



# Reframing Disability in News

Pilot programme  
impact report

November 2020



# About Media Trust

Media Trust is a charity that works in partnership with the media and creative industry to give charities, underrepresented communities and young people a stronger voice, through training and access to free resources and matching them with communications volunteers. Find out more at [www.mediatrust.org](http://www.mediatrust.org).



## The BBC's 50:50 The Equality Project

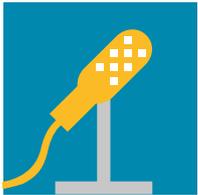
50:50 The Equality Project is committed to inspiring and supporting the BBC and organisations around the globe to consistently create journalism and media content that fairly represents our world. The initiative, born in the BBC's London newsroom, uses a methodology that is rooted in data, creativity, practicality and passion to fundamentally shift representation within the media.



# Reframing Disability in News



In October 2019, Media Trust brought together 18 disability charities and 60 media and creative industry attendees to discuss a range of issues – from improving the representation of disabled people both on-and-off screen to inclusive recruitment processes, improving platform accessibility and the role advertising can play in destigmatising disability.



From this summit, the Reframing Disability in News programme was born. A collaboration between Media Trust and BBC's 50:50 Project, its aim is to increase the representation and visibility of disabled people in broadcast news.



Media and creative organisations need to be meaningfully engaging with disability charities and disabled people to ensure they are taking into account insights and views of people with lived experiences and not just their own assumptions of what works for them.”

**Su-Mei Thompson, CEO of Media Trust, in her blog following the Reframing Disability summit**





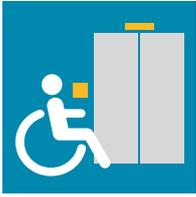
The pilot programme ran throughout the first half of 2020 with funding support from the Future News Pilot Fund, which was managed by Nesta on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The programme was supported by an Advisory Group consisting of broadcasters, disability organisations, and others, including:

- ▶ BBC
- ▶ Cabinet Office Disability Unit
- ▶ Channel 4
- ▶ Disability Rights UK
- ▶ Inclusion London
- ▶ ITV
- ▶ Learning Disability England
- ▶ National Autistic Society
- ▶ OfCom
- ▶ Scope
- ▶ The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
- ▶ Time to Change





Disabled people make up 20% of the population. Yet when we watch the news, it is rare to see disabled people featured and when we do, they are almost always speaking about disability issues. This lack of representation means important stories risk going unreported, talent going unrecognised and negative attitudes towards disability going unchallenged.



This project seeks to address these issues through four main areas of work. The fact that the launch of the pilot coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic meant the initial plan had to be adapted, with programme delivery moving to online and virtual platforms.



The four broad categories of the programme are:

1. Media training for disabled experts
2. Disability training for BBC journalists
3. Creating connections between experts and journalists
4. Resources and guidance





# Media training for disabled experts

For anyone, media interviews can be extremely daunting. Many people would feel uncomfortable taking part in an interview without professional media training. This could be even more daunting for disabled people, especially those with high levels of anxiety or stress.

Many disabled people told us they were most concerned about what happens before the interview (i.e. trying to anticipate what sort of questions would be asked and how to ask for reasonable adjustments) and after the interview (i.e. potential backlash on social media, whether the interview might be edited down or cut out altogether).

Listening to these concerns, the media training we offered was built on Media Trust's experience of working with many training partners over the years, however tailored specifically for disabled experts. This ensured the training was accessible and included a dedicated section on how to approach the media to ask for adjustments and how to look after yourself.

We worked with Hayes Collins Media who jointly developed and delivered the training with us, through a unique online structure which allowed us to deliver the programme in light of Covid-19.

## Training structure

The training was delivered in small groups so that it was less overwhelming for participants and allowed for one-to-one coaching and feedback.

- ▶ Before the training, participants were asked to watch a video covering the more theoretical elements of media interviews and the media landscape. This meant there was no pressure to watch it all in one go and trainees could take breaks, make notes, and take their time to come up with any questions they may have.

