



Country Report

Journalists in the United Kingdom

Neil Thurman and Jessica Kunert, *LMU Munich*

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Backgrounds of Journalists

Of the 695 journalists surveyed, 314 were female—45.2 percent of the sample. On average, UK journalists are 43.17 years old ($s=12.30$), with the youngest in the sample 20 years old and the oldest 80. The median age is 43.

Of the journalists surveyed, 86.4 percent hold at least a bachelor's degree, with 52.1 percent having left university after their first degree, and 32.4 percent having finished with a master's. The proportion of journalists holding a doctorate is 1.9 percent. Only 0.6 percent have not finished high school, 6.0 percent work in the profession with a high school diploma as their last qualification, and 7.1 percent did some university studies but do not hold a degree. A third of the journalists specialized in journalism during their studies (33.3%). A further 5.1 percent specialized in another communication field, and 5.7 percent specialized in both journalism and another field of communication. However, over half of the journalists did not specialize in any of these fields (55.9%).

Journalists in the Newsroom

Roughly three quarters of the journalists work in a full-time position (74.0%), while 16.6 percent are freelancers, and 6.9 percent indicated that they work part-time. The last 2.6 percent undertake a mixture of part-time and freelance work. Of those in a full- or part-time position, 96.9 percent have a permanent contract.

Levels of experience vary within the sample. On average, the journalists have worked in the profession for 18.53 years ($s=11.48$), close to the median of 18 years. About half of the journalists work on a specific beat (52.9%), such as politics, sports, or entertainment. The remaining 47.1 percent work across more than one specific subject area. On average, journalists in the UK work for 1.48 newsrooms ($s=1.54$), and 26.7 percent work in other paid jobs outside journalism. The proportion of journalists who are members of a professional association is 43.8 percent.

Most (54%) journalists in the UK work in one medium (print, TV, radio, or online). When asked to state all the media types they worked in, about a quarter (25.9%) report that they do work for a daily newspaper, and 18.4 percent for a weekly newspaper. Almost half of the journalists, 43.7 percent, do work for magazines. Moving on to electronic media, 13.6 percent contribute to television outlets, and 12.0 percent to radio stations. Around half (52%) do work for online outlets and 5.7 percent for a news agency.

Journalistic Roles

Journalists in the UK stated that their most important role is to report things as they are (see Table 1). Other important roles are educating the audience, being a detached observer, and providing analysis of current affairs. Agreement on the importance of the top three roles is strong, as shown by the low standard deviations. At the other end of the table, only a small minority of journalists think that supporting government policy, conveying a positive image of political leadership, and being an adversary of the government are important. Other political roles, such as motivating people to participate in political activity, also found low support. Again, the low standard deviations demonstrate high levels of agreement between the journalists' answers.

Other roles named as important by a majority of UK journalists were telling stories about the world, monitoring and scrutinizing business, and letting people express their views.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying 'extremely' and 'very important'	Mean	Standard deviation
Report things as they are	697	93.0	4.59	.63
Educate the audience	694	78.7	4.10	.92
Be a detached observer	694	76.8	4.11	.89
Provide analysis of current affairs	689	67.2	3.81	1.14
Tell stories about the world	686	64.9	3.78	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize business	681	58.6	3.61	1.30
Let people express their views	686	53.9	3.43	1.23
Provide entertainment and relaxation	692	49.9	3.36	1.28
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	674	48.1	3.26	1.48
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	681	46.7	3.22	1.40
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	690	45.4	3.30	1.16
Provide information people need to make political decisions	676	37.0	2.83	1.45
Advocate for social change	674	28.8	2.77	1.29
Provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life	674	25.8	2.57	1.29
Influence public opinion	684	23.7	2.72	1.16
Support national development	663	20.2	2.44	1.21
Motivate people to participate in political activity	663	18.1	2.20	1.26
Set the political agenda	669	15.1	2.29	1.17
Be an adversary of the government	661	9.4	1.93	1.09
Convey a positive image of political leadership	657	2.1	1.43	.74
Support government policy	655	1.2	1.37	.66

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

Professional Ethics

Almost all journalists agreed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation and context with a majority believing that what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation (see Table 2). Fewer, roughly a third, thought that what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgement, and that it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. These results show UK journalists' views on ethics closely match the codes of conduct they work under.

