

**Project Proposal Application**

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,  
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS		
<b>Proposed Project Title:</b>	A level playing field? Understanding diversity in the British sports media	
<b>Project Summary:</b> <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	<p>A collaboration between Northumbria University and the Black Collective of Media in Sport, this project proposes the first detailed scholarly exploration of the amount of diversity at all levels within British sports journalism, the experience of members of the workforce from minority backgrounds, and the understandings of this issue among the industry's senior management.</p> <p>The PhD will bring new knowledge to (1) academic researchers in the fields of media and cultural studies, the sociology of sport, and sports journalism; (2) practitioners in the UK sports media, and; (3) sports journalism educators.</p>	
<b>Host University:</b>	Northumbria University	
<b>Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b>		
1. The Black Collective of Media in Sport (BCOMS)		
2.		
<b>Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s):</b> <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>		
Name:	Leon Mann MBE	Email: leon@leonmann.co.uk
Name:		Email:
<b>Primary AHRC Subject Area:</b> <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Do not add or amend subjects - there will not be a corresponding Subject Area panel to assess the application.</i>	Media and Communication Studies	
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why:</b> <i>(Maximum 100 words. Note, all applications will be assessed by the appropriate primary subject area cross-institutional panel.)</i>		

## SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

By focusing on the under-researched area of workforce diversity among British sports journalists, this project will (1) provide new and much needed insights into the levels of diversity and inclusion (or lack thereof) at all levels of the industry, (2) explore the challenges and opportunities that sports journalists from minority groups encounter within the industry, and (3) provide insight into senior managers' understandings of the current state of play.

The decision to situate the project between Northumbria University and the Black Collective of Media in Sport (BCOMS), will ensure that the research is (1) informed by a leading network and advocacy group focused on diversity within the British sports media with which the university already has a strong working relationship, thus ensuring that is (2) relevant to professional practice. This will ensure that the opportunities to reflect the findings back to the industry and make visible where any structural problems may lie are maximised.

### Research context:

The sports media is a compelling site of cultural negotiation which brings into sharp relief specific forms of identity, in particular: gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability and class, as they are articulated through intersections with each other. Academic work interrogating the (re)presentations of women and minority groups within the global sports media and in specific countries, including Britain, is well established (for example, but not limited to, Bruce 2016; Cooky *et al* 2012, Farrington *et al*, 2012; Magrath 2018; van Lienden *et al* 2021). However, while this area is very well covered in research to date, the social profile of the British sports journalists has, by contrast, received very little scholarly attention. This is surprising considering the fundamental role sports journalists play in creating the discourses within which athletes are (re)presented.

The oft-stated perception is that the typical British sports journalist is predominantly white, male, heterosexual and able-bodied, a notion which at face value is supported by BCOMS' research (2018, 2022). However, by the organisation's