



# Diversity in Journalism

An update on the characteristics of journalists

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“ We must encourage those from all walks of life into journalism roles, remove the barriers and support people in their careers so they can join the decision-makers.”

Joanne Butcher,  
chief executive, NCTJ

# Foreword

## Diversifying the journalism profession is at the heart of everything we do at the NCTJ.

This annual report on the characteristics of UK journalists helps us measure and reflect on our progress.

Changing an entrenched culture, as the latest data in the report on diversity shows, is one of the toughest challenges for us all alongside overcoming the economic and social threats to quality journalism and trusted news.

It's pleasing to see that more people with health issues and disabilities are working in journalism and women are being promoted equally into senior roles, even though there has been a downturn in the number of women working in journalism overall.

There has been some progress but there are no easy answers to how we can attract people from disadvantaged backgrounds into journalism and promote journalists from under-represented ethnic groups into senior roles.

We all need to work together to make this happen. We must encourage those from all walks of life into journalism roles, remove the barriers and support people in their careers so they can join the decision-makers. We should place equal value on alternative, non-graduate entry points and boost recruitment and promotion from this talent pool.

To mark publication of this report, the NCTJ is announcing a major investment in outreach work with our partners in the media and education sectors. This work aims to boost recruitment of school leavers onto our further education college courses as well as to diversify cohorts on accredited university courses. We want to increase applications to the Journalism Diversity Fund, which has already supported more than 500 journalists, and to provide a bigger pool of diverse talent for employers to recruit from.

Thanks to further investment from the Google News Initiative, we continue to develop the Journalism Skills Academy, which offers an ever-increasing range of professional training for journalists throughout their careers. Our exciting new leadership programme is designed to strengthen the quality of leadership across the industry – nurturing diverse, high-performing, effective editorial leaders.

We are delighted, for the first time, to have the opportunity in this report to add statistics about sexual orientation. Including this data alongside all the other characteristics of journalists – employment levels, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, health and disability, religion, qualification and social class – enriches the information we have about journalists.

After so many years of remarkable growth, we are reporting a downturn in the employment of journalists. The shedding of journalism jobs comes at a time when many are finding it more challenging to recruit and retain talent. This will be explored in more detail in upcoming research to be published in a new edition of *Journalists at Work* next year.

We hope you find this report useful and informative and we look forward to debating the issues and taking action with you all.



**Joanne Butcher**  
Chief executive of the NCTJ



# Diversity in Journalism

## 1. Background

This research report updates the NCTJ's analysis of journalists' diversity characteristics to 2022<sup>1</sup>. This is 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 reports, published in 2017 and 2022, and *Journalists at Work*, published in 2018.

Data is presented on the most detailed classifications of journalism available, which are the two 'four-digit' Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, which is a divide based on experience and seniority. The 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 website and other periodicals.

In the analysis below we show the data for both these occupations separately and then also combine them into a single 'all-journalists' grouping.

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 spanning all sectors.

<sup>1</sup> See the 2022 report '*Diversity in Journalism: an update on the characteristics of journalists*', May 2022 at: <https://www.nctj.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Diversity-in-journalism-2022.pdf>.

<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.

The number of Journalists identified as working is estimated in 2022 at 101,500, with 39,900 working as newspaper, periodical and broadcast editors (39 per cent of the total) and 61,600 as newspaper, periodical and broadcast journalists and reporters (61 per cent). This is a fall in the number of working journalists from that found in 2021 which, at 108,000, was the highest level of journalism employment ever recorded in the LFS. Whilst this is not a diversity matter for this report, it may be significant that there is a drop for the first time in many years which could be a one off or the start of change in underlying trend.

