
Gender Inequality and the Scottish Press Awards

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Introduction

A critical mass of women in decision-making positions in media bodies is central to improving gender equality both in terms of the content produced and the cultural context of the workplace¹. This can in turn prompt better policy provision for a diverse workforce. One way to boost the number of high-profile women leaders is to highlight the visibility of role-models receiving public recognition.

The Scottish Press Awards (SPA), organised by the Scottish Newspaper Society (SNS), are bestowed annually. The SNS website describes the SPA as “the top awards for the newspaper industry, in both print and digital formats, in Scotland.”² Nominations are made across a range of categories and finalists are announced at a prestigious ceremony event.

It should be noted that SNS Director John McLellan introduced two new changes to the awards in 2016, recognizing that “it’s not before time that we addressed the issue of female representation”³. Firstly, serving editors would no longer sit on judging panels (potentially judging their own journalists’ work) and secondly the jury would consist of 25 external judges, the majority of whom would be women. These two changes are significant, as they begin to disrupt a system of value-judgements based on nepotism and sexist bias. Whether these changes have had an effect since being introduced at the start of the analysis period (2016-2020) will be discussed latterly.

The nomination process has 2 stages⁴. First journalists are invited to nominate themselves for an award, a process which involves:

- an entry fee (£21.60)
- providing a portfolio of best work
- the signature of an editor of at least one publication in which you have been published.

This entry process disproportionately excludes women both practically and culturally. The fee is nominal, and yet more significant for freelancers than contracted staff, for whom the cost can be covered by their institution. Women In Journalism has

¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU\(2018\)596839_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU(2018)596839_EN.pdf) (p49)

² <https://www.scotns.org.uk/awards/>

³ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/2016/12/14/gender-balanced-in-scottish-press-awards-overhaul/>

⁴ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/awards/to-enter/>

attempted to redress this balance by covering the cost for women wishing to put themselves forward⁵. Having sufficient pieces of work and getting editorial sign-off is more difficult for freelance journalists – which women are more likely to be due to the need for flexible working. Moreover, editors are more likely to put their staff forward, or support them in the entry process, pointing to an institutional rather than individual sign of distinction⁶. Assembling work is time-consuming; given the degree of invisible work that women disproportionately do to bolster Scotland's economy⁷, entering an award may not be prioritised.

Culturally, women are more likely to suffer from imposter syndrome⁸, often socially constructed to perceive themselves as less capable or indeed worthy of an award. Moreover, given the *competent or likeable* double-bind, women face a social backlash for displaying counter-stereotypical behaviour such as competitiveness or self-promotion⁹. In addition, the perception that the awards are not a level-playing field also dissuades women from entering in the first place. This in turn is linked to the entrance fee; women might feel more inclined to 'have a go' if there was no personal financial risk involved. Overall then, the conditions around self-nomination are not conducive to a gender-equal entry system for the awards, which in turn affects stage two.

The second stage of the nominations process involves a panel of judges shortlisting five, six or seven journalists for a series of categories. Table 1 shows the number of men and women who entered the awards in 2018 and were shortlisted – along with the judging panel breakdown. Obviously, it is not possible to comment on the strength of the entries and subsequent selection process, however the figures are nonetheless revealing.

⁵ <https://www.wijscotland.com/news/wij-scotland-cover-scottish-press-awards-entry-fees>

⁶ Harrison, B., & Jepsen, D. M. (2015). The career impact of winning an external work-related award. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 89, 21-31.

⁷ <https://makingworkvisible.engender.org.uk/what-needs-to-change/>

⁸ <http://hrnews.co.uk/over-6-in-10-women-suffer-imposter-syndrome-in-the-uk/>

⁹ Rudman, L. A., & Fairchild, K. (2004). Reactions to counterstereotypic behavior: the role of backlash in cultural stereotype maintenance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 87(2), 157.



Table 1. Entries, Shortlist and Judging panel from 2018.

