

Ngā Awa Kōrero

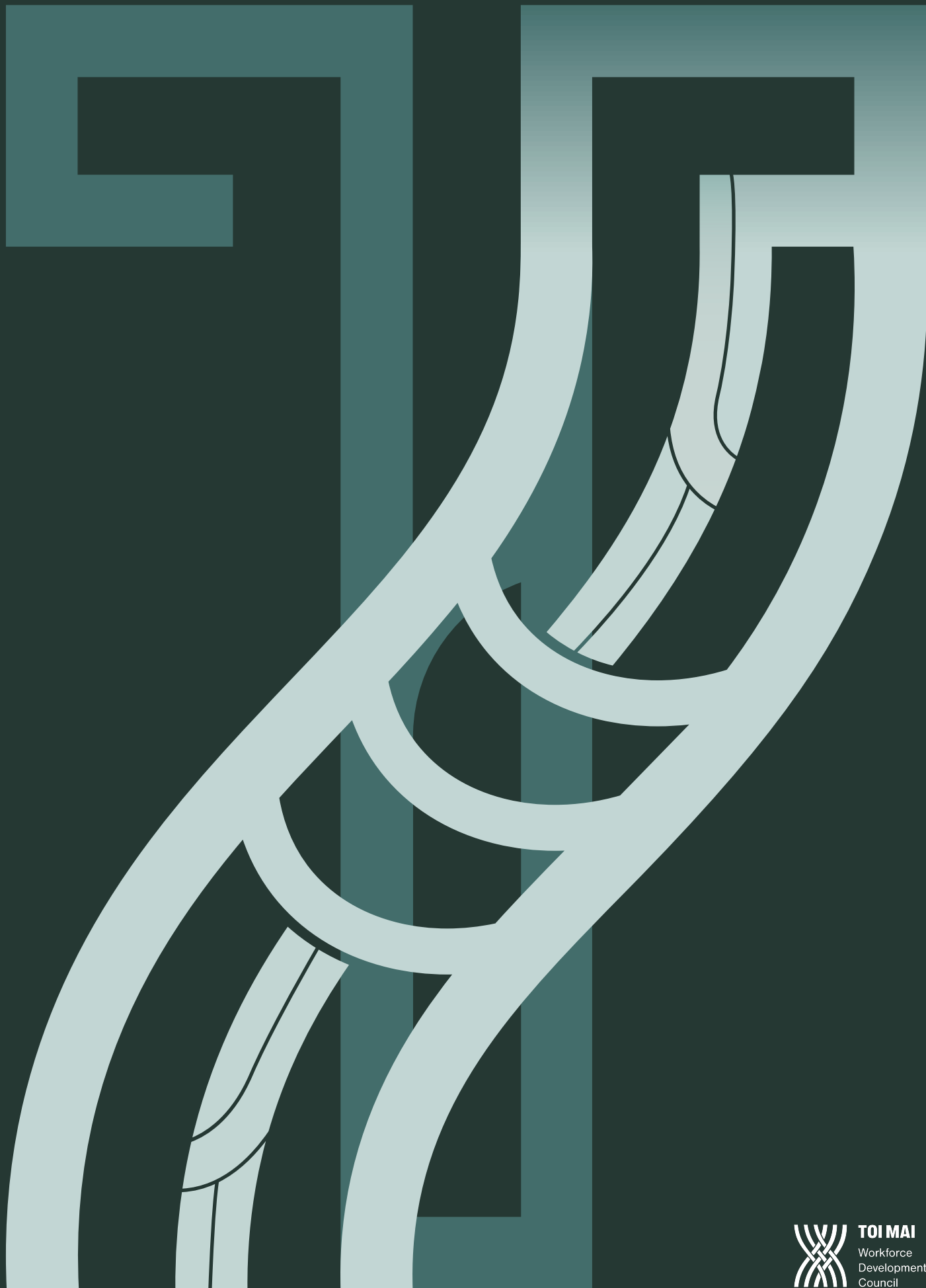




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ECOSYSTEM AFFIRMING

Ngā Awa Kōrero – The Rivers of Narrative: the Journalism Workforce Development Plan

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Te Hikuwai ki Tai

Executive Summary

A strong journalism sector is critical to a healthy democracy. Aotearoa functions best when journalists inform, uncover truths and hold power to account.

While the media sector faces significant issues, the journalism workforce also faces its own challenges. A growing number of students are leaving training without the skills they need to work in the industry. The journalism industry has highlighted the current approach to educating journalists is not fit for purpose, with an increasing emphasis on degree-level and postgraduate study that doesn't reflect what industry needs to produce graduates who are ready for work.

This mismatch in training to industry need places additional pressure on an already struggling sector, which is losing the experienced, mid-career workforce needed to upskill and support people entering an industry decimated by new forms of media and declining revenue.

Industry would like to see training shift to more work-based and on-the-job learning to provide graduates with the right skills. Industry appears less concerned with formal qualifications than they are

with people having the skills to work in and around a newsroom, knock on doors or appreciate the distinction between news and opinion.

In essence, industry wants to shift the balance away from class-based learning to more practical experiences to learn skills journalism needs. Models such as cadetships or training partnerships between providers and industry would offer more relevant training with skills learned while doing.

Restoring traditional training and development pathways is also critical. The regional centres are a good pathway for junior journalists to develop their trade with the number of roles and skill sets needed in smaller newsrooms, provided there is adequate mentoring.

A strong journalism sector needs more relevant work-based training, a more enabling regulatory and funding environment, and more concentrated efforts to ensure communities are represented by the journalists who tell their stories.

This workforce development plan is the result of data analysis and both in-person and online engagements with a broad range of people from the sector. This research and these engagements have informed the recommendations and actions made to empower the journalism sector.



Photo from Pexels

Journalism, often referred to as the “fourth estate”, plays a vital role in upholding democracy by holding those in power accountable. As citizens, we rely on trusted news sources and trained reporters to stay informed on a range of issues of political, social and cultural importance.

In an Aotearoa context, it is particularly important for journalism to reflect the cultural and demographic diversity of our society. Māori news has been instrumental in giving visibility to issues that hold deep significance for whānau, hapū and iwi Māori across the motu. Sustained efforts over decades have fostered a strong workforce of reo Māori-speaking journalists, with Māori news playing a key role not only in informing communities but also in revitalising te reo Māori across the country.

While journalism as a profession has been around for hundreds of years, the rise of the internet, social media and technologies has rapidly transformed news dissemination. There is now an ability to reach more audiences than ever before, across multiple platforms and forms of media, instantly. This shift has brought both opportunities and challenges, redefining the role and relevance of journalism as well as the business models that support it. Trust in some parts of the media sector has also eroded. The sector has changed: “[w]e have thousands and thousands of people producing content now. And anything is news, and everyone can create it. So how do we, as so-called journalists and people in journalism, compete against that?”

A highly skilled, innovative journalism sector needs robust training pathways and an updated and supportive regulatory environment to thrive independently. We want to continue to see, hear and engage with the issues that matter to Aotearoa, delivered by voices and faces that reflect our own communities.

Te hikuwai ki tai

Overview

In envisioning the future of the journalism sector in Aotearoa, we draw upon the metaphor of Ngā Awa Kōrero – the rivers of narrative.

Just as awa (rivers) flow across the whenua (land), bringing life, connection and nourishment to all they touch, journalism carries stories, information and diverse voices to communities across the motu. Each part of this awa system is essential, playing a role in maintaining the sector's health, flow and direction.

As the awa flows, it feeds and sustains the whenua, nourishing the land and the people along its course. In the same way, the journalism sector supports the communities it serves, providing essential knowledge, amplifying diverse voices, and fostering connection and understanding.

Our approach to the journalism workforce development plan integrates this metaphor to illustrate how we can nurture a resilient, adaptive and inclusive ecosystem for journalism, and it is spread throughout the plan as a guiding narrative.

In essence, the strength of Ngā Awa Kōrero lies in its interconnectedness. As the awa flows through the whenua, it nourishes and sustains the land, symbolising how the journalism sector supports the communities it serves. Each part of the sector, from training and regulation to revenue models and cultural diversity, must work in harmony, just as an awa thrives when all its elements support one another.

The goal is a resilient, adaptive and diverse ecosystem where stories flow freely, reflecting the voices of all communities and nurturing a well-informed society.



Photo by Paul Lequay from Unsplash

Mātāpuna Māramatanga Data

MĀĀPUNAJUNA MĀRAMATANGA

Mātāpuna Māramatanga Data

“

I think the tragedy is that it's the New Zealand journalism sector that's being hit hardest by this.

