



Emerging skills for journalists



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Acknowledgements

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All views and opinions expressed within this report are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the National Council for the Training of Journalists.

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Introduction

This report on 'Emerging Skills for Journalists' identifies the issues affecting journalism and the impact these changes are having. It builds on earlier research¹ which successfully fed into the provision of journalism training and has been recognised as making an important contribution to the understanding of the changes impacting on journalistic employment and skills. The intervening years since that report was published have seen continued changes both to the business landscape and to how journalists do their jobs. It is therefore timely to return to the issue of how the world in which journalists work is changing.

Understanding changing skills needs is complicated because it needs to identify the issues which are driving change and then place them within the context of the business environment. To do this, the research followed the same broad approach which was successfully applied in the 2014 work:

- 1. Develop a discussion paper on the development of journalists' skills**
- 2. Undertake a consultation process, whereby we (i) distributed the discussion paper to selected individuals/organisations (employers, education and training providers, employee representative groups) and (ii) arrange for them to give their views back to us on a range of developed questions. The list of consultees is listed at Annex 1, though their individual contributions have been anonymised**
- 3. Develop the responses into this final report on the future of journalism as we see it**

This paper explores four areas:

- **Global trends that are impacting on employment and skills**
- **More specific developments in the world of journalism**
- **Recent changes in journalism in terms of employment levels, employment patterns and skills**
- **A discussion on how these factors combined will impact on journalism in the next few years**

This report has greatly benefited from insightful comments from the NCTJ's staff and board members, but any views or opinions expressed in the paper remain those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the NCTJ.

It goes without saying that recent events (Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic, the Ukraine war, the cost of living crisis) are having significant impacts on the economy and, within that, on people working as journalists. However, while there are clearly significant negative effects on the economy, it is unclear what the longer-term impacts will be – whether these will be short lived as the economy bounces back or whether there will be longer term effects. In previous 'shocks', such as the 2008

¹ *Emerging skills for journalists*, National Council for the Training of Journalists, 2014

financial market crash, the key drivers of employment re-asserted themselves and employment trends returned to their long-term growth path. If this is repeated, the short-term impacts are most likely to be felt in a quantitative way – the number of people working and working in a journalism capacity. However, there is also a school of thought that a major impact of these events is an ‘acceleration effect’, whereby trends which were happening, albeit slowly, have been concentrated in a much shorter time frame. In which case, they may have brought about more fundamental changes.

In this paper (while there is a brief discussion of the numerical trends) our interests are more focused on the qualitative changes affecting journalism: where and how people are working as journalists. And, assuming that the key drivers are not fundamentally altered, it is possible that the recent events will not impact on the nature of these longer-term changes, although they may have hastened the speed in which they are being introduced.

Global trends

While the emphasis of our project is the future of journalism, here we start our analysis on the strong body of evidence on the major drivers of change in the UK and global labour market. Research in this area includes foresighting projects undertaken by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills², Government Office for Science³ and NESTA⁴, as well as by international communities including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁵, World Economic Forum (WEF)⁶ and International Labour Organization (ILO)⁷. This allows us to start from a broad perspective, enabling us to look beyond current influencers to identify potential disruptors. Indeed, some of the most significant trends impacting the world of work – from automation and AI to Britain’s exit from the EU – have in the past been described as disruptors or wild cards. This body of research identifies the following themes:

Social and demographic change

- **The ageing of the population, with the UK’s population aged 65 and over set to increase by 42 per cent, whereas the percentage of those aged 14 – 64 is projected to grow by three per cent**
- **Shifts in migration patterns, with the level of in-migration into the UK expected to diminish and (as a result of Brexit) to re-balance away from migrants from the EU. The ethnic make-up of the workforce will continue to change**
- **Changing social and consumer trends, with consumption patterns varying markedly over lifetime. Older households spend a higher proportion of their income on recreation and culture. At the same time the increased purchasing power of millennials is shaping a new demand for goods: their tech-savviness and tendency to engage in entertainment and gather information through the internet is leading to new models of online and mobile on-demand consumption, where purchase/ownership is no longer a need**
- **Changing customer choices and expectations about the type and quality of products and services, the development of niche consumer markets, consumer preference for tailored goods and services, and rising consumer expectations about quality**

Technological change has had, and will continue to have, a major impact on work. The number and type of jobs available has been dramatically changed by technological innovations, including automation, cloud computing, digital communications and artificial intelligence (AI). In some areas,

² UKCES (2014) The future of work: jobs and skills in 2030

³ Government Office for Science (2017) Future of Skills & Lifelong Learning

⁴ NESTA and Pearson (2017) Future of Skills: Employment in 2030

⁵ OECD (2017) Future of Work and Skills

⁶ WEF (2016) The Future of Jobs

⁷ ILO (2017) Future of Work, various publications

new technologies are creating demand for higher-level skills, shifting skill needs and displacing employment in some occupations, while creating new jobs in other areas.⁸ Changing technology also makes it possible to redesign jobs, which can be split into sets of smaller tasks that can be performed remotely, allowing flexibility and freelance work and supporting the 'gig-economy', job sharing, etc.

Economics and globalisation

- **Shifting economic power, with a shift away from the developed economies of the west to emerging economies around the world**
- **The emergence of new overseas markets**
- **Increasingly integrated labour markets, with the emergence of reverse migration, with immigrants living in the UK being attracted away**

Politics and the government can impact across a range of areas: for example, the impact of Brexit or structural changes vis-à-vis the green economy, which is closely linked to government policy or policy change. At the time of writing, the impacts of Brexit are still revealing themselves but which are, broadly, negatively impacting business investment and consumer spending.

A general consensus around the need for action to tackle **environmental sustainability and climate change** will impact on a range of issues such as the management of pollution, changes in demand for different types of energy and availability and use of water and food. As we are currently seeing, there are also events such as the coronavirus pandemic, which had very significant effects, which have yet to be fully revealed or understood.

The last two years has seen the UK economy subject to a series of economic shocks which have rarely been seen before. The combined impact of the coronavirus-related lockdowns (which led to government intervention on unprecedented peacetime levels), the Brexit departure, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (and the associated international sanctions) and the cost-of-living crisis has left the economy in an uncertain and unsettled position. Any assessment of future employment and skills needs to take account of the economic shocks which have impacted on the economy.

The **coronavirus pandemic** has had a significant impact, with the effect of lockdowns and public health restrictions reaching various degrees of severity. The UK economy suffered the largest economic shock since recorded data, with output falling by 9.4 per cent in 2020, one of the largest economic contractions among the major advanced economies. The government put in place a range of virus-related rescue support to households, businesses and public services with a total cost of £344 billion at the time of writing.

⁸ RSA, *The Age of Automation: Artificial Intelligence, robotics and the future of low skilled work*, B Deloit and F Waller-Stephens, 2017

Added to this uncertainty is the impact of **Brexit**. The government has concluded the UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) that will govern the future trading relationship between the UK and the EU. The government's Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) takes a view on the TCA:

- **It has broadly retained the position of no tariffs or quotas on goods, subject to these meeting appropriate qualifying conditions (for example, rules of origin) with additional commitments to streamline some aspects of customs administration**
- **It introduces significant barriers to trade in services, with (i) no mutual recognition of professional qualifications⁹, (ii) limited mobility for service workers, with this now being subject to significant restrictions, (iii) more complex market access for services with the introduction of rules in supplying services to each member state¹⁰ and (iv) with the deal making little mention of financial services and with many of the EU's unilateral equivalence decisions for the UK being postponed¹¹**

Analysis¹² suggests that, during the next 15 years, the impact of leaving the EU will reduce the long-run productivity of the UK by around four per cent.

While, first and foremost, the **Russian invasion of Ukraine** is a human tragedy, it also has repercussions for the global and UK economies. It has directly pushed (already high) gas and oil prices to their highest levels in more than a decade. The OBR has assumed that the Russian invasion will reduce global GDP growth by 0.5 percentage points in 2022.

With these uncertainties in mind, the OBR has set out its central scenarios¹³ for the path of the economy:

- **During the lockdown GDP fell dramatically (by 9.4 per cent over the course of 2020). The bounce-back from this low produced a high level of growth in 2021 (with a 7.5 per cent increase). The forecast suggests some face further contraction in 2023 and as a result, the GDP level will not return to its 2019 level until the end of 2024. From this point, increases in GDP are forecast to return to levels closer to their long-term trend**
- **Inflation, which has not been a major policy consideration for some time, has increased rapidly, leading to concerns about a cost-of-living crisis. The OBR suggests these have peaked at a yearly average of 9.1 per cent in 2022, before decreasing through 2023 and returning to within the Bank of England's target rate (ie below two per cent) by 2024. There are some**

⁹ While there is a broad ambition to mutually recognise professional qualifications, no qualifications have yet been recognised

¹⁰ This essentially means that businesses will need to establish a new commercial presence within the EU

¹¹ The EU and the UK are aiming to agree a memorandum of understanding on the future framework for financial services regulation over the remainder of the year

¹² Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and fiscal outlook*, March 2022

¹³ Office for Budget Responsibility, *Economic and fiscal outlook*, March 2022. These will be next updated in August 2022

concerns about inflation becoming embedded, which is why the Bank of England has started to take measures against inflation by increasing interest rates

- During the downturn, the falls in GDP were not accompanied by the ‘typical’ falls in employment, reflecting the impact of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), with millions of employees kept on the payroll while not working¹⁴, and assistance to the self-employed¹⁵. As a result, employment has not, and is not forecast, to decline to anywhere near the same extent as GDP, with an decrease from 2021 to 2022 of 100,000, increasing thereafter
- It is expected that the unemployment rate will increase as a result of the recession in 2023 to a high of 4.4 per cent in 2024. It is forecast to decline thereafter

Table 1: Overview of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) economy-wide forecast

	Outturn		Forecast				
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
GDP (% change on year earlier)	7.6	4.0	-0.2	1.8	2.5	2.1	1.9
GDP levels (2019 = 100)	95.4	99.3	99.1	100.9	103.3	105.5	107.5
Inflation (CPI)	2.6	9.1	6.1	0.9	0.1	0.5	1.6
Employment (million)	32.4	32.7	32.8	32.8	33.1	33.4	33.7
Unemployment rate (%)	4.5	3.7	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.1

Source: OBR, March 2023

¹⁴ In the first lockdown, 8.3million jobs (about a quarter of employees) were furloughed

¹⁵ It is expected that the support provided by these two schemes will eventually total £107billion

Drivers of change in journalism

The media ecosystem is facing challenges on every front: digital disruption and the commoditisation of news; the erosion of trust; a changing funding dynamic; and the increasing dominance of platforms. Companies like Google, Amazon, Meta and Apple have accumulated power in ways that existing regulatory and intellectual frameworks struggle to comprehend and democratic societies may require new legal and conceptual tools if they are to adequately understand and (if necessary) check the economic might of these companies. There is an increasing need to understand how this changing landscape impacts on the control of personal data and the flow of news, information and public opinion.

In this section we discuss how these broader developments specifically impact on journalism, including (i) the changing market for news, (ii) the changing business model of news publishers and (iii) the degree of political involvement in journalism and in (mainly local) news provision.

3.1 Changing market for news

While the Cairncross Review¹⁶ shows that there is no apparent large-scale decline in the UK public's attitude to news, other research suggests that there are significant changes. Cairncross reports that people still regard news as being important, with almost everyone reading, listening to or looking at news at least once a week. More recent Ofcom research on news consumption¹⁷ shows that 64 per cent of adults think it is important for 'society overall' that broadcasters provide current affairs programming, more than the 54 per cent who say it is important to them personally. However, the Reuters Digital News Report¹⁸ suggests that both news consumption and trust have recently dipped – partly reversing strong gains by many news brands during the Covid crisis. Reuters suggests that almost half of people say that they avoid the news sometimes or often – almost twice the level seen in 2016.

Certainly, the way that people consume news has changed – readers have moved to consuming news online and it seems unlikely that they will return to print. The audience reach of print and online newspapers has decreased, driven by reductions in print, with online newspaper reach remaining steady. Five of the top six TV channels have seen a decreased reach among adults.

Different age groups consume news very differently, with younger age groups more likely to use the internet and social media for news, while their older counterparts prefer print, radio and TV. Among teens, social media is overtaking traditional channels, with Instagram, TikTok and YouTube now being the top three most-used sources.