Category	Entries Received		Shortlist		Judging Panel	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Sports Photography	15	1	4	1	3	2
News Photography	24	3	4	1	2	3
Arts & Entertainment Journalist	14	5	4	1	2	3
Young Journalist	7	9	3	2	3	2
Interviewer	17	10	1	4	3	2
Political Journalist	13	5	6	1	2	3
Columnist	23	13	4	1	5	0
Sports Columnist	14	1	5	0	3	2
Financial/Business Journalist	10	4	5	0	3	2
Feature Writer	10	14	3	3	2	3
Sports Feature Writer	20	0	5	0	5	0
Sports News Writer	9	0	5	0	5	0
Outstanding Digital Journalist	10	9	7	0	2	3
Scoop	19	6	3	2	3	2
Reporter	26	13	2	3	2	3

- In 12 of the categories, more men are shortlisted than women; typically 4:1. In 1 category (*Feature Writer*) an equal number were selected; this is the only award for which more women entered than men. In 2 categories more women than men were shortlisted: *Interviewer* and *Reporter*. These two awards also attracted amongst the highest number of entries overall, suggesting that women need to enter in greater numbers to be in with a chance of shortlisting than men.
- At least 1 man is shortlisted for every award, whereas in five categories no women make the shortlist at all. Of these, two awards had no women entries to begin with, however in the category *Outstanding Digital Journalist*, although an almost equal number of men and women entered, 7 men were shortlisted – and 0 women.



- In total, 45 men and 30 women took part in judging the shortlists, although some may have taken part multiple times. If the jury is supposed to have a majority of women, as detailed by the SNS in their 2016 changes¹⁰ then this effect is diminished by having men judge more frequently across the panels.
- Of the judging panels, 9 consisted of more men than women, and 6 had more women. However, 3 of the awards were judged by all-male panels. 2 of these awards had no women entries to begin with, yet the third (*Columnist of the Year*) had one of the highest numbers of women entries (13) and yet only 1 woman was shortlisted, alongside 4 men. Having at least 2 women on each judging panels would prevent unfair aspersions being cast about gender bias in the shortlisting process.

Examining the shortlists themselves in greater detail provides insight into the gender balance of those journalists considered by the industry to be potentially award-winning. The report does not extend to the winners of each award each year, in order to focus exclusively on structural processes as opposed to individual merit. Instead it focuses on the annual shortlists, as these provide more data, and therefore a greater overview of the sector's most lauded and visible journalists. The findings reveal problematic, exclusive practices in both category selection and the judging process.

2. Methodology

The following shortlists were examined:

- The 36th Awards in 2015¹¹
- The 37th Awards in 2016¹²
- The 38th Awards in 2017¹³
- The 39th Awards in 2018¹⁴
- The 40th Awards in 2019¹⁵

¹⁰ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/2016/12/14/gender-balanced-in-scottish-press-awards-overhaul/>

¹¹ https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2015/12/winners_runners_up2015.pdf

¹² https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2016/04/winners_runners_up2016.pdf

¹³ <https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2017/news/shortlist-unveiled-for-scottish-newspaper-awards/>

¹⁴ https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2018/04/winners_runners_up_2018.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2019/04/Scottish-Press-Awards-2019-Shortlist.pdf>



- The 41st Awards in 2020¹⁶

Women In Journalism Scotland introduced the Nicola Barry Award for women in 2018, which “is open to all women journalists of any age working in print and online media in Scotland deserving of recognition for their work in issue-led reportage or commentary”¹⁷. Journalists nominated for the Nicola Barry Award were not included in the analysis as these were selected based on gender.

It should be noted that as a six-year period was covered, those journalists – regardless of gender – who have reached acclaimed status in their career are likely to feature more regularly. The time period acts, therefore, as a snapshot representative of present practices and gender balances, and cannot inform commentary on specific journalists’ careers.

3. Findings

I first examined the total number of men and women nominated in each award shortlist from 2015 to 2020. There has been an 11% increase of women nominees since 2015, up from 15% to 26% (see Table 2). Women journalists’ perception that the awards are not a level-playing field appear valid.

Table 2. SPA Nominees by Year, including numbers and percentages.