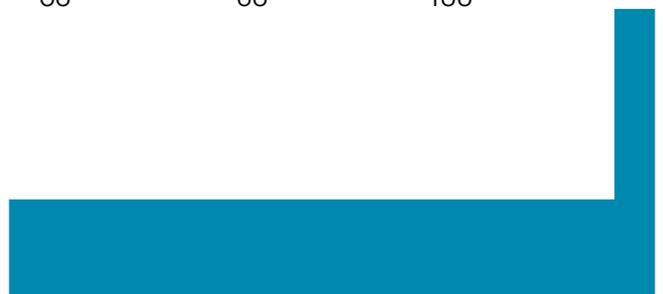
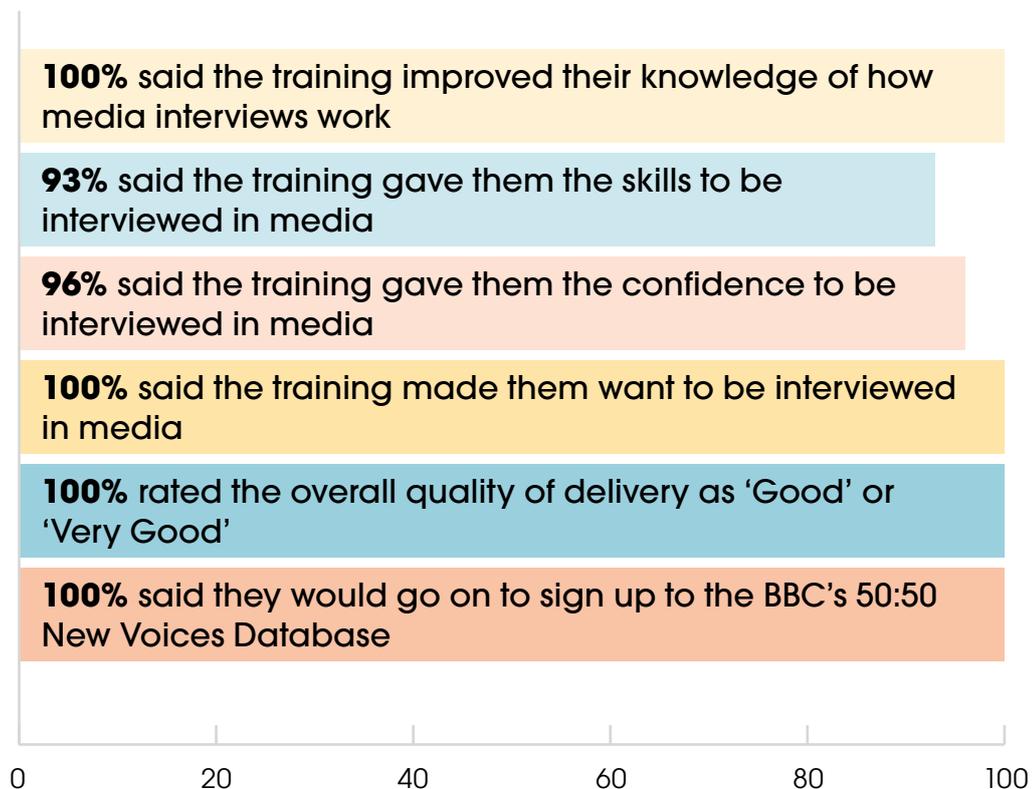


- ▶ On the training day, all participants joined via Zoom. Trainees introduced themselves and could ask any questions they had from watching the video.
- ▶ Each participant had TV and radio interview training and a press interview session. The interviews were one-to-one with the trainer, removing any potential anxiety of performing in front of others. Trainees used the rest of the time to focus on areas they wanted to improve with the help of the trainer. This included refining key messaging, interview control and managing nerves.
- ▶ After all trainees had completed their individual sessions, we brought the cohort back together for a closing session to provide advice on next steps. This also gave trainees the chance to network with each other.



In total, 35 disabled experts were trained during the pilot programme. Their expertise covered a range of fields from the economy to technology, and education to hospitality. The participants included academics, business and charity leaders, artists and many more.

Feedback from trainees who completed our post-training survey was overwhelmingly positive:





Here are just some of the comments from participants:

“The trainers built my confidence in talking to the media. A really positive experience. Changing it to deliver over video worked well. I liked that we didn’t have to watch each other which makes it feel more competitive when you have to do that.”

“The practice interviews were great for building confidence and telling me that I did in fact enjoy the experience and would like to do it again.”

“The facilitators were amazing at explaining things in an accessible way and gave really helpful constructive feedback.”

“It was such a positive and relaxed experience. I was not scared to mess up and that really helped me learn.”

“The whole (training) was put across professionally, accessibly, with a friendly inclusive quality.”