¹⁶ The Cairncross Review, *A Sustainable Future for Journalism*, 2019

¹⁷ Jigsaw Research, *News consumption in the UK: 2022*, Ofcom, 2022

¹⁸ Reuters Institute, *Digital News Report 2022*

The shift in news consumption to online and mobile also seems to have changed habits and attitudes to news. Overall, people spend less time on news as digital technology and tools allow them to cherry-pick the content they want without having sight of other news stories. Meanwhile news publishers are using data and insight to see what most people want to read online and for how long – and the temptation is therefore to provide that and just that.

Attitudes to news (on measures such as quality, accuracy, trustworthiness and impartiality) remain consistent, with TV performing strongest and social media performing least well. However, Reuters finds that trust in the news has declined since the Brexit referendum and increasingly polarised debates about politics and culture.

3.2 Changing business models

The business model in which much of journalism is practised is changing fast. The revenues which have traditionally underpinned local and regional journalism have essentially collapsed, due to a combination of factors:

- **Collapsing revenues from print advertising. Cairncross¹⁹ cites evidence that while in 2007 advertising in the national and local press accounted for 40 per cent of the total UK advertising spend, by 2017 this had fallen to 12 per cent. In financial terms, this has meant that while in 2007 the press received £4.6billion, this had fallen to £1.4billion in 2017**
- **Declining press revenues from print circulation, from £2.2billion in 2007 to £1.7billion in 2017**

The problem is one of **revenue** decline rather than **audience** decline. Demand for news content remains high, with 48million people a month now reading newspapers in print and online, and growing. But digital advertising revenues have not followed these audiences, with the press capturing just £487million in 2017, less than five per cent of the digital advertising market. The current inflationary pressures will feed through to cost increases for newsprint and printing, leading to the print sector being squeezed from both sides. These will add further pressure onto the publishing business models, particularly when combined with expected lower levels of discretionary spending.

News publishers have spent much of the last decade trying to create an alternative business model to replace that which has gone, with limited success. Some have developed subscription models but most have chased online advertising, given that people now expect to access their news for free. However, it is reasonable to assert that a common business model has not yet emerged; a concern given the role of news publishers as the biggest investors in news production in the UK. It is possible that there is no longer a single business model and that business in this sector will occupy different business spaces.

¹⁹ Cairncross, *op cit*

Research commissioned for the DCMS²⁰ suggests that there is a clear pattern of declining sustainability in the press sector since 2010, consistent with patterns of reduced income and increased costs, discussed above, combined with a reduction in investment and related capital employed in the sector. This suggests that the shift towards digitisation may not be sufficient to offset the decline in more traditional areas. While it might be the case that digital models themselves are commercially viable, the implication is that legacy models may largely disappear. The local and regional press is thought to be generally less resilient than the national press.

With a broader interest in journalism, the business model of **publishers** is not the only one in which we are interested. Audience demand for broadcasting output appears to be in a positive position. As noted by Ofcom²¹, broadcast TV (on a TV set) has a mass reach, with 89 per cent of individuals watching TV at least once a week. Public sector broadcasting (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) remains highly valued by viewers and Ofcom anticipates that they will continue to be an integral part of the TV landscape for decades to come. And news reporting remains a key offer of these channels: Ofcom²² notes that television is the most-used platform among UK adults for news, with a steady increase in social media as a distributor of news produced by others. Live radio continues to have a wide reach, with nine out of 10 adults listening to radio at least once a week. There is also evidence that UK adults are now consuming news more actively via social media, although they may be unaware of the original sources of that news (largely news publishers and broadcasters).

However, the situation regarding the robustness of TV and broadcasting business models is also open to debate. There are ongoing questions about the BBC licence fee (which has led to announcements of substantial staff reductions), ITV and other channels are reliant on commercial revenues, including digital advertising which, as we have seen, may have migrated elsewhere. And there will be increasing competition from other broadcasters such as Netflix and Amazon.

3.3 Ensuring the provision of public interest news

The provision of news coverage in the UK has long been the subject of political interest. At the time of the NCTJ's last emerging skills report²³, the main area of concern was the impact, if any, of the Leveson report. The concerns of the development of risk-averse journalism seem to have not been realised, but the increasing emphasis on ethical practice appears to have improved journalism practices, partly as a result of increased training in ethics and improved management practices.

A more pressing public policy concern at the time of writing is the provision of 'public interest news', reflected in the Cairncross Review. This argues that, as a result of falling revenues, cutting costs has led to a lessening of the provision of types of public interest news, but particularly among local-level

²⁰ Economic Insight Ltd, *Press Sector Financial Sustainability*, 2021

²¹ Media Nations: UK 2019, Ofcom, 2019

²² News Consumption in the UK: 2019, Jigsaw Research for Ofcom, 2019

²³ *Emerging skills for journalists*, NCTJ, 2014

democracy reporting. Cairncross concludes that the government has a role in helping publishers adapt and that this should support public interest news providers and in the immediate future, government should look to plug the gap to ensure the continued supply of local democracy reporting.

As well as the initiatives suggested by Cairncross, there are **non-governmental** initiatives to provide support to local-level reporting:

- The **Community News Project**, a partnership between Meta, the NCTJ and local news publishers, the project is creating around 100 new community reporter roles in newsrooms around underserved areas in England, Scotland and Wales
- The BBC's **Local Democracy Reporting Service**, which helps to fill a gap in the reporting of local democracy issues across the UK. Up to 150 new journalism jobs are funded by the BBC as part of its latest Charter commitment but employed by regional news organisations. At present 149 local democracy reporters have been allocated to news organisations in England, Scotland and Wales. These organisations range from a radio station to online media companies and established regional newspaper groups

There are also other funding initiatives in operation, particularly from the tech companies (such as Google) which are recognising the importance of supporting journalism.

3.4 Artificial intelligence

An area of increasing interest is the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism. The use of AI is now with us (as it is in nearly all aspects of life) and due to the advent of digital media we all regularly (and probably unknowingly) consume content produced by AI.

As a descriptive term, AI can cover a wide range of applications. A review of the use of AI in journalism²⁴ found a number of purposes that it was being mainly used for:

- **Augmenting reporting capacity, where AI combs through large document 'dumps' with machine learning, detects breaking news events in social media and scrapes data from government websites**
- **Reducing variable costs, with tools automating the process of transcription, tagging of images and videos and story generation**
- **Revenue optimisation, including the use of dynamic paywalls, recommendation engines and digitisation of news organisation archives**

²⁴ *The present and potential of AI in journalism*, Keefe J, Zhou Y and Merrill J, Knight Foundation, 2021

- **Engagement, which focus on efforts to corral audience input**
- **Self-critique, including work to assess gender and racial balance in an organisation’s output**

Some AI projects in news organisations may cover a number of these purposes at the same time.

This survey suggests that most AI projects are happening at larger news organisations, simply because they have more resources in time, people and money to devote to this innovation and experimentation. However, it is thought that many AI projects could be adapted and repeated for smaller news organisations – it is possible therefore that over time, we will see a cascading of AI projects through the industry.

The ethical and legal implications of the use of AI have not yet been fully considered. Should readers be made aware that content they are reading has been produced by AI? It is possible that many readers may not be aware that the possibility of automated content production exists, but at the same time they may be unconcerned by the fact. At the time of writing, there is no specific legislation on the use of AI in journalism in the EU.

The implementation of AI projects requires people with very specific skills, often requiring a person being hired specifically for that purpose. A greater understanding is needed of what these skillsets are, how these workers are integrated into the workforce, whether such skillsets are easily available and the potential impact on wider journalistic employment.

There are some estimates of the impact of AI on the workforce²⁵, though these do not tend to relate specifically to journalists but to the whole information and communications sector. Estimates range from job losses of between eight and 17 per cent, though all studies emphasise that jobs involving human relations and interactions will be preserved. Countering these views, there are also optimistic viewpoints, suggesting that AI will enhance rather than replace journalists’ work. As with other areas of journalism, the change may not be in the number of jobs, but in the changing character and complexity of those jobs²⁶.

‘The main thing that I would add is the emerging areas of AI and tech and how this is feeding through into journalistic reporting. Using AI, a computer can write a 100-word sports report or financial report with no journalism input. The journalist comes in and adds the gloss and the spin.’

Respondent 11

²⁵ *How artificial journalism in transforming journalism*, Crespo M, Equal Times, 2018

²⁶ *Artificial Intelligence and automated journalism: contemporary challenges and new opportunities*; Ali W and Hassoun M, International Journal of Media, Journalism ad Mass communication, 2019

The potential for AI to be developed in some aspects of journalism is a clear trend. However, it is a technology that has not been fully developed yet – for example, not being advanced enough yet to add nuance to opinion pieces. It seems possible to automate the more repetitive tasks, but it seems impossible, at the moment, to create a technology that replaces the essential human part of journalism such as relationship with sources, opinion, in-depth analysis or determining newsworthiness. As such, AI may enhance rather than replace journalists' work.

Changing employment and skills in journalism

This section considers how global trends and forces will impact on employment and skills in journalism, looking at employment levels and the changing nature of journalism.

4.1 Employment levels

While the focus of this paper is exploring the future of journalism, it is important to set this in the context of the current and recent situation. We do this by discussing recent changes in employment levels.

4.1.1 Changing employment levels

The number of people working (ie employed and self-employed) in the UK economy has grown over the last decade at a steady rate, increasing in every year, except for the last two (for coronavirus and lockdown-related reasons), at an annual rate between 0.8 and 2.3 per cent. The change over the 10-year period has been of just below three million jobs, an increase of 9.1 per cent, at an annual average rate of one per cent.

Perhaps contrary to the popular view, the number of people working as journalists has also increased over the period, but in a less consistent manner²⁷. There are four years with year-on-year declines in total employment and some of the annual increases are particularly marked – with increases of 17.5 per cent from 2010 – 2011, 15.7 per cent from 2015 – 2016, and (most strikingly) of 28 per cent from 2019 - 2020. The change during a 10-year period has been an increase of 36,000, an increase of 49.8 per cent. Journalism employment levels, as recorded by the Labour Force Survey, are now at a historic high of 108,000 working journalists in the economy. More recent data may suggest that the number of journalists in the economy has stabilised, but we wait to see if this is a one-off or the start of an underlying trend.

We do not know whether this volatility of year-on-year changes is because of real changes in employment of journalists, caused by changes in employment market, or a feature of the research methodology (notably limits to sample sizes) which can cause fluctuations. But the trend line is clearly upwards and what is particularly clear is that the reports of collapsing numbers working as journalists are not supported by the ONS data.

²⁷ The relative lack of consistency in the journalism series may reflect the 'survey' nature of the data source (the Labour Force Survey). As we use a more disaggregated set of data to focus purely on journalists, the smaller the sample size becomes and the greater the degree of variability introduced by sampling and not necessarily by 'real' changes.

Table 2: Employment levels of journalists in the UK

	All			Journalists		
	Employment (000s)	Annual change (000s)	%	Employment (000s)	Annual change (000s)	%
2012	29,321,000			72,000		
2013	29,728,000	407,000	1.4	70,000	- 2,000	-3.1
2014	30,360,000	632,000	2.1	72,000	2,000	3.4
2015	31,071,000	711,000	2.3	71,000	- 1,000	-0.8
2016	31,424,000	353,100	1.1	83,000	11,000	15.7
2017	31,870,000	444,000	1.4	79,000	- 4,000	-4.6
2018	32,121,000	252,000	0.8	75,000	- 4,000	-4.9
2019	32,508,000	387,000	1.2	80,000	5,000	7.1
2020	32,418,000	-90,000	-0.3	103,000	23,000	28.4
2021	32,004,000	-414,000	-1.3	108,000	5,000	4.5
2012 - 2021		2,683,000	9.1		36,000	49.8
Annual average			1.0			5.5

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Note: numbers are rounded, so summing individual numbers may not equal totals

Sometimes the response to the increase as evidenced above is scepticism, as it jars with the perception that journalism is an occupation under pressure and even in decline. Certainly, the data that is presented in the Cairncross Review suggests that the number of 'frontline journalists' has fallen from 23,000 in 2007 to around 17,000 in 2018. Responses from some of the consultees reflect a little of this scepticism:

'We don't recognise the picture of gradual growth in journalism. In our view, the numbers of frontline content producing journalists is on a steady decline, slightly accelerated by Covid and now by the cost-of-living crisis. The mood music is never for an upward trend. We don't dispute the LFS data, but I'd question whether the SOC code for journalists is that useful in identifying the core sector of news. We use a much narrower lens; we think about 'frontline' journalists.'

