

Public Interest News Foundation

# Index

of Independent News Publishing in the UK

2024



**The PINF Index of Independent News  
Publishing in the UK, 2024**

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# Foreword

**For four years now, we have charted the changing fortunes of the independent news sector in the UK. We have shown how small news providers are punching above their weight and playing a crucial role in their communities – amplifying the voice of underrepresented groups, creating a forum for debate and driving democratic change.**

One publisher this year told us that their outlet was the only source of local news providing live updates on what turned out to be a leadership change at the local council. 'The story was so popular, our website crashed. But our readers then donated to cover the cost of a bandwidth upgrade.'

This story typifies the bizarre contradictions of the independent news sector in the UK. Providing unique coverage of important democratic issues? Yes. Cherished by the community? Yes. Able to afford decent broadband? No.

Last year's Index revealed that indie publishers were working flat out on minimal resources to meet the needs of their communities. 'There is nothing left to cut,' one publisher told us.



**Jonathan Heawood,**  
Executive Director,  
Public Interest News Foundation

This year, with average revenues falling by 30%, indie publishers have had to find those impossible cuts. Last year, the typical indie newsroom employed the equivalent of three full-time staffers. This year, that's down to only two.

This can't go on. The UK can't continue to rely on the efforts of professional journalists who

are effectively subsidising the information needs of our society.

That's why, at PINF, we are stepping up our efforts to strengthen capacity among indie news providers and to build external support for the sector.

We are launching Indie News Week, to help indie publishers strengthen their relationship with their communities. We are also running the UK's first match-funding campaign for public interest news, through which money raised by participating publishers will be doubled by generous national donors. And we are creating a Local News Commission, to recommend new policies to ensure a sustainable future for local news.

We are also working with philanthropists to see whether we can emulate the success of

the Press Forward initiative in the US, through which major US donors have pledged half a billion dollars to rebuild local news.

And we are continuing to work on the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers bill – shortly to become law – which will for the first time create a level playing field on which indie news providers can negotiate for a fair share of data and revenue from the big tech giants.

At the heart of our work is the vibrant community of independent news providers for whom we provide a range of networking and training opportunities, and from whom we learn so much every day about journalism, entrepreneurialism and courage. As ever, the PINF Index of Independent News Publishing is dedicated to this sector. We are proud to work with you.



Jaldeep Katwala, PINF's Network Manager, leads a discussion at our Indie News Forum in Bristol in October 2024

# Headlines

The PINF Index 2024 is based on the responses of 73 UK-based news publishers with a turnover of under £2m to a 48-question online survey open during January 2024.

There are eight headline findings highlighted below, before the report goes deeper into the full survey data. New for this year is a light segmentation analysis to help news publishers judge themselves against peer organisations.

## 1. Independent news publishers are not immune to the revenue challenges facing the broader UK media sector.

- This year's survey finds the average revenue of an independent news publisher is £62,000. This is down 30% on last year's finding.
- This reflects the situation of the wider news media sector, such as the revenue fall for Reach PLC and The Guardian.<sup>1</sup>
- Given an estimated 300-400 independent publishers in the sector, this suggests a sectoral revenue of £18.6m to £24.8m.
- While 21% of publishers have revenues over £175,000, some 15% of news publishers have no revenue at all.

For more on revenue, see section 5.

## 2. Average website audiences are significantly smaller in this year's survey, while publishers are relying ever more on advertising.

- The average website reach of an independent publisher is 344,000 unique users. This figure is down 56% from last year's survey.
- Assuming that a significant part of these audiences is unique to the publisher, this suggests the independent sector still reaches a large part of the UK population.
- Advertising makes up 59% of the revenue for the sector, the largest share of revenue seen in any of the Index surveys. Some publishers also suggest businesses are cutting their advertising budgets due to difficult economic conditions, especially at the local level.
- Unlike previous Index surveys, analysis this year finds no correlation between social media activity and revenue, but there is still a positive link between podcasting and revenue, and email newsletters and revenue.

**For more on audiences, see section 4. For more on sources or revenue, see section 6.**

## 3. Last year, publishers said there was 'nothing left to cut'. This year, cuts are being made to staff: the average publisher has just two FTE employees, risking a downward spiral of reduced output and further reduced revenue.

- The fall in revenue (above) is reflected by a similar fall in expenditure, which averages £56k, 38% less than last year.
- Staffing makes up publishers' largest expense. The average staffing at an independent publisher is now two FTE employees on average, down from three employees in last year's survey. The sector, including for-profit publishers, is relying on volunteers more than ever.
- The sector as a whole is estimated to employ between 600-800 people across the UK.

**For more on costs and staffing, see sections 7 and 8.**

## 4. Independent publishers who focus on local news show the most revenue stability.

- Among news publishers who focus on one local area, average revenue is largely flat across the last three Index surveys, consistently between £63,000 and £67,000.



- Local news publishers are concerned about reduced advertising revenue, rising print costs, and competition from local radio. More positively, they see opportunities in the gaps left behind by corporate outlet closures.

**More on local news publishers can be found throughout the findings.**

### 5. Print is dying. Long live print.

- Thirty-seven per cent of publishers produce some content via print, a larger proportion than in last year's survey.
- Of those publishers already providing printed content, some report falling print sales and others are concerned by the rising costs of print.
- However, several publishers not already using print see opportunities in producing their first print editions this year, partly as a chance to diversify away from the challenges of digital advertising and social media.

**More on the use of print can be found throughout the findings.**

### 6. Publishers are seeing a drop in social media follower numbers, and while Facebook and Twitter/X are the most used platforms, publishers are trying out new options.