Year	Total Nominees	Women Nominees	Men Nominees	Women %	Men %
2015	78	12	66	15%	85%
2016	81	16	65	20%	80%
2017	82	18	64	22%	78%
2018	79	20	59	25%	75%
2019	95	21	74	22%	78%
2020	100	26	74	26%	74%

¹⁶ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2020/03/shortlist-Scottish-Press-Awards-2020.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.wijscotland.com/news/about-the-nicola-barry-award#:~:text=The%20Nicola%20Barry%20Award%20is,issue%2Dled%20reportage%20or%20commentary.>



However, since 2018 the upward trend has faltered; the 2019 figures replicate 2017 – women nominees making up only 22% of the total. By 2020 the figure jumps again up to the highest it has ever been – 26% (see Figure 1).

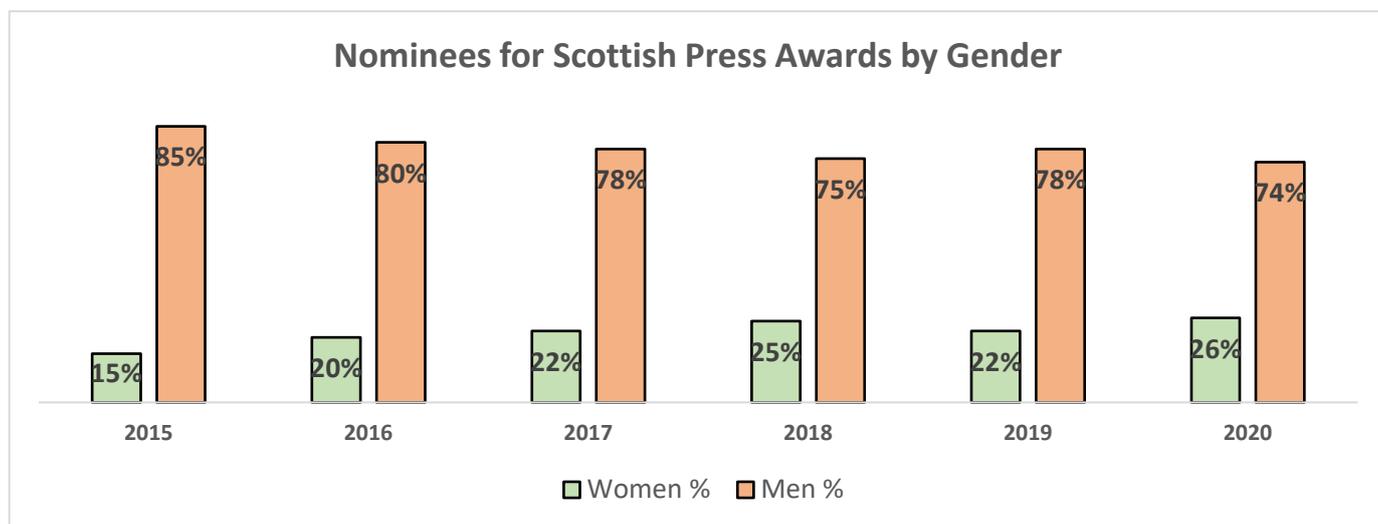


Figure 1. Percentage of Nominees by Gender 2015-2020.

While the overall trajectory is positive, these figures remain deeply problematic. On a shortlist for the most prestigious news awards in Scotland - only a quarter are women. Men are three times more likely to be nominated for an award than women.

4. Categories

4.1 Overview

The individual awards categories have changed over the 6-year period studied, yet in many respects reflect an outdated, masculinist version of journalism. From the outset this excludes both women and more diverse content-creators, reinforcing a version of journalistic value based on stereotypically male-coded categories.

Alongside a number of awards for publications, rather than individuals (e.g. Headline Of The Year (OTY)), a typical set of award categories are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Typical Award Categories for the SPA

Columnist OTY	Feature Writer OTY	Political Journalist	Sports Photographer
Reporter OTY	Interviewer OTY	Financial/Business Journalist	Sports Feature Writer



Scoop OTY	Local/Weekly Feature Writer	Arts/Entertainment	Sports News Writer
News Photographer	Young Journalist	Digital Journalist	Sports Columnist

Just as occupational segregation by gender signals inequalities in the distribution of men and women across employment categories¹⁸, so too does journalistic segregation continue in the news media sphere¹⁹. The ‘hard’ news/ ‘soft’ news gendered reporting divide unfortunately still remains²⁰, where political, financial and sports related news are still largely considered masculinist spaces²¹. That there are four sports awards in the SPA and only one arts/entertainment (combined) category reveals a journalistic focus heavily weighted towards masculine-coded interests.