Respondent 8

‘It is possible the increases seen in national statistics are accurate, if data is being skewed by the categorisation of roles. Over the last decade, we have witnessed the closure of titles, cuts to teams, stagnated pay and poor terms and conditions leading to a reduction of roles across the ‘core’ sector – notably in regional and national newspapers. In other sectors, such as book publishing and some magazines, however, the picture is more diverse.’

Respondent 1

But others believe that the data reflects a broader truth about what is happening in journalism in its broadest sense:

‘This general narrative makes sense. Two years ago, there were so many jobs and vacancies, opportunities were on the increase because the digital change was creating so many opportunities. There are so many online outlets opening up (YouTube) and other social platforms. It’s all expanding the role of journalism. I don’t think there will be a decrease in the demand for content: there may be a short-term dip because of the various difficulties, but I think that long term the trend will continue.’

Respondent 5

‘There has been a huge shift in emphasis: there has been a decline in sub-editors and a big increase in those who are more online and digital and using social media. Those who were mainly print-based have declined, those who are online have increased. It’s tilted, but the numbers are the same.’

Respondent 6

‘There has been a decline in jobs in these traditional areas. But there are also many new types of jobs in these areas which are really exciting: SEO, infographic specialists. So many different journalist roles.’

Respondent 15

‘The number of jobs in broadcast journalism has been increasing. For many years it felt at a standstill, sometimes almost in retreat but not just now when it feels like it’s massively increasing. Just look at the output: Channel 5 now has an hour’s news programme, ITV has an hour’s news programme, ITV’s digital programme is coming on stream. All in all, it leads to a significant increase in headcount for broadcast journalists.’

Respondent 15

‘I find the contrast between the data and my perceptions interesting. I can see that newsrooms are shrinking – all the bad news about local newspapers. And if I look round here there are fewer journalism roles than there used to be two or three years ago. But I’ve no reason to assume that the numbers are not right and probably the key here is the growth in ‘journalism-related’ activities: quite a lot of people would describe themselves as journalists.’

Respondent 2

4.1.2 Forecasting changing employment levels

Constructing forecasts at this particular moment is fraught with difficulties, but we can use these long-term employment trends to create some view of future numbers of the number of working journalists. The government’s own forecasts of employment change for media workers²⁸ suggest that this employment growth will continue at a rate of 1.2 per cent a year. The actual annual rate of change over recent years for journalists has been at a rate of 5.5 per cent if we calculate it over a 10-year period or 6.1 per cent over a five-year period.

If we factor these various rates of change onto the base year data level of 108,000 in 2021, we see that by 2026 the number of people employed as journalists throughout the UK economy could be between 114,000 and 141,000.

It is worth asking how likely these outcomes are: while they are consistent with other research analysis²⁹ which suggests that journalism (and its attendant skills) is generally resistant to being replaced by artificial intelligence, they do rest on a very high base figure of 108,000 in 2021. If future

²⁸ *Working Futures 2014-2024*, UKCES Evidence Report 100, 2016

²⁹ NESTA and Pearson (2017) *Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*

sweeps of the APS suggest that this level is higher than can be justified, the future forecasts will also be lower.

Table 3: Forecasts of change of number of journalists

	Lower level	Middle level	Higher level
2021	108,000	108,000	108,000
2026	114,000	125,000	141,000

Source: APS, authors calculations

4.2 Changing nature of journalism

4.2.1 Journalism job roles

The reconciliation between the perceptions of those who consider journalism to be declining, the data and those that accept it to be increasing is probably to be found in the definition we are using of ‘journalism’.

The definition of journalists in the ONS data is wider than that used by Cairncross. The Labour Force Survey is a ‘self-reporting’ system, by which individuals are asked to describe their job role and from which they are coded to the ‘journalists’ code in the ONS’s Standard Occupational Classification³⁰. There are far more job roles than codes and the job roles which link to the two journalist codes are as shown below. SOC 2491 (newspaper and periodical editors) covers, as you might expect, mainly ‘editor’ roles, whilst SOC 2492 (newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters) covers reporter, correspondent, journalist and writer roles as well as individual titles such as ‘columnist’ or ‘commentator’.

Also of note, however, is what is **not** included: individuals who call themselves ‘bloggers’ would not get assigned to journalism jobs. Instead, they would be coded to a separate occupational code of ‘authors, writers and translators’ (SOC 3412). Similarly, individuals who would describe themselves as ‘social media managers, writers or executives’ would be classified as ‘PR professionals’ (SOC 2493), not journalists.

Figure 1: Underpinning job titles for SOC classification

SOC 2491: Newspaper and periodical editors		
Art editor	Editorial manager	Online editor
Content editor (newspapers, magazines)	Listings editor	Picture editor

³⁰ This is the ONS’s new 2020 Standard Occupational Classification, which has split the single journalism code into two, to give a greater disaggregation based on seniority.

Copy editor	Managing editor	Production editor
Desk editor (newspapers, magazines)	Multimedia editorial director	Publications officer
Digital editor	News editor	Publishing editor
Editor	Newspaper editor	Sub editor
Editorial executive	Online editor	
SOC 2492: Newspaper and periodical journalists and reporters		
Broadcast journalist	Feature writer	Political correspondent
Columnist	Features writer	Press representative
Commentator	Foreign correspondent	Radio journalist
Correspondent	Freelance writer	Reporter
Court reporter	Journalist	Sports writer
Critic	Leader writer	Staff writer
Crossword compiler	Multimedia journalist	Technical correspondent
Data journalist	News writer	Travel writer
Digital journalist	Online journalist	Turf correspondent
Diarist	Newspaper correspondent	Writer

Source: Office for National Statistics, SOC Classification

The fact that there is a wider set of roles covered under ‘journalism’ and that journalists seem to be working in a wider range of roles is confirmed by our consultees.

‘When I go to visit universities and talk to the students about their work experience, more and more of them seem to be doing their placements as press officers or in PR placements (in its broadest sense). And they would, as journalism students, doing a journalism course, absolutely define themselves as journalists.’

Respondent 2

‘It stretches the definition of journalism. It’s clear that print is in decline, particularly local and regional. But all the other areas are growing. And new ones are emerging and spreading: audio, podcasts are exploding and didn’t exist before. Digital now has so many outlets: people could be writing for an outlet that has never existed in a print version.’

Respondent 12

‘There are a number of ‘journalism-adjacent’ roles and people have a more fluid career path. So, they may be in journalism today, in social media (a mix of journalism and PR) next year and in marketing or PR and comms the year after. How they describe themselves will depend on what they want their next job to be: if they are applying for a job in marketing, they’ll ‘big-up’ these aspects of their CV.’

Respondent 14

‘When you are talking about journalism it’s not just about news, it’s about content. You need to widen what you mean by journalism. Accept it, you cannot control it, but there may be some aspects which do need to be controlled. It’s better for being a broad church.’

Respondent 7

‘New graduates do not want to work in the traditional news outlets - it’s not what they aspire to. It’s not a desirable pathway – it’s not how they consume news so why would it be a place they want to work to produce news? If they have been on an NCTJ course, then they are more likely to know about these legacy brands, but they won’t be attracted to them. Badly paid, local newsrooms are closing down. They are under-resourced, there is no office and working from home. Why would you work there if you can use your skills somewhere else?’

Respondent 15

Indeed, some respondents believe that given the changing nature of journalism, the data may not capture the full extent of people working in journalism roles and it is possible that the numbers presented in the data actually underrepresent the true number of journalists. Given the emergence of ‘new journalism’ jobs and emerging job roles, it is possible that the ONS’s tools don’t capture and code journalists doing these jobs to journalism codes.

‘If anything, if the jobs listed are anything to go by, the numbers are possibly an underestimate as that list doesn’t seem to capture emerging jobs titles. The overlap in the Venn diagram between writers and journalists must be huge.’

Respondent 14

An examination of ‘adjacent’ job roles suggests this may be the case. The full list of job titles for SOC 3412 (authors, writers and translators), is shown at Annex 2, but jobs which could conceivably be considered as also being ‘journalists’ include blogger, editor, editor-in-chief, editorial assistant, editorial consultant and freelance writer.

This widening of roles is supported by the data, with the overall narrative of recent changes in journalism seeming reasonably clear. Employment of journalists is increasing in most of the ‘employing’ sectors, including the ‘traditional’ areas of journalism, and this growth has been enhanced by growth in new areas. The table below compares the sectoral distribution of employment of journalists comparing 2011 and 2021. It shows that there have been increases in employment of journalists in nearly all sectors but that there have been particularly large increases in journalists working more widely across the economy with the number working in all other sectors now at 23,000, an increase of 12,500 (119 per cent) and the numbers located in ‘artistic creation’ (which essentially means self-employed journalists working across the economy) increasing from 10,000 to 20,000 (an increase of 99 per cent). However, the largest percentage increase is in TV programming and broadcasting activities, which has increased from 2,000 to 8,500 journalists (an increase of 333 per cent).

Table 4: Changing sectoral employment of journalists, 2011 - 2017

Sector		2011		2021		Change	
Code	Description	n	%	n	%	n	%
58.11	Book publishing	3,000	5	8,000	7	5,000	166
58.13	Publishing of newspapers	15,000	25	21,500	20	6,500	42
58.14	Publishing of journals and periodicals	13,000	21	17,000	16	4,000	29
58.19	Other publishing	2,500	4	2,500	2	0	-
60.10	Radio broadcasting	1,000	2	1,000	1	0	-
60.20	Television programming and broadcasting activities	2,000	3	8,500	8	6,500	333
70.21	Public relations and communications	1,000	2	1,000	*	0	-
73.12	Media representation	3,000	5	5,500	5	2,500	88
90.03	Artistic creation	10,000	16	20,000	19	10,000	99
All other sectors		10,500	17	23,000	21	12,500	119
All journalists		62,000	100	108,000	100	46,000	76

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2021

The data from the LFS covers conflates in a single SIC code the ‘publishing of newspapers’ and thereby does not disaggregate between national newspapers and local and regional newspapers. As such, it doesn’t fully reveal the differing experiences of these two sub-sectors, with general acknowledgement that the local and regional newspaper sector has suffered some difficulties. So,

the increase in number of journalists may conceal the fact that some parts of journalism are in decline:

‘The downside is the decline in local newspapers. There needs to be a ‘scrutinising’ function at local level: you get local fiefdoms, with people who have local control. These need to be held to account and national newspapers and channels are just not going to do it. You look at local newspapers now, they are so stretched, journalists working across lots of different titles so they have essentially lost the direct link to local. You could say they don’t actually do local news anymore. And being out in their communities is key, but it doesn’t happen.’

Respondent 4

‘The distinction is between a healthy news sector and a healthy journalist’s sector – it’s not the same thing because so many journalists now do work outside the news sector.’

Respondent 8

‘While the numbers of journalists show reasons for positivity, I remain very concerned about the ongoing viability of certain types of ‘news’. Large sections of the press, including but not limited to the local and regional press, have significant doubts about their financial security. This impacts on, as much as anything else, the ability of those sectors to produce ‘thoughtful’ journalism: it becomes churn, processed with not that much thought.’

Respondent 9

‘It’s not all good. Concerns persist about the state of local news and it’s difficult to see how to make local journalism pay. This happened in the USA and look what happened. Without the local scrutiny, without the emphasis on truth you get a corruption of truth. If public institutions are not being scrutinised, they will try and get away with stuff.’

Respondent 9

‘There is a declining trend in the national, regional and local press, although they seemed to have turned a corner – or at least stopped the decline and stabilised - over the last couple of years. Many of these have now launched new digital only titles. There has been an expansion of broadcast and multi-platform output.’

Respondent 11

This sub-sectoral shift will have impacts, not least on the supply and pipeline of journalists entering the industry:

‘I’ve a concern that the supply chain has been seriously disrupted with the (relative) demise of local and regional newspapers. It has been one of our biggest through-routes and without it, it’s become a challenge. We have perhaps taken it for granted, but the people coming through that route have a real developed news sense: they have the skills of making a story out of nothing, being able to spot the top line and make it news.’

Respondent 14

4.2.2 Journalism job definitions

Given this, the question becomes whether all the people who are self-reporting as journalists are actually working as journalists – and in particular whether the people working in non-core sectors are doing jobs which could be regarded as journalism.