# Disability training for BBC journalists



Giving disabled experts the training and confidence to participate in media interviews was one aspect of the journey. We recognised that journalists also needed the skills, confidence, understanding, and empathy to invite disabled people for interviews. Talking to newsrooms, we found that the journalists were keen to increase the diversity of their reporting, but the same questions and concerns came up again and again:

- ▶ Where do I find disabled experts?
- ▶ How should I talk about disability? I'm worried about causing offence or saying the wrong thing.
- ▶ How can I make sure the disabled expert has the adjustments and support they need to do the interview?
- ▶ What if they require an access adjustment and I don't know how to make it happen?

The training was devised to cover all these questions and was created and delivered by Reframing Disability programme manager Chris Pike and BBC Panorama reporter Sean Dilley, with support from the 50:50 Project team.

By the end of October 2020, five pilot training sessions have been rolled out. The training, which initially started as a one-hour session, evolved into a 2.5-hour session after feedback from journalists who needed more time to absorb the information.

Initially the BBC participants were individuals who already had some knowledge of disability, with the later sessions opened to anyone from the BBC's newsrooms. The last session was open to any BBC teams, including comedy, entertainment, and teams from across the world.



The feedback for the training has been positive and constructive – allowing for consistent improvement over the course of the pilot sessions:



The BBC and the 50:50 Project are committed to increasing the representation of disabled people in our content. Partnering with Media Trust has given us insight from the not-for-profit sector and disability organisations that has been invaluable. There has been demonstrable impact of the BBC and Media Trust partnership too including through our jointly developed training for journalists. It is engaging as it is relevant and will be rolled out for our content-makers.”

**Nina Goswami, Creative Diversity Lead, BBC**





Here are some of the comments from the feedback survey:



“The trainer was very engaging and knowledgeable and made me feel very comfortable.”



“The discussions gave me the opportunity to think about how I would handle real life scenarios and things that I would need to consider when scheduling interviews with contributors living with disabilities.”



“The honest and open nature of the training... allowed for us to pose questions that would otherwise feel awkward to ask.”

Following the fifth pilot, the BBC’s 50:50 Project team will be rolling this training out across the content-making divisions of the BBC. The BBC will adopt a ‘train the trainer’ model to ensure the rollout can have maximum reach.

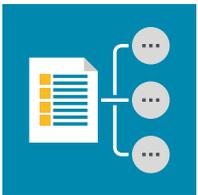
Media Trust will also be offering the training as part of our paid-for training courses for journalists and newsrooms. The feedback from BBC journalists in a short space of time was that this training was much needed, valued and appreciated. We have received a lot of interest from other broadcasters in attending this training and we hope to roll it out further as a result.



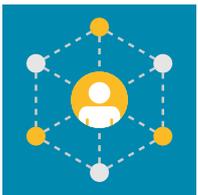
# Creating connections between experts and journalists



Once the training for both disabled experts and journalists was complete it was crucial to ensure that this translated into tangible results.



For journalists, they wanted to know how to find disabled talent for stories that were not about disability. They know to get in touch with a disability charity, or disabled people's organisation, if the story is about disability but what about if the story is about finance, the economy, or any other topic?



The 50:50 Project created a database of women experts that BBC journalists could access. As a result of Reframing Disability, that database has now been expanded to include other diverse contributors from underrepresented groups, including disability.

Everyone who took part in our disabled experts training was encouraged to sign up to the [New Voices Database](#), and 100% of our survey respondents said that they had signed up already or intended to.

In July, the experts and journalists who had completed the training sessions were given the opportunity to meet virtually and network at a showcase event. It was a chance to celebrate the programme as well as for dozens of journalists and experts to network in small breakout rooms. The first part of the event was a panel discussion and is [available on the 50:50 Project website](#) alongside a report by Reframing Disability programme manager Chris Pike.

# Resources and guidance

To ensure the programme continues to have impact, a series of three guides have been produced and are available in our Media Trust Resource Hub:



1. **The first guide**, co-produced with disabled people's organisation [Disability Rights UK](#), is aimed at disabled people who want to prepare themselves for media interviews.



2. **The second guide** is for newsrooms and journalists. It covers much of the material from the training for journalists, including how to find disabled talent for interviews and how to support contributors so they give the best interview possible.



3. **The third guide**, co-produced with the pan-disability charity [Scope](#), is for organisations and staff – particularly PR officers – who want to support their disabled staff and volunteers to become spokespeople and appear in media interviews. This guide is relevant for any organisation, whether they are private sector, public sector, or third sector.