”

The number of journalists continues to decline in direct correlation with decline in advertising revenue

Looking specifically at the newspaper publishing, radio broadcasting, and free-to-air-television industries:

- In 2023, there were approximately 1,210¹ journalists and editors.
 - 19% decrease from 2013.²
- The decline in roles can be directly correlated with the change in traditional forms of advertising revenue, over a 15-year period between 2008 and 2023:
 - Television ad revenue has fallen **\$113m** (-17%).
 - Newspaper ad revenue has declined **\$463m** (-61%).³

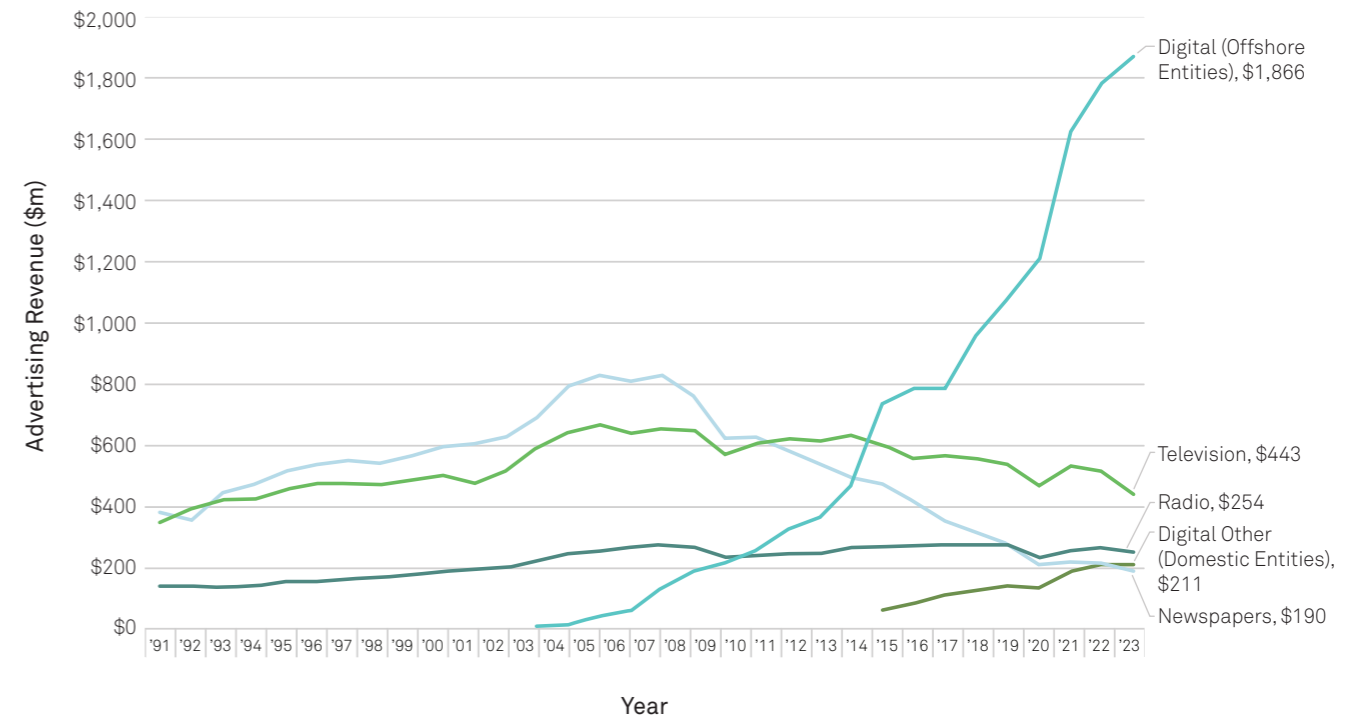
¹ This number does not include the closure of Newshub, and the subsequent loss of journalist roles, nor any journalists whose roles were created, and funded, as part of the Public Interest Journalist Fund, which has now ended. As a result, those roles are expected to decline as that fund has ended.

² Statistics New Zealand IDI

³ Advertising Standards Authority, Advertising Turnover Report

Digital advertising has grown exponentially to over \$2 billion, with approximately 90% going to non-domestic organisations

Advertising Revenue



*Note: television digital, radio digital and newspaper digital are included in 'Digital Other'.

Since 2008, overall advertising revenue has increased by over \$1 billion (45%), reaching \$3.36bn in 2023. During the same period, digital advertising revenue has increased nearly 900%, totalling over \$2 billion in 2023. Of this, 90% was revenue to offshore entities.

In 2023, television digital, radio digital and newspaper digital for domestic organisations made up \$211 million (6.3%) of total advertising revenue – representing the domestic entities, compared to \$1.86 billion (55.6%) from digital-only – representing the offshore entities.

Between 2008 and 2023, advertising revenue across the same period for television, radio and newspaper has declined by one-third (34%) in value, and makes up 33% of total advertising revenue in 2023, compared to 72% in 2008.

⁴ Advertising Standards Authority, Advertising Turnover Report

Potential news deserts in the regions, places where there are a low number of journalists have appeared

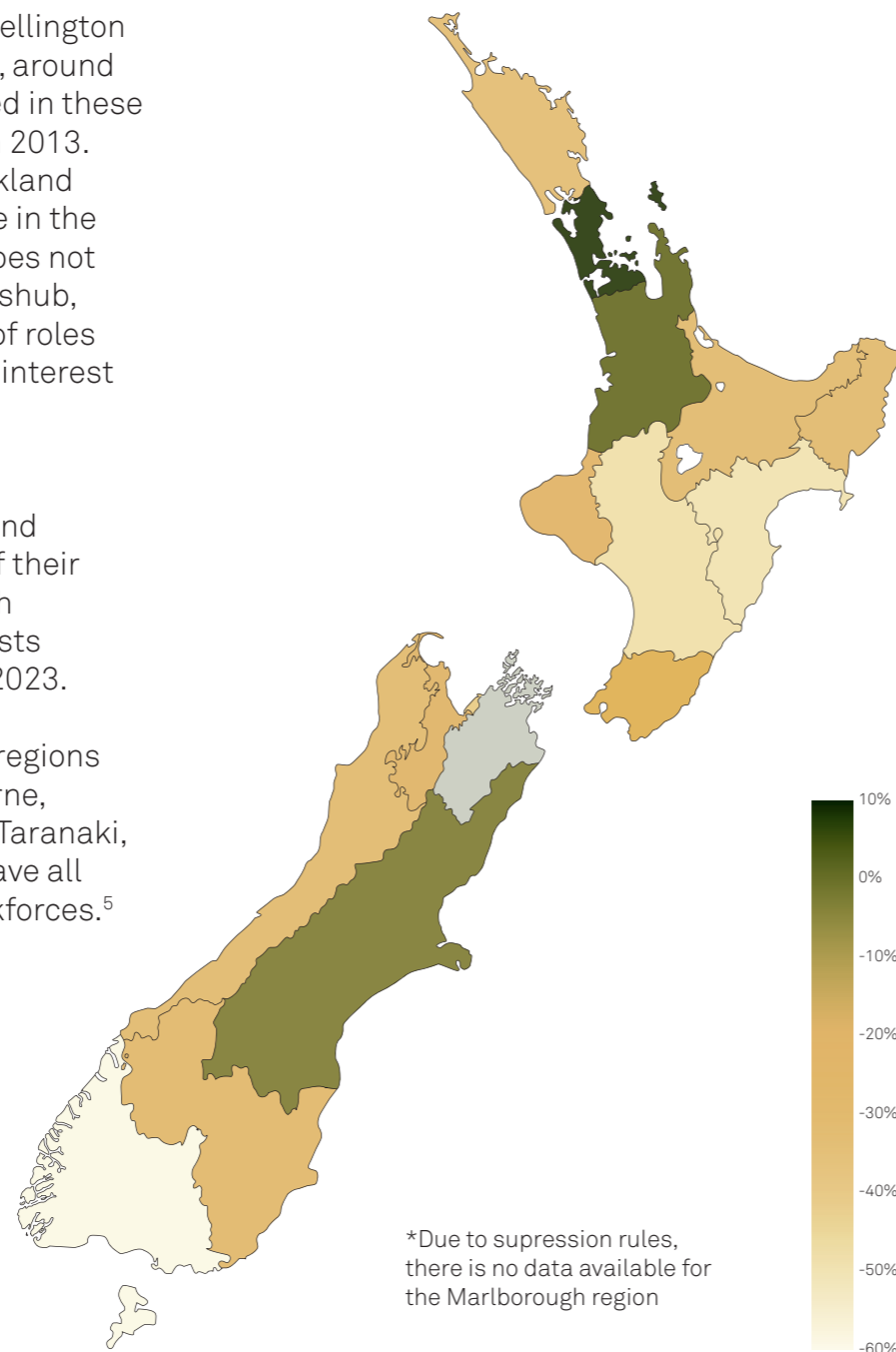
The regions have subsequently been impacted as a result of the decline in the number of journalists.

Over ten years, between 2013 and 2023, there has been a shift in the concentration of journalists in the main centres: Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. By 2023, around 70% of journalists operated in these areas, compared to 61% in 2013. All regions apart from Auckland have experienced a decline in the workforce; however, this does not include the closing of Newshub, cuts at TVNZ and the end of roles funded through the public interest journalism fund.

The regions of Manawatū-Whanganui, Hawke's Bay and Southland have lost half of their workforce in ten years, with only 32, 21 and 16 journalists respectively remaining in 2023.