It used to be clear what a journalist was and where they work, but these lines of demarcation have become increasingly unclear. There are now much easier and clearer routes to publishing so it is perhaps not surprising that this has led to an economy where the ability to research and tell a story is in much more demand, and that those people who have been trained to do exactly that should find themselves also more widely in demand. The debate perhaps now centres around whether being a journalist relates to a place where someone works (a newspaper, magazine or broadcasting house), to the nature of the job or to a set of skills that are brought to bear.

It is clear that individuals working outside the traditional journalism areas are still regarding themselves as journalists (because that is how they self-classify in the LFS), but does this reflect a desire to keep their journalism title rather than a reflection of the nature of work that they do? It is possible that the definition of journalism has become too open, with a diverse range of people working as commentators, influencers, etc adding ‘journalist’ to their job title to add to their credibility.

Related to this is the question of whether ‘journalism’ has become ‘content’? Content can be created to benefit one interest group or faction: it should not be called journalism as it can be one-sided and biased. But, as businesses across the economy realise the value of people who can ‘tell a story’, are they building their own in-house teams supplying content? The fundamental art of ‘storytelling’ and the related technical skills are useful in this context. This is one explanation of the national data showing an increase in the number of journalists working in the economy at a time

when we know the 'traditional' publishing sectors are declining. But this may change our understanding of what a 'journalist' needs to be.

Consultees believe this to be the case, but they would question 'is it journalism?':

'There has been an explosion of journalism careers and journalism practices. And some will consider themselves to be a journalist regardless of what they are doing. There has been a big boom in social media, social media management jobs, digital journalism, managing companies' digital profile. It's all about content.'

Respondent 4

'You might say 'that's not journalism' but where does one stop and the other start?'

Respondent 2

Some believe that there has to be a distinction between those who develop content and those who are journalists, with the line being related to the purpose of the content and the extent of editorial independence. Clearly, there is a difference in that individuals working in PR and communications do not have editorial independence, are not investigating or exposing stories. It does seem to be impossible to be neutral/impartial and tell both sides of the story, which is a critical pillar of journalism.

'The adjacent stuff is more debatable: PR and comms – is it journalism? Where is the line? For me, it's whether anyone has paid for it to be made with a particular slant. The money itself may not be the issue: someone can sponsor a football match, but if they try and influence the reporting then it crosses the line. They can pay for profile raising but not to determine the content. But there are so many grey areas: social media is one where the distinction is vague.'

Respondent 12

'There is a need for a test of independence: not something which is being written with a specific interest group in mind. When we talk of independence, we mean it is independent of vested interests, such as religious groups or powerful groups who have a vested interest in some spin on news being reported.'

Respondent 13

‘You have to draw the line somewhere. I wouldn’t want to be an elitist or a journalism purist, but there is a difference between journalism and content, which for me is that they serve different masters: the difference is between creating content specifically for someone while journalists are working on behalf of the public. It’s not about the quality of journalism (or the content) it’s about the purpose of it. And someone can have been a journalist once and have all the journalism skills and processes, but if they’re not doing a journalism job then you’re not a journalist. If you are, for example, editing an in-house magazine then you’re not going to ask the hard questions.’

Respondent 4

‘Some of them won’t be journalists, but it all depends on where you draw the line. For me the line is when they are doing something on their own, not a brand as such, but just putting stuff out as Joe Bloggs’s Blog. They don’t have the underpinning skills to do the ‘smell test’ to allow verification. They don’t even know that they should be doing verification. To be journalists they have to go through a journalistic process.’

Respondent 10

‘But is it journalism? There has been a significant change in the type of output beyond ‘traditional articles’. Is this journalism? The people writing them are journalists. But it’s written to generate money rather than for journalistic merit. It’s about top 10 hairdryers, which generates e-commerce revenue for the publisher. It’s only a short step to 10 funny pictures of cats.’

Respondent 11

‘If you’re doing a press release for a product then you’re always going to be restricted. You have to have the freedom to disagree with people to be classed as a journalist.’

Respondent 10

‘I have a genuine belief in the value of independent journalism: I believe in it as an ideal, although I recognise that part of this is a sense of purism.’

Respondent 2

Some believe there is no real distinction and that the same could also be said for many journalists working in newspapers. Coverage of local events, anniversaries and golden weddings, general features could be seen as content to fill the paper (and connect with local audiences) rather than 'journalism'.

'As long as it's clear who is producing it then it's fine. If it's a retail magazine, but it's clear who the retailers are, then it's valid content. Don't lock those producing it out of the circle. I take a different view of publications which try subterfuge: local council newsletters which try and pretend to be local newspapers.'

Respondent 9

'The concept of editorial independence is very murky. In reality, journalists have never had total editorial independence. The issue is over clarity of where the boundaries lie: editorials in newspapers make it very clear, in some other areas it's not so clear – eg magazines writing about brands, having models wearing brands, travel journalists being paid to take a trip, etc. In some ways, journalists creating content for brands and being clear about that is much more honest.'

Respondent 15

'You want to be pure of mind, but the reality is that contract publishing has existed for a very long time and it's not unreasonable that it continues. The ethical considerations and thoughts on editorial independence are a bit thin. While someone writing for an in-house magazine won't write about their supply chain issues, those working for a national newspaper also have areas that they cannot explore. There is always a bargain being struck, but they still remain journalists. And looking back to halcyon days is a bit misleading: the mantra for a local journalist was always get photos of as many children in each copy so that relatives of the children would buy multiple copies. Most journalists' work is not about holding power to account but chronicling the lives of communities.'

Respondent 3

'And there is an element of honesty about most PR: it's not pretending to be anything else than what it does. The mock-ups of local newspapers put out by local councils is far worse – it's impersonating, passing off, pretending to be something they are not.'

Respondent 3

'Is it journalism if the output is agenda-free, is objective? But is that true? All newspapers have a political slant to which the journalists fit within. And all newspapers are businesses and can you take issue with them? At the 'nth degree' no journalist has total independence.'

Respondent 2

For some it is not the nature of the job itself but the skills and the work processes that the individuals bring to their jobs which determines which side of the 'journalism line' a particular job sits:

'It's always been about content and all journalism is content, but not all content is journalism. What distinguishes between the two? For me it's about process: a key part of journalism is fact-checking, understanding your sources. They now need to be explicitly clear and understood. Just because it's on the internet doesn't mean it's true. And it's not just about doing it, but understanding why it needs to be done and that it needs to be done: it's what sets you apart as a journalist.'

Respondent 14

'There is no doubt that there are people who have been educated as a journalist who are working in allied fields, often providing in-house content either video or writing. This is not traditional journalism but it is writing, creating content using a journalistic format and using journalistic skills. Some of these will be creditable: eg the World Economic Forum is not a traditional publisher, is an NGO, but provides journalistic-type content to try and promote debate and hold power to account. But they use the same skills with very different drivers.'

Respondent 3

'To do these jobs you still need journalism skills and to be trained as a journalist. And if that's what you've been trained as, that's what you are going to describe yourself as.'

Respondent 2

'There is no reason why someone should not describe themselves as a journalist if the skills are the same, if their output is honest and they are not trying to deceive anyone.'

Respondent 2

'People should be able to say that they are journalists if they have earned that title by training in the appropriate areas: legal and ethical training.'

Respondent 5

'If you're a first-person blogger, just talking about yourself, then you are not a journalist. Being a journalist has to encompass some basic job needs, like research, fact-checking. If you don't do this, then you are more likely to be an author or writer, but not a journalist.'

Respondent 5

'If they go to the PR side of things then they will be writing for their corporates in a way that they consider to be journalistic. Things like advertorials and corporate histories feel journalistic and create a narrative. They may have left the newsroom but they still consider themselves to be journalists because they are using the same skillsets.'

Respondent 11

'Many of these people will have been taught to be journalists and the skills, the processes that they use will probably be the same.'

Respondent 2

This may relate also beyond just skills but also standards of behaviour:

'While roles may differ from those working in traditional core sectors such as news publishing, people working in PR and communications roles can carry out 'journalist jobs' contributing to the media landscape. The nature of roles may vary, and some publishers have chosen to embrace the language of content creation rather than journalism in job titles, but at their core the standards of quality and ethical behaviour remain constant.'

Respondent 1

Ultimately, to be able to have control on the parameters of what is a journalist (and what isn't) needs a wider consideration of how the occupational arrangements for journalists work. Other occupations which are more directly controlled (such as accountants, architects, etc) have professional bodies which determine entry requirements and assign the right for individuals to call themselves members of a profession. Journalism does not have this and as a result, the debate on who is, or is not, a journalist will continue:

'The big question that needs asking is whether journalism is a profession, a semi-profession or some kind of craft. In my view, it's not a proper profession, like medicine or the law, because it does not have a single point of access, of entry into it. People come into it via a number of different routes. We don't have a professional body.'

Respondent 7

'Should there be some kind of an occupational licence? Would it be a good thing? In my view, no. The openness of the profession, the fact that you can enter from anywhere, leads to a slightly anarchic feel to it. You need people with a difference, it's richer for having mavericks, eccentrics in the profession. If you over-professionalise it, then you may well not improve it. You need people to think outside the box. But if you want to make it a profession, then you have to have this single-entry point. And if you don't have that, then standards may suffer. If it's not, then you cannot control it because you don't have a regulatory body that everyone recognises, respects and subscribes to. But then you have the need to maintain standards – is this impossible to square?'

Respondent 7

4.3 Increasing use of marginal workers

The advantages of using marginal workers (self-employed and part-time) are obvious in that it is cheaper and gives businesses more flexibility to staff up and down as the news agenda requires. For some they will undoubtedly be a cost-cutting measure, using fewer employed journalists having committed to reducing headcount to meet financial targets or obligations without reducing editorial content. Employers do not need to pay fringe costs such as pension payments, sick pay, holiday entitlement, etc. Employers are increasingly forced down this path as a result of squeezed budgets and higher demands for content. But it is not the only advantage: increased use of a self-employed workforce gives them access to a wider range of skills to provide specific content as and when needed.

Publishers are by no means the only sector in the economy to have moved to a more flexible workforce: for example, across the economy the number of people working on zero-hours contracts has increased from 190,000 (0.6 per cent of people in employment) to 1,030,000 (3.2 per cent of people in employment) over 2011 to 2021.

Consultees confirm that this is a trend that is happening:

‘There has been a big increase in self-employment, including ourselves. It’s all about resources: they simply cannot afford to have, for example, a full-time photographer anymore, but we work with a couple of freelancers. And we run a tight ship so sometimes we need cover in holidays and the rest.’

Respondent 10

‘The pattern of opportunistic casualisation across the industry has become entrenched over many years. Employers make significant savings hiring journalists as self-employed. The self-employed do not receive holiday pay or sick pay and are not auto enrolled into the company’s pension schemes. The savings for a company can be significant, but with serious implications for a journalist if they are not fully aware of the terms of their contract. Lack of job security and reduced protections at work are an added barrier to asserting journalistic ethics and standards in workplaces.’

Respondent 1

‘We have a ‘mixed economy’ of employees and non-employees: about half and half. It gives us flexibility of coverage for things that we don’t need to have a full-time staff member for.’

Respondent 12

In reality, the data suggests that this trend is not widespread in journalism as may be anecdotally believed. The data shows that the proportion who are self-employed has doubled (from 18,100 to 37,500) but in proportionate terms, the increase has been from 30 per cent to 35 per cent. Similarly, for those working part-time, the number has more than doubled (12,500 to 27,400) but the proportion which are working part-time has only increased from 20 per cent to 25 per cent. And this may be impacted in the next few years as the impending IR35 rules (which allows the HMRC to collect an additional payment where a contractor is an employee in all but name) may diminish the advantages of using such a high proportion of self-employed contributors.

Table 5: Changes in employment status, 2011 - 2021

	2011		2021	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Employee	43,000	70	70,100	65
Self-employed	18,100	30	37,500	35
Full-time	48,600	80	80,200	75
Part-time	12,500	20	27,400	25
Total	61,100	100	108,000	100

Source: Annual Population Survey, 2011 and 2021

There will be implications of this increase in the proportion of ‘marginal’ workers (ie the self-employed and part-time) if the skills of these vary widely from those needed by employed/full-time journalists. Probably the core journalism skills will remain the same, with the need for a series of ‘add-on’ skills for successful self-employment – marketing, financial management, project management, etc. There may also be other implications of this for publishers – does it run the risk of losing loyalty, experience and institutional knowledge? Does it impact on the ability to build a pipeline of future leaders?