- Facebook is now publishers' most used social media platform, switching places with Twitter/X compared with last year's survey.
- The average publisher reports 10,000 Facebook followers and 9,000 Twitter/X followers, significantly lower than last year's survey results.
- In order of use, TikTok, Threads, Mastodon, LinkedIn and Bluesky make up the remainder of the social platform list. Some 14% of publishers report using Threads, which was only launched in 2023.
- While follower counts are down, publishers perceive there to be an increase of social video views in all platforms except Twitter/X. This is especially true for local publishers on Facebook, and for non-profit publishers on TikTok.

**For more on social media, see section 4.**

**7. Analysis of PINF's Index surveys over the last three years shows data that is consistently inconsistent: this is a volatile sector.**

- The results from 2024's Index seem more similar to 2022's results than to 2023's results. It is possible that last year's revenue and audience figures included significant outliers, and that this year perhaps demonstrates a return to 'normal'.
- Further, on statistics from revenue to audience, the sector is not distributed 'normally'. A normal statistical distribution would see publishers clustering around the average with a few outliers each side of the average. In this sector, however, different clusters or groupings emerge along the distribution range.

**For an example, see the distribution of revenue charts in section 5.**

**8. Despite immense challenges, independent publishers continue to achieve vital social impact in the communities they serve.**

- Publishers believe they make a significant contribution to change in society, scoring themselves at 62/100, a slight dip from 68/100 from last year's survey. Non-profits continue to believe they make a higher contribution than for-profits.

- The survey results highlighted abundant examples of how the work of independent publishers gives voice to their communities, leads to council action, inspires bigger publishers to pursue stories, highlights wrongdoing... and much more.

**For more impact, including publishers' real-world examples, see section 9.**

# The 'typical' publisher

From our entire 2024 sample, we can put together a picture of the typical independent publisher in the UK.



Started work in 2011, so has been running for **13 years**.

Publishes **locally specific news** about **general news** topics.



Is a **limited company** and not part of a wider group.

Has revenue of **£62,000**, the majority of which is from advertising.

Has costs of **£55,000**, mostly staffing.



Considers its best contribution to change in society the increased ability to **debate** and generate a shift in **public conversation**.

Is 'digital-only', reaching **344,000 people** via its website alone.



Has **10,000 Facebook** followers, **9,000 X** followers, **2,500 Instagram** followers and **1,500 email** subscribers.

# What kind of publisher are you?

As well as the numbers for the overall typical publisher, we have segmented the survey data into four publisher types. Due to small sample sizes, this is less reliable than the

average overall. Here we highlight examples of publishers from each segment, though it should not be assumed that any example precisely fits the 'typical' for its segment.

## Four publisher types

1. Local, for-profit

2. Local, non-profit

3. Regional, national or global, for-profit

4. Regional, national or global, non-profit

**1. The typical local, for-profit publisher (n= 29)** began publishing in 2006 and is a company limited by shares. It has revenues of £69,000 and costs of £60,000.



→ £69,000  
£60,000 →

## Example Progress Publishing



THE  
BEDFORD  
CLANGER



Erica Roffe, Julie Course and Paul Hutchinson, Co-Founders

"Progress Publishing was created to provide vital high-quality news about Bedford Borough through the Bedford Independent and to continue celebrating culture in our patch through the Bedford Clanger. Both publications provide anti-clickbait and sensationalism-free public interest

news to our 130,00 readers, telling them what's happening on their doorstep and holding those in power to account through fair and impartial reporting, whilst also celebrating local positives by reporting on the organisations, businesses and individuals who make Bedford brilliant."

**2. The typical local, non-profit publisher (n= 23)** began publishing in 2009 and is a community interest company. It has revenues of £50,000 and costs of £59,000.



→ £50,000

£59,000 →

## Example

Blog Preston CIC

**Blog Preston**

[www.blogpreston.co.uk](http://www.blogpreston.co.uk)



Kate Rosindale, Ed Walker and Luke Beardsworth, Co-Editors

"Blog Preston was established in 2009 and became a Community Interest Company in 2013. Together co-editors Ed Walker, Kate Rosindale and Luke Beardsworth work with a team of freelance writers, photographers, social videographers and the community of Preston to keep the city and surrounding

area informed on all that's happening. What's made in revenue is reinvested back in more community reporting about the city and Blog Preston has built a highly engaged audience of more than 80,000 Prestonians a month across digital, newsletter and social media channels."

**3. The typical regional, national or global for-profit publisher (n= 8) began publishing in 2009 and is a company limited by shares. It has revenues of £80,000 and costs of £64,000.**



→ £80,000

£64,000 →

## Example

journalism.co.uk



"Journalism.co.uk is a Brighton-based independent media company that has been providing news coverage on the media industry since 1999.

Our industry-recognised content has made Journalism.co.uk one of the world's leading sites for the latest trends in digital publishing. We are also one of the top advertisers of journalism-related jobs, events and training courses.

Our mission is to inform, empower and support journalists in the UK and abroad."



Marcela Kunova, Editor

**4. The typical regional, national or global non-profit publisher (n= 13) began publishing in 2014 and is a company limited by guarantee. It has revenues of £47,000 and costs of £51,000.**



→ £47,000

£51,000 →

## Example

### EachOther



"EachOther is the UK's award winning weekly human rights publication. As a charity, we use independent journalism, storytelling and filmmaking to report on human rights issues across the UK. Founded in 2015 as RightsInfo, our small team has provided human rights education and reportage to the UK public for almost a decade, at times, to an audience of over half a million people a year.