Over the same period, the regions of the Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Nelson, Northland, Otago, Taranaki, Tasman and West Coast have all lost one-third of their workforces.⁵

Percentage change in workforce size: 2013–2023

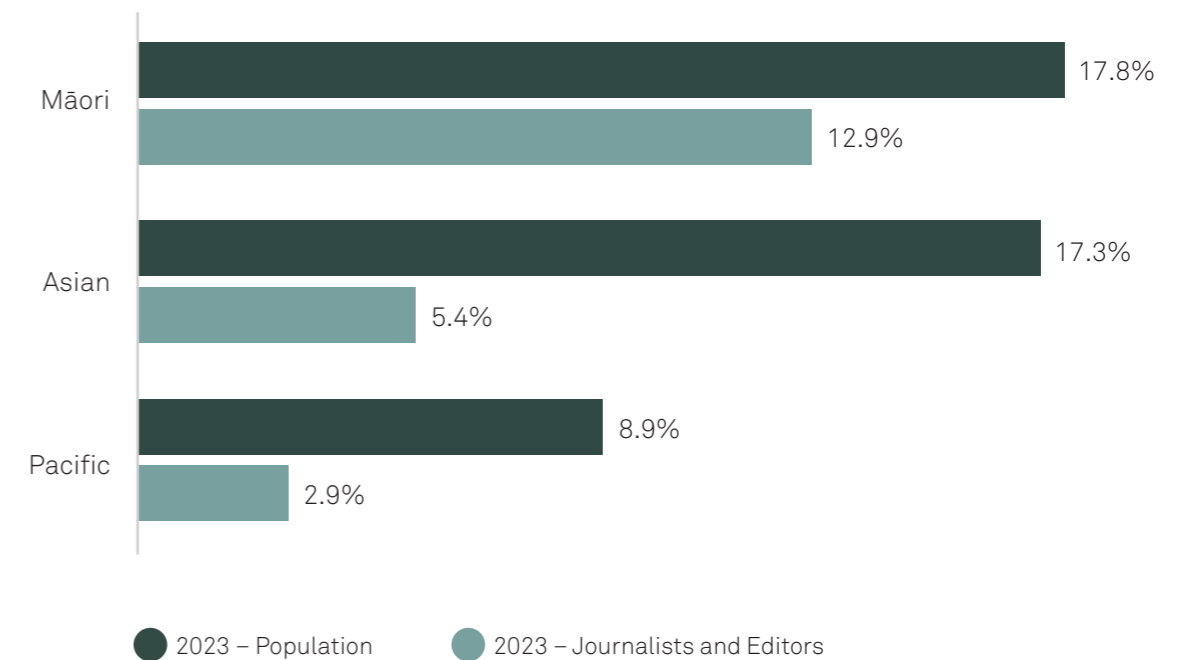


⁵ Statistics New Zealand IDI

Māori, Pacific peoples and Asian are underrepresented in the sector

With a changing audience demographic, schemes have tried to combat workforce underrepresentation. However, in 2023, demographically, 12.9% were Māori, 2.9% Pacific peoples and 5.4% Asian. All three are significantly below population parity.⁶

Workforce Demographic



Incomes for journalists have increased since 2013, with the median incomes above \$70k by 2023

Income for journalists has remained relatively static between 2013 and 2018 but has increased in 2023. In 2023, median income is above \$70k, a rise from 2013 and 2018 where it sat between the \$50–60k income bracket.

⁶ Statistics New Zealand IDI

⁷ Statistics New Zealand IDI

Mahere Whakaterere

The plan

MĀHĀRE WHAKATERERE

Mahere Whakaterere

The plan

This plan lays the foundation for empowering Aotearoa New Zealand's journalism sector to make it more resilient and sustainable, supported by a diverse and highly skilled workforce.

The plan discusses the current issues with aspects of formal training, highlighting the disparity between training and preparing for a career in journalism, particularly due to a lack of on-the-job training. It highlights the importance of increasing work-based learning and work opportunities, addresses newsroom skill gaps and the changing demands of journalists, while also highlighting the need for supporting both regional and community pathways. These issues cannot be looked at in isolation, given the relationship between revenue and the number of employed journalists. Therefore, wider systemic issues such as declining revenue and regulation are discussed.

The plan unveils key themes from in-depth research with education providers, journalists and management in media organisations. It spotlights current barriers faced by the journalism workforce and proposes actionable recommendations to foster industry collaboration, increase diversity, and bridge the gap between current training and industry needs.

A central focus in the plan is on achieving greater collaboration

between organisations in the industry and tertiary training providers, while acknowledging the different and often competing interests for organisations. The plan approaches this focus through understanding the commonalities from a training perspective, while also examining ways to increase participation of Māori, Pacific and Asian people, all of whom are currently underrepresented and face barriers to entry and retention into the sector.

The plan examines ways to better align current training programmes to meet the sector's evolving skills requirements. It identifies knowledge and skill gaps and proposes ways to bridge them, with a greater emphasis on work-based learning and exploring cadetships. It does not propose that all training should be work-based without the support of tertiary providers, but suggests that this pathway has virtually disappeared from the sector and training outcomes could improve with different models.

While the plan does have a training focus, it highlights that any training intervention for increasing the work-readiness of graduates in the journalism sector cannot be done in isolation from wider sectoral changes. These wider issues – such as declining revenue that has caused a decline in the number of journalists (particularly mid-career journalists), an out-of-date and challenging regulatory environment, and the

perceived lack of attractiveness in a journalism career – need to be addressed concurrently with changes in training.

The plan does not specifically discuss proposed legislative changes, such as how revenue is increased nor how platforms may negotiate with industry members. However, in order to fund journalism, where people addressed what they felt was needed from a revenue perspective, these issues are discussed. It does, however, explore how simple tax changes and legislation may help fund journalism.

About industry quotes in this plan

Conversations were conducted kanohi ki te kanohi (in person) or hui topa (online) and were semi-structured around a career in journalism. We have removed all job titles and position descriptions to provide, where possible, anonymity of participants, but we spoke with a broad range of the sector, including CEOs, managing editors, editors, news producers, senior journalists and junior journalists, among others.

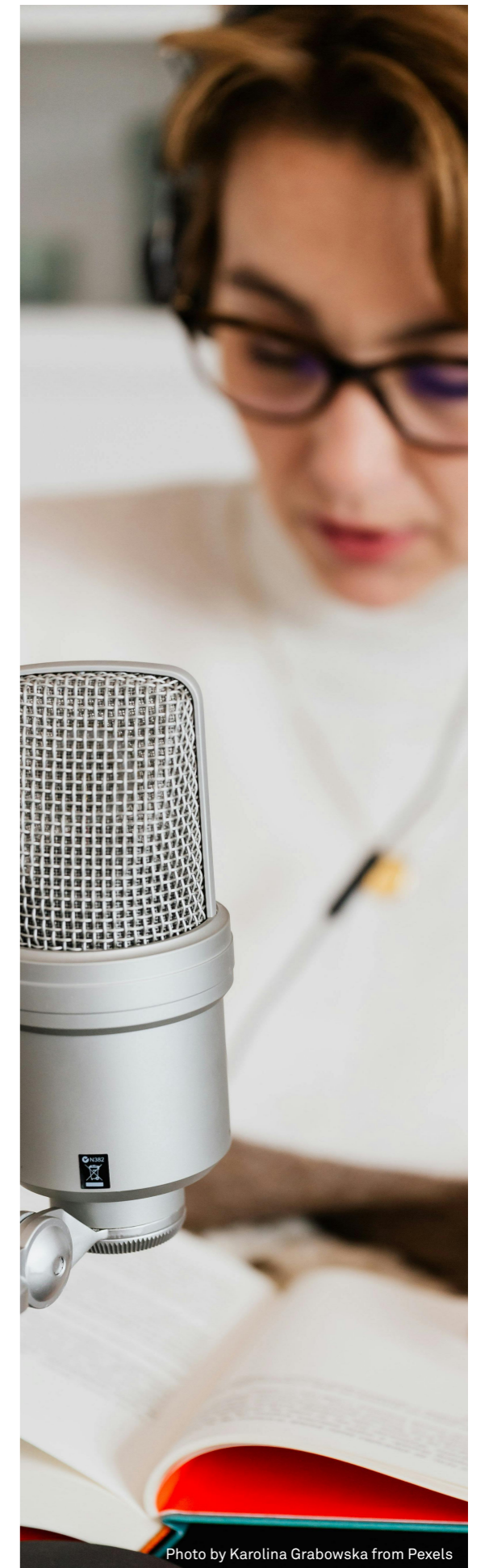


Photo by Karolina Grabowska from Pexels



Te Whānuitanga o te Rere Scope

The journalism sector is made up of different organisations, each with their own unique motivations and needs

In order to understand the sector, it is necessary to point out the different providers that currently operate in the journalism landscape of Aotearoa. While there is consensus that journalism is about the sharing of news and information and a drive to provide high-quality, impartial journalism, the approach that different organisations take to this can differ.

While there are nuances and exceptions to these descriptions, it is helpful to understand the different areas across the industry and how this impacts their motivations, and therefore the needs and challenges of different journalism organisations.

Rere-ā-Kāwanatanga State-owned media

RNZ and TVNZ are the only state-owned news broadcasters in Aotearoa. RNZ is fully funded by the Government, while TVNZ operates a commercial model with funding for specific programming. These government-owned organisations

have a public service mandate that prioritises impartial journalism and news coverage. They focus on providing comprehensive coverage that may not always be commercially viable for other types of media.

Rere-ā-Pakihi Commercial Media

These are privately owned, profit-driven and purpose-led organisations that rely primarily on advertising revenue, subscriptions and/or paywalls to operate. These outlets drive competition in the market, which encourages innovation in content

delivery and engagement strategies. The stories that they cover depend on their audience and business model. Stuff, NZME and magazine publishers are examples of this.

Rere-ā-Hapori Community-based media

These organisations are often smaller, non-profit or independently owned outlets that focus on serving specific communities, including Māori, Pacific or rural audiences. Community media typically runs on a combination of

funding that allows them to focus on content that reflects the interests and concerns of the communities they serve.