An alternative way of looking at this data is to consider ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ sectors in conjunction with employment status. The table below shows our calculations on this and suggests that the core areas of journalism³¹ employed some 56,000 journalists in 2021, of which 41,000 (38 per cent of our total) are employees and 15,000 working as self-employed (14 per cent). 31,000 journalists (29 per cent of the total) are employed but in non-core sectors. 19 per cent of those identifying as journalists are self-employed in non-core sectors.

Because of the shifting relative balance of sectoral employment of journalists (particularly the growth in ‘other’ sectors of the economy), this has resulted in a shift from core to non-core employment. So, the proportion who work in a core sector has decreased from 59 per cent in 2011 to the 52 per cent we see in 2021.

Table 6: Employment of journalists by core/non-core sectors and employment status

Actuals		Sector		Total
		Core	Non-core	
Employment status	Employed	41,000	31,000	72,000
	Self-employed	15,000	21,000	36,000

³¹ Which we define as being SICs 58.11 (book publishing), 58.13 (publishing of newspapers), 58.14 (publishing of journals and periodicals), 60.10 (radio broadcasting) and 60.20 (television programming and broadcasting activities). Non-core activities include all other sectors, but those employing larger numbers of journalists include SICs 73.12 (media representation), 70.21 (public relations and communications) and 90.03 (artistic creation).

	Total	56,000	52,000	108,000
Percentage		Sector		
		Core	Non-core	Total
Employment status	Employed	38	29	67
	Self-employed	14	19	33
	Total	52	48	100

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2021

Note: numbers rounded, so may not always sum to totals

4.4 The increase in working from home: hybrid working patterns

Another aspect of the nature of work, hastened by the coronavirus pandemic, is the proportion of those who are working from home. Research by Press Gazette³² among professionals in the media and related industries, suggests that most (74 per cent) were still doing all of their work from home. This is almost four times as many when compared to a year before and more than the country overall (estimated as being 36 per cent working only from home).

There are impacts of working from home, with the balance of respondents suggesting:

- **A positive impact on productivity**
- **A negative impact of work-life balance, with more working longer hours**
- **A negative impact on enjoyment of their job**

Most of these respondents have developed 'hybrid' models of working, mixing remote working with some time spent in the office.

'In magazines and book publishing, most appear to have settled into some sort of hybrid working pattern – some of the week at home and some in the office. Some have less space in the office now so are hot-desking, which of course brings its own problems.'

Respondent 1

³² One year since lockdown, news industry survey, Press Gazette, March 18, 2021

'Hybrid working is here to stay, but only in a small way. Many broadcasting systems cannot be operated from home: you have to go into the office and some jobs mean that you have to be there.'

Respondent 2

'We are now working in a hybrid way, but mostly office-based. Mostly its 80:20 - four days in the office, one day at home, but it's a case-by-case basis. The producers will be in all the time because someone has to press the buttons.'

Respondent 12

'We had the 'core' people in and working throughout and a 'hybrid' working pattern emerged over time. The core newsroom people had to be in pretty normally, with more peripheral people working from home.'

Respondent 14

The pattern of home working versus office working has not yet settled down, with employers still exploring the different patterns that are available to them:

'The patterns of home working are not settled yet, we are seeing an ebb and flow. Businesses saw some benefits certainly such as office cost savings – I cannot see any business making a new investment in a large office space just yet. It's not yet settled down.'

Respondent 5

'We are currently hybrid office/home working, but this is swinging back. The cost of living crisis is driving people back to the office. It will accelerate, though at the moment it's a slow drift. It's expensive to work from home – heating, charging your laptop, charging your phone, boiling a kettle, it'll all swing it back.'

Respondent 11

'We did close the office during the lockdown and got by with people making the occasional visit in. We are now back 3-4 days a week. This is relatively new, but the early enthusiasm for working from home, Zoom meetings and online chats is wearing thin. The thought that 'we don't need offices anymore' is receding and people are rediscovering the benefits of having a physical newsroom.'

Respondent 6

‘Some are not that keen to go into an office yet, some are keen to get back.’

Respondent 5

While the benefits of not having a large office are obvious, as are the advantages of staff not commuting, there are increasing concerns about potential drawbacks. Some of these relate to the need to develop creativity and team working:

‘There are drawbacks. What are you losing in terms of creativity? We have developed hubs where you can go in for a few days a week, here and there, to get your human connections, host face-to-face meetings, etc. This is all very important!’

Respondent 5

‘Over the pandemic and the lockdown we have made it work, but people are realising that there are real benefits to people being in the same room and listening to what others are doing.’

Respondent 2

‘It’s a collaborative industry and it’s difficult to get the quality of interaction via Zoom, you just don’t get the feedback. You lose the reaction time: if something is happening, you walk into the studio and talk to the producer. You cannot do that remotely. You lose the sounding board, people giving instant feedback.’

Respondent 12

‘Will it impact on retention? Realistically, nobody stays in journalism for the money and you’re never going to make a fortune. You do it for the love of the game and much of that is the interaction with your colleagues. Working under Covid arrangements wasn’t fun.’

Respondent 9

‘I want people to be in the office on a regular basis. This is a team sport and to achieve things you need the team to be together.’

Respondent 14

Specifically, there is some concern about skills development, particularly for young people or new entrants into journalism, because the opportunity to develop skills working alongside more experienced colleagues will be lost:

‘Working from home was having negative impacts on young people and their skills development. ‘Osmosis learning’ is important and it can only happen by being around more senior and experienced people. Those water cooler moments are important and you cannot replicate them. CEOs randomly joining Zoom meetings to see how people are doing just terrifies people.’

Respondent 11

‘Given the amount of churn and new starters, I need them in because that’s how you do on-the-job learning: the soft skills, how to get on with people, how to make decisions. Lots of learning is by seeing other people do it: seeing how the team gets to the end of the day and produces what it has to produce is the most valuable part of it.’

Respondent 14

‘The importance of vicarious learning is understated – it’s a real thing. If you are not with your colleagues, you are getting fewer opportunities. But people who have only worked from home, new entrants, just don’t know what they are missing. They need to understand that this is part of their learning process.’

Respondent 5

‘A greater level of home working may impact the skills and development of journalists new to the profession who would have benefited from guidance from colleagues in a more informal approach pre-pandemic. Practical approaches such as attending court frequently also shifts with home working.’

Respondent 1

‘I think that hybrid working is potentially dangerous in the long run. I’m in favour of flexibility, a work life balance and hate the commute, but journalists, particularly young ones at the start of their careers, are generally happier when they are around people.’

Respondent 14

‘Home working is a very big deal for us. We are very concerned about publishers who have gone to fully remote working. Two days a week in the office is OK, but a fully remote operation is a big deal. Staff don’t learn properly, don’t see how things are done and open themselves up to complaints and libel actions. An email sent with ‘let’s go get ‘em’, while sent in a light-hearted manner could open you up to being found to be libellous. Often, with the speed of working in a dynamic operation, people have to make judgments in difficult circumstances. To be on top of this in a remote office is a very resource-intensive business and those who don’t have the resources may be particularly exposed.’

Respondent 9

‘It impacts on skills. In a remote office, how do you onboard new staff, how do you do inductions? How do you make up the learning deficit? Much of skills transfer is informal – and this is true for old journalists as much as young ones. Things like tech change, channels, platforms: often older journalists stay abreast by listening and talking to their younger colleagues. And it’s not just tech: it can also be topics and the language to use. Without interaction, how do you stay abreast of things?’

Respondent 9

4.5 Skills

Research consistently reinforces the message that the core skills of journalism remain the same: journalists will continue to need to know media law, ethics, interview skills, they must be curious and objective and they must produce accurate content:

‘Core skills – such as shorthand – remain vital and valued in workplaces and this is likely to continue to be the case.’

Respondent 1

‘The fundamental core skills remain – find a story, research it, tell it: that’s not changing. But the tools by which they do this are constantly changing and you will expect your journalists to tell their stories on more than one platform.’

Respondent 2

'The bread-and-butter skills which are mentioned are the right ones: legal training, ethical behaviour, the ability to tell a story, the need to be adaptable and able/willing to learn to be able to react to different working environments and the introduction of new technology – this one has gone through the roof.'

Respondent 5

'You still need the core skills: the ability to write in a clear and logical manner. At the end of the day, if you can't write journalistically, you are never going to work as a journalist.'

Respondent 3

'The basics are the same. You still need to do the basics: verification, fact-checking. You've got to be sure that what you are printing is true!'

Respondent 10

'What stays as the bedrock of journalism is the fact-checking and source verification type of activities. If we ever lose the authenticity and the ability to say 'this is journalism' then this would be very problematic.'

Respondent 11

'Storytelling is still the core journalistic skill, whether this be curating or original investigation. It's about storytelling across a range of different platforms.'

Respondent 15

'Of course, these changes mean that there are different skills needed, but they all still need the bread-and-butter skills.'

Respondent 5

There is a possibility that some aspects of these ‘old’ skills are being lost and there may be a need to re-focus:

‘One that appears to be being lost is the ability to connect with people. Sometimes young journalists can have all the digital skills, be savvy with the digital stuff, but they won’t pick up a phone or meet someone for a coffee: all this new stuff is complementary to having a chat. The bread and butter of the job is to talk to people, look them in the eye, shake their hand. If you want exclusive stories, original reporting (which is still the aim of all good journalists) then you’ve got to talk to people, be out there. You cannot just sit at a desk, behind a computer and do journalism: call someone, talk to them. Talk to people, find out things, cause trouble, change the world for the better. Don’t teach them digital skills, teach them social skills!’

Respondent 4

But at the same time new skills were also needed to add to these ‘traditional’ skills³³. In effect the ‘skills basket’ required from journalists gets bigger over time as new skills get added, but it seems rare for skills to be taken away. As a result, it’s an ever-expanding list:

‘The number of different skills that journalists need to have just keeps growing and growing. I take part in panel discussions with employers and course leaders and the question educators ask are ‘if you need all these new skills, what can we stop teaching to make space?’. The answer is nothing. The new skills are on top, not replacing.’

Respondent 2

‘Nothing drops off the list of skills that they need to have. We have fewer sub-editors but that just adds as well so individual journalists have to write their own headlines, source their own photos and the rest. They write a story and have to do lots more with it – fact-check, attach a photo, write the headline, post it on the website. It’s hard to think of a skill which has dropped off.’

Respondent 6

³³ Which is, of course, putting to one side the perennial debate about the value of shorthand.

The need for additional skills and the nature of these expanding skillsets have been examined before. The Skills Foresighting research in 2014 suggested new and enhanced skills are needed:

- **IT and digital skills, with the ability to use and adapt to new technologies as they emerge and to be able to ally these to their journalism skills. They will often be the person bringing the new technologies into their workplace so they need to be able to ‘manage upwards’ to develop the potential that the new technologies offer**
- **Quality control/fact-checking skills, with the journalist acting as ‘curator’. With journalists deriving their content from an increasingly wide range of online sources, increasing emphasis is placed on the ability to verify sources and quality control, particularly as there has been a reduction in layers of quality control in many publishing environments (for example, the removal of sub-editors, news editors, etc)**
- **Ethics, with journalists needing to be able to recognise when an ethical issue arises and how to deal with these when they do**
- **PR and corporate communications skills, to allow journalists not working in ‘core’ sectors to be most effective**
- **Entrepreneurialism and management skills, needed by the increased number of self-employed people to allow them to win new business and manage their affairs**
- **Communication and relationship skills, to allow journalists to build the two-way relationships between themselves and their readers. The ability for a journalist to be able to generate an audience for their story is now a key skill. Journalists also need to be able to do this across different channels, online and offline**

Similarly, the NCTJ’s Journalists at Work research³⁴ shows that the majority of journalists believe that they need new or additional skills in order to operate more efficiently. The most common area of skills needed were in the area of ‘social media’ which included media analytics, advanced Google and Facebook and the use of social media platforms for research. There was also a need for video and editing skills, reflecting the increased tendency of journalists to operate in a multimedia environment. They also need to be aware of and responsive to new trends and platforms.