A commendable change was the 2019 inclusion of 4 awards for local/weekly journalism, providing opportunities for journalists across Scotland to have their work acknowledged²². It should also be noted that as of 2021, a series of new categories have been introduced²³, as follows: Specialist Reporter, Student Journalist, Food and Drink Writer, Travel Writer, Best Coverage of a Live Event, News Website, Daily Newspaper of the Year, Sunday Newspaper of the Year and Chairman’s Award. The inclusion of the first few individual awards signals a change from the traditional categories, and it is hoped that the subsequent shortlists may be more diverse and gender balanced than previous years as a result. However, the collation of Arts and Entertainment into one category remains problematic, especially given the plethora of arts for which Scotland is famous.

4.2 Breakdown

The categories reveal patterns within specific shortlists and more nuanced gender imbalances. Analysing every category was beyond the scope of this report, so I chose a selection. I examined content-based categories (Sport, Arts/Entertainment

¹⁸ <https://www.closethegap.org.uk/content/resources/HANDOUT2.pdf>

¹⁹ Steiner, L. (2017). Gender and journalism. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Communication*.

²⁰ Schoch, L. (2020). The gender of sports news: Horizontal segregation and Marginalization of female journalists in the Swiss Press. *Communication & Sport*, 2167479520951162.

²¹ <https://rm.coe.int/bis-factsheet-gender-equality-sport-media-en/1680714b8f>

²² <https://www.scotns.org.uk/2018/12/19/local-journalists-be-heroes-at-40th-scottish-press-awards/>

²³ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/113/2021/02/42nd-Scottish-Press-Awards-Categories-Final.pdf>



and Political Journalist) then five of the genre-based categories (Columnist, Interviewer, Feature, Reporter and Photographer of the Year). Finally, I turned to Digital Journalism and Young Journalists.

Due to journalists being repeatedly nominated for the same category each year, I examine both the gender breakdown of shortlisted names as well as the number of journalists ever nominated for the award. Figure 2 below shows latter: the number of journalists nominated for each award.

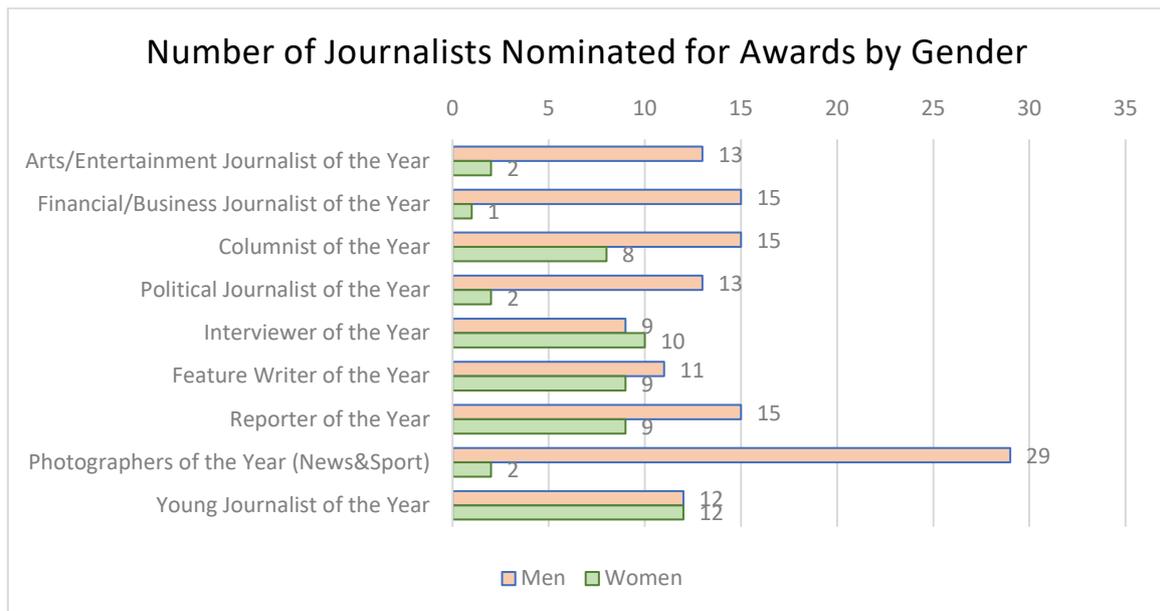


Figure 2. Gender breakdown of journalists ever nominated for each award.