Ngā Au O Te Wai Themes

Ō AU IWA NGĀ E



Photo by Makea Pokere from Manurewa High School

Ngā Au O Te Wai Themes

The following section delves deeper into these ideas and explains the reasoning behind the proposed actions and recommendations outlined in the journalism workforce development plan.

Industry believes the majority of training does not prepare learners for a career in journalism

- Graduates possess high technical capabilities.
- Activism and opinion need to be trained out of new journalists.
- There is not enough on-the-job training for journalism.
- Upskilling and reskilling for journalists to develop greater multimedia technical and storytelling skills are needed.
- Increasing meaningful on-the-job training and developing work-based learning would better prepare early entrants for a career in journalism.

There is a 'missing middle' in newsrooms, and without them industry loses knowledge and capability

- The missing middle also affects the upskilling, mentoring and training of junior journalists.

The regions can provide a meaningful pathway for the future of journalism

The workforce needs to reflect changes in demographics and audiences

- Māori and Pacific media provide pathways for new journalists.

Diverse revenue streams are needed to reduce reliance on delivery platforms that support the dissemination of news

- Diversifying revenue streams is key for reducing platform susceptibility.
- Advertising revenue remains a key revenue stream.
- But some are moving to creating premium content for a paying audience to reduce the reliance on advertising.

Sector needs better collaboration between organisations

- Te Rito is an example of partnering for the sake of training.

Regulation is no longer fit for purpose

AI is disruptive, but government can help the sector innovate

Tē rere tika ana te awa ki te moana, he hohoro nō te hikuwai

Industry believes the majority of training does not prepare learners for a career in journalism

Te hikuwai – The source of the river (training and skills development)

Foundational strength: Te hikuwai, or headwaters, represent the essential beginnings of a journalist's journey. This is where robust training and cadetship programmes provide the skills and resilience needed to thrive in the field. Like a clear, strong source, these programmes must be well-supported to sustain the downstream flow, ensuring new entrants are ready to navigate the currents of the industry. Without these solid foundations, the awa struggles, reflecting how inadequate training weakens the sector's future.

During the 1980s the number of journalism qualifications increased in New Zealand, and “the training of reporters . . . largely shifted to journalism schools.”⁸ As a result, and as industry moved away from training its own journalists, the sector began relying on education providers to teach journalism, rather than in-workplace training schemes such as cadetships. Journalists in New Zealand tended to be trained in classroom-based settings, such as polytechnics and universities, with less on-the-job training experience.

Current provision has declined in the last decade, along with enrolment in tertiary programmes, which is reflected in the overall decline in journalism roles. Tertiary provision is funded through the equivalent fulltime student (EFTS) model, and training is not tied to employment outcomes. Funding is prioritised for classroom-based instruction rather than within industry.

When we spoke with industry, there was a belief journalism training had become disconnected from workplace expectations and industry need.

In addition, there was also a feeling graduates were emerging with the wrong skill sets and skill deficiencies.

⁸ Rees, J. “Training Journalists in New Zealand: The Industry View of Training 1979-2002”. Pacific Journalism Review : Te Koakoa, Vol. 29, no. 1 & 2, July 2023, pp. 65-77, doi:10.24135/pjr.v29i1and2.1249.

“

They can't do interviews, they've never done a door knock. They can't write. We have pretty big concerns about the people who come out of journalism schools now.

”

“

We found the level of, I suppose, grammatical – just literacy – really quite poor that we have communicated to some of the training organisations that we expect, and it's not just on them. I think it's a reflection of the school system as well.”

”

“They're work ready, in that they understand the theory, most of them, but they're not in the sense that they have the resilience to survive in this industry, which can be really tough when you're out and when you're doing a door knock or you're confronting somebody to tell a story that they don't want told, or you're dealing with just the cut and thrust of daily deadlines.”

“. . . journalism training has become a business in itself for the universities – postgrad degrees as opposed to trade qualification – and there's nowhere near enough on-the-job training.”

We also heard from industry the number of journalists entering the sector from tertiary training is not an issue within the sector, even as the number of graduates declines. Rather, there is a mismatch in skills and preparedness to enter journalism roles, and significant investment is required to train new journalists on the job, which put resourcing burdens on employers and newsrooms.

“... straight out of journalism school, ... we basically have to train them from scratch completely. They don't spend enough time in newsrooms, and having people in newsrooms is a bit of an ask for the newsroom because ... quite a lot of work goes into having a trainee journalist there.”

The pathways for developing Māori and te reo Māori speaking journalists are even more difficult. We heard that formal training often does not cater to a pathway into Māori journalism, so Māori news organisations have to provide their own training.

“I don't think there has been any formal course that I'm aware of that has been fit-for-purpose for reo speaking journalists ever.”

“We're the subject matter experts, so [providers] need to work with us to draw that out and help inform a curriculum or a programme or a course. So when I talk about a structured approach, I mean we want to collaborate and partner with the likes of a wānanga or tertiary provider who understand the way Māori think and work, so we can create a specific course for Māori and reo speaking journalists.”

The challenge, then, is to bridge the academic and critical thinking that tertiary institutions provide with the sector's need for work-readiness and workplace experience.



Photo by Cottonbro from Pexels



Photo from iStock

Graduates possess high technical capabilities

However, while journalism graduates may lack skill sets acquired from on-the-job training, they do possess a high degree of technical capability. This could be explained by the inherent digital skills of younger people, who have grown up as digital natives having been exposed to technology platforms their entire lives. We heard NCEA students interested in media prefer to pathway into screen-focused careers rather than journalism. In addition, tertiary providers also told us they teach technical aspects in their courses now to reflect industry changes, and this reflects the role

and demand of journalists as being much more technical than ever before. Such skills are highly sought after, especially as employers need journalists to complete work across multiple platforms and formats, while taking on extra activities, such as photography, posting to social media, and audio and video editing. These changes also reflect a move to a story-centric approach that can be disseminated in multiple ways across platforms.

“Everybody's job includes a multitude of things these days.”

“ I would say that young people coming into this profession now possess much better technical skills than existed when I first started. ”

Activism and opinion need to be trained out of new journalists

Further, people we spoke to also noted a rise in opinion and activism in new journalists, which was attributed as being a by-product of social media influence, changing viewpoints, particularly on social issues, and the rise of ‘opinionification’ of news content on social media platforms.

“One thing that I was noticing recently as well, even with people who had come out of the journalism school training . . . even young graduates sometimes didn’t understand the difference between opinion and what would be actual reportage. And so there’s a real shifting of how to tell a story and what is your personal opinion and all of those fine distinctions, which I think we just grasped immediately in our day. It wasn’t that there were no other ways of, wasn’t that different way of sharing opinions, readily, kind of confused the issue.”

“ . . . we’re seeing young reporters want to come out straight away and write pieces that are almost based around activism as opposed to journalism.”

While this trend was considered worrying to some, there were others who felt it could be managed with better training, particularly on-the-job:

“You can [train] that out of them . . . It’s just not the role of a junior journalist. A junior journalist is on the phones

and doing live news, and they can develop over that time. But if we had too many of those people then no one would read us.”

However, participants we spoke with, some of whom had been involved in previous cadetship programmes, noted merely training more journalists, regardless of how they were trained, without an increase in demand for journalism roles, and an all-of-career pathway, would be pointless, as graduates would not have jobs to enter after graduation.

“The thing is that we never foresaw that there was a total collapse in terms of the jobs. So our kids are competing for jobs. There are less and less jobs in the sector. So there’s no point really [training more cadets]. There’s no point carrying that on than this year or the next year or, say, for the next three to five years, because there are no journalism cadetship jobs for them to go into right now.”

A disconnect between training and industry has emerged, but with ongoing workforce development planning, training can be better coordinated with industry, particularly when it comes to workforce supply and demand. Industry and providers meeting together collectively to discuss and plan workforce needs and standards is vital for a healthy sector.

There is not enough on-the-job training for journalism

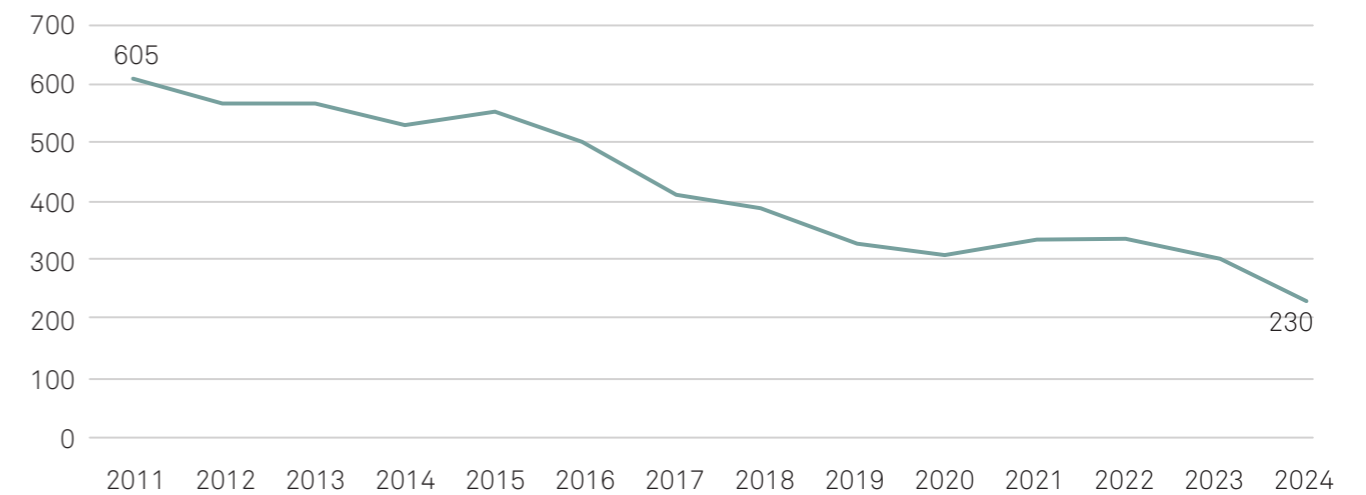
Historically, journalism training in Aotearoa was predominantly delivered on-the-job, such as through training programmes or cadetships in industry or with significant on-the-job training and industry organised support.