# What we have achieved

A lot has been achieved in this short time; however, it is only the beginning in a long process of moving the dial for disabled people's representation. Alongside Reframing Disability in News programme, we have made contributions to wider work in this area.

For example:

- ▶ A [submission to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry on the impact of Covid-19 on those with protected characteristics](#). The submission was based on our work across many underrepresented groups but focused particularly on the Reframing Disability programme.
- ▶ Media Trust published a [piece on the visibility of disability](#) as part of Response Source's Diversity in Journalism white paper.





The pilot programme also provided many insights of its own to help shape future work in this area:

- ▶ The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting move to remote working, and remote interviews, has been instrumental in opening up media opportunities from an accessibility perspective. However, it could also create an even bigger digital divide for those with a low level of digital literacy or those who do not have the accessible software they need.
- ▶ Both demand and supply are there. There are many disabled experts who want to take part in media interviews, and the interest from journalists within the BBC in diversifying their interview pool has been hugely positive. Creating connections and networks between journalists and experts, for example through database systems, can therefore be extremely effective and it is hoped that other broadcasters will follow the BBC's lead.



- ▶ A lot of the time, the biggest challenge for disabled experts in participating in media interviews is one of confidence, and anxiety around whether the process will be accessible. One of the biggest and most important reasonable adjustments which a journalist can provide is therefore simply to reassure the individual about the process and give as much information as they can.
- ▶ While database systems can make a significant difference, it is also essential that PR agencies and in-house teams ensure that they diversify their own pools of spokespeople, so that when they are approached by journalists to speak on a story, they are able to put forward a disabled spokesperson.



# Next steps

The Reframing Disability in News programme will continue to have sustainable impact through the three guides as well as through the BBC's rollout of the training for journalists. However, further action is required to ensure ongoing change. Recommendations include:

1. More broadcasters and media organisations committing to similar schemes, providing training for their journalists, contributor databases and networking opportunities to find more disabled talent.
2. Taking the programme wider to expand beyond news to other areas of broadcast, including entertainment and factual. To have significant impact, the initiative could be rolled out to print, advertising and other creative industries.
3. Further funding so more disabled experts can be trained, while supporting businesses and charities – particularly small charities – to develop their disabled spokespeople and talent.

Representation and visibility are not just buzz words or matters of compliance. They truly improve people's confidence and belief in what they can achieve. Everyone can do something to make representation possible. The journalist booking a guest, the disabled expert appearing in the news, or the PR officer choosing a disabled spokesperson to put forward for an interview – each has the power to influence what audiences see, hear and read.

**The change starts here.**



# With thanks

## The core team working on this programme were:

- ▶ Chris Pike, Programme Manager
- ▶ Jenny Walton and Su-Mei Thompson at Media Trust, as well as many other staff at Media Trust
- ▶ Nina Goswami and Lara Joannides from the BBC 50:50 Project
- ▶ Sean Dilley, Senior Journalist at the BBC

Without them the programme would have been impossible, and it is thanks to them that it has been able to achieve so much in such challenging circumstances.

## We would also like to thank:

- ▶ Our Advisory Group members
- ▶ All 35 experts who took part in our disabled experts media interview training
- ▶ Hayes Collins Media who developed and delivered the disabled experts media interview training
- ▶ The BBC journalists and others who took part in our journalist training
- ▶ Laura Burnip at Scope, disability consultant Graeme Whippy, Ben Furner of Furner Communications, and the Disability Rights UK team for their co-production of the three guides



FURNER  
COMMUNICATIONS

HAYES  
COLLINS / MEDIA

**SCOPE**  
= Equality for  
disabled people



- ▶ Marcom who designed the guides, and Kirsty Marrins for her excellent copy-editing
- ▶ The team at Nesta who managed the funding, particularly Anna Hamilos and Karmel Edmonds
- ▶ The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), who funded the programme
- ▶ June Sarpong, Miranda Wayland, and Emily Phillips from the BBC Creative Diversity team



**THANK  
YOU!**

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## Contact us

We hope you've found this guide helpful and informative. We're keen to encourage as many people as possible to get involved in our work and increase the visibility of disabled people in the media.

If you want to know more about the 'Reframing Disability' project, or would like to talk to us about media interview training, please email [trainingandevents@mediatrust.org](mailto:trainingandevents@mediatrust.org) or get in touch via our [online form](#).





**REFRAMING  
DISABILITY**

**MediaTrust**

In partnership with

**50:50**  
THE EQUALITY PROJECT

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