With regard to using controversial reporting methods, we can see that certain techniques are thought to be justified on occasion by roughly three quarters of journalists, but few journalists say that such techniques are always justified (see Table 3). This is the case for using confidential business or government documents without authorization, using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, getting

employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, and using hidden microphones or cameras. Another reporting method that a majority thought to be justified on occasion was paying people for confidential information. On the other hand, only a small proportion of the journalists thought it justified, either always or on occasion, to accept money from sources, to alter or fabricate quotes from sources, or to alter photographs.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying 'strongly' and 'somewhat agree'	Mean	Standard deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	694	94.1	4.56	.73
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	689	65.9	3.49	1.29
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgement	691	38.4	2.74	1.27
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	688	34.9	2.79	1.29

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying 'always justified'	Percentage saying 'justified on occasion'
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	672	8.0	73.2
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	614	6.4	67.9
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	670	3.7	71.2
Using hidden microphones or cameras	670	2.7	75.7
Paying people for confidential information	663	1.5	51.4
Publishing stories with unverified content	667	1.3	23.8
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	669	.9	46.3
Altering photographs	677	.6	11.1
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	682	.4	4.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	662	.3	34.9
Accepting money from sources	678	.3	3.7
Claiming to be somebody else	670	.1	46.3

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Professional Autonomy and Influences

UK journalists generally believe they enjoy a high degree of professional autonomy. Almost three quarters (72.8%) stated that they have complete or a great deal of freedom when selecting news stories. A comparable proportion said that they have either complete or a great deal of freedom when deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized (77.8%). Moreover, roughly half the journalists stated that they either always or very often participate in editorial and newsroom coordination (52.4%).

The factors journalists believe have the greatest influence on their work were journalism ethics, information access, editorial policy, and time limits (see Table 4). A majority also believe that media laws and the availability of news-gathering resources are of relevance. A minority of the journalists believed that economic factors

such as profit expectations and advertising have a large influence on their work. Least influence was attributed to pressure groups, political actors, the military, and religious considerations. However, the standard deviations for all items show that there is disagreement, especially in the case of the influence of personal values and beliefs and of journalists' peers.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying 'extremely' and 'very influential'	Mean	Standard deviation
Journalism ethics	687	76.4	4.10	.91
Information access	677	66.3	3.77	.99
Editorial policy	681	64.2	3.77	.96
Time limits	688	64.1	3.80	.92
Media laws and regulation	692	62.9	3.75	1.10
Availability of news-gathering resources	665	59.8	3.64	.99
Your personal values and beliefs	671	51.4	3.61	1.06
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	656	46.8	3.44	.96
Feedback from the audience	695	44.6	3.42	.92
Relationships with news sources	690	43.2	3.22	1.11
Audience research and data	666	41.1	3.26	1.08
Your peers on the staff	670	34.0	3.13	.96
Competing news organizations	695	32.1	3.11	.93
Managers of the news organization	642	29.1	2.93	1.12
Owners of the news organization	618	19.4	2.51	1.21
Public relations	691	19.2	2.63	1.03
Colleagues in other media	696	16.1	2.60	.98
Profit expectations	611	16.0	2.43	1.11
Censorship	662	15.3	2.21	1.16
Business people	688	15.3	2.32	1.12
Advertising considerations	612	13.9	2.35	1.09
Friends, acquaintances, and family	695	9.5	2.27	1.01
Religious considerations	555	8.3	1.87	1.04
Military, police, and state security	676	7.4	1.77	1.01
Politicians	681	6.0	1.94	.95
Government officials	678	4.9	1.92	.92
Pressure groups	686	4.5	2.00	.92

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means it has little influence, and 1 means not influential.