The digital content we produce is grounded in the lived experience of ordinary people affected by human rights issues. We involve them in the process of developing their stories, rather than talking for or over them. In this way, we hope to grow public support for human rights here in the UK."



Emma Guy, Editor



# Findings

**This section represents the full findings from the survey results. From where independent publishers are, to who they reach, to their impact, this is the best picture we have of the UK's independent publishing scene in 2024.**

There were 73 participants this year, representing around 25% of some 300 targeted organisations. Eighteen publishers completed the survey this year as well as last year. Our year-on-year analysis uses time series methodology, where we explore relationships between whole cohorts of respondents from one year to the next.

## 1. Geography

As was the case in previous years' Index surveys, England has fewer publishers (75% of this year's sample) than its population (85% of the UK population) would predict. Scotland has more publishers than its population would predict (15% against 8%), Wales too (7% against 3%) and Northern Ireland is proportionate (at 3%).

The scope of the publishers is predominantly local (71% of publishers), followed by regional (16%), national (8%) and global (4%).

## 2. Content and medium

The majority of independent publishers are covering general news. Some 13% cover topics under one common umbrella (e.g. politics and government) and another 7% only cover a single topic (e.g. education, environment).

In response to more open questions, several publishers told us they saw the upcoming general election as an opportunity to produce content that would build audiences and serve communities with good information.

When describing their coverage approach, most publishers say they prioritise current news, while 14% say they prioritise solutions journalism, 4% explanatory content and 4% investigative journalism.

Across the whole sample, our survey suggests that online text is by far the most popular medium. Of all content published, 70% is by online text, 20% is in print, with a remainder in video, audio and other, possibly referring to events. Seventy-one per cent of publishers report using an email newsletter.

When writing about challenges and opportunities, one publisher worried that there was a shift away from audiences using websites or reading email, towards using social media and apps. Another, however, saw 'visual content' as an opportunity for diversification, via Instagram and LinkedIn. Several others mentioned opportunities – and plans to expand – in email newsletters and podcasting.

Thirty-seven per cent of publishers published at least some print content in the last year, ten points up on last year. In the qualitative responses, views of print were mixed. Several existing print publishers worry about falling sales, particularly among younger people, but at least two publishers mentioned plans to move into print in 2024 as a chance to stand out from the 'digital overwhelm'.

The vast majority of publishers – 85% – produce content exclusively in English, with the other 15% publishing in more than one language. These included Polish, Scots, Welsh, Slovak, Romanian, Urdu, Arabic, Portuguese, Kurdish, Farsi, Czech, Italian, Irish, Ukrainian.

In the qualitative comments, some publishers reported using AI to auto-translate into different languages to serve different communities. More broadly, several publishers mentioned AI as both a challenge and opportunity.

### 3. Legal status and regulation

Our survey shows that a wide range of legal forms are used by independent publishers. The most popular form is a company limited by shares (34%), followed by a community interest company (19%) and then a company limited by guarantee (18%). Sole traders, cooperatives, community benefit societies, charities and unincorporated voluntary organisations make up the remainder.

These can be grouped into non-profit and for-profit publishers, with the sector dividing nearly 50/50, the same as last year's survey.

Issues of legal status are mentioned only rarely in the qualitative responses on challenges and opportunities, but one publisher talked of their plan "*to ultimately hand over the company to my employees to allow me to retire...*" and another talked of "*handing over the title to a CIC.*"

Independent publishers are members of various support organisations and regulators, including Impress (43%) or IPSO (14%). More than half of publishers are members of the Independent Community News Network (55%) and many are members of the Independent Media Association (15%).

#### 4. Audience and distribution

Independent publishers in our sample reach an average of 344,000 unique users per year via their websites. On average, those users viewed nearly 950,000 pages during 507,000 sessions. Those figures are 54%, 78% and 71% lower respectively than last year's Index results.

Given a sector of 300-400 independent publishers, if there were no overlap between their audiences, this would suggest a sector-wide audience of 103m-138m. Therefore, even allowing for significant overlap, it seems likely independent publishers are reaching most of the UK population.

For-profit publishers' websites are viewed by many more people than view non-profit

publishers' websites, with unique users reported at 652,000 and 177,000 respectively.

Publishers also use social media platforms extensively: Facebook and Twitter/X are the most popular to use, a switch in places versus last year's survey. These are followed by Instagram and YouTube, which is unchanged from last year's survey. This year's survey shows new use of Threads and Mastodon among 14% and 7% of publishers respectively.

Our survey results suggest a fall in social media followers this year. The average publisher reports 14,000 Facebook followers and 7,000 Twitter/X followers. The small number of publishers using Threads, which only launched in 2023, report an average of 14,000 followers.

