

# **New Beats: A study of Australian journalists who became redundant in 2012**

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# What is New Beats?

- In 2012 more than 1,000 journalists became redundant in Australia
- That's around 15 % of the journalism workforce
- What has happened to them?
- And what are the implications for journalism in Australia?
- A planned three-year study involving annual surveys and interviews, and a project blog [www.newbeatsblog.com](http://www.newbeatsblog.com)
- Pilot survey conducted in September this year – contacted 225 journalists, 107 responses, 95 from 2012 cohort

# Main research questions

- How have journalists who were made redundant in Australia in 2012 understood and made sense of that experience, both at an individual and collective level?
- How are they navigating the reinvention of their careers in journalism or other fields?
- How might the collective wisdom of these journalists be used by Australian media?
- How is the reinvention of individual careers contributing to the reinvention of journalism?
- How are their experiences and career trajectories relevant to an increased understanding of changes happening in workplaces more generally in 21st century Australia?

## Approaches elsewhere

- No study of this kind in Australia or anywhere else, despite earlier onset of journalism layoffs in US
- As web sites such as *Newspaper Death Watch* and *Paper Cuts* testify, 15,000 news employees in the US lost their jobs in 2009 alone.
- Investigated in one-off studies of journalists in particular newsrooms ([Levy, 2009](#)) as well as in broader national studies of occupational change such as *Out of the News: Former Journalists Discuss a Profession in Crisis* ([Viggo Wexler, 2012](#)) and the Tow Centre's report on 'post-industrial journalism' ([Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012](#))
- Sporadic reporting of layoffs in sites such as Poynter and 10,000 Words, which also has a "Revolving Door" newsletter

## Overall findings (1)

- The average age of the participants in this survey was **49.1** years, with a range of 24 to 69 years old.
- The participants had an average of **25.7** years in journalism, with a range of 1 to 44 years.
- The sample was almost equal in terms of gender representation with 48 men and 47 women who had been made redundant in 2012 completing the survey.
- The overwhelming majority (89.5%) of the participants took voluntary redundancy.
- The majority come took voluntary redundancy from a print company (93.7%).
- The most common job title pre-redundancy was that of a senior editor, section editor or deputy editor (27 of 85 respondents), while 20 identified as journalists or reporters and 20 as senior journalists and reporters.
- Currently, only 36.6% selected that they had a Union membership, compared with 75% who had a Union membership pre-redundancy.

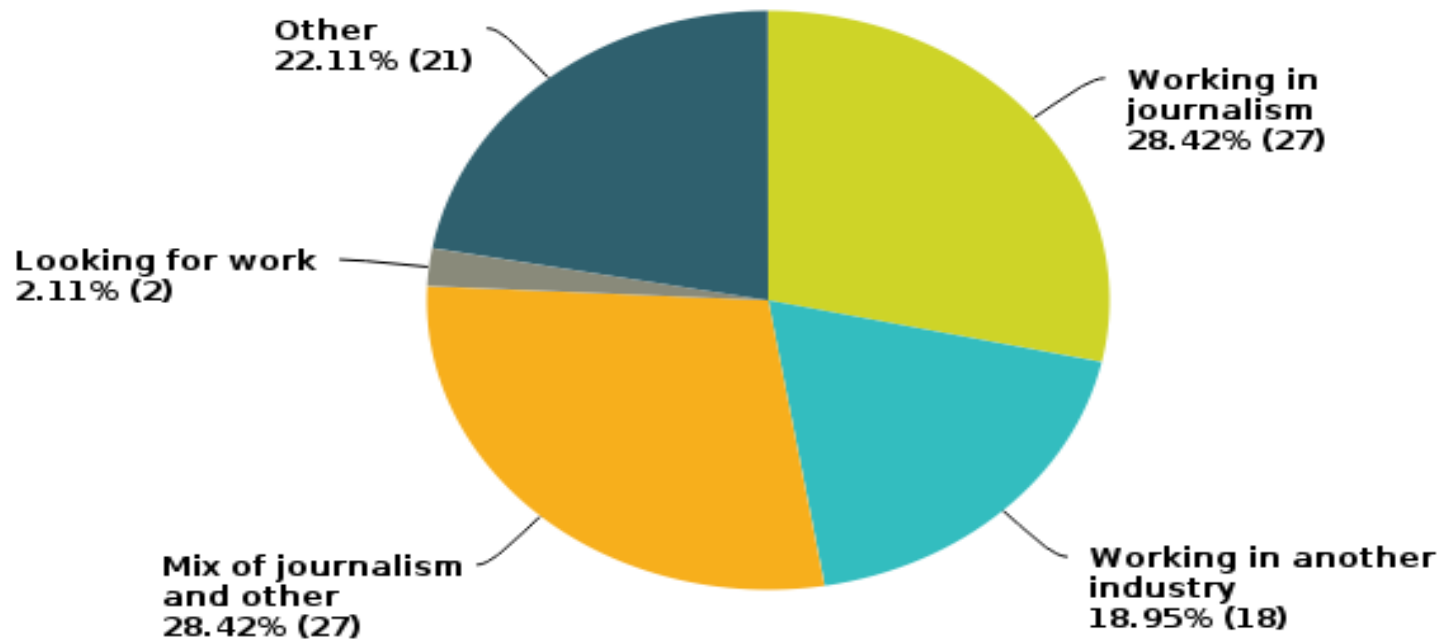
## Overall findings (2)