Journalism in Transition

Change is manifold according to journalists in the UK (see Table 5). They reported, almost unanimously, that the use of search engines has increased. Similarly, a large majority found that the importance of technical skills has increased, as has the average working hours of journalists. There is disagreement with regard to changes in the relevance of journalism for society, with roughly a third saying that its relevance has increased, and roughly a fifth saying the opposite. However, there is considerable agreement that journalists now have less time for researching their stories, and to a lesser degree that the credibility of journalism has decreased.

There are also clear changes visible regarding influences on journalism (see Table 6). A very large proportion of journalists found that the influence of social media and user-generated content, such as blogs, has strengthened. With regard to the other influences mentioned, such as audience feedback and profit-making pressures, a majority of journalists stated that most of these influences had become stronger, with only a small proportion claiming the opposite. However, in the case of ethical standards, the picture is ambiguous, as roughly half the journalists believed that

these standards have strengthened, and roughly one third thought the opposite. The picture is similar in the case of journalism education.

The questions about changes in journalism and changes in influences on journalism were only asked to journalists who had five or more years of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has 'increased'	Percentage saying has 'decreased'
The use of search engines	593	97.3	.2
Technical skills	585	81.4	10.4
Average working hours of journalists	556	81.1	1.3
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	571	64.3	21.5
Having a university degree	540	43.0	12.4
The relevance of journalism for society	577	36.6	21.8
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	538	34.0	20.3
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	540	19.8	40.6
The credibility of journalism	585	9.2	66.5
Time available for researching stories	577	2.6	86.1

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of the following aspects of work in the United Kingdom. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has 'strengthened'	Percentage saying has 'weakened'
Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook	592	98.0	.2
User-generated content, such as blogs	587	91.7	2.4
Audience feedback	578	77.3	2.1
Profit-making pressures	559	77.3	1.8
Audience involvement in news production	570	73.7	4.2
Competition	580	70.5	10.2
Audience research	561	68.4	4.6
Advertising considerations	537	66.1	4.5
Public relations	568	60.2	5.6
Pressure toward sensational news	571	51.8	10.0
Ethical standards	565	49.6	29.0
Journalism education	503	40.4	35.2

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in the United Kingdom. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

Journalistic Trust

Journalists generally have very little trust in political institutions, with the exception of parliament, which ranks slightly higher than the government, politicians in general, and political parties (see Table 7). The most trust, by a margin of 10 percent, is put in the judiciary. This is followed by the military and the police. The news media take the middle ground in the table. Trade unions and religious leaders rank similarly to parliament. There was little disagreement, as the standard deviations show, but journalists were most divided on the question of how much trust they have in religious leaders. It should be noted that there is no institution that is trusted either completely or a great deal by the majority of journalists.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying 'complete' and 'a great deal of trust'	Mean	Standard deviation
The judiciary/the courts	671	41.4	3.35	.78
The military	657	30.4	3.10	.84
The police	670	26.1	3.04	.80
The news media	677	21.1	2.99	.73
The House of Commons/Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly/Northern Ireland Assembly	666	13.2	2.79	.78
Trade unions	666	12.3	2.70	.81
Religious leaders	662	11.2	2.50	.93
The Prime Minister/First Minister, Cabinet, and other ministers	670	8.5	2.51	.83
Politicians in general	672	2.4	2.39	.69
Political parties	671	1.8	2.33	.71

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

Further reading

All the data from the UK survey is fully described and analysed in the following monograph:

Thurman, Neil, Cornia, Alessio, and Kunert, Jessica (2016) *Journalists in the UK*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

<http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/journalists-uk>

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	63,618 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple random sample
<i>Sample size:</i>	700
<i>Interview methods:</i>	online
<i>Response rate:</i>	8%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	12/2015