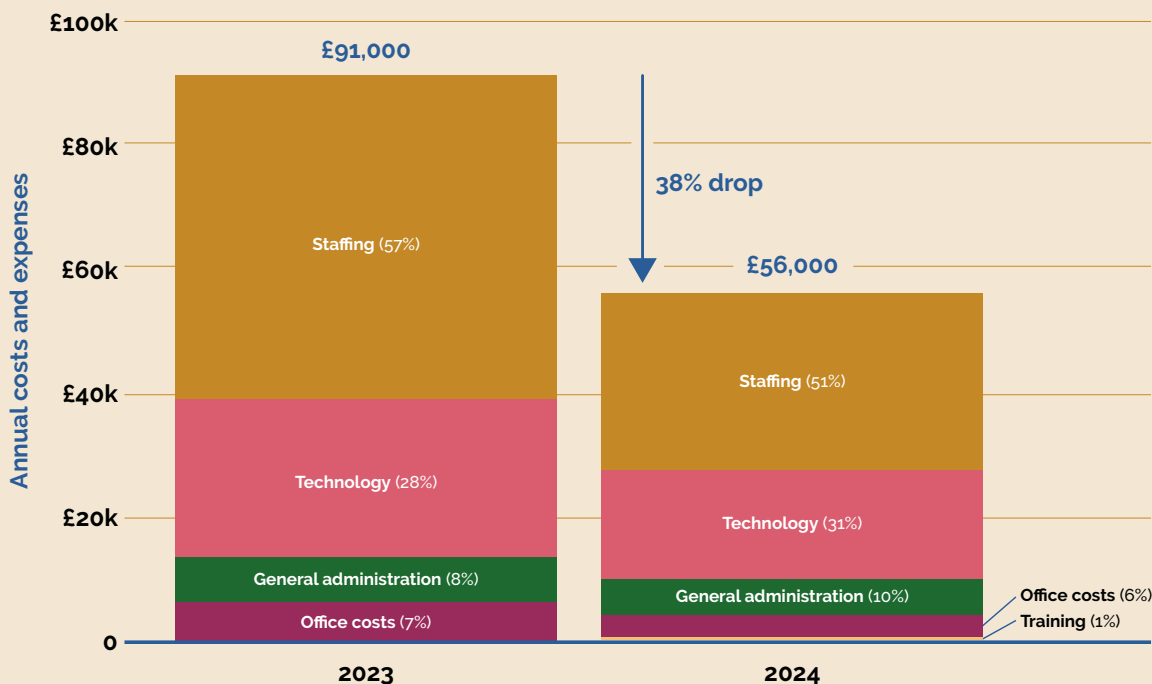


Figure 1: The average publisher's annual costs and expenses

While follower counts may have fallen, publishers report an increase in video views on social. In previous years, the survey asked publishers to report their number of video views. To simplify a complex reporting process, this year we asked for their perception of whether they had increased or decreased their viewer counts. The cross-sector response was that they had increased views for all social media platforms, except Twitter/X. Growth was perceived to be particularly strong in local, for-profit Facebook video views and in TikTok video views, especially for non-profits.

In terms of email newsletters, publishers report an average of 1,900 email subscribers, down significantly on last year's survey, but flat when compared to 2022's results.

A similar story is found in print circulation, where this year we find an average annual circulation (for those who produce print) of 58,000.

Overall, the quantitative findings regarding audiences across show a similar pattern across the last three Index surveys. This year's results suggest a considerable drop in audiences compared with last year, but they are very similar to 2022's results. This suggests that either 2023's survey reflected a genuine spike in audiences for news or our 2023 sample happened to be skewed by a group of publishers with particularly large audiences (only 18 participants were the same across 2023 and 2024).

Two issues stood out in publishers' qualitative responses around the challenges in audience engagement. The most significant issue was a desire to grow

the diversity of audiences, organisation members and volunteers, and especially to reach young people.

The second issue was social media, which is loved and loathed by publishers. Facebook was seen as a particular challenge due mostly to falling audiences, presumed to be the result of changing algorithms that determine who sees what content. Shifts in big tech algorithms or policies came up as a regular challenge for publishers. The vast majority of mentions of social media concerned Facebook, but one publisher talked about moving on from "*the wrecked husk of twitter*."

Publishers felt that the greatest opportunities for audience engagement – if they could find the resources – lay in the gaps or lack of alternative provision: "*no other news organisation is doing it well*". Some publishers talked of the need to move away from the "*stranglehold of social*" to "free ourselves from Facebook and Google" and create direct relationships with readers. One publisher wrote that while 'eyeball metrics' are important, they would like to "*find better ways of tracking whether our content is not just being clicked on or glanced over but is actually relevant, interesting, and transformational in people's lives, especially for our most disadvantaged readers*."

The majority of organisations report making some specific efforts to serve marginalised or under-represented audiences, with 26% reporting making very considerable efforts, i.e., scoring themselves as greater than 90 on the scale of 100. Some 7% reported making no effort.

**5. Revenue**

The average revenue of an independent news publisher is £62,000, a 30% fall from last year's survey. The fall has been smaller in the case of for-profits (average £77,000, a 5% fall) than the case of non-profits (average £48,000, a 50% fall). These figures are also lower than those found in the 2022 Index.

