

Diversity in Journalism

REPORT COMMISSIONED BY THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE
TRAINING OF JOURNALISTS

An update on the
characteristics of journalists

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Foreword

In the fast-moving, social media world we live in today, journalism is one of the most important professions, helping to investigate, interrogate and interpret the stories that shape our society in a factual and ethical way. Trusted journalism is vital to our democracy and to understanding the world around us.

It is essential that journalists reflect the society on which they report. Sadly, this report shows that we are not there yet. While there has been some progress, the diversity data for 2024 highlights continuing challenges across several areas, particularly social class. Journalists remain more likely than the wider workforce to come from professional homes, to be older, and to hold higher-level qualifications. The industry still has work to do to ensure that people from all backgrounds have fair access to careers in journalism and equal opportunities to progress.

There are no easy answers to the question of how to attract and retain talented people from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups, nor to how we can change deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers within the industry. This challenge sits alongside the broader pressures facing journalism, economic, social and technological, that continue to reshape the media landscape. If we want journalism to be relevant, representative and trusted, we must meet it head on.

This is not a task for any single organisation. It requires all of us – employers, educators, funders and policymakers – to work together to open access, support early careers and ensure fair opportunities for progression. Diversity in journalism strengthens the profession, enhances the quality of news, and ensures that all voices and communities can be heard.

At the NCTJ, promoting equality of opportunity is central to our mission. Through initiatives such as the Journalism Diversity Fund, which over two decades has supported hundreds of aspiring journalists to train and enter the industry, we are helping to widen the pipeline of diverse talent for employers to recruit from. We will continue to work in partnership with those who support our values and want to build a more inclusive and representative workforce. A diverse newsroom is not just good for journalism; it is essential for the public it serves.



Joanne Forbes
Chief executive of the NCTJ



Diversity in Journalism

1. Background

This research report updates the NCTJ's analysis of journalists' diversity characteristics to 2024¹. This is a regular report, using the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey data², so that the NCTJ and industry can measure progress. It can be read in conjunction with the NCTJ's previous Diversity in Journalism reports, published in 2017, 2022 and 2023 and the most recent Journalists at Work report, published in 2024.

The ONS has been experiencing issues regarding response rates to the LFS, with a rapid decline during the Covid lockdown which has not fully recovered. This has led to the LFS being downgraded from 'accredited official statistics' to 'official statistics in development'. As a result, care needs to be taken with recent LFS data, particularly with detailed breakdowns, such as those used in this report to look at journalists. The ONS is moving to a 'Transformed Labour Force Survey' (TLFS), which is intended to resolve the problems, but this is not yet operational.

Because of this, although there are two 'journalism' Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes (a divide based on experience and seniority³) we show the data only on a single 'journalism' basis, although where the data allows and there are issues of note we make comment on differences by the two different journalism SOC codes.

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

¹ See the 2023 report '*Diversity in Journalism: An update on the characteristics of journalists*' 2023 at [Diversity in Journalism 2023 - National Council for the Training of Journalists](#)

² The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is run by the Office for National Statistics. It is the main UK data source for regular individual key labour market statistics. It provides data at a level of precision not matched by any other regular survey. It is a household-based survey, interviewing about 59,000 individuals in 27,000 households each quarter

³ The two Journalism SOC codes are **SOC 2491: Editors**, who evaluate, manage and oversee the editorial direction for the style and content of features and stories for broadcasting and for newspapers, magazines, news websites and periodicals and **SOC 2492: Journalists and reporters**, who investigate, write up and tell stories and features for broadcasting and for newspapers, magazines, news website and other periodicals

2. Journalism diversity compared to all UK employment

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

The data shows:

- **sex:** the proportion of journalists who are women is higher than the proportion of women working across the whole economy (53 per cent compared to 49 per cent). There is evidence of some distinction between the two SOC codes: in the more senior SOC code of editors (SOC 2491), 53 per cent are men and 47 per cent are women. In the junior code (journalists and reporters, SOC 2492), 55 per cent are women and 45 per cent men;
- **age:** 12 per cent of journalists are under the age of 30 compared to 22 per cent of all in employment. Over a third (39 per cent) are aged 50 and over compared to a third (33 per cent) of all in work. As would be expected, there is a distinction between the two separate journalism roles, with there being a higher proportion of older journalists in the senior journalism role (SOC2491) than in the more junior role (SOC2492): 46 per cent of editors are aged above the age of 50 compared to 36 per cent of journalists and reporters;
- **ethnicity:** 86 per cent of journalists come from white ethnic groups, higher than all UK workers (83 per cent)⁴. Employment of those from other ethnic groups is now in line with employment across all UK-sectors, although as journalism remains concentrated in London and metropolitan areas, which have higher proportions of other ethnic groups, it could be argued that further progress is needed;
- **nationality:** 85 per cent of journalists were born in the UK, with 15 per cent from the EU27 and the rest of the world, similar to the proportions for all UK workers;
- **health and disability:** 17 per cent of journalists report having a work-limiting health problem or disability, lower than the level for all UK workers (20 per cent);
- **religion:** 64 per cent of journalists report as having no religion compared to 51 per cent of all UK workers. Twenty-seven per cent of journalists state that they are Christian, lower than the 39 per cent for all UK workers. Ten per cent of journalists identify as having some other religion⁵, the same as for all in UK employment;
- **qualification level**⁶: journalists are highly qualified. Ninety-three per cent are qualified at RQF level 4 or above, compared to 51 per cent of all in work. Only four per cent of journalists are qualified at RQF level 2 or below compared to 29 per cent of all UK workers;
- **social class:** journalists are more likely to come from households where a parent works/worked in a higher-level occupation, one of the key determinants of social class. Sixty-one per cent of journalists had a parent in one of the three highest occupational groups, compared to 43 per cent of all UK workers. Seven per cent have a parent in the lowest two occupations compared to 20 per cent of all workers.

4 Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is available for a range of ethnic groups including 'White', 'Asian', 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British', 'Chinese', 'Mixed' and 'Other'. However, sample size restrictions within the LFS means that we cannot show this data at this level and so have gathered the data for these other 'non-white' groups into a single group, which we have called 'other ethnic groups'.

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

6 The data on qualification levels is presented on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) as well as NVQ levels. The RQF covers general and vocational qualifications and is regulated by OFQUAL in England. It is split into nine levels: entry level (further subdivided into sub-levels one to three) and levels one to eight.

Table 1: Diversity data, journalists and all in work compared, UK, 2024

	All in work (UK)	All Journalists
	%	%
Sex		
Male	51	47
Female	49	53
Age		
29 and under	22	12
30-39	24	30
40-49	22	19
50 and over	33	39
Ethnicity		
White	83	86
Other ethnic groups	17	14
Nationality		
UK	85	86
Non-UK (EU27 & Rest of world)	15	14
Health/disability		
Have work-limiting health problem/disability	20	17
No work-limiting health problem/disability	79	83
Religion		
No religion	51	64
Christian (all denominations)	39	27
Other religions	10	10
Highest qualification		
RQF 7 & 8/Level 5	16	41
RQF 4, 5 & 6/Level 4	35	52
RQF 3/Level 3	20	3
RQF 2 and below/Level 2 and below	29	4
Social class/occupation of parent		
Higher-level occupations	43	61
Middle-level occupations	37	30
Lower-level occupations	20	7

Source: Labour Force Survey quarterly tables, averaged over four quarters Jan/Mar 2024 to Oct/Dec 2024. Weighted to ONS 2020 population estimates.

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



In the last Diversity in Journalism publication, we reported, for the first time, on sexual orientation, using data collected by the ONS in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as ‘experimental’ data,⁷ and additionally in the 2021 Census. There is no new data available and so we are not in a position to update this data, but to recap:

- the LFS data suggests that 89 per cent of journalists report as being heterosexual or straight, lower than the 96 per cent of the UK population. Three per cent of journalists report as gay or lesbian, three per cent bisexual and five per cent other;
- the Census data is broadly consistent with the LFS data. It also suggests that journalists are less likely to be heterosexual or straight (92 per cent compared to 96 per cent of all those in work).

3. Change in journalism diversity

The table below shows the change from 2016 to the latest 2024 data. It should be borne in mind that these are (in LFS terms) small sample sizes and changes observed in the data below may well be the result of sampling variability rather than ‘real’ changes in the underlying population and we should ideally see a pattern of change over time rather than comparing just two points.