- Only 24.2% selected that they had undergone retraining.
- Of those who are currently employed, some are still working in journalism (28.4%), while an equal number selected that they are in a mix of journalism and other work (28.4%), while 19% are working in another industry.
- Of those that are currently employed, 56% selected that the conditions were better at their current job, but 68.5% selected that the wages were not as good.
- Of those who were no longer working in journalism full time (66 participants), they were asked to explain why. The majority (65.2%) selected that they had chosen to leave.
- The most common jobs for those who are no longer in journalism included PR – consisting of media manager, media officer or media advisor, or PR officer and account managers (20 across all of these roles) or university lecturer or tutor (9).
- Most participants indicated their willingness to be involved in the New Beats project on an ongoing basis, with 93.7% stating they complete an annual survey, 50.5% agreeing to be filmed and 65.2% willing to be involved in a public capacity on the project blog.

# Where are they working now?

**Q20 Thinking about what you have been doing since you became redundant, please provide the following information. Please describe your current employment status:**

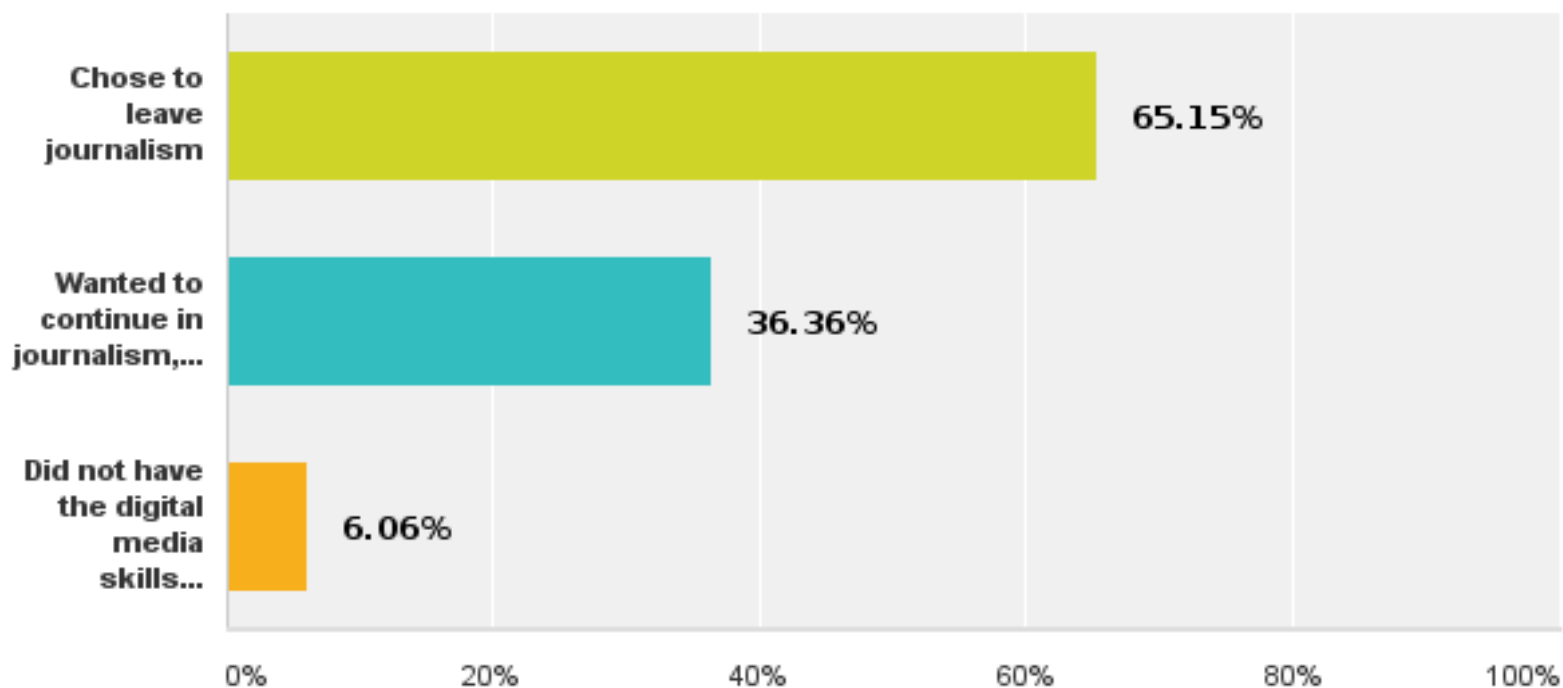
Answered: 95 Skipped: 0



## Leaving journalism

**Q21 As you have indicated you are not currently employed in journalism, we are interested in why. Please choose the most appropriate answer from the list below.**

Answered: 66 Skipped: 29





# Open-Ended Question 1 - Please tell us about your redundancy experience

## Making the decision

- Most mentioned the difficulty associated with this decision, however there were three most common themes in terms of reasons why they took voluntary redundancy: deteriorating work conditions, the 'right time,' and a generally negative view about the future of journalism.
- The most common reason was that this type of work was not what they signed up for.