4.3 Sport

From 2015-2020, 113 names were shortlisted across four categories: *Sports Photographer*, *Sports News Writer*, *Sports Feature Writer* and *Sports Columnist*. Table 5 reveals that only two women have ever been nominated for any of these awards. No women were shortlisted at all in 2020. 96% of all journalists shortlisted for a sport award since 2015 have been men.

4.4 Political Journalist of the Year

Awards for political journalism, too, remain dominated by men. Across the 6 years 32 names have been shortlisted. Two women have been nominated four times between them; otherwise all other nominees have been men. Taking into account



the repetition of names, 13 men have ever been nominated, and 2 women (see Figure 2). Therefore 88% of those every shortlisted for the award have been men.

4.5 Arts/Entertainment Journalist of the Year

I thought that perhaps a less ‘masculine’ coded award (like sport or politics) might reveal a more balanced shortlist. However, of the 27 names shortlisted for *Arts/Entertainment Journalist of the Year* (2015-2020, excluding 2017 which did not award this category) only 2 women have ever been nominated – once each. As seen in Figure 2, 13 men have been nominated – the same as for the Political Journalism award. Therefore, 93% of those ever shortlisted for the award have been men.

I turned from content-based categories to the genre-based awards: *Columnist, Interviewer, Feature Writer, Reporter and Photographer of the Year*.

4.6 Columnist of the Year

The category Columnist of the Year shows some improvement. From 2015 to 2018 the shortlists are dominated by men, with one woman nominated each year - often the sole woman. Indeed 15 of the 23 journalists nominated across the years are men (see Fig. 2). But in 2019 there were equal number of men and women nominated, and in 2020 three (different) women and two men. This may reflect greater numbers of women becoming columnists, entering themselves, or being selected; either way the gender balance is welcome and will hopefully continue.

4.7 Interviewer of the Year

This category continues the positive trend. Overall, 30 names have been shortlisted over the 6 years, of which 18 have been women and 12 men. Moreover, when one accounts for repetition (see Fig. 2), 19 journalists have ever been nominated, 10 women and 9 men. This is the only category in which more women journalists are nominated than men.

4.8 Feature Writer of the Year

Given that this award was the only one to have attracted more entries from women than men in 2018 (see Table 1) I was interested to see whether the category is more gender-balanced in general. Over the 6 years, 33 names have been shortlisted, 12 women and 21 men. Again, some journalists are repeated, and so in total 9 women and 11 men have ever been nominated in this category.



This award has the potential to be amongst the most gender-balanced – and indeed in 2020 four of the five shortlisted journalists were women. Yet the effect of repeated names is shown here, as 11 men have secured 64% of all nominations over the period between them.

4.9 Reporter of the Year

In total 34 names have been shortlisted for Reporter of the Year, one of the most prestigious awards presented. 12 of these have been women, and 22 have been men. There have been several people repeatedly nominated however, thus as shown in Figures 2 and 3, in total 9 women have ever been nominated, and 15 men.

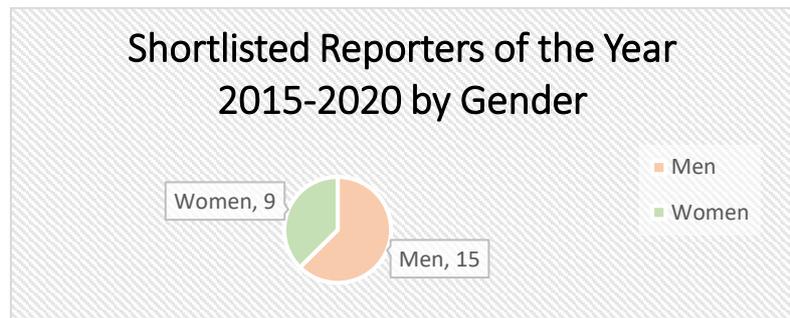


Figure 3. Journalists ever nominated for Reporter of the Year (2015-2020) by gender.