Newsrooms provided hands-on training for new recruits as a way to build workplace capability, with mentoring and support from senior journalists, and journalism was, essentially, considered a trade, and even had its own industry training body: the Journalism Training Organisation. Gradually, however, training moved to tertiary institutions – polytechnics and universities – with shorter in-industry opportunities for training.

Currently, journalism training is predominantly delivered at tertiary institutions at degree-level or as a postgraduate qualification, and often within a communications qualification rather than a stand-alone journalism qualification⁹, though the numbers of people training to be journalists continues to decline.

Overall enrolments into journalism qualifications have deteriorated between 2011 and 2024. In 2011, there were 605 enrolments, compared to 230 in 2024 – a drop of over 60%.¹⁰

Number of enrolments – narrow Journalism qual scope

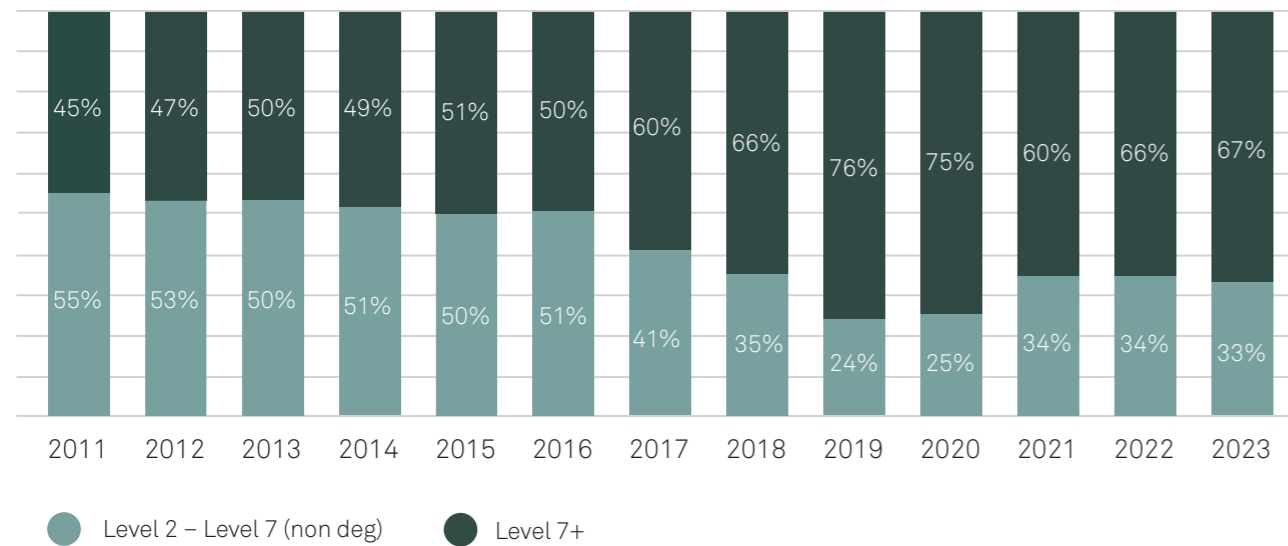


⁹ Ara Institute of Canterbury’s Bachelor of Broadcasting Communications provides a long, on-the-job paid practicum in the final year of the degree.

¹⁰ Ngā Kete

Journalism is mainly taught in bachelor's degree and graduate-level qualifications.

Proportion of enrolments by level – Journalism specific quals



In 2011, 55% of enrolments for journalism-specific qualifications were delivered through vocational education and training (levels 2–7 non-degree). By 2023, just one-third enrolled in journalism training was vocational education and training levels, a significant shift in 12 years.¹¹

Participants we spoke with felt a disconnect has emerged between what graduates in journalism qualifications study and industry needs. While students have a good academic understanding of journalism, industry feels graduates are not work-ready and need extra training when they enter the workforce.

“We don’t believe people need postgraduate training to be a journalist. But we do think they need critical thinking training and on-the-job training. So, yes, if we were able to have more workforce training that supported people partly in industry and partly to gather the skills that they need, that would be ideal.”

Delivering on-the-job training, however, is difficult for newsrooms, especially as resources are stretched, and junior journalists struggle with increased workload and deadlines. Training opportunities, then, can be ad hoc and difficult to undertake.

¹¹ Ngā Kete

“I don’t think it’s realistic for people to participate, because the expectations don’t change, even if you’ve got extra things to take on it. You’re still expected to file stories every day. It becomes this nice idea. We’d probably all like to have more training, but whether that’s realistic or not.”

With funding for most tertiary provision incentivising classroom-based training, finding a way to mix tertiary provision with more on-the-job training and experience is important to produce well-rounded graduates.

Upskilling and reskilling for journalists to develop greater multimedia technical and storytelling skills are needed

Ngā kākahi me ngā kōura – The freshwater mussels and crayfish (support structures and digital skills)

Purifying and sustaining the flow: freshwater creatures like kākahu (mussels) and kōura (crayfish) act as natural filters, keeping the wai fresh and clean. They represent the unseen but essential support systems – editors, mentors and trainers – who refine and uphold quality. They also signify the ongoing need for upskilling, particularly in digital and multimedia skills. Effective support structures, like these creatures, ensure that the sector can adapt and thrive in a changing environment, maintaining clarity and health.

As the delivery of journalism changes, with greater emphasis on digital platforms, as opposed to just writing for print, the skills required of journalists are changing to meet the needs of multi-platform storytelling.

During our engagements, industry highlighted that new entrants tend to have multimedia technical skills such as proficiency in various types of software, but this is less the case for

more experienced journalists. These experienced journalists may need to upskill and reskill to keep up with the needs of the role.

In addition to challenges with training and upskilling new journalists, the sector also struggles to upskill and reskill mid-career and senior journalists.

“If I’m moving away from print journalism, what can we do online like having interactive graphs and tables . . . I would like to have more time to think about those things. And I think to myself, I really need to learn how to put these things together . . . it’s just not realistic on the job.”

“So we’ve now moved into a different, I suppose, a phase where we expect the multi-platform skill . . . someone who can only do one skill will probably be quite limited in the modern-day environment.”

We heard that developing these multimedia skills is essential in reaching diverse audiences that consume news differently to the traditional TV, radio or print, such as social media for younger demographics.

“So how can we make perhaps a mundane story about politics attractive to that audience if we want to target them or we want to target everyone because our funding requires what numbers have you reached. So there’s a certain age group with TikTok and Instagram a little bit more serious, but they don’t want to see the long-form, three-minute stories as much.”

Additional to this, industry say that improving the storytelling ability of journalists will help meet the changing needs of how news is being consumed, but each audience and platform has its own needs that need to be understood. For example, storytelling for community news outlets such from a te ao Māori

perspective or Pacific people’s perspective, compared to traditional mainstream storytelling of news.

“[W]e need to cater for all of those different needs and audiences, because they’re all important, and our parents and the way they consume content is just as valuable as the way our kids are. And I’ll do this thing where I’ll say to my kids: oh, did you see the about such and such? And they’ll be like, yeah, we saw it on TikTok, and I’m like, choice, that is awesome. I’m so thrilled you just saw it there and you consumed it, and then it’ll be a different version for my mum, but it is actually all still the same issue in story.”

“I think that’s also because we’re just tuning out good stories and getting better with our storytelling, but we are targeting or we’re creating stories that are specific to the people in [the region], and so our stories have got out there and amongst the different marae and amongst the different young people, young Māori, who go to Kura, who go to Marae, who go to certain events and they’ll see one of their buddies who might be on one night. They go, they’ll just share so you’ll have that instant increase of viewership because it hits their target straight away.”

Industry indicated there will be a continuing convergence of the sector as the sector embraces a digital-first strategy, and journalists will need to file stories across multiple platforms, which in turn require different story types.





Photo by Engin Akyurt from Unsplash

Increasing meaningful on-the-job training and developing work-based learning would better prepare early entrants for a career in journalism

Industry and journalists we spoke with communicated a desire to develop work-based learning models, such as cadetships or a hybrid provider–industry model, where a trainee journalist spends a significant amount of time in the workplace training.

“But I’m all for it. I love it. I love it. I love to have that. That to me is the best model – that full integration with tertiary provider who can do some of the heavy lifting around the training, but in our workplaces, because we are the ones who will, it’s like a porous passing of the baton rather than a hard pass.”

On-the-job training was deemed important due to the difference between the training environment and people’s experiences of working in the newsroom. The pace, the pressure and the unpredictability of newsrooms and the real world was something we heard cannot be meaningfully replicated in classroom training.

While we heard that on-the-job experience is important for work readiness, this is a big demand on the capabilities and resources of news organisations to accommodate trainees. Where there are work-based opportunities, these usually come in short internships that aren’t considered long enough to adequately prepare graduates for a career in journalism.

