

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHER or PHOTOJOURNALIST

This is one of a series of Fact Sheets on the photo imaging sector developed by industry experts to help people new to the sector understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. Fact Sheets are based on Job Profiles developed by Skillset. For the full list of *Job Profiles for the Audio Visual Industries*, visit www.skillset.org. We aim to keep this information as current as possible - a fully updated version will be available in the Winter of 2006. All Fact Sheets can be downloaded and printed from our website www.skillset.org/careers. To give us feedback, e-mail careers@skillset.org.

Press photographers provide the media with photographs of current events and the people involved in them, on a daily basis. They can work for national or regional newspapers, news magazines, free-sheets and news agencies. There is a stereotype of the "paparazzi" (literally "buzzing insects") chasing after glamorous celebrities, but the majority of press photographers are skilful, diplomatic people who work under pressure to capture the best possible image to tell a story and meet the picture editor's deadlines. Most work is published in local newspapers where the photographer covers every possible subject from court reports to agriculture, from the local hospital to a village fête. On national newspapers it is usual for photographers to specialise in a particular field, eg political coverage or sport. Photojournalists provide both words and images, but usually work for magazines rather than newspapers. They often suggest the story themselves rather than follow a brief from a news or picture editor. Press photographers can have staff posts or be freelance, but there are a decreasing number of staff jobs available. Freelance photographers may sell pictures directly to a picture editor if they are of sufficiently high standard, and if they cover subject areas not taken by staff photographers. Most picture editors will consider work offered them speculatively, and some may commission established freelance photographers, who would normally have a picture library that can be accessed through their website.

The work

The working schedule can often be in shifts, eg from 10am to 6pm or from 3pm to 10pm, but the late shift photographer may also be on call during the night in case something important happens. The news editor decides what stories to cover, and the picture editor decides how many images will be required. The photographer may take a variety of shots, but must present a selection of 4/5 suitable pictures for each story. They have to get to the right place at the right time, and can be under pressure on a busy day, rushing from one location to another. Most press photography is now recorded as a digital image, and the photographer will carry a camera, a flashgun, plus a laptop and mobile phone in order to download images straight back to the picture desk. Local photography requires the ability to make the mundane or commonplace interesting. The photographer is always looking for a fresh "angle". Agency press photographers often know longer in advance what stories they will cover, because the agency will have negotiated the right to take images, eg the World Cup. They look for material that can be syndicated around the world.

Essential knowledge and skills

Press photographers need skill in using cameras, even though many functions are now automatic. They will need to know when to use a flashgun, understand depth of field and have a good "eye" for framing, editing and enhancing images. They must know how to interact well with people. They should be prepared to do some research, where possible, into the background of their subjects. On a local newspaper the photographer will become known in the community, so tact and diplomacy are essential.

A press photographer should be able to demonstrate:

- Excellent communication skills
- Patience, perseverance and stamina
- Good self-presentation and appropriate dress
- Quick-thinking and awareness, and be able to meet strict deadlines
- Creativity and inventiveness

Typical career routes

It is usual to start on a local paper or free-sheet. The picture editor will need to see a portfolio of 12 images of different subjects, which should include people and action. They may offer the opportunity of a trial week's work at the paper. If they are fortunate, the photographer may be offered a staff post or freelance work.



England Helpline
08080 300 900

Scotland Helpline
0808 100 8094

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The Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries

This is a highly competitive field, and candidates must have exceptional talent, plus the right approach to working with people, in order to succeed. Many photojournalists start as press photographers, though this is not mandatory.

Training and qualifications

Entrants are usually fully trained in photographic techniques before entering the profession. For formal entry on a training scheme, a trainee needs at least 5 GCSEs including English and/or two year's experience in photography, and a further education qualification in photography. Some photographers are self-taught but need to be extraordinarily gifted to succeed. The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) endorses two main training schemes. One is by direct entry to a newspaper, involving on-the-job training supplemented by block release to college. The other is to complete a full-time course and seek employment afterwards. Photographic courses can be expensive, both for the college to run, and for the student.

Health and Safety

Press photographers need to be aware of health and safety, and not put themselves or their subjects in situations of unnecessary risk. However, the nature of the work can be inherently risky for some, eg working in a war zone or area of conflict, in which case they may need to undergo safety training and wear appropriate protective clothing. It is essential to establish behaviour guidelines and movement directives on location, and be sensitive to local customs and cultural norms. They should also ensure that there is a current Public Liability insurance policy in place to cover their working practices.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. For information about training and professional qualifications, links to the Skillset network of training partners, and access to the comprehensive Skillset course database, visit www.skillset.org

Skillset Careers is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service delivering individual career solutions when and how you need them. For detailed media careers information and advice, contact one of the free careers helplines. Call **08080 300 900** in England (also available to callers from Wales and Northern Ireland) or **0808 100 8094** in Scotland, or visit the website www.skillset.org/careers

National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)

Has a list of affiliated courses including press photography and photojournalism.

www.nctj.com T: **01279 430009**

The British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP) is a not for profit association of professional image makers that aims to improve standards, develop skills and encourage continuing professional development. The BIPP recognise over thirty colleges across the UK who have proved that they have the resources, facilities and expert lecturers necessary to run an effective professional photographic course. For details of BIPP Qualifications for practising professionals, visit the Membership pages on the BIPP website www.bipp.com. For a list of approved colleges, including those offering the PQE, e-mail mberry@bipp.com. Student membership is available to students attending a vocational course in photography at an educational establishment in the UK. The Institute's journal *The Photographer* is supplied free to all members. T: **01920 464011**

The Association of Photographers (AOP) is a trade association of professional photographers, who campaign vigorously for photographers' rights and have had a key influence on the development of professional photography in the UK. Their publication *Beyond the Lens* is widely recognised as the definitive industry guide to copyright and licensing law, ethics and business practice.

The AOP has a number of affiliated colleges and promotes, maintains and develops relationships between education and the professional industry. It also publishes *IMAGE* magazine, which reports on current trends in professional photography and image making.

www.the-aop.org T: **020 7739 6669**

The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) is the industry's 'learned body'. Established over 150 years ago, it aims to promote the art and science of Photography. It awards distinctions that are recognised throughout the world and has established specialist interest groups, and meetings for its members, who are drawn from both amateur and professional photographers. It publishes a monthly *Journal*. www.rps.org