- Overall, there were 20 mentions of stressful and in two cases 'toxic,' work conditions.

***"I didn't really want to leave because I love working in newspapers but the work atmosphere had become very toxic and the workload unsustainable."***

# The redundancy process

- There were 57 mentions of how the redundancy process unfolded at their workplace, and the discussion of how management handled the process was the most common theme with 25 responses mentioning this. Of these, most had negative connotations
- ***“The process was very confronting. I had been with the company for many years and been through many changes and redundancy rounds and they are usually handled poorly. There is a strong impression senior management is unwilling to genuinely listen to its staff and are tone deaf about decision making processes and how they are communicated.”***
- However, there was also a small group – eight responses – that mentioned it was a positive experience.
- ***“It was all good from my perspective, my voluntary application was accepted quite quickly so no worry period, organising a date and exit arrangements were painless and stress free.”***

# Emotions

- The most common emotional category in these answers to the redundancy experience question were negative, but there was a broad range, from anger, to disillusionment, guilt, anxiety, sadness and anger. However the three most frequently referenced emotions were that of **feeling not valued by the company, difficulty and sadness.**
- Those who didn't feel valued commonly referred to a lack of recognition of experience.
- ***“I was told three days before I finished that my redundancy application had been approved. No editor spoke to me about my record on the paper, let alone thanked me. The paper's administrative manager/accountant was the only person who acknowledged what I had done for the paper. Other people, with more illustrious records than mine, were treated even worse. A business editor, news editor, award-winning foreign editor, and former deputy editor walked out without a word of thanks.”***