And since this research new skills could be added to these lists, including:

- **Data and graphics, with more journalism being delivered via coding and analysis of databases and visual and graphics experts being brought more centrally into the newsroom. An understanding of algorithms and how they work is now increasingly needed**
- **Audio and podcasting**

³⁴ Journalists at Work, NCTJ, 2018

- Verification which goes beyond simple fact checking. Video may be the next frontline for fake news and false information, with increasing uses of recycled video (a viral video purporting to be about a current news event but actually from a previous event) and the development of 'deepfake' (a technique for human image synthesis so that a person can be depicted saying things or performing actions that never occurred in reality)
- Data and analytics tools to measure and understand audience engagement with online content
- An understanding of SEO
- A responsiveness to new trends and platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok

Given the range of sectors and platforms that journalists are now operating in and on (particularly those in the non-core sectors) it is possible that whilst the 'core' skills may remain the same, some additional skills may vary according to the sector in which journalists are working.

The drivers for these skills are the **digital and social media skills**, with much need for new skills being driven by digital platforms and social media, advanced by Google and Facebook:

'There are always new skills to learn, mainly because of the digital changes which change how you get stories and how you promote your stories. The traditional skills are very different to knowing your way around TikTok and being responsible for promoting your own material online.'

Respondent 6

'Skills have changed completely and are completely driven by digital advances.'

Respondent 3

'The rise of digital platforms is likely to require an increase in digital skills combined with search engine optimisation. An understanding of social media and its use for research as it develops over the next decade would also be beneficial. The war in Ukraine made clear the importance of identifying fake images and support in this area would be helpful to prevent disinformation.'

Respondent 1

'There are also an entire range of tech and digital skills, some of them related to managing their contacts, privacy and social media. There is a huge amount of learning required there.'

Respondent 13

'There are new sources via the social media and the internet. This requires digital skills: anyone can scan Twitter and get enough gossip to put a story together, but if you want to have a proper investigative story it needs an extra level of skills which have to be trained. Do journalists have the skills to do a proper FOI? Government officials are being trained in rejecting them or in giving away as little information as possible.'

Respondent 9

Relating to the changing way in which journalists distribute their content and engage with their content consumers, there is an increased need for **audience building**:

'Audience awareness and audience analysis is now a core skill. If you cannot build an audience, you cannot build a business model.'

Respondent 15

'How you apply that to the end product changes all the time. Writing for the web is different than writing for print. You have to think about how these are located (SEO), how will you put it on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram. You need to be able to adapt what you do to different audiences.'

Respondent 10

'The internet has made us all realise that there are a far wider range of audiences than we may have originally thought. So, the audience for our news output is different to that for BBC News at 10, or Channel 4. So, we have to be very specific and focussed on what this part of the population wants. They have to make it accessible to their people. It has to be perfect for the slot, to tap into people who are not served by other offerings: it could be called 'playing to the audience' but really it's thinking about your audience's needs. And this takes skill: think about who your audience is, how do I edit this to a two-minutes telly piece, a written piece for Facebook or the website.'

Respondent 14

'The journalist as an entrepreneur is really important: the 'multi-hyphenate' may be the future proofing of journalism: being a journalist, being a blogger, being a podcaster, being a writer. You have to find a niche topic and then understand where to place it in the audience – you've got to be able to navigate access across the economy.'

Respondent 15

As this implies, journalists will have to broaden their range of skills and multi-skill to cope with **media convergence** and develop a **multimedia mindset**. Journalists will have to become even more multi-skilled to allow them to publish their content across different platforms. Journalists are now expected to be able to work across disciplines/platforms and understand the associated technology, whether that would be text, video, social or audio. The distinction between print and broadcast journalists may become very blurred.

'Everything is now multi-disciplinary, you have to be able to 'think' across different mediums. I used to be a print journalist and now I'm a digital one. There are loads of technical things to learn – uploading, understanding SEO, understanding the various media platforms, but more than anything else it's a mindset. When you write you have to be able to hold in your head how you are going to get this out in all the different formats.'

Respondent 4

'They need to have a multimedia mindset. There is a danger that this will be developed at the expense of developing very deep levels of skills in a single area. Before you could aim at being a very, very good writer and not much else – those days are gone. You have to accept that this multimedia mindset is what is required, that you have to be skilled in more than one area and this might be at the cost of being the best writer in the world. It may lower standards in specific areas, but the breadth of roles that they can do is what will make them employable.'

Respondent 15

'Cuts at publishers mean it is not uncommon for journalists to undertake many roles as part of their work – ones that require specific expertise and experience. For example, in writing their own headlines and laying out pages.'

Respondent 1

‘No-one is writing for print and then converting it to online. Print is not the primary function anymore and the old ‘boast’ that they’ve gone ‘web-first’ is so old hat: no-one says this anymore. But it’s true: you are writing for social media and then some of that goes into print. But you don’t have the separation.’

Respondent 4

‘You won’t get a reporter now who only provides content for radio: they have to provide it for TV and radio and for online. And they will have to do it themselves with little support. A national level reporter might have the support of a producer, but a local reporter certainly won’t. And this means they have to have a range of technical skills: editing on various platforms and capturing content (usually now via their smart phone).’

Respondent 2

This is not just the result of technology, it’s also a result of the need for businesses to find ways to monetise their content, which will vary from business to business:

‘It’s not just technology that dictates this, it’s also the business model of the company. At <name of company>, the home page was secondary, it was the content pages which mattered and they were tailored to different audiences and platforms – you’d have Facebook, TikTok, Twitter – because you knew people were accessing the content via mobile phones. Now I’m at the <name of company> they have a subscriber base which accesses the content via a paywall and because of that the homepage is everything, it’s where people land. So, journalists are competing to make sure their content is prominent on that homepage.’

Respondent 4

A number of the consultees raised the issue of the need for **resilience and ability to withstand pressure**. In an environment which is constantly changing, pressure to produce output is high. Where there is regular contact between journalists and the consumers of their content and where social media provides a platform for some people to make comments without any apparent restraint, journalists need to be robust:

‘Resilience has always been needed, but it has shifted. Journalists now face constant change. And they have to be able to adapt and cope. Journalists now have to be aware of the need for self-care and welfare and take mental health seriously. Some stories, the nature of the things that they cover can impact on people and journalists need to know what they need in terms of welfare support, to be able to articulate their needs – particularly if they work in an organisation where this isn’t encouraged.’

Respondent 5

‘Schools and universities are now very good at talking about mental health and good at providing support. As these students filter through into work, they take these experiences with them and want a similar level of understanding and support. This can be problematic for employers who cannot provide this, but some can. And this will change, these people will flow through into management positions and they will be more aware of the issues and better at managing them. Until then there is a degree of upwards management taking place.’

Respondent 5

‘Resilience is now as much about external facing pressures. With increased exposure social media platforms bring, can you cope with online exposure? Can you manage your life? With the amount of online abuse, you have to know how to be safe online, how to set and manage boundaries – but this is a set of skills which have to be learnt.’

Respondent 5

‘With so much abuse around these days there is a risk that you can get blasé about it: you need a regular debrief with a colleague to release the pressure or it can build and build and sometimes a single final comment can break you. And you can be too resilient: put armour plating on and not take it off. You must be able to analyse and think about all this – which is really difficult because you have no time and it is still uncomfortable for some.’

Respondent 5

‘They need cultural change: this is starting to happen, some managers are good at it, some are not. It’s a skillset the younger generation may be better at and they are managing upwards with their expectations.’

Respondent 5

‘One of the things that we have to tell their trainees is that they have to have a thick skin: some people are simply vile and you have to get used to the fact that this is the way that some people think it’s ok to behave on social media. It has to become water off a duck’s back, but it’s very unpleasant.’

Respondent 6

‘An increasing ‘skill’ is the ability to work under pressure. Their schedule is relentless.’

Respondent 10

‘The other thing to consider is the volume that journalists now have to produce – 10 articles a day rather than just one. Whatever the numbers, it’s significantly higher than it used to be. So, the sourcing has to be different, the level of output has to be higher and some may be using tech (eg voice text) to facilitate this.’

Respondent 11

‘Journalists now have to have the skills to be an online personality, but these skills need to be learnt: how do they engage? What are the implications of having a public profile? It can lead to harassment, which has impacts on personal life and on journalistic output. There are publisher brands and these seem happy for individual journalists to have their own brands. But ultimately everyone will need to be a community engagement manager.’

Respondent 9

Holding an NCTJ qualification may be part of the resilience-building process:

‘Being an NCTJ-qualified person is good for the individual – if they are being harangued in the street, mentally they can fall back on the knowledge that they are trained and qualified and have credibility.’

Respondent 14

Journalists need to be able to adapt and respond to new technologies as they emerge. We cannot second guess the nature of social media platforms in the future, but what is important is that as they do emerge, journalists can use them by demonstrating an ability to learn:

‘It’s not so much about the platforms: they can always find a tech native who knows and (indeed) will teach us. You don’t have to explain TikTok, they already know. But what you can teach them is how to maximise these platforms – what to post, when to post, etc. These are learnt skills.’

Respondent 12

‘One of the key attributes is that the individual exhibits a willingness to learn new tech skills and understands that they will always be learning. The ability to learn is the key skill. It’s a job that is always about learning. Individuals may be talented and come in with lots of skills but they will always need more learning and they must be willing to do it.’

Respondent 14

‘New technology is in a state of constant change and what you need is an open-mindedness to work with the new formats. Don’t dismiss anything: TikTok started off as a platform for daft dance routines, but what could it be? It’s increasingly where people are placing content.’

Respondent 3

Of course, not all journalists will have to do this. At the risk of stereotyping, some in the older generations may struggle to do this, but these individuals have other skills (such as institutional knowledge) which makes them valuable in a different way. Employers have to develop their abilities to take advantage of both groups, upskilling and filling gaps where possible.

‘Experienced journalists are expected to expand their skills to cope: old dogs certainly have to learn new tricks. There is an expectation that they will learn and adapt. But you are also expecting new dogs to learn old tricks: they may come in with social media and digital awareness, but they’ve got to learn the core skills.’

Respondent 2

‘There hasn’t been a complete turnaround of staff because the skills that older journalists have are still the skills that you need to be a good journalist. Of course, older journalists can be just as good as younger ones but the reality is that the additional digital skills will be among younger ones. But you need to mix and match, you need a balance of both types of skills in the newsroom and you can get this if you have older ones with the traditional journalism skills and the younger ones with social media skills. It can all hang together. You cannot have a newsroom full of young people because it would present challenges on whether you have all the traditional journalism skills you need. And vice versa: you need a mix and you can get the best of both worlds.’

Respondent 6

Consultees point to the need for journalists to learn a wider set of skills relating to **leadership and management**. This relates to employed journalists being better able to manage those that are reporting to them, but also to self-employed journalists being better able to manage their business environment:

‘For the freelancers, the skills needed are related to the fact that they are now (often suddenly) entrepreneurs. So, they need to learn a large number of management related skills: HR, legal, commercial, digital. Things which in a larger employer they would have someone to do for them. Sometimes these skills are actually opposite to the skills which enabled them to become good journalists.’

Respondent 13

‘Journalists need to be better managers, and many of them are not. This is particularly true of people management, where there tends to be an attitude of ‘get on with it’. People can get lost and left behind. And there is only a rudimentary awareness of equality.’

Respondent 4

‘They are teaching people who are in their mid-careers and sometimes they are not ready for this. You need to prepare people at the start of their careers for the fact that one day they may become independent.’

Respondent 13

Will the skills needed and used by journalists vary according to whether they are working in the core or non-core sectors? So, while all the people trained as journalists have similar skills, the extent to which they deploy these skills varies according to the nature of the content that is being developed.

‘Communications and PR officers may not investigate stories or build relationships with sources for the same purposes as journalists in core sectors. To suggest they are solely delivering content appears reductive in that roles vary considerably across non-sector roles. Ethical codes must be adhered to by all whether in core or non-core sector roles.’

Respondent 1

4.6 Upgrading skills

Upgrading and maintaining skills of journalists is obviously critical. The skills students learnt on their (possibly NCTJ) course 10-15 years ago need updating so that journalists can enjoy the next 10-15 years of their careers. The Journalists at Work (2018) research showed that among individuals who had received training in the last year, their training had been funded by their employer in the majority of cases:

- **Funding such training will be increasingly challenging for employers due to ever-tightening business constraints, particularly when decision-makers with financial backgrounds and financial priorities are distanced from an understanding of what is required to maintain good journalism. There may be pressure to reduce spending on training or to seek alternative skills development approaches (such as mentoring, blogs, etc) as opposed to classroom training or hiring external training providers**
- **The most direct link to skills development is the journalists' editors and managers, but it is sometimes the case that the best editors do not always make the best managers. Organisations need to make sure that they are supporting their senior teams appropriately**

'The CPD elements are important. If you qualified 15 years ago then it's possible that your 'base skills' are out of date because you are so far away from the initial training. The NCTJ needs to reach out to both employers and individuals to make the case that their updating and upskilling is worthwhile.'