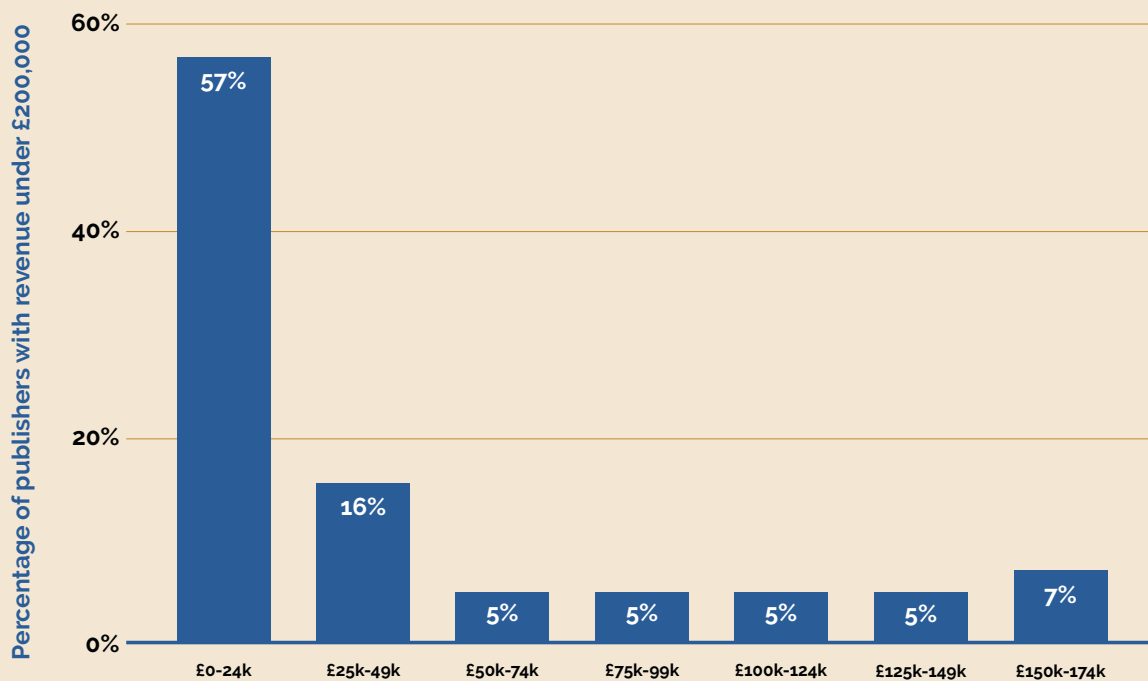
Given our estimate that there a total of 300-400 independent publishers in the sector, this suggests a sectoral revenue of £18.6m to £24.8m. Publishers with a revenue of over £2m are not invited to complete the Index survey. In fact, 80% of publishers in our sample have revenues of less than

£200,000. Figure 2 shows the distribution of those <£200,000 publishers when grouped into bands of £25,000s.

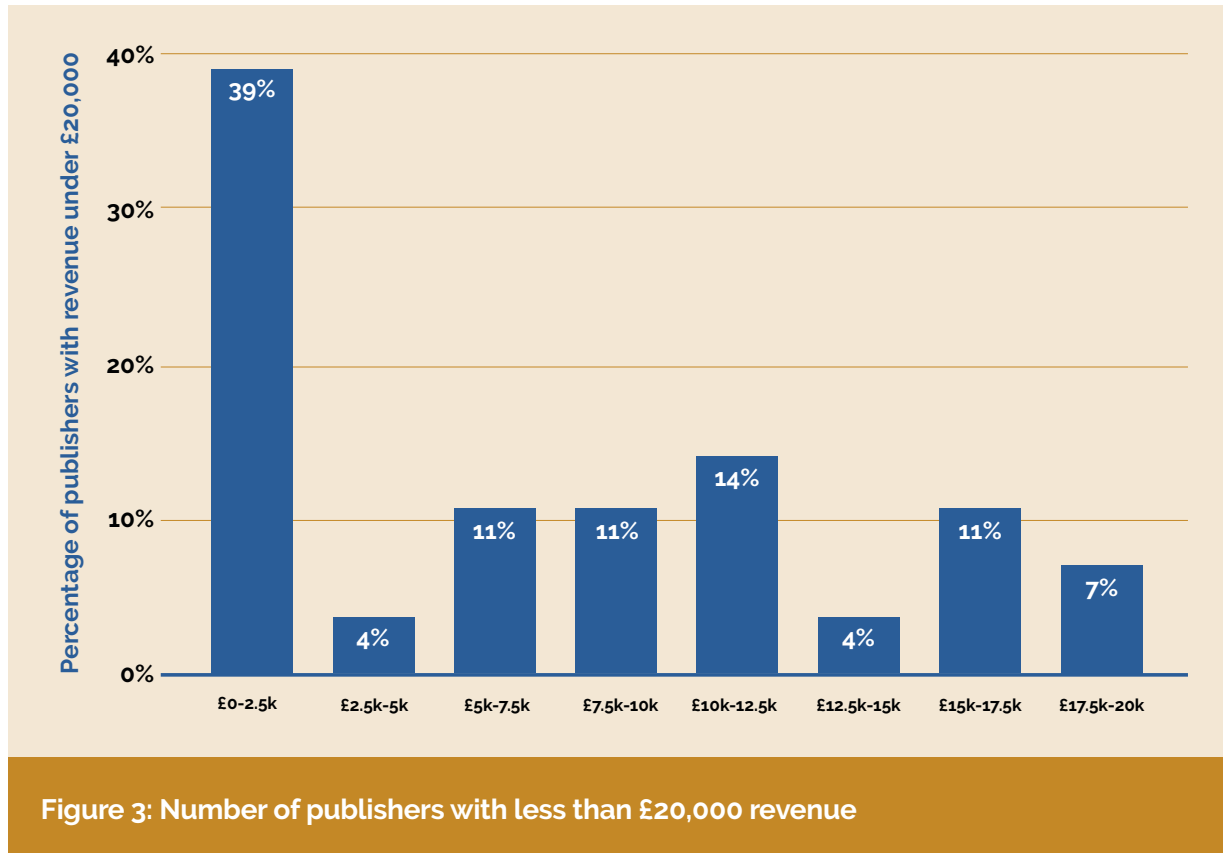
A significant proportion of publishers – 40% of this year's sample – have revenues of under £20,000. Figure 4 shows the revenue breakdown of those publishers, with 11 of them (15% of the total sample) having no revenue at all.