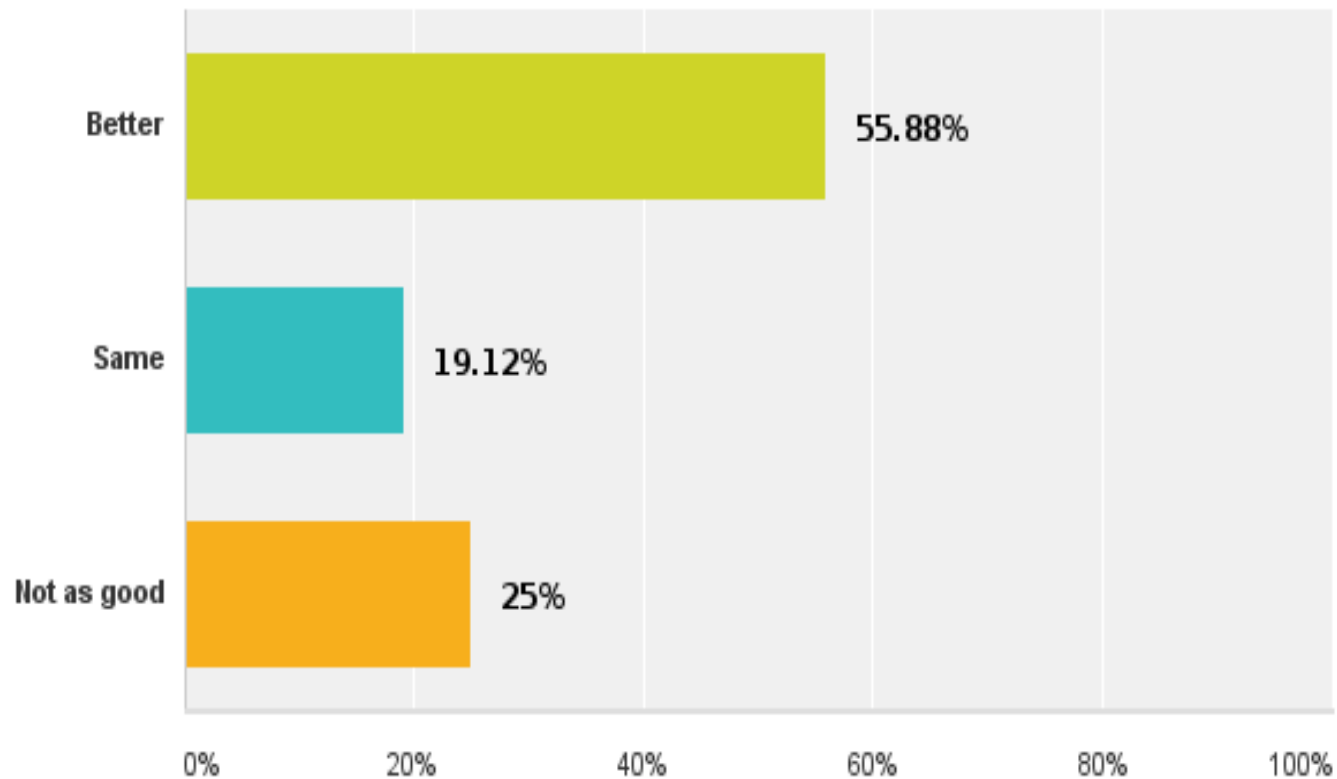
## Open Ended Question 2 - Please tell us of any issues arising from your redundancy experience, including but not limited to employment, income, health, professional identity, well-being

### Professional Identity

- More than a quarter of all surveyed said that redundancy had had a negative impact on their professional identity. As one respondent explained, panic set in immediately after the leaving the newspaper along with a loss of identity and purpose.
- *“My routine had been shattered I had to find a way to motivate myself.”*
- *“The hardest thing has been adjusting to life outside a newsroom”.*
- *“It was a change from a professional identity perspective. Suddenly you were no longer “Joe blogs for the [Newspaper], simply Joe Blogs.” It took some time getting used to, especially when you were calling people, and still is a little strange almost a year on.”*

## Q25 If you are employed, what are conditions like compared to your previous job?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 27