Respondent 12

'Most new skills are learned on the job and you can keep up to speed. Occasionally people will need a refresher course on something. Older journalists are the same: most of the time they'll learn things by spending 10-15 minutes with a colleague. There wouldn't be a formal process, but roughly they will have identified a training need (or their managers will have) and you will work through it on the job: watch someone do it and then do it yourself. Every now and again, if there is a particular skill (eg they introduced a new analytics programme) and they all need to know it then they will have a company-wide training programme.'

Respondent 6

Given the economic pressures that some businesses are facing, there are questions as to whether this maintenance and upgrading of skills is being delivered, with some clear concerns about the availability of training:

‘Provision of training is patchy across the industry. The ability to produce high quality virtual in-role training should serve to improve this.’

Respondent 1

‘The CPD stuff is really important and I don’t think it’s done well enough at the moment by the industry. There is a real need to ensure that skills meet the market need and are suitable to drive efficiencies. It’s really important. But how do we do that? It’s not been cracked yet.’

Respondent 11

‘My team is flat out delivering training on new systems, new tools and new skills to all journalists. How this gets done in an environment which is not well resourced, I don’t know – it must be hard. Budgets are tight here but we have budgets. Where there is no institutional money, where the organisation is trying to work out the business model and trying to survive, training will not be a priority and the money for it will have gone. I feel for them.’

Respondent 2

‘Many report frustration at the lack of quality training provision in their workplaces, and particularly so in relation to opportunities for progression within their roles and careers.’

Respondent 1

As employers are a major funder of training, a concern is how self-employed journalists keep their skills updated. Journalism is not alone in this issue: other professions have significant numbers of self-employed people, but combine this with a requirement for CPD for these individuals to maintain their ‘professional’ status. However, an implication of the mandatory nature of CPD for some professions does exclude some people, leading to a two-tier profession. Possibly there are lessons which could be learnt from other professional bodies to how journalism could be organised to ensure that skills are maintained.

A question has been raised as to whether there is a gap between the skills that courses teach and the skills that the employer needs. Trainers may have left 'active' journalism many years earlier and may have become detached from current practice. The NCTJ introduced a work experience scheme for NCTJ trainers, so that they spent time in modern day newsrooms to see for themselves the changing work environment and how modern newsrooms operate. This scheme received positive feedback, but one of the impacts of Covid and lockdowns has been that it has been put on hold.

'There are skills needs in colleges: colleges are often not good at teaching these digital skills because they just cannot keep up to date. If they are going to run a digital skills module it has to be current: have it in your curriculum but have it taught by a young journalist, by specialists parachuted in. It needs to be more sophisticated. Working journalists need to support education, to make sure that any of the new stuff is being taught properly.'

Respondent 4

The possibilities of reputational damage for education providers can be high:

'The dangers of getting this wrong can be big – students can be quite sophisticated. They will already be big media users, they know about social media, so the problems of getting someone teaching them who is behind them can be quite damaging.'

Respondent 4

Although others would argue that there is a distinction between the skills that are taught in educational establishments and those that are taught in industry are different and that each should recognise and deliver their part:

'A BA is not a training course. It's about critical thinking. We need journalists who have in-built critical analysis, that can look at big data and the rest of it. We need those who can explore and understand complex issues such as war, Covid, deep fakes. They need to be able to sift through complex social issues. Developing practical skills is very different from developing an enquiring mind: that is the source of the rub between academia and industry.'

Respondent 15

The NCTJ has sought to help to address the skills upgrading needs by launching its Journalism Skills Academy (JSA) to support journalists in training and development throughout their careers. The JSA is aimed at journalists at any stage of their career: it will be suitable for new entrants to journalism, early-career journalists, mid-career journalists and freelance journalists. It will also benefit journalism tutors and trainers and, indeed, anyone who would benefit from journalism skills and knowledge.

'I'm impressed with the JSA: part of my job is to work with trainees and find out where they need additional support and then find out where they can source that support. The JSA seems a useful tool to plug the gaps – a bit on shorthand, a bit on law. It's useful refresher training, particularly if it's just a couple of elements which need topping up, or some refresher training.'

Respondent 6

4.7 Role of qualifications

Journalists are (generally speaking) highly educated and qualified and, in addition, are likely to hold relevant journalism qualifications. Eighty-one per cent of journalists hold a journalism qualification and, of those, 81 per cent hold an NCTJ qualification³⁵. These proportions have been steadily increasing.

Given that (i) the NCTJ qualifications were originally rooted in the newspaper industry and (ii) the relative importance of the newspaper industry is declining, this increasing concentration of journalists holding an NCTJ qualification is of interest, because we would, other things being equal, have expected it to decline. However, 88 per cent of journalists who have an NCTJ qualification rate it as being important in getting them started in journalism. The role that the NCTJ plays in that job finding is, however, changing. In 2015, NCTJ qualifications were an employer requirement for 77 per cent of working journalists after they had gained their NCTJ diploma. By 2019 this had decreased to 48 per cent³⁶.

This leaves us with the interesting conclusion that while the proportion saying that their NCTJ qualification is a requirement is *falling*, the proportion holding an NCTJ qualification and saying that it was important in them getting their job is *increasing*. The explanation for this may lie in the very dispersion of employment of journalists that we have seen earlier – in a more confused journalism market, individuals may need a qualification which offers clarity to employers of their skills.

Clearly many of the consultees value the NCTJ qualification:

³⁵ *Journalists at Work, 2018*, NCTJ

³⁶ *Destinations of NCTJ Diploma in Journalism Students, NCTJ, 2019*

‘How many organisations have the resources, have the ability to train people to the standards that the NCTJ adheres to? It’s relatively easy to teach them, for example, a new editing system but what is hard to do at work is teach them the fundamentals. You need these in place before you start work. The ability to tell a story, media law, ethics. If there is no NCTJ, where does that knowledge and skill come from?’

Respondent 2

‘I do look for the NCTJ qualification. If you get someone who has gone via this accredited route then you know that you have got someone who has at least a basic understanding of the legal issues and OFCOM. They will know about good journalistic practices, about sourcing and balance, etc. They will have been trained in this and will consider it. In the recent Ryan Giggs case, we could not have sent anyone to cover this who wasn’t properly qualified.’

Respondent 12

‘I lean on the NCTJ qualification (and academic qualifications) more now than I did before. If someone has an NCTJ you know that they have skillsets that I can make assumptions about and add to. I know they have a baseline. For me, the NCTJ is one of the key markers – it’s the third column in my recruitment spreadsheet (after ‘name’). Basically, they won’t get through if they don’t have the NCTJ.’

Respondent 14

‘It’s important that you have bodies such as the NCTJ and BJTC which can link education and employers, something businesses can say ‘this is what we need’.’

Respondent 3

‘The NCTJ and BJTC are increasing in importance. The pressure is on the employer to quickly source someone who can do key things as a basic standard. The NCTJ is a statement that they can. It’s important to have key skills defined and to know that people can deliver against these. And because most managers are time poor (and increasingly pressured) this increases in value.’

Respondent 14

‘It needs standards, of integrity, accuracy, honesty and the rest. Without it being a profession, how do you impose these? It’s hard to have universal standards because, as data shows, there has been a big increase and a big diversion across sectors. The NCTJ is important for standards, but its roots and its focus are very much on local and regional newspapers. Being a journalist on a national newspaper is (or should be) the high point in a journalism career, but many won’t have an NCTJ – they will have come straight from university and gone straight into it. But the NCTJ’s reach into the magazines sector is, at best, fragmented.’

Respondent 7

‘A point I make to all new recruits is that they have got to get the NCTJ: it’s something that will underpin their whole careers. Any suggestion that the NCTJ’s role is to be diminished should be rejected immediately as nonsense. It gives new journalists the structure to allow them to grow in confidence, learn the skills they need and apply them.’

Respondent 10

‘The NCTJ qualification is the stamp of approval and quality. It’s a form of verification, something that you can say that new people coming in have and have been through the process.’

Respondent 11

But (of course) it is **not just the NCTJ that is valued:**

‘The NCTJ isn’t the only credible qualification: others are acceptable – such as BJTC, in-house training programmes (such as the BBC’s programme).’

Respondent 5

It is likely that the perceived value (to employers) of NCTJ qualifications differs in different sectors, with the possibility that employers in ‘non-core’ sectors have less understanding of their value. While news organisations in the core sectors recognise and value NCTJ qualifications, emerging news organisations and those from the wider corporate sector may not do so. The diffusion of journalism employment away from the ‘traditional’ sectors means that more employers and educational centres might challenge the value of NCTJ qualifications, which has hitherto been the accepted skills standard.

As a result, some centres may choose not to seek NCTJ accreditation for their courses. This may lead to less consistency and clarity in the crossover from education into employment as what has been a structured and widely understood set of standards, with the NCTJ at its core, may become more diverse, with a less prominent common standard. This may risk a weakening of the common skills base across journalism, which may undermine attempts to maintain quality. There may also be implications for students on non-accredited courses when they seek employment. This is only acceptable where there is full transparency around the extent of 'non-NCTJ' opportunities available.

'If entry points are becoming diversified, how do you maintain the quality label that comes with the NCTJ qualification? Big companies say that they are beyond that point anyway, that their in-house training programmes are beyond the NCTJ. The BBC and ITN graduate training schemes have credibility, but others?'

Respondent 3

'Individuals need their NCTJ. It gives a licence, a demonstration to say to employers that 'I've got the skills you need'. Universities basically build their courses around the NCTJ accreditation modules, use them as the core and then add on to give each course their 'own feel'. But it needs the NCTJ as a core.'

Respondent 4

'What the NCTJ does is so important. They are the skills that journalists need to be called a journalist.'

Respondent 4

'But newsrooms are hiring differently and some won't look for the NCTJ anymore – even if I do! So, it's a big challenge. But you know that if they don't have the NCTJ, they may not have the grounding: I would be worried that they didn't have the skills. We have just employed someone who has 'hacker-level' IT skills, but we need them to have journalism skills. How are we going to get them into him?'

Respondent 4

This suggests that if the NCTJ's role in maintaining quality by ensuring that journalists are qualified to the required standards is accepted, the NCTJ needs to further develop its reputation more widely as a trusted brand, denoting standards and quality. This is to a wider cohort of employers, going beyond the core sectors, but perhaps also to the public at large. The NCTJ needs to explain that it is

not just contemporary but forward thinking, aware of industry and audience trends and responsible for world-class training and standards.

The pace of change in newsrooms is very fast and this makes it incumbent upon the NCTJ to constantly re-evaluate the skills that its qualifications should cover: as long as the qualifications cover these, they retain their credibility. There is also a need for trainers to maintain their understanding of current practice so that the gap between skills taught and those needed in the workplace is as small as possible.

‘Investment in skills and training for journalists is important in maintaining quality, including routes into the profession. The NCTJ can support this by identifying skills gaps and create schemes and opportunities to address this – engaging directly with journalists and others to ensure identified areas reflect demand.’

Respondent 1

4.8 Maintenance of quality and building trust

In the era of proliferating news outlets, combined with the rise of ‘fake news’ and the increasing use of social media as sources for the development of content, there is a concern about the maintenance of quality. The role of standards and ethics in journalism is arguably more important than ever. For publishers in the core sectors, their competitive advantage is that consumers trust their content: it has been sourced and written by a professional and quality checked.

It is increasingly important that journalists are regarded as trusted professionals. As discussed above, the NCTJ and its associated qualifications have a role to play in building the public’s trust in journalism and journalists, allowing a distinction between those who are properly trained and qualified and those who are not.

‘Many freelancers don’t have formal journalism qualifications or NCTJ and came into journalism via another route. We would get quite a lot of queries from freelancers unaware of more than a basis knowledge of libel or court reporting and other media law. It’s important to provide training and for freelancers to maintain their skills.’

Respondent 1

‘There is an expectation that an NCTJ-qualified person will have some standards.’

Respondent 14

‘It’s made more difficult by not just entering in different ways, from different places, they then go and work in very different sectors – national newspapers, local newspapers, magazines, broadcast and the rest. So, when you talk about ‘journalists’ what do you mean?’

Respondent 7

But beyond this, the existence of a system of ethical behaviour and reporting is seen as important in laying a baseline of trust:

‘Adherence to ethical reporting standards that build public confidence in both journalists and journalism.’