There is a group of publishers with a very consistent revenue: those who focus on local news. Their average revenues have not dropped below £63,000 or exceeded £67,000 in the last three Index surveys.

A review of the last three year's results also shows that limited companies



**Figure 2: Percentage of publishers with revenue under £200,000**



have consistently higher revenues than community interest companies and sole traders.

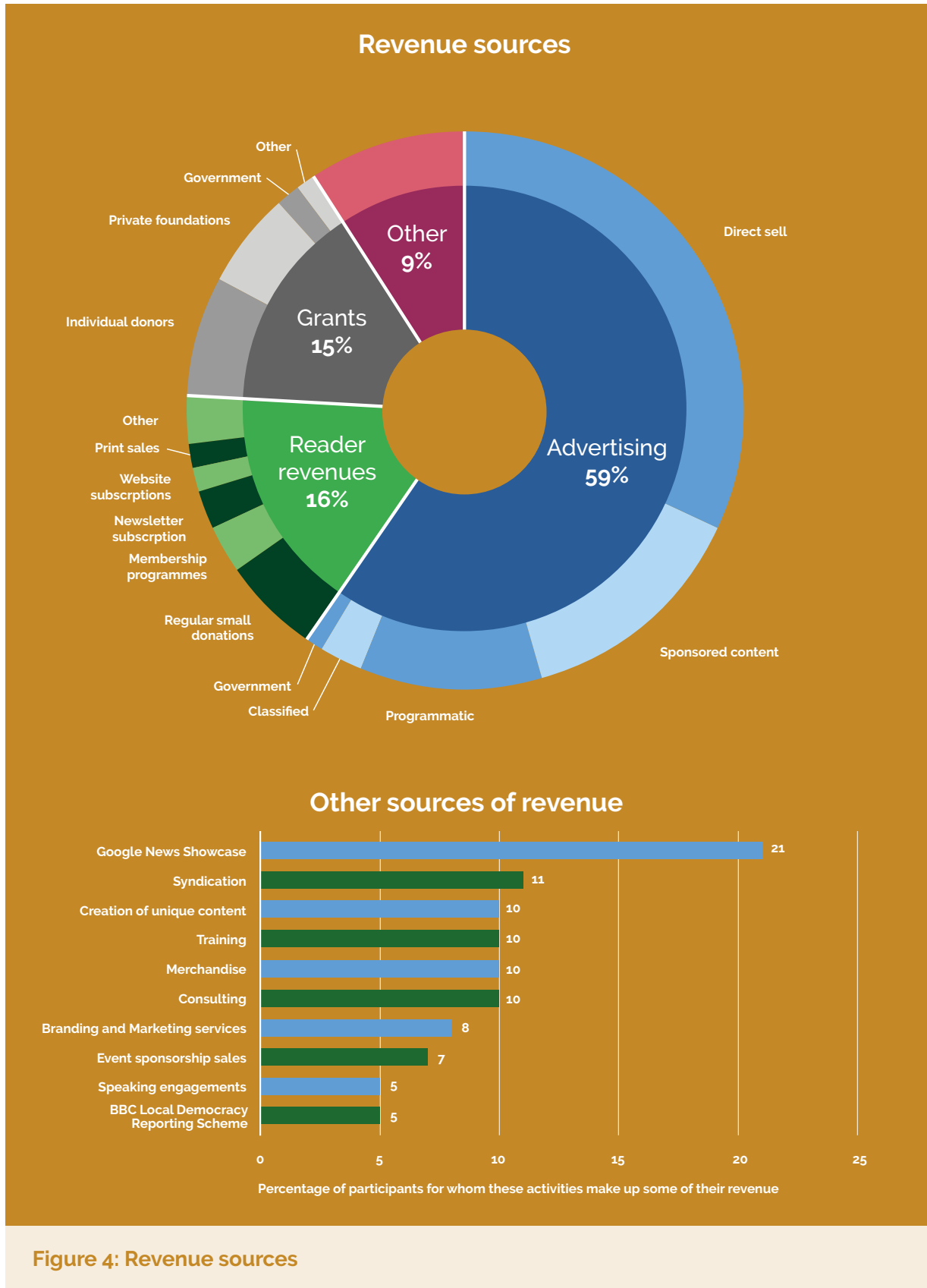
Revenue – or the staffing capacity it can generate – is the most widely mentioned subject in the qualitative responses on challenges and opportunities. It is almost universally seen as a challenge. The responses make up a worrying picture of an extremely difficult business environment. One publisher said: *"it constantly feels like a never-ending challenge without much opportunity, of economic unease in an already challenging marketplace...amid a cost-of-living crisis. Local businesses are struggling so advertising spending is usually the first to be cut."*

Publishers worry about their ability, given the lack of revenue, to maintain editorial breadth, depth and quality, and worry about burnout and exhaustion of staff.

## 6. Sources of revenue

The structure of revenue for the independent news publishing sector continues to show the importance of advertising, which makes up more than half of publishers' revenue (59%), the highest level in the last three years.

The share of revenue that comes from readers (16%) has fallen six percentage points from last year's survey and is the lowest in the last three years.



The same is true for grant revenue (15%) down five points from 2023 and nine points from 2022.

Correlational analysis of the data hints at routes to success in growing revenue. For the average non-profit, there is a positive correlation between revenue and each of Twitter/X followers, Threads followers, Instagram followers, podcast audiences, email subscribers.<sup>2</sup> In the case of for-profits, there is no link between revenue and social media.