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

- **sex:** the proportion of journalists who are women is lower than the proportion of women working across all the economy (41 per cent compared to 48 per cent). The proportion of women in senior journalism roles (SOC 2491) is actually higher (at 47 per cent) than in the more junior roles (37 per cent);
- **age:** five per cent of journalists are under the age of 25 compared to 11 per cent of all in employment. Just over a third (35 per cent) are aged 50 and over compared to just under a third (32 per cent) of all in work. 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 role (SOC2491) than in the more junior role (SOC2492): seven per cent of editors are aged below the age of 30 compared to 30 per cent of journalists and reporters;
- **ethnicity:** 88 per cent of journalists come from white ethnic groups, just higher than all UK workers (86 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 six per cent of editors. This would suggest that there are some issues with diversity in more senior levels of journalism;
- **nationality:** 87 per cent of journalists were born in the UK, with five per cent from the EU27 and eight 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 18 per cent of the more senior editorial role (SOC2491) being non-UK compared to 11 per cent of the more junior journalist and reporter roles (SOC 2492);
- **health and disability:** 22 per cent of journalists report having a work-limiting health issue or disability, higher than the level all UK workers (18 per cent);
- **religion:** 60 per cent of journalists report as having no religion compared to 49 per cent of all UK workers. Twenty-seven per cent of journalists state that they are Christian, lower than the 41 per cent for all UK workers. Thirteen per cent of Journalists identify as having some other religion<sup>4</sup>, compared to 10 per cent of all in UK-employment;

<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, some are uncomfortable with the phrase 'minority' as it can sometimes (without intentional purpose) invoke feelings that they are groups that are subordinate, or lacking power in society regardless of skin colour and country of origin. We have decided that throughout this report we will use the term 'other ethnic groups'.

<sup>4</sup> This 'other religion' grouping gathers together data for Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and 'any other religion' religious groups, as sample size restrictions mean we cannot show this data at this level.

- **qualification level<sup>5</sup>:** journalists are highly qualified. Eighty-two per cent are qualified at RQF Level 6 or above, compared to 38 per cent of all in work. Only three per cent are qualified at RQF level 2 or below compared to 26 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 88 per cent qualified to RQF 6 and above compared to 72 per cent – though this may reflect the changing entry requirements for more recent entrants and the increase in university participation;
- **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. Seventy-two per cent of journalists had a parent in one of the three highest occupational groups, compared to 44 per cent all UK workers. Fourteen per cent have a parent in the lowest two occupations compared to 19 per cent of all workers. It is also notable the relative low proportion of journalists who have parents in the skilled trades occupations<sup>6</sup> at eight per cent compared to 20 per cent for all those in work. Again, it is the more junior journalists and reporters (SOC 2492) who appear to be less socially diverse than the more senior editors (SOC 2491), with 75 per cent having a parent in high-level occupations compared to 69 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> This year the data on qualification levels has changed to be presented on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) as opposed to NVQ levels. The RQF covers general and vocational qualifications and is regulated by OFQUAL in England. It is split into nine levels: entry level (further subdivided into sub-levels one to three) and levels one to eight.

<sup>6</sup> Which includes electrical trades, construction and building trades, etc.



**Table 1:** Diversity data, journalists and all-in work compared, UK, 2022

	All in work (UK)	Journalists		
	%	All journalists %	2491: Editors %	2492: Journalists & reporters %
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	52	59	53	63
Female	48	41	47	37
<b>Age</b>				
Under 25	11	5	0	8
25-29	11	16	7	22
30-39	23	23	27	20
40-49	22	21	28	18
50 and over	32	35	38	33
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	86	88	93	85
Other ethnic groups	13	12	6	14
<b>Nationality</b>				
UK	87	87	82	89
EU27	7	5	5	5
Rest of world	5	8	13	6
<b>Health/disability</b>				
Have work limiting health problem/disability	18	22	21	23
No work limiting health problem/disability	81	77	79	77
<b>Religion</b>				
No religion	49	60	58	61
Christian (all denominations)	41	27	33	24
Other religions	10	13	9	15
<b>Highest qualification</b>				
RQF 7 & 8	16	32	24	38
RQF 6	22	50	48	50
RQF 5	11	7	15	2
RQF 4	3	2	0	3
RQF 3	21	6	8	4
RQF 2 and below	26	3	4	2
<b>Social class/occupation of parent</b>				
Managers, Directors & Senior Officials	12	25	27	24
Professional Occupations	22	32	26	36
Associate Professional & Technical Occupations	10	15	16	15
Administrative & Secretarial Occupations	8	3	9	0
Skilled Trades Occupations	20	8	0	12
Caring, Leisure & Other Service Occupations	4	0	0	0
Sales & Customer Service Occupations	5	2	1	3
Process, Plant & Machine Operatives	10	11	17	8
Elementary Occupations	9	3	4	2
<b>All (n)</b>	<b>32,552,000</b>	<b>101,500</b>	<b>39,900</b>	<b>61,600</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey quarterly tables, averaged over four quarters Jan/Mar 2022 to Oct/Dec 2022.