“It’s exciting to step into a newsroom for the first time, but it’s always just, like, quite a shock because it’s so different to the experience of being in a classroom. So, I think the more you can have that experience, the better prepared you’d be in the workforce.”

While there was less of an emphasis in delivering a formal qualification, and focusing more on skills, industry acknowledged that providers could still provide aspects of training and manage students through the cadetship in partner with industry.

“And longer interns as well, because they tend to just do two-week placements, but we’ve got capacity to support interns for longer periods of time that I think will expose them more to the reality of the job, which is an amazing job, but it can be tough.”

“I think cadetships you probably structure them . . . they do require much more infrastructure than you think. And newsrooms are really hard. There’s nothing worse than being an intern in a newsroom, because everybody’s on deadline except you. And so no one’s got time to talk to. But having said that, if there was somebody who was actually bought into run scheme forward to help you run the scheme or maybe do it across multiple organisations, I think that would be useful.”

“And so when we set up [cadetships] one of the fundamental things was that it had that start, which was we had a three-month wānanga intensive boot camp on how to be a journalist, which covered everything, like what is

opinion, what is journalism? Why do we tell these stories? Who do we tell them to? Absolute fundamentals to get these people to the point where they were just basically not going to be too much of a drain on the newsroom by putting them into a newsroom, because knowing that there were not people there to really devote the time that they used to. So, yes, and then they moved into a newsroom with a support member for a group, looking out to several of them in a newsroom. And then, as they became more able, sort of probably by about six months, then they were in newsrooms just in twos and threes. And then towards the end, they were on full placement with whichever newsrooms they’d gone to, but still, with that support, back to a couple of full-time staff who were looking after them remotely or whatever. There needs to be a national voice in training.”

A cadetship or work-based learning programme, delivered in conjunction with an education provider, would allow industry to be more involved in training and standard setting for new journalists. Trainee journalists would develop relevant knowledge and be assessed in the workplace, and thus be up to date with industry needs and changes.

We heard from industry that any model developed, whether a cadetship, work-based learning programme or a combination of provider and work-based learning, needed to be designed in a way that would be attractive for the inclusion of career changers, such as providing a living wage.

Irrespective of current training models and how they may be adapted in the future, there is a need for new pathways and more work-based opportunities in training. We heard, then, there is an urgent need for industry and providers to gather and discuss the future of journalism training.

“So a programme where we can identify people that would suit our newsroom and that where the gaps we’re looking to fill. And then we can work with them and also have maybe half the time they’re with us, half the time as part of a training programme.”

However, some felt any formal training had become irrelevant given technological innovations for delivery and dissemination of information.

“Are they going to sit around here and wait for two years to be trained? When they think, I don’t want to bother with this, I’m going to start my own YouTube channel, do my own thing. We’re talking about . . . what modern technology allows that’s completely disrupted universities. And why do you even need to go to university? Why get a degree when I can learn this stuff in some other way? I think we, as an industry, we need to be cognisant of that. If we go back to, like, the 70s or 80s and do a two-year cadetship, you’ll get no one. They all want to take on the world now, take it on today. And in many ways they can, because technology allows it.”



Photo from Pexels

Kua hūtia ake te rito harakeke, Ka ngaro ngā toka tū awa, he kōrero wawau

There is a ‘missing middle’ in newsrooms, and without them industry loses knowledge and capability

Ngā pā harakeke – The harakeke beds along the riverbanks (mid-career journalists and mentorship)

Stability and mentorship: Pā harakeke (flax bushes) along the riverbanks stabilise the flow of the awa and prevent erosion. They represent the mid-career journalists who act as mentors, guiding and supporting new reporters. When these experienced professionals leave, the banks weaken, making it harder for the river to sustain a steady course. Addressing this ‘missing middle’ is crucial for ensuring a stable, thriving sector that can nurture the next generation.

With a hollowing out of mid-career journalism roles, even with the decline in journalism sector, retention is difficult as skilled mid-career journalists can move into more stable communication and public relations roles with better compensation and work-life balance.

“So as soon as they start hitting that mid-to-senior role, we start getting head hunted, and we start getting offered – maybe not at the moment – crazy money to go into comms. Most journos can walk out the door and double their income overnight, if not more, and be working nine to five.”

“We lose them in the mid-career, generally in their 30s or something like that, and they go. So that’s a real challenge. That is the time when people are like, I could earn more money. And I’ve got a house now.”

The missing middle also affects the upskilling, mentoring and training of junior journalists

“At the moment, we’ve got some really senior people and we’ve got some

really junior people, and we’ve got no one in between.”

Losing mid-career journalists also places pressures on training and upskilling junior journalists. This limits the ability of newsrooms to take on cadets and apprentices and means that senior journalists are often having to do a lot more training of journalists on top of their normal workload.

“It also places a lot of strain in our senior people as well, right? Because ideally you would have mid-career supporting the younger, and then using the senior strategically. But instead, it becomes our most senior person in the editorial team . . . who is extremely time poor having to develop the younger writers.”

Finding ways to retain mid-career journalists is considered a priority for industry, but economic conditions of the sector and the kinds of work, particularly for those in 24-hour newsrooms, make doing so difficult.

Kei ngā kautawa te oranga tonutanga o te awa

The regions can provide a meaningful pathway for the future of journalism

Ngā kautawa – Converging streams (collaboration and regional journalism)

Enriching the flow: Kautawa are tributaries that flow into the main river. These symbolise regional, community and Māori/Pacific media. Each stream brings its own unique nutrients, local stories, cultural insights and regional perspectives that enrich the main river. Strengthening these tributaries through collaboration ensures a diverse, richer flow, preventing ‘news deserts’ and fostering a more inclusive national narrative. This convergence reflects the plan’s emphasis on bolstering regional pathways and encouraging greater cooperation across the sector.

While we heard junior journalists often aspire to work in large newsrooms based in urban centres, there are also good pathways for junior journalists in regional centres; smaller newsrooms require journalists to fulfil a number of roles and skill sets, and these places provide good long-term pathways for those wishing to work in the sector.

“[Wanting to work in a regional newsroom] is just about a sign – if someone wants to take a job or wants or applies for those jobs and they want to take a job in those places to me, it’s almost sort of a sign that they’re actually going to be a good journalist.”

Further senior journalists we spoke with often mapped their own career trajectory through regional and community news operations before moving into larger news organisations and felt career journeys needed to be aligned to realistic expectations.

“I worked for a local newspaper . . . I did that sort of traditional thing from the 80s and 90s, which has kind of broken down a bit more now, but you

used to start at the bottom of the local paper. Someone would knock you into shape. Then you’d go on to regional newspaper and you’d learn more skills. Then you go onto a metropolitan daily, and then after that, you’d either stay there or you might go to TV and so on and move around national media, and that’s pretty much what I did . . . We had to do absolutely everything. You wrote, took the photos, delivered the plates to the printing press.”



Photo by thisisengineering from Unsplash

“And I’m a firm, firm, firm, 100% firm believer that probably all journalists should go out into a regional newsroom, because you just have to do everything. You can’t just do all the exciting stuff. You’ve got to put your hand to everything. And then that’s where you really learn how to be a journalist. And then there’s a traditional pathway for them here.”

However, we also heard there needs to be opportunities for ‘training the trainers’ and ‘training the mentors.’ If a junior journalist is to succeed in a newsroom, for example, they would need highly skilled and qualified mentoring.

E ora ai te awa, me ututau ki tōna ao

The workforce needs to reflect changes in demographics and audiences

Ngā awa tipua – The sacred waterways (diverse representation)

Cultural depth and diversity: Ngā awa tipua are sacred waterways that bring depth and diversity, symbolising the vital role of Māori, Pacific and Asian journalists. Their presence enriches the sector, ensuring that the awa reflects the true cultural landscape of Aotearoa. By prioritising inclusivity and cultural competency, the sector can nurture these sacred pathways, empowering diverse voices to join and lead in journalism, much as these waterways carry significance and life to the ecosystem.

Population projections suggest that a third of children will identify as Māori in the year 2040.¹² With this growth in population will come a need to reach increasingly diverse audiences and be supported by a more representative workforce.

Mainstream media’s approach to news has often not aligned with the needs or interests of its diverse audiences. We heard that Māori and Pacific news providers choose to focus more on positive, holistic and aspirational stories that resonate more deeply their communities. This approach appears to counter-balance the dominance of critical and negative news narratives often seen in the mainstream media.

“I think from a Pacific context it’s quite different. More recently, just in the last two years, we have been leaning more into the storytelling element of journalism. And I know that that’s not seen in a positive light by some educators and within the journalism sector, because when you come from a mainstream setting, they’re quite defined in what journalism is. It includes hard news. Breaking. The clickbait world . . . It’s fast paced.”

“Just because the Pākehā here, you see more negativity coming from the mainstream, and I feel with like Māori and Pacific Islander and indigenous news, it’s more of a positive light or raising serious issues that’s happening within our separate communities as well.”

¹² <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/third-of-children-to-identify-as-maori-in-2040-stats-nz/D6HZO22MDQUCRC4HSL45RZA04A/>

Māori and Pacific make up 12.9% and 2.9% of the journalism sector workforce, respectively, whereas Māori and Pacific account for 17.8% and 8.9% of the population, respectively.¹³ This not only highlights an issue with underrepresentation, but also points to a broader skills gap within the sector in effectively engaging with Māori and Pacific audiences.