Respondent 1

‘At the end of the day, we should have high ethical standards and when we do, then people will trust us.’

Respondent 3

However, a number of consultees suggest that the journalist’s own behaviour undermined this level of trust:

‘The evidence is all around that journalists have behaved poorly – the phone hacking and the rest. Why should people trust them when the evidence is that they have behaved poorly? Journalists have brought it on themselves. Obviously not all journalists and it’s sad that we have all been tarred with the same brush, but it’s hard to say it’s not justified.’

Respondent 3

‘The trust thing is hard when you still have the backstory of phone hacking and people do still link into that narrative. It’s not helped by social media where you can have false stories, or people attacking journalists and you get the mob weighing in. Everyone can be a critic. It can build a picture of a lazy clutch of journalists and how they are all no good.’

Respondent 6

‘We must subscribe to some kind of values of integrity, honesty, etc. In the past, the need for accuracy was absolutely drummed into you, but increasingly the press is part of the entertainment business and, within this, these values are less important. So, while there may be a lid on some of the worst behaviours, these issues are not resolved. I think that newspapers are less accurate than they used to be. And it’s not just about the ‘entertainment’ it’s also about staffing: they don’t have the layers of people like sub-editors to fact check.’

Respondent 7

‘Some columnists have had a very loose relationship with the facts and their host papers do not seem to mind at all.’

Respondent 11

‘The nature of journalism doesn’t build the reputation. The daily briefings during Covid exposed journalists to the public and the nature of the questions – goading, looking for that ‘gotcha’ moment didn’t endear journalism to the public.’

Respondent 11

‘During Covid people could see the regular press sessions and could hear the questions being asked and that increase in transparency didn’t increase trust – in fact it made people feel worse about journalism. Seeing how the sausage is made is sometimes not that useful.’

Respondent 3

Building trust (or re-building it where it has been lost) is a work in progress and needs further development:

‘Trust has to be built – readers will see journalists who publish regularly, but they will also see the people who are regularly pushing ‘lines’ and who are pushing a particular narrative. All you can do is to continue to do the job properly and present the respectable face of journalism. But we have to get across the message that all our people are trained and that they follow ethical standards.’

Respondent 6

‘Trust is important and it’s getting worse. This is a broader societal problem – people are more sceptical than they have been and so it’s a challenge which is not just for the news industries. But some sectors have managed it. Trust in the banking sector and in bankers collapsed after 2010, but they have recovered it: not quite back to the levels that they were at, but a significant recovery. Can there be lessons learnt from them and other sectors?’

Respondent 11

‘To improve this, they may need to get some of their workings from behind the scenes in front of it: show people how they do fact check and why it’s so important. But it’s hard. Does the public know, understand or care that the NCTJ accredits qualifications? Do people know about OFCOM? They don’t know or want to know. And do they need to know? And if they did know, would they just lump the NCTJ in as part of the system, part of the conspiracy?’

Respondent 12

‘Trust is a big issue. The general eroding of trust among people means that it cannot be taken for granted anymore. Some people need to be able to see a badge to be able to say ‘that’s trustworthy’. It’s about building a brand, developing standards and delivering these/reflecting these in our broadcasts.’

Respondent 14

‘There is an expectation that an NCTJ-qualified person will have some standards. Training and qualifications are very much part of the trust-building process.’

Respondent 14

And part of this trust-building process will be as part of community engagement:

‘There is a training need in the area of community engagement. Having a face-to-face contact appears to be key; if people know who the journalists are, know a publication that is produced in the area then they have more trust. It’s not magic, it’s a basic human connection: if you know people you can hold them accountable. It helps if journalists are genuinely local.’

Respondent 13

4.9 Diversity

The diversity of the journalism workforce has been discussed extensively elsewhere³⁷ but a number of consultees raise it as an essential element to consider in the employment and skills make-up of the journalism workforce in the future.

‘A big challenge is for us to recruit a diverse cohort of graduates for employers to pick from – news agencies are increasingly aware that they are not able to access stories reflecting their whole communities and some of this at least is because they are not employing people who represent those communities.’

Respondent 3

‘The danger is that, even more than they are now, newsrooms will become full of university graduates. We are all saying that we want to diversify and have different types of people, but universities are not as diverse as they want the newsrooms to be and the danger will be that they become as diverse as universities are. Other routes are a good thing – it’s why we are working with the NCTJ on an apprenticeship.’

Respondent 2

‘There is only a rudimentary awareness of equality.’

Respondent 4

‘For us, diversity is key. We have to be able to get people in at different entry points.’

Respondent 14

Developing alternative pathways and access to current accreditation are seen as vitally important:

‘To increase diversity and that range, employers need to go back (at least partly) to the apprenticeship model, developing their own in-house talent. They can access levy funding to make it happen.’

Respondent 3

³⁷ See *Diversity in Journalism, 2023*, NCTJ

‘We need to create pathways for people to enter journalism who could not, for whatever reason, get access to the appropriate education. There is lots of good work done by the NCTJ and by others. It’s important: if people do not feel that the newspapers represent them, do not think that ‘their’ stories will be told then they will go elsewhere.’

Respondent 5

‘The NCTJ is an asset if the individual can afford it. Although there is lots of help out there, the NCTJ have got to make sure it’s a passport, not a barrier.’

Respondent 4

‘It’s a changing landscape. People are coming up organically from different routes: YouTubers and the like. This is a good thing: it helps with diversity that not everyone has got the same background and has been to university. But they will have gaps because they have not had the formal training – they may not even know that they have gaps. How can these gaps be filled?’

Respondent 12

Of course, there are many initiatives in existence to try and address the diversity issues in journalism. The NCTJ alone has the Journalism Diversity Fund, which has already supported more than 500 journalists from diverse backgrounds as well as the Community News Project, which focuses on recruiting journalists from diverse backgrounds. The NCTJ has also recently announced a major investment in outreach work with its partners in the media and education sectors, aiming to boost recruitment of school leavers onto NCTJ-accredited FE college courses as well as to diversify cohorts on accredited university courses.

Discussion and conclusion

This report covers a wide range of trends and issues relating to the future employment and skills in journalism. It is clear that the world of journalism has changed and is continuing to change and those working within it need to be aware of these changes and plan for these to continue into the future.

The drivers of the employment and skills changes impact on some of the most fundamental elements of the industry (continuing digital and IT changes, the changing market for news, changing business models), which are unlikely to diminish in the future. Change appears to be the default setting for the near future at least.

However, this should not be regarded as a negative force. While it is true that some parts of the journalism-employing world have been suffering considerable difficulties – particularly the local and regional newspaper sector – the data shows that the number of people who are working in the economy as journalists has steadily increased. The relative decreases in employment in these traditional sectors have been more than replaced by growth in employment in other sectors – both ‘traditional’ employers of journalism (such as broadcasting) but also more widely across the economy.

This general narrative is broadly accepted, but with one important caveat: are the jobs that these people are doing outside of the traditional world of journalism, ‘journalism’ jobs? There is no clear, single answer to this with some saying that there is a need to ‘draw a line’ and others saying that there is no need for this. Means of drawing these lines relate to the existence of editorial independence, whether the individuals doing those jobs have been trained as journalists and bring those journalism skills to bear in the job that they do. This is very much a grey area and this report does not provide a clear answer – and more discussion may be needed (possibly requiring examinations of other professional arrangements in other parts of the workforce).

There has been an increase in the absolute number and relative proportion of ‘marginal’ workers – those working part-time and in self-employment. Although again the data does not support the levels of increases that have been suggested previously (the proportion who are self-employed has increased from 30 per cent in 2011 to 35 per cent in 2021, the proportion working part-time has increased from 20 to 25 per cent over the same period). There are advantages to using marginal workers – cost savings and access to a wider skills pool than would otherwise be possible – but there are also disadvantages, in that it might limit the ability to build loyalty, experience and institutional knowledge. If we consider ‘core’ workers to be those who are employed in ‘traditional’ sectors, the data would suggest that this covers 38 per cent of journalists.

As a result of Covid there has been a development of hybrid working, mixing remote working from home and office working, although these patterns are not yet settled. While there are obvious advantages of not having a large office, the disadvantages are becoming increasingly clear, not least in the loss of team working, team spirit and creativity. There are particular concerns for the development of skills among relatively new entrants to journalism who, with remote working, are less likely to benefit from the knowledge of their more experienced colleagues.

The need for traditional journalism skills has not diminished. Indeed, some consultants suggest there is a need to re-emphasise the need for these in their education and training. However, in addition to these, consultees note that there is an expansion of the skills needed – nothing is ‘not needed’ but additional skills need to be added to the required skillset. Some of these have been discussed before – IT and digital, investigation and verification, ethics, entrepreneurship and business, data, audio, video and podcasting, and an understanding of digital platforms. To these we would add:

- **An increased understanding of the need to identify, build and retain audiences**
- **An ability to cope with media convergence and develop a multi-media mindset**
- **The ability to be resilient and withstand pressure**
- **The ability to learn and be adaptive, particularly with regard to developments in new technologies as they emerge**
- **Leadership and management skills**

In the face of all these changes, maintaining and upgrading skills is obviously vital, but in the face of economic constraints employers may increasingly find it difficult to be the main funder of this training. Initiatives such as the NCTJ’s Journalism Skills Academy will become increasingly important to fill this gap of training provision.

Journalism qualifications, such as those provided by the NCTJ, remain very important in providing reassurance to employers that their new recruits have the skills that they need, although the diffusion of journalism employment across an increasing range of sectors will make it increasingly difficult to maintain these as industry benchmarks.

There are concerns that the reputation of journalism and journalists has diminished over recent years. Clearly industry-accredited qualifications can play a key part in developing standards of behaviour, but this will only be effective if all journalists adhere to these. Consultees feel that there are unfortunate examples, albeit a minority, where journalists have not conformed to these high standards, which has damaged the reputation of the conforming majority. Building (or re-building) trust remains a work in progress.

The need for a diverse journalism workforce is acknowledged by nearly all consultees and initiatives to develop this are welcomed across the industry.

Annex 1: List of consultees

Bea Adi	Senior campaigns and communications officer	NUJ
Mark Allen	Chairman	Mark Allen Group
Kathryn Anastasi	Head of live sport	talkSPORT
Robert Barman	Managing editor	KM Media Group
Adam Bennet	Analyst, media policy, media and creative industries	DCMS
Tom Brocket	Head of analysis, media policy and media and creative industries	DCMS
Abu Bundu Kamara		
Andy Cairns		
Phil Creighton	Managing director	Wokingham Today
Charlotte Dewar	Chief executive	IPSO
Alan Edmunds	Director	Reach Regionals
Cait Fitzsimons	Editor, 5 News	Channel 5
Jonathan Heawood	Executive director	Public Interest News Foundation
Joe Mitchell		Public Interest News Foundation
Colm Murphy		Ulster University
Elizabeth Pears	Acting deputy editor	Financial Times
James Porter	Head of journalism training	BBC
Alexandrea Shakespeare		Oxford Brookes University
Matt Walsh	Head of School of Journalism, Media and Culture	Cardiff University
Joanna Webster	Deputy global editor, visuals	Thomson Reuters
Rebecca Whittington	Online safety editor	Reach plc
Martin Wright	Editor-in-chief	MNA Media

Annex 2: Underpinning job titles for SOC 3412, authors, writers and translators

Authors, writers and translators: job titles

Audio describer	Interpreter and translator	Script writer
Author	Language consultant	Senior reports writer
BSL interpreter	Lexicographer	Senior technical writer
Bibliographer	Linguist	Specialist writer
Biographer	Lip reader	Specifications writer
Blogger	Literary adviser	Subtitle writer
British Sign Language interpreter	Literary agent	Sales editor
Cartographic editor	Literary reader	Screenwriter
Communicator for the deaf	Logger	Speechwriter
Copywriter	Lyric writer	Technical compiler
Copy writer	Managing editor	Technical publications manager
Corporate communications writer	Medical writer	Technical editor
Creative writer	Novelist	Technical translator
Dramatist	Playwright	Technical writer
Editor	Poet	Translator
Editor-in-chief	Publishing consultant	Translator and interpreter
Editorial assistant	Publications manager	Travel writer
Editorial consultant	Publisher's reader	Writer
Freelance writer	Report writer	Writer and creator
Interpreter	Screen writer	

Source: ONS, SOC 2020, Volume 2, Coding Index