## Well being

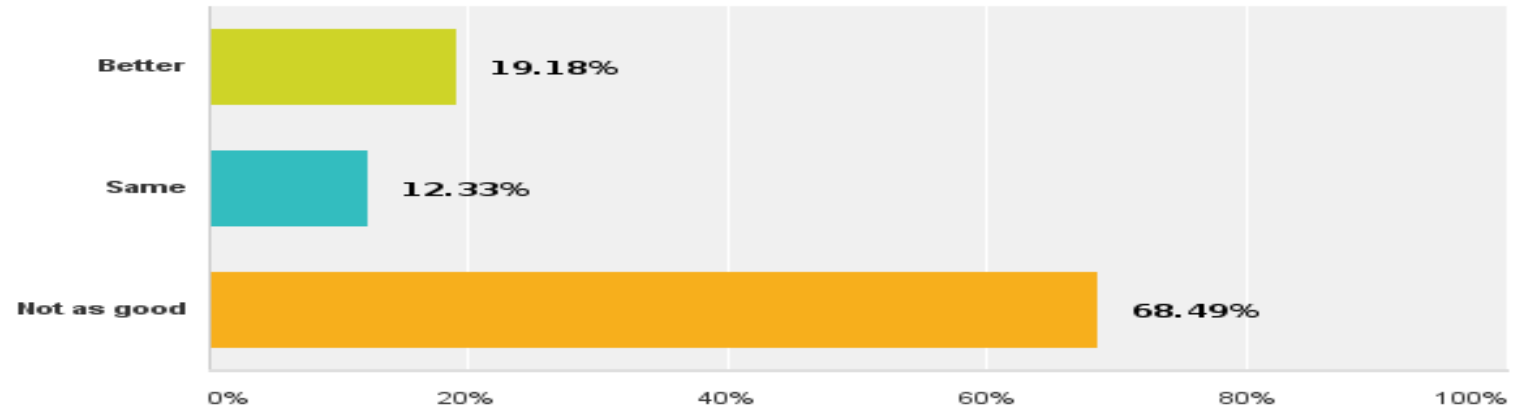
- Of the 40 participants that mentioned health and wellbeing in their answers, 25 responses explained that redundancy had actually had a positive effect on their wellbeing and health. Of these, most referred to the fact that they have more time and no longer have workplace stress.
- ***“I work a lot from home, I make my own rules and decisions, and I don't have a third of the stress I had in my last job. That was an impossible workload, with minimal or no support from a misogynistic management. My life now is creative, stimulating and purposeful. My health has no doubt improved due to reduced stress levels, my income is more or less the same, although less regular, and my well-being has skyrocketed. I can think of no negatives in my experience.”***
- “There were 15 who mentioned a negative affect on health and wellbeing, and most of these responses also mentioned that they had not found employment yet or struggled to find a new job.
- ***“Still unemployed, depressed somewhat and feeling worthless - with not much hope of getting back in the industry.”***

## Discussion theme: The well being/income paradox

- How might this square up with well being?
- Redundancy payout cushion? Being less stressed?
- Are fledgling freelance careers sustainable?

### Q24 If you are employed, what are wages like compared to your previous job?

Answered: 73 Skipped: 22

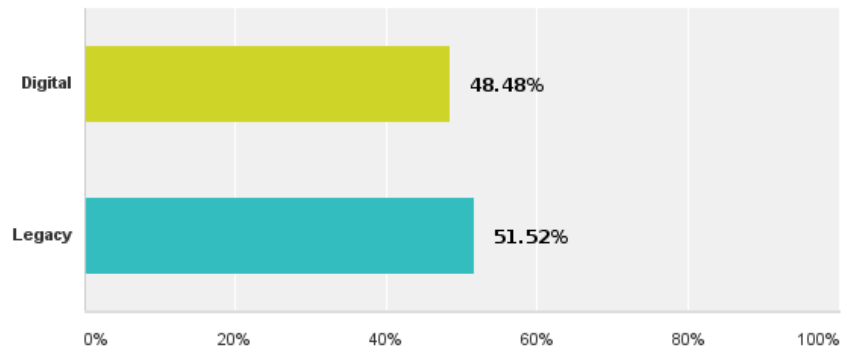


## Discussion theme: Old journalists, new media?

- 16 out of 95 respondents have jobs in digital media; 17 in
- With only 24% of respondents saying they'd received retraining, to what extent will the experience of many others from this group be valued in emerging media enterprises?
- How does the lack of training contribute to a desire to leave journalism?
- Where else might that expertise be channelled?

**Q23** If you are working in the media, are you working for digital (eg. online start-up) or legacy media (eg. newspaper)?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 62





# Next steps

# Panel discussion this afternoon

16:15 to 17:30

- Peter Fray -Politifact Australia (formerly SMH editor)
- Liz Minchin – The Conversation (formerly The Age)
- Penny O'Donnell
- Matthew Ricketson
- Andrew Dodd
- Lawrie Zion





**Thank you**

Our blog is at <http://newbeatsblog.com>

Follow us on Twitter @newbeatsproject

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