Part of this is the reinforcing effect that underrepresentation has on being able to attract a diverse workforce; when rangatahi do not see themselves represented in more senior roles, they are less likely to consider a career path into journalism. We also heard the need for mainstream newsrooms to provide a more culturally supportive work environment and invest in new strategies to attract and support Māori and Pacific talent.

“We don’t understand what a person, what kind of support network someone needs or is used to. They come from a Pacific community, or they come from a Māori background, and that’s a different kind of support network to what we’re used to. And I just think we need to educate; part of a lot of it is about us educating ourselves as well.”

We also heard the need for upskilling in language skills across the sector, given the growth of te reo Māori use across all forms of news, including mainstream.

“I think one of the things that’s really missing is learning te reo and learning. I guess that cultural awareness like when I would hear about the things other people do in other organisations, like having karakia and just having that kind of interaction with te reo. We don’t have any of that. I don’t think anybody – barely anybody knows how to say anything.”

We heard from Māori news providers that it is difficult to find journalists with both a command of the language and strong journalism skills. It seems that it was often easier to train fluent speakers journalism skills, rather than teach journalists the language skills required to deliver news in te reo Māori.

“The approach we’ve always taken is we’ve worked with fluent speakers, because it’s far easier working with reo speakers and training and developing their journalism rather than the other way around, and both have been tried.”

Language was also identified as only one component of capturing Māori perspectives in the news.

“The reality is you have to have a strong command in reo and you need to be well versed in tikanga as well, because it’s not just about delivering in a language; it’s also about the way in which you do it and the way in which you approach and share those perspectives.”

Māori and Pacific media provide pathways for new journalists

Similarly to the regional pathway, we heard that Māori and Pacific media outlets can provide an accelerated pathway for early career journalists due to the size of the organisations and the opportunities to cover a variety of topics and stories of varied importance. This was often compared to the mainstream counterpart, where there was more hierarchy due to the sheer size of organisations and the experience of journalists within them.

“Because I tell you: if [she] was at [mainstream news], she wouldn’t be the prime political reporter, she’d have to wait in the queue. They’ll give that opportunity to that [mainstream news] reporter who can’t understand a word of Tongan and is following the local journos around. So I think we’re just a place where we can sort of put our journalists in places, because that’s what our communities want. And there’s no one else who’s going to speak on our behalf, but our people. So I think we’re a creator of opportunities.”

“Then I went to [Māori news], which is very Māori, and a lot of those things that I’ve trained for, as Māori are, were a little bit more loose and laxed on things, but that allows for a bit more creativity. You’re not confined to just, that’s your job, and that’s all you’re going to do. [Mainstream]’s a little bit more of that. So I was able to grow into probably about five different roles while I was at [Māori news].”

“We were the most popular across Māori and non-Māori, and the feedback we received for the reason for that was because of the way in which we worked; and because it was a smaller newsroom, there was more opportunity for them to get their teeth into something grunty where they may not have been able to, because there was more hierarchy and more experience in other newsrooms.”

The idea of an accelerated pathway could also be because of the stronger support and understanding of cultural context that Māori and Pacific outlets can provide rangatahi and new career entrants, given the familiarities of support structures and worldviews.

“So the thing is that it’s all about leadership, and it’s all about the intent of the head of news to look after our kids when they’re in there and sort of making sure that it’s a culturally safer space . . . Because in our te āo Māori view, the manaakitanga thing is pretty big. And I don’t just see that ‘well I was training them in this programme and that’s it, kua mutu’.”

“We need newsrooms that reflect society, and we don’t necessarily have that yet, but if you just bring in one or two or three 20-year-old kids, they’re going to look around and they’re not going to see the mentors that they need to see.”

¹³ Statistics New Zealand

Diverse revenue streams are needed to reduce reliance on delivery platforms that support the dissemination of news

Ngā wai whakaora – Waters of rejuvenation (sustainable revenue and innovation)

Spaces for sustainability and growth: Ngā wai whakaora, or waters of rejuvenation, are places of revival, healing and innovation. They symbolise sustainable revenue models that allow for long-term, stable journalism. Diversifying revenue streams is akin to creating multiple paths for water to flow, ensuring the awa remains clear and vibrant. These pools also foster innovation, where new ideas and business models can grow, supporting the sector's evolution in a digital age.

“New Zealand media needs . . . subscription rates to come up. And it's problematic at the moment.”

The industry has traditionally relied on revenue from advertising and/or print (newspapers), and for print media, subscriptions, but reliance in either can bring financial uncertainty. As highlighted prior in this plan, advertising revenue across the industry has dramatically fallen. The digital transformation in the media sector has shaped how content is created, disseminated and consumed. The latest *Where are the audiences*¹⁴ is an example of this change, as it shows the rise over the past few years of 'NZ online video', which is the viewing of video on NZ sites, such as Stuff and NZ Herald.

Withdrawals from NZ Post exemplify also this, with weekend newspaper delivery stopping in most rural areas, with the remaining areas to be phased out by June 2025.

“We can make money out of rural readers, but New Zealand Post keep pulling back. And so the Saturday papers were our biggest revenue papers. In June, New Zealand Post stopped delivering on a Saturday, which meant that on a Monday you get a Friday, Saturday and Monday newspaper. So we don't know what to do about that, other than trying not to lose too many subscribers.”

“That's where it really has impacted, obviously, regionally, it's going to be a huge impact there.”

¹⁴ *Where Are the Audiences?*, New Zealand on Air, 2024

“

... it's affected 25% of our readership. Shocking. We are so angry. I couldn't be more angry about it. And they've also hiked our prices with these outrageous price increases. So we're responding by walking away from New Zealand Post because they, just . . . shocking.

”

Diversifying revenue streams is key for reducing platform susceptibility

In order to reduce the reliance on delivery platforms, we have heard from the industry that there is need to develop diverse revenue streams while external factors continue to shape the outlook of the future.

“Well, I think we’re quite fortunate because . . . [we] identified quite early the need for diverse revenue streams.”

“So we have the advertising revenue, which is really substantial. We’ve got a subscription revenue and we’ve got radio advertising as well, so digital.”

Advertising revenue remains a key revenue stream

Despite declining, advertising revenue remains a key stream of income for organisations, and with this comes the prioritisation of the content that is produced due to its profitability and ability to monetise compared against other areas of coverage.

“We look at the package and we look at what our readers need, and that includes the content that is highly commercialisable, like, for instance, travel content. There are lots of advertisers who want to advertise around that content.”

As newsrooms shrink, with fewer journalists available to cover the far-reaching stories in Aotearoa, the focus on advertising revenue has consequently caused a narrowing of the content that is being produced, given such metrics as page views.

“People aren’t buying newspapers anymore. We need to find a way to make this industry sustainable.

I understand that . . . people in Wellington love housing stories or how much houses cost, and that’s necessary, but there are so many other things that get dropped off, because this is where our focus is at the moment; hopefully it’s a temporary thing.”

We heard the concern of some senior journalists that the focus on clicks and an engagement-driven model had also led to a declining quality of journalism.

“I am concerned, gravely concerned about the future of journalism. The resource constraints and an overreliance on clicks is a big issue.”

“We ourselves, as media professionals, as journalists, need to think deeply about the state of journalism that we currently have and is it what we want to see, or could it be a lot better by focusing on journalism quality and editorial standards?”

But some are moving to creating premium content for a paying audience to reduce the reliance on advertising

Some media organisations are moving away from the reliance on advertising revenue, and instead are working to create greater stickiness with a paying audience through diverse and longer-form content.

“. . . we’ve kind of deprioritised things like page views, which an advertising-driven model kind of prioritises . . . So we’ve made the decision in the last year to kind of focus on more longer form, because it was disappearing elsewhere. And it’s something that we felt that we could do that our paying audience would appreciate and pay for.”

“We’re narrowing down to, I won’t call it clickbait, but populist stories like housing prices, cycle lanes. That’s where the focus has gone. So what we are finding is our traffic is actually increasing again because we’re in those gaps again.”



Photo by vm from iStock

Waiho i te toipoto, kia kotahi ai te au rere
Sector needs better collaboration between
organisations

“

The industry lacks any cohesive view or voice in my view.

”

Industry needs to collaborate where it has common interests, such as a unified voice, training, and sharing of content and resources – particularly with smaller organisations in regions that have local knowledge and expertise in the area. We heard from many of our engagements that the industry struggles to come together consistently. While content agreements and partnerships are a core part of business, it is harder to get long-term cohesion and collaboration going for an industry with so many different players, all with differing motivations and levels of resourcing.

“One of the biggest problems in the industry is a sort of disparity of it. The industry lacks any cohesive view or voice in my view, partly because, certainly up until very recently it was very segmented: newspapers, radio, TV, online; and each one of those is affected by very different economic forces, very different skill and craft

requirements, different political issues in terms of funding, etc.”

Across all our engagements, collaboration was universally highlighted as a key opportunity, especially when looking at the spread of news providers across the country. The data tells a story of what could be described as news deserts, with 69% of the journalists operating out of the main centres of Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington in 2023, compared to 61% in 2013. The importance of a journalism presence in the regions was highlighted, as well as the opportunity for higher-quality journalism and cost saving if collaboration could be better facilitated between regional and national organisations.

“I think because I’ve been in a centralised news model, which is about Aucklanders and Wellingtonians telling regional

stories from their urban perspectives. That’s about to change. So it’s about actually empowering those regions or the collaboration of regions to be able to tell their own stories, because they are the people from there.”