Print circulation correlates with revenue for the average publisher, but this is particularly strong in the case of for-profits.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the greater the percentage of original content that is via print, the greater the revenue.<sup>4</sup> This chimes with anecdotal evidence from the qualitative feedback of interest in new print products.

When given the chance to elaborate, publishers talked about significant challenges around sources of revenue, the most common being a downturn in advertising, with a common perception that local businesses were cutting back on local advertising. One publisher mentioned competing with local radio for advertising sales.

Publishers reliant on grant-funding also talked of a challenging grant-seeking environment "*since the cost of living crisis has left more third sector bidding for a smaller share of charity money.*"

One exasperated publisher said: "*none of the models work!*".

There were also more optimistic comments, typically on two themes. First, that reform to the rules around public notices could result in a new source of revenue, and second, that diversification by publishers could help stabilise revenue.

## 7. Costs and surplus

The average costs or expenses of a publisher are £56,000. This figure is down 38% from last year's Index, and broadly reflects the fall in average revenue. This suggests that publishers have cut costs to maintain similar levels of surplus or loss. The cuts have been greater in non-profit publishers, presumably to reflect the greater fall in revenue for non-profit publishers.

The breakdown of costs remains similar to previous years. The highest cost is staffing (51%), followed by technology (31%), general administration (10%), office costs (6%) and training (1%).

Analysis of surpluses provides more evidence for the importance of print, with greater print circulation correlating with greater surpluses.<sup>5</sup> There is also a positive correlation between the level of surplus and the level of advertising as a percentage of overall revenue.<sup>6</sup>

Publishers' open comments to the survey rarely concerned costs or surpluses, except for several mentions of concern around the rise of print costs, as was the case last year.



## 8. People

The number of employees of the average independent news publisher has fallen 33% since 2023 Index to just two people at full-time equivalency. This again reflects this year's falls in revenue and costs. The fall is worse in non-profits than in for-profits. The average number of people employed in any way by publishers has fallen to 2.8 people. Using an estimate of the total population of publishers of 300-400, the survey suggests that the independent news publishing sector employs around 600-800 people. Reach PLC's layoffs during 2023 were estimated at 700.<sup>7</sup>

This year's survey suggests that 34% of employees in the independent news publishing sector are women. This is the highest percentage yet measured in the Index reports. Some 4% of staff are from ethnic minority groups (including White ethnic minority groups), which is unchanged from last year.

In comments, publishers told us that where they do have the resources to be recruiting new staff, they can struggle to find suitable candidates and volunteers, although one had luck by partnering with a local college, which led to "**finding talented work experience students**". Two publishers told us they hoped to arrange succession plans to allow them to retire this year.

Many independent publishers make use of volunteers. Both non-profit and for-profit publishers are relying much more on volunteers this year, presumably again reflecting reduced revenue and costs. When

asked how much they relied on volunteers, publishers gave an average of 53pts out of a possible 100, up twenty points from last year. Even the for-profits reported a reliance of 37pts on average.

Correlative analysis also finds that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the more an organisation depends upon volunteers the less revenue they report – or, the lower the revenue, the more they have to rely on volunteers.<sup>8</sup>

## 9. Impact

Independent news publishers still believe their work influences societal change. The survey asked respondents to score, out of 100, the extent to which they believe that their organisation contributes to change in society. This year, the average response was 62pts, a slight reduction from last year's survey (68pts). As usual, there is a divide between non-profits and for-profits, the former scoring themselves at 69pts (down from 72pts) and the latter at 55pts (down from 63pts).

When asked to define the best contribution they make to society, the top answer publishers give is an "**increased ability to debate and generate a shift in public conversation**" (37%) before "**increased civil engagement**" (31%) and then "**inspired members of [our] audience to be involved in public life**" (22%). Five percent say, "**a change in government services or practices**" and the remainder say they "**inspired audience members to participate in protests, demonstrations in person, or online activism.**"

**The survey offers an opportunity for publishers to tell us their favourite story of impact over the last year. We include some of these here, lightly edited for brevity and anonymity.**

When analysed by theme, the areas of impact most mentioned were around community voice and involvement, such as encouraging volunteering or highlighting the work of an underrepresented group.

The next most popular theme was around council oversight, such as spotlighting significant decisions made by the council that may not have otherwise come to the attention of residents.

This was followed by examples that concerned planning and development, such as highlighting new housing or development plans, then examples of election oversight, such as fact-checking or providing the only coverage of debates or the count.

"We helped organise a big sleep out, which raised more than £40,000 for a centre for rough sleepers in the city, and more than 150 people slept out at the football stadium on a very wet night!"

"We investigated and shone a light on examples of public land being sold without the public being told, and private land being gentrified with public money."

"The local council cited our reporting as having inspired a policy change on private renting in the city."

"We got 400 people involved in a Just Bin It campaign."

"We have published contributed articles by 197 writers, the majority of whom had not previously written for publication."

"Our coverage of local issues resulted in several becoming campaign pledges by the party which won the May 2023 election."

"A survivor of human trafficking is reclaiming her narrative through community journalism and writing articles for our website."

"We also covered the issue of fly-tipping in lanes. These have been now covered by larger publications and have led to council action - clearing lanes and holding meetings."

"Training of volunteers, interns and work experience where they wouldn't have otherwise had the opportunity or means."

"We were the only ones providing live updates on what turned out to be a political leadership change for our local council. The story was so popular, our website crashed. But our readers then donated to cover the cost of a bandwidth upgrade."

"Hugely increasing responses to detrimental planning applications causing them to be withdrawn."

"Holding fact checks of political leaflets during recent elections. These exposed lies and misrepresentations of facts."