4.10 Photography

There are 2 photography categories: Sports Photographer and News Photographer. Across the 6 years, 61 names are shortlisted for these awards. As shown in Figures 2 and 4, 2 women are shortlisted: one in 2015, and another 7 times over the years. Meanwhile 29 men have ever been shortlisted. Thus photography remains a male-dominated award: 94% of nominations are men.

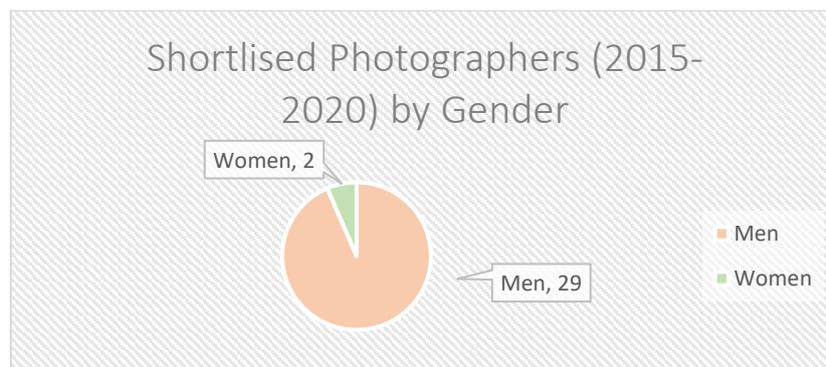


Figure 4. Shortlisted Photographers by Gender, 2015-2020.



Overall, the SNS shortlist more women for genre-based than content-based awards, however distinct gender inequalities remain consistent, though variable across the categories. Moreover the practice of repeatedly nominating journalists serves to consolidate these categories as male-dominated. I turn now to Digital Journalism and Young Journalist of the Year.

4.11 Outstanding Digital Journalist of the Year

Given the increasing centrality of digital journalism to news media, this category's inclusion in 2017 was a progressive step – and a welcome way to include more women, whose exclusion from other forms of media has prompted a diversification of content online. However, the category is not extended beyond 2019, and despite having had an equal number of men and women shortlisted in its 2017, by 2018 all six shortlisted names were men, and in 2019 only one woman to 4 men.

In 2020 the category was missing, but there were two new ones which offer a more nuanced deconstruction of 'digital journalism' and again, therefore, an opportunity for more women to be nominated. *Podcast of the Year*, however, nominates 7 people, one of whom is a woman, and *Video of the Year* nominates 5 people, two of whom are women. Of a total 12 names, a quarter are women – a figure which closely matches the 26% women across all the awards overall (Figure 1).

This trend, should it continue, risks the further exclusion of women from having their digital journalistic work recognised for its merit.

4.12 Young Journalist of the Year

The shortlist for Young Journalist of the Year is the most gender balanced overall. 31 names are shortlisted across the 6 years, of which 17 are women and 14 are men. There is still repetition across the 6 years, however of the 24 young journalists ever nominated, there are 12 women and 12 men overall (see Figure 5).





Figure 5. Young Journalists shortlisted from 2016-2020 by Gender.

There also features in this category one of only two women of colour shortlisted from 2016-2020.

Given the gender balance amongst shortlisted journalists at the first stages of their careers, the clear dominance of male journalists in more senior categories begs the question: why are the women disappearing? The answer, of course, is complex, and includes sets of practices across the news media landscape that systematically disadvantage women and prevent them reaching senior positions to the same extent as their male colleagues. The SNS should be aware of these causal factors and be working constructively to counter the effect in the awards themselves.

5. Perceptions of Diversity

It is worth returning to the shortlisting process itself to better understand both the selection process and the reasons people might have for deciding not to enter themselves. Two practices were noted which further complicate the gender breakdowns observed in Figure 1: the repetition of shortlisted journalists each year, and the duplication of journalists nominated across several categories. Both practices were observed for men *and* women, and speak to deeper, systemic issues with the self-nomination and panel-selection stages of the shortlisting process. Crucially they contribute to a wider perception of the SPA as a foregone conclusion, discouraging more diverse entrants.