Looking at the trends in diversity indicators:

- **sex:** the latest 2024 data shows a shift in the relative balance of women to men. The higher level of employment of men in the 2022 data seems to be a random data point;
- **age:** the 2024 data shows a fall in the proportion of younger journalists. This would be consistent with falling employment levels and recruitment into journalism as people already in work get older and there is not an influx of younger new entrants;
- **ethnicity:** the proportion coming from white ethnic groups appears to have stabilised, being 87 per cent in 2021, 85 per cent in 2022 and 86 per cent in 2024;
- **nationality:** the proportion with UK nationality has declined further in 2024, albeit only slightly;
- **health and disability:** the 2024 data shows a decrease in the proportion of journalists reporting a long-term health problem or disability (down to 17 per cent), following a sustained period of increases;
- **religion:** the proportion who have no religion remains significantly higher than those who have a religious faith;
- **qualification⁸:** as discussed above, those working in journalism have long been highly qualified. The data suggests, as at last year, that this has started to plateau, with the proportion having an RQF level 4 (or NVQ level 4) at 92 per cent. The proportion with no or low qualifications (level 2 or below) remains low (and is now at five per cent);
- **social class:** the proportion coming from the highest social classes is at 61 per cent, lower than 2021 and 2022. The proportion coming from lower-level occupations remains low at seven per cent.

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

⁸ Previous diversity reports have used ‘NVQ levels’ to show qualification levels. The Labour Force Survey has now moved to ‘RQF levels’ which have nine qualification levels, running from ‘Entry level’ and level 1 through to level 8 (which equals a doctorate).

Table 2: Journalists diversity data, change 2016 – 2024

	2016	2018	2020	2021	2022	2024
Sex						
Male	55	54	47	53	59	47
Female	45	46	53	47	41	53
Age						
29 and under	16	16	23	21	21	12
30-39	25	19	29	24	23	30
40-49	27	32	22	20	21	19
50 and over	32	34	26	35	35	39
Ethnicity						
White	90	94	92	87	85	86
Other ethnic groups	10	6	8	13	14	14
Nationality						
UK	-	92	90	91	87	86
Non-UK (EU27 & Rest of world)	-	8	10	9	13	14
Health/disability						
Have work-limiting health problem/disability	10	15	16	19	22	17
No work-limiting health problem/disability	90	85	84	80	77	83
Religion						
No religion	-	62	58	67	60	64
Christian (all denominations)	-	34	39	28	27	27
Other religions	-	4	3	5	13	9
Highest qualification						
RQF 7 & 8/Level 5	32	32	32	32	32	40
RQF 4, 5 & 6/Level 4	55	55	58	57	59	52
RQF 3/Level 3	7	6	7	5	6	3
RQF 2 and below	7	6	4	6	3	5
Social class/occupation of parent						
Higher-level occupations	72	55	75	80	72	61
Middle-level occupations	20	35	17	18	13	30
Lower-level occupations	7	9	8	2	14	7
All (n)	73,000	78,000	96,000	108,000	101,500	74,000

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021 & 2024

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

4. Concluding remarks

We have to be careful not to read too much into changes over a limited number of time points. The LFS is a sample survey and it is to be expected that there are changes which are due to the vagaries of the research method as much as underlying trends. This is particularly the case (i) when examining a relatively small subset of the data, such as journalists and (ii) when the Office for National Statistics is having to address falling response rates to the survey.

Having said that, the data suggests that the characteristics of journalists differ from those of all those in work in terms of:

- sex, with relatively more women;
- age, with journalists being, on average, older than the wider workforce;
- ethnicity, with more journalists being from a white background and less likely to be from other ethnic backgrounds than the overall workforce;
- disability, with fewer journalists reporting long-term health issues or disabilities affecting the type of work they can do; and
- social class, where it remains the case that journalists are much more likely to have a parent (or head of household) who works (or worked) in a higher-level occupation. There do not appear to be any consistent changes impacting on this disparity, although the latest data does suggest some change in the balance between those coming from middle and lower social class groups.

Data on sexual orientation of journalists (using data from two sources, the LFS and the 2021 Census of Population) suggest that journalists are more likely to classify themselves as being gay or lesbian, bisexual or of other sexual orientation than the overall population.

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



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