<b>34,000</b>	<b>74,000</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey quarterly tables, averaged over four quarters Jan/Mar 2021 to Oct/Dec 2021.

Weighted to ONS 2020 population estimates.

Note: Religion statistics apply to GB only, NI not included



### 3. Change in journalism diversity

The table below shows the change from 2016 to the latest 2021 data. It should be borne in mind that these are (in LFS terms) small sample sizes and changes observed in the data below may well be the result of sampling variability rather than 'real' changes in the underlying population and we should ideally see a pattern of change over time rather than compare just two points.

Again, perhaps the most striking point of the data is not one that relates to diversity but to the overall number of working journalists. At 108,000, this is an increase of 12,000 over the 2020 level of 96,000, which itself is an increase on the 2018 level of 78,000.

#### Looking at the trends in diversity indicators:

- **sex:** the latest 2021 data shows a return to the levels of women employed in journalism seen in 2016 and 2018 of just below half (47 per cent).
- **age:** the 2021 data suggests that the journalism workforce is getting younger, with the proportion aged below 25 increasing from four per cent in 2018 to seven per cent in 2020 and nine per cent in 2021. This may be due to factors such as (i) an expanding number of non-graduate entrants via apprenticeship programmes and (ii) the overall growth of the occupation, with greater numbers entering at junior levels;
- **ethnicity:** there is a decrease in the proportion coming from white ethnic groups, from 94 per cent in 2018, to 92 per cent in 2020 and 87 per cent in 2021, and a corresponding increase in those coming from other ethnic groups (from six per cent in 2018, eight per cent in 2020 and 13 per cent in 2021). This is bringing employment in journalism in line with employment across all UK-sectors, although as journalism remains concentrated in London and metropolitan areas, which have higher proportions of ethnic groups, it could be argued that further progress is needed;
- **nationality:** there is little change in the proportion with UK nationality (from 92 per cent, 90 per cent and 91 per cent in 2018, 2020 and 2021);
- **health and disability:** there is an increase in the proportion with a disability, from 15 per cent in 2018, to 16 per cent in 2020 and to 19 per cent in 2021. This reflects changes across the economy, where we have seen (i) an increase in the percentage willing to declare a health problem/disability (and Covid has played a part in this) but also (ii) an increase in the proportion of those with a health problem/disability being able to find work;
- **religion:** the proportion who hold no religion has increased from 62 per cent in 2018 to 67 per cent in 2021. Those who are of Christian faith has fallen from 34 per cent in 2018 to 28 per cent in 2021;
- **qualification:** as we have seen above, those working in journalism have long been very highly qualified. The data suggests that this has started to plateau, with the proportion having a level 4 qualification and above staying at 89 per cent. The proportion with low or no qualifications remains low, and is now at six per cent;
- **social class:** there is an increase in the proportion coming from the highest social classes (from 75 per cent in 2020 to 80 per cent in 2021), which takes it beyond the level seen in 2016. This suggests there is no real sign of an increase in the proportion of journalists coming from middle and lower social groups.

**Table 2:** Journalists' diversity data, change 2016 - 2021

	2016	2018	2020	2021
	%	%	%	%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	55	54	47	53
Female	45	46	53	47
<b>Age</b>				
Under 25	5	4	7	9
25-29	11	12	16	12
30-39	25	19	29	24
40-49	27	32	22	20
50 and over	32	34	26	35
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	90	94	92	87
Other ethnic groups	10	6	8	13
<b>Nationality</b>				
UK	-	92	90	91
EU27	-	3	5	5
Rest of world	-	5	5	4
<b>Health/disability</b>				
Have work limiting health problem/disability	10	15	16	19
No work limiting health problem/disability	90	85	84	80
<b>Religion</b>				
No religion	-	62	58	67
Christian (all denominations)	-	34	39	28
Other religions	-	4	3	5
<b>Highest qualification</b>				
Level 5	32	32	31	32
Level 4	55	55	58	57
Level 3	7	6	7	5
Level 2 and below	7	6	4	6
<b>Social class/occupation of parent</b>				
Managers, directors & senior officials	23	19	14	17
Professional occupations	35	24	43	48
Associate professional & technical occupations	14	12	18	15
Administrative & secretarial occupations	7	13	2	7
Skilled trades occupations	9	18	12	5
Caring, leisure & other service occupations	*	1	1	4
Sales & customer service occupations	4	3	2	2
Process, plant & machine operatives	3	4	7	1
Elementary occupations	3	5	1	1
<b>All (n)</b>	<b>73,000</b>	<b>78,000</b>	<b>96,000</b>	<b>108,000</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2016, 2018, 2020 & 2021

Note: Religion statistics apply to GB only, NI not included

## 4. Concluding remarks

The 2021 data shows a continued increase in the number of journalists working in the economy, up from 78,000 in 2018, to 96,000 in 2020 and 108,000 in 2021. The nature of this employment growth is not the subject of this diversity paper, but will be addressed elsewhere in the NCTJ's research programme<sup>5</sup>.

With specific regard to diversity, we have to be careful not to read too much into changes over a limited number of time points: the LFS is a sample survey and it is to be expected that there will be changes which are due to the vagaries of the research method as much as underlying trends. This is particularly the case when examining a relatively small subset of the data, such as journalists.

Having said that, the data suggests that characteristics of those working as journalists are not dissimilar to those working across the economy, in terms of sex, age, ethnicity or health and disability. Where those working as journalists do differ markedly is in terms of:

- ethnicity of those working in more senior journalism roles; and
- social class, where journalists are much more likely to have a parent (or head of household) who worked in a higher-level occupation and far less likely to have a parent in one of the two lowest occupations. There do not appear to be any underlying changes in this disparity;

The continued very high levels of qualification attainment of journalists may be a reason behind this. Journalism employers (mainly) recruit graduates as new entrants, but entrants to higher education are not themselves representative of the wider population. To the extent that journalism continues to recruit mainly from a pool which is itself under-representative of individuals from lower social groups, it is likely that under-representation will continue.



<sup>5</sup> This is being explored in the ongoing project 'Emerging skills for journalists' and will be examined further in the next Journalists at Work research project, currently scheduled for 2023.



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