Weighted to ONS 2020 population estimates.

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

- **Sexual orientation:** New data is starting to become available on sexual orientation. Currently this has been collected by the ONS in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as ‘experimental’ data and additionally in the 2021 Census.

As this is new data, it is important to understand its nature. The ONS define sexual orientation as being an ‘umbrella term covering sexual identity, attraction and behaviour’. The ONS asks respondents whether they classify themselves as being heterosexual or straight, gay or lesbian, bisexual or other. All the questions are asked only to respondents aged 16 and over and the questions are voluntary. The ONS note that the sample sizes for the non-heterosexual/non-straight categories are low and that estimates should be used with caution<sup>7</sup>.

The LFS data suggests that 96 per cent of the UK population are heterosexual or straight, with two per cent gay or lesbian, one per cent bisexual and one per cent other. A higher proportion of journalists are non-heterosexual/non-straight, with three per cent responding as gay or lesbian, three per cent bisexual and five per cent other; 89 per cent of journalists report as being straight.

The Census data is broadly consistent with the LFS data. It also suggests that 96 per cent of those in work are heterosexual or straight, with two per cent gay or lesbian, one per cent bisexual and less than half of one per cent classifying themselves in an ‘other’ category. As with the LFS data, a lower proportion is heterosexual or straight (92 per cent) and a higher proportion of journalists are non-heterosexual or straight, with four per cent gay or lesbian, four per cent bisexual and one per cent other.

**Table 2:** Diversity data, journalists and all-in-work compared, UK, 2020/21

	Labour Force Survey		Census of Population	
	All (UK) %	Journalists %	All (UK) %	Journalists %
Heterosexual or straight	96	89	96	92
Gay or lesbian	2	3	2	4
Bisexual	1	3	1	4
Other	1	5	*	1

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2020 and the 2021 Census of Population.

Note: UK, aged 16+.

<sup>7</sup> Further points to note on this data are that (i) the LFS data is only available from the 2020 LFS and so can only be produced on the basis of the ‘old’ (ie 2010) SOC classification), (ii) the LFS data is for all the UK, whilst the Census data is only for England and Wales, (iii) the LFS data compares journalists’ sexual orientation with the all-UK population (not just those in work) whilst the Census data compares the characteristics of the working journalists with those of all others in work and (iv) the Census data has a greater degree of breakdown for ‘other’ sexual orientation than is available in the LFS.



### 3. Change in journalism diversity

The table below shows the change from 2016 to the latest 2022 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.

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

- **sex:** the latest 2022 data shows an increase in the proportion of men working in journalism to 59 per cent, the highest level recorded in the LFS data;
- **age:** the 2022 data shows a reversal of the trend for the journalism workforce to be getting younger, with the proportion aged below 25 decreasing from nine per cent in 2021 to five per cent in 2022 (a return to the 2018-19 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, 87 per cent in 2021 and 88 per cent in 2022. There is a corresponding increase in those coming from other ethnic groups (from six per cent in 2018, eight per cent in 2020, 13 per cent in 2021 and 12 per cent in 2022). 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 other ethnic groups, it could be argued that further progress is needed;
- **nationality:** the proportion with UK nationality has declined in 2022, with an increase particularly in the proportion coming from the rest of the World (from four to eight per cent);
- **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, 19 per cent in 2021 and 22 per cent in 2022. This reflects changes across the economy, where we have seen (i) an increase in the percentage willing to declare a health issue/disability) but also (ii) an increase in the proportion of those with a health issue/disability being able to find work. Covid has played a part in this;
- **religion:** the proportion who are of Christian faith has fallen from 34 per cent in 2018 to 27 per cent in 2022. There is an increase in those with other religions at 13 per cent, although whether this is a sustained change needs to be examined in future reports;
- **qualification<sup>8</sup>:** as discussed above, those working in journalism have long been highly qualified. The data suggests, as at last year, that this has started to plateau, with the proportion having a RQF level 4 and above or NVQ level 4 and higher qualifications at 91 per cent. The proportion with no or low qualifications (level 2 or below) remains low (and is now at three per cent);
- **social class:** the proportion coming from the highest social classes is at 72 per cent, lower than 2020 and 2021, and at the same level as 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. However, there has been an increase in the proportion coming from the lowest social group from two to 14 per cent. Again, this may be a result of the vagaries of the survey data and we need to wait to see whether this is a sustained change over time.