Given the common pressures that the industry is facing, more collaboration could be beneficial to spreading resources and addressing issues of training and retention of the workforce. This relies on the organisations themselves and might be difficult considering the competitive landscape.

“I mean, you do have to collaborate more, undoubtedly; otherwise we’re not going to survive.”

“As a smaller platform, we have tried for years to work in partnership with the larger guys, and it just hasn’t worked for us.”

“For us, it has meant a much more collaborative approach, because we see ourselves in a privileged position and not an unreasonably privileged position, but we recognise that our revenues, at least, are static and as others, revenues have fallen, so we’ve taken a very strong strategy in the last, yeah, probably ten years, actually, ”

to share content to be as collaborative as possible while also competing in the news market.”

Industry does ad-hoc collaborative training, but there are opportunities to work together more formally:

“

Because as everyone retreated to their corners we’ve . . . our strategy is to be a cornerstone of the media industry, because we’re worried about the future in terms of more media companies disappearing. So, yeah, it’s actually in quite a collaborative space, which is good.”

”



Photo by Jainam Sheth from Unsplash

Te Rito as an example of partnering for the sake of training

The Te Rito Cadetship came up in many of our engagements as a unique example of different news organisations partnering on a training programme. The partnership aspect seemed to be a critical success factor for the cadetship, which saw 26 rangatahi with diverse backgrounds undertake the programme. Cadets were trained by four different organisations: NZME, Pacific Media Network, Whakaata Māori and Warner Bros. Discovery.

“I think the thing was that there weren’t enough partners in that collaboration, so that we could actually develop. So while we had four real solid broadcasting partners, we were also sort of looking at what the state of play is. We need to, more and more people, more and more partners need to come together because we’re all suffering the same issues. So, they’re all having workforce problems, and the issue is that if one of us is investing time and resources into training journalists and they’re getting poached to go over to another newsroom, the burden or the heavy lifting is on one rather than the whole lot. So one can’t keep on doing training and providing that, providing those individuals.”

Te Rito was operationalised through the Public Interest Journalism Fund, which has since closed. While many of the parties involved praised it as a training pathway, there was also feedback that similar training programmes need to ensure a clear outcome into a job. One interviewee suggested that while Te Rito was a critical injection, it came at a time where newsrooms were going through job cuts and didn’t necessarily have the space to take on new reporters.

Crucially, cadets also received a living wage while undertaking their cadetships, and this enabled a broad range of people to pursue a career in journalism while also being able to support themselves financially; future models of work-based learning should investigate models for paying cadets.

Ka ngawhā te awa Regulation is no longer fit for purpose

Ngā tahatika – The riverbanks (regulations and sector boundaries)

Guiding the path of the awa: The tahatika (riverbanks) shape and guide the flow of the awa, ensuring it stays on course. These are the regulations and policies that form the framework within which journalism operates.

Just as riverbanks need maintenance to handle changing currents, the sector’s regulations must evolve to keep pace with digital transformation. Outdated rules act as blockages, and addressing these barriers is crucial for sustaining a clear, strong flow.

Where traditionally public journalism came through print and broadcast, the rise of digital technology has caused the industry to operate differently. Increasingly, people access and consume both news and content through digital platforms, such as social media and video platforms like YouTube.

Our engagements with the industry suggest that key regulations that set the parameters for journalism are no longer fit for purpose, and in some cases, pre-date the rise of digital technology and have failed to adapt to these changes, particularly given the heavy reliance on advertising revenue. An example provided by industry is the Broadcasting Act 1989, which places restrictions on Sunday and some holiday advertising for domestic broadcasters, with digital platforms not facing the same restrictions.

“So we’re in an environment where the big tech players . . . they’re allowed to run ads on Sunday mornings . . . So a lot of the regulation is completely out of date and I’m talking about the broadcasting act.”

Another example given was the Harmful Digital Communications Act.

“We are seeing a really quite steep increase in people using the Act against our journalists . . . we’ve one just actually on Friday: journalists who had covered a court case, factually, no errors, all perfect coverage, and the defendant has now taken a Harmful Digital Communications Act claim against us, and now we have to defend that. And that’s annoying because it’s expensive.”

While some global technology platforms have agreed to deals with some media organisations, the historic regulatory gap has created a revenue imbalance, enabling technology platforms to generate revenue and profit at the expense of news media, without needing to invest back into the local industry that funded the journalism. We do acknowledge current work that is underway in relation to the Fair Digital News Bargaining Bill, but overseas technology companies collectively take \$1.8 billion in advertising away from domestic advertisers and pay little tax.



Photo by AI Gr from Pixabay

“

Those overseas players are taking money out of the market from the local commercial players here, and we're a big commercial player, and as our revenue goes down, we have to cut cost, and that's journalist jobs.

”

He au kaha, he ara rau

AI is disruptive but government can help the sector innovate

Ngā manu kōrero – The birds that carry the news (platforms and dissemination)

Messengers across the motu: The manu kōrero fly along the awa, carrying kākano (seeds) and stories across the whenua. They symbolise the platforms, from TV to radio, social media and digital news outlets, that disseminate news to audiences.

Different types of manu reflect various forms of media. The kōtare (kingfisher) is sharp and swift like breaking news; the kererū carries weighty, long-form journalism; and the pīwakawaka (fantail) flits about, echoing the engagement of social media. These manu ensure that stories reach te moana nui – the wide-open ocean – where all awa eventually reach.

There will be more upheaval in the sector as companies merge workstreams, downgrade the number of journalism roles, and the sector reorientates itself due to changes in audience, demographics and income streams.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has already disrupted the sector and will replace some work in newsrooms, mainly in spaces where information is legally filed and regulated or re-writing press releases into news form.

“[AI's] not going to replace journalists. The human editing and human oversight and human curiosity and the human capacity to connect with other humans is fundamental to what we do – that will never be replaced. But there are some jobs, like reading through large, large bodies of documents that have gone unread for many, many years that AI is very, very good at where we use the tools to support our journalism, not to replace it.”

“Where it probably will impact more, as on the community papers, regional papers. So you're in a community

newspaper . . . Local theatre group sends on a list or a press release of a play they're doing, and they want you to do an interview or do something on it. You can feed that into an AI and generate an article. And then we already have AI that will edit that, put a headline on it and put it onto a print page. So a lot of that kind of basic community journalism will be where AI hits first.”

However, the sector needs help innovating and preparing for a world where there are less organisations and less journalists.

“What about an innovation fund for journalism or media? It doesn't necessarily have to be long-term systemic support to hire reporters. It can actually just be, here are some really significant tax breaks for you to go do innovation.”

“I think there will be an entirely converged and multi-platform environment that will be supported by generative AI. There will be far fewer journalists, because the business models are going to continue to be challenged.”

Ki te hoe

Actions and recommendations

Actions (what Toi Mai will do)

1. Work with industry, agencies, providers and funders to explore, develop and implement a cadetship/work-based learning-type model for junior journalists.
2. Work with Te Māngai Pāho to progress some actions from the Māori Workforce Development and Capability Plan, particularly for Māori journalism.
3. Establish a forum to convene industry and providers (across all levels) to discuss common concerns and opportunities specifically around training, retention and attraction, and how journalism training can be fit for purpose for the sector.

Recommendations (what Toi Mai recommends)

1. Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Media and Communications to direct the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to explore options for setting up a fund designated for industry training, with contributions from both government and industry.
2. Parliamentary Under-Secretary to direct the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to work with the Treasury to explore the viability of digital news subscription tax credits for subscribers.
3. Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Media and Communications seeks advice on where regulation is constraining the journalism industry, e.g. Broadcasting Act 1989 and Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015.
4. Ministry of Education to review the funding categories to align Journalism programmes to be funded at the 'F2: Trades' rate, rather than 'F1: Humanities, Business and Social Service Vocations'.

MAHI TAHI

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Te moana nui – The vast ocean (public and global reach)

The ultimate destination: All rivers flow to te moana nui, the vast ocean, representing the public and global audience. The stories, knowledge and voices carried by Ngā Awa Kōrero converge here, where they connect, inform and inspire on a larger scale. Just as the moana is boundless and encompassing, the reach of journalism extends from local roots to a global stage, ensuring that the diverse voices of Aotearoa are heard far and wide.

Kuputaka Glossary of terms

a

Awa
River.

h

Hui topa
Virtual/online meeting.

k

Kanohi ki te kanohi
In person.

Karakia
Incantation, prayer.

Kua mutu
Almost done, nearly done.

Kura
School

m

Mahi
Work.

Manaakitanga
Hospitality, kindness, generosity,
support.

Marae
Meeting house.

Motu/Ngā motu
Island, country, land, nation, clump
of trees, ship – anything separated
or isolated.

r

Rangatahi
(a) younger generation, youth (b) to
be young.

t

Tangata whaikaha
A person with a disability.

Te Ao Māori
The Māori world.

Te reo Māori
The Māori language.

W

Whenua
Land.

About the statistics used in this plan

Access to the data used in this study was provided by Stats NZ under conditions designed to give effect to the security and confidentiality provisions of the Data and Statistics Act 2022. The results presented in this study are the work of the author, not Stats NZ or individual data suppliers.

These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) and Longitudinal Business Database (LBD), which are carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI and LBD please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes, and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.

Ngā Awa Kōrero – The Rivers of Narrative