The same journalists were nominated repeatedly across the six years. To understand this pattern, I examined a male-dominated category: *Financial/Business Journalist of the Year* from 2015-2020. One woman is shortlisted in 2015 and 2016; all the other journalists are men. Similar, although less extreme patterns were observed for



women, indicating that similar sets of names – regardless of gender – are being selected fairly regularly.

The same journalists, regardless of gender, were named across numerous categories. For example, in 2016 three journalists were each nominated for two awards. In 2019 six journalists were each nominated twice, and one three times. In 2017, one journalist was even nominated twice for the same award (*Columnist of the Year*), a practice allowed in the regulations: “The number of entries per category is unlimited; however, the number of shortlisted entries per category will be limited to two per title”²⁴. Indeed, the effect appears to extend to winning; in 2018 two men won four awards (*Reporter of the Year*, *Scoop of the Year*, *Feature Writer* and *Arts/Entertainment Journalist of the Year*) between them.

These two practices – rather than being the exception – have become the norm. Undoubtedly, the natural progression of journalists in their career creates a cyclical weighting of certain names as their work gains deserved recognition. Yet such practices are significant as they distort the accuracy of the figures in Table 2. The shortlisted names by gender do not in fact reflect the *actual* number of individual men and women nominated each year, and as shown in the analysis of the categories, this worsens the gender imbalance.

More practically, both structural practices contribute to a strong perception of an established status quo, maintained cyclically, and tough to break through. This has the unfortunate effect of discouraging some journalists from entering. From an intersectional perspective, such an impression is particularly damaging for those journalists who may already be less likely to enter for socio-cultural or economic reasons.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This report constitutes a broad-stroke overview of the SPA awards over the last 6 years. It reveals clear gender imbalances persisting across almost all awards, demonstrating that the ‘overhaul’ announced in 2016 has made some progress, but certainly not enough. That men are 3 times as likely to be nominated for an award as women is unacceptable.

An extended analysis reaching back prior to 2015 would give greater insight into stagnations and progressions in different categories over the years. It would be

²⁴ <https://www.scotns.org.uk/awards/to-enter/>



beneficial to the SNS to undertake a thorough assessment of equality and diversity amongst their nominations and make this a regular feature of their annual awards process. Regular self-monitoring would demonstrate the need for - and indeed prompt - more systematic reviews of the nominations process as a whole.

Working with equalities organisations expert in diversity bias, gender imbalances in journalism and equality initiatives to enact changes to the entry, nominations and judging processes would be a judicious step. *Gender Equal Media Scotland* and *Women In Journalism Scotland* are two such organisations that could provide valuable insight.

There is clearly an urgent need to review the judging process for the selection of shortlisted names, proactively seeking out new and emerging talent, and ensuring that the awards are inclusive of a diverse range of journalists. The lack of women of colour is deeply concerning. The continued gender chasms in many categories remains problematic, and that women nominees remain overall at 26% in 2020 is shocking. Increasing the transparency of the judging process would significantly increase the credibility of the awards. Ensuring each judging panel is at least 40% women could be an important step.

The replication and duplication of names across years and categories should be noted and reduced, as the effect diminishes opportunities and contributes to a damaging perception of the Awards. In the first instance it is recommended that the rules be amended to confirm that a journalist can only enter each award once. To create opportunities for a greater diversity of entrants, the regulations could also stipulate that once shortlisted for a category, the entrant cannot apply for the same category the following year. A shift away from current guidelines, this would signal a recognition of the need for inclusivity and create space for less established journalists entering categories.

The categories, now improved, are still weighted towards masculinist interests; one fewer sports category and the separation of Arts and Entertainment would be a useful step. The outcome of the shortlists for 2021 are anticipated with interest.

This report was compiled using publicly available data, as part of the development work towards the creation of an Equal Media Centre for Scotland. I am indebted to Women In Journalism Scotland for their insight and additional resources.

About Gender Equal Media Scotland (GEMS)



Gender Equal Media Scotland is a coalition of journalists, organisations and academics working to bring about women's equality in Scotland's media.



The post of Development Officer is hosted by Engender, Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, on behalf of GEMS