<sup>8</sup> Previous diversity reports have used 'NVQ levels' to show qualification levels. The Labour Force Survey has now moved to 'RQF levels' which have nine qualification levels, running from 'entry level' and level 1 through to level 8 (which equals a doctorate).

**Table 3:** Journalists' diversity data, change 2016 - 2022

	2016	2018	2020	2021	2022
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	55	54	47	53	59
Female	45	46	53	47	41
<b>Age</b>					
Under 25	5	4	7	9	5
25-29	11	12	16	12	16
30-39	25	19	29	24	23
40-49	27	32	22	20	21
50 and over	32	34	26	35	35
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
White	90	94	92	87	88
Other ethnic groups	10	6	8	13	12
<b>Nationality</b>					
UK	-	92	90	91	87
EU27	-	3	5	5	5
Rest of world	-	5	5	4	8
<b>Health/disability</b>					
Have work limiting health problem/disability	10	15	16	19	22
No work limiting health problem/disability	90	85	84	80	77
<b>Religion</b>					
No religion	-	62	58	67	60
Christian (all denominations)	-	34	39	28	27
Other religions	-	4	3	5	13
<b>Highest qualification</b>					
RQF 7 & 8/Level 5	32	32	32	32	32
RQF 4, 5 & 6/Level 4	55	55	58	57	59
RQF 3 /Level 3	7	6	7	5	6
RQF 2 and below	7	6	4	6	3
<b>Social class/occupation of parent</b>					
Managers, Directors & Senior Officials	23	19	14	17	25
Professional Occupations	35	24	43	48	32
Associate Professional & Technical Occupations	14	12	18	15	15
Administrative & Secretarial Occupations	7	13	2	7	3
Skilled Trades Occupations	9	18	12	5	8
Caring, Leisure & Other Service Occupations	*	1	1	4	0
Sales & Customer Service Occupations	4	3	2	2	2
Process, Plant & Machine Operatives	3	4	7	1	11
Elementary Occupations	3	5	1	1	3
<b>All (n)</b>	<b>73,000</b>	<b>78,000</b>	<b>96,000</b>	<b>108,000</b>	<b>101,500</b>

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

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

## 4. Concluding remarks

The 2022 data shows a fall in the number of journalists working in the economy, down to 101,500 from 108,000 in 2021. The nature of this employment change is not the subject of this diversity paper and will be explored at greater length in the NCTJ's research programme<sup>9</sup>.

With 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 are 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. It is also the case that recent experiences (particularly the Covid-related lockdowns) have subjected the economy to a series of stresses and there may be impacts on the structure of the economy that we do not understand as yet.

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

- sex, with relatively fewer women; and
- social class, where it remains the case that journalists are much more likely to have a parent (or head of household) who work (or worked) in a higher-level occupation. There do not appear to be any consistent changes impacting on this disparity, although the latest data does suggest some change in the balance between those coming from middle and lower social class groups (with an increase in the proportion coming from households with parents in the lowest occupational levels).

In addition, there are some indications that there are issues relating to ethnicity of those working in more senior journalism roles.

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

We have presented, for the first time, data on sexual orientation of journalists using data from two sources, the LFS and the 2021 Census of Population. Both these data sources suggest that journalists are more likely to classify themselves as being gay or lesbian, bisexual or of other sexual orientation than the overall population.

<sup>9</sup> This has been explored in the NCTJ publication *'Emerging Skills for Journalists'* and will be examined further in the next *'Journalists at Work'* research project, scheduled to begin summer 2023.



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