"We have lots of stories of community groups growing in numbers or more volunteers signing up as the result of being featured in the magazine."



# About the Index

## About this survey

The PINF Index is based on an online survey of UK news publishers whose turnover is less than £2 million and who publish predominantly text-based content. The survey was not open to licensed broadcasters (including community radio stations) as these organisations operate in a distinct economic and regulatory environment. The survey was open for responses in January 2024.

Using a purposive sampling strategy, the survey was promoted via social media, email newsletters, direct emails and telephone calls.

There were 73 participants this year, representing around 25% of some 300 targeted organisations. Eighteen publishers completed the survey this year as well as last year. We collected limited IDs so that we can continue to survey the same participants year-on-year if required. The consent document assured confidentiality to all participants, and personal details, if they were supplied, were separated from the dataset before analysis.

GDPR guidelines were followed and data were stored securely.

Our quantitative survey items covered nine aspects: demographics; organisation, mission & scope; content; distribution; audience engagement; revenue; costs; staffing and diversity; and impact. Our research design therefore, was cross-sectional and explored relationships between the 57 survey items. Thus, we were able to conduct descriptive analysis, whilst also exploring patterns of association.

Qualitative questions further explored the theme of societal impact, as well as the challenges and obstacles that respondents were experiencing. The responses were thematically coded to facilitate analysis.

As all questions were optional, there were some missing data. However, missingness analysis (Little's Test) estimated that the levels and patterns of missingness were not likely to significantly disrupt the analysis.

Survey questions that asked participants to choose between multiple choice questions resulted in categorical variables. Items that asked participants to respond on a scale of 1 to 10 were used to create continuous variables. Normality tests were performed on these

continuous variables, resulting in the detection of significant numbers of outliers within the data. Therefore, we reported averages using the trimmed mean. The trimmed mean, otherwise known as the adjusted mean, is a way of averaging that removes outliers at the top and bottom end of the data, before calculating the mean. All 'averages' this year refer to the trimmed mean.

Inferential analyses reported both significance levels ( $p$  values) and effect sizes ( $r$  values,  $t$  statistics, chi square and odds ratios). Significance was indicated as a  $p$  value, such that  $p$  is the probability that this result could have been achieved by chance. Here, it is desirable to register a  $p$  value as small as possible. For example,  $p < .05$  means that for a particular analysis, there is a less than a 5% probability that this result could have been achieved by chance. All reported significances met the minimum cut-off of  $p < .05$ . Effect sizes, on the other hand, measured the magnitude of the result. Here, it is desirable to have an effect size as large as possible. For effect sizes which measure correlation, the standard cut-off criteria were  $r = .1$  (weak effect);  $r = .3$  (moderate effect);  $r > .5$  (strong effect). For effect sizes which measure the relationship between two

groups (*t* statistics), the difference between the two should be seen as significant if the *p* value is less than 0.05. Odds ratios measured the strength of association between two categorical variables. As this was a cross-sectional study, we do not confuse correlation with causation. None of our results are therefore perceived as predictive. Our year-on-year analysis uses time series methodology, where we explore relationships between whole cohorts of respondents from one year to the next (*N* = 100).

#### About the authors

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#### About the Public Interest News Foundation

The Public Interest News Foundation is the UK's first charity to support public interest news – ethical and impartial journalism that informs and empowers the public about the things that matter to all of us. We believe that everyone in the UK should benefit from public interest news that speaks to them, for them and with them. We believe that independent news providers with turnover below £2m have a crucial role to play in reaching communities that have been let down by other parts of the media and developing new, ethical models of journalism. Our mission is to ensure the social and financial sustainability of independent news providers in communities across the UK.

Our trustees are Jo Adetunji, Polly Curtis, Alison Gow, Lord (Richard) Inglewood, Isabelle Roughol, Patrick Swaffer and Julius Weinberg.

#### Acknowledgements

Most of all, we are grateful to the publishers who completed this year's Index. We know that completing surveys takes time and energy away from your core purpose of providing public interest news to communities up and down the UK. We are grateful to you for sharing so much data, and we hope that we can repay you by using this to design our own programmes, and to advise policymakers, philanthropists and social media platforms on how they can best support independent public interest news.

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We are also grateful for regular interaction with the Institute for Nonprofit News, a leading journalism support organisation. Their ground-breaking Index of non-profit news inspired us to launch the PINF Index, and we look forward to continuing our partnership over the years ahead.

# Over to you

We would love to hear your feedback on this year's Index and ideas for research or evidence that you could use in your work.

Please let us know via [this link](#) or by using the QR code.



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## Endnotes

- 1 For Reach PLC results, see [https://pressgazette.co.uk/media\\_business/reach-results-2023-revenue-falls-5-as-print-out-performs-digital](https://pressgazette.co.uk/media_business/reach-results-2023-revenue-falls-5-as-print-out-performs-digital). For The Guardian, see [https://pressgazette.co.uk/media\\_business/guardian-advertising-downturn-hole-12m](https://pressgazette.co.uk/media_business/guardian-advertising-downturn-hole-12m).
- 2 (r = .49 and .80 respectively; p < .001)
- 3 All publishers r = .52; p < .001. For-profits only: r = .97; p < .001.
- 4 r = .33; p < .01
- 5 r = .42; p < .001
- 6 r = .29; p < .05
- 7 [https://pressgazette.co.uk/media\\_business/journalism-job-cuts-2023/](https://pressgazette.co.uk/media_business/journalism-job-cuts-2023/)
- 8 r = -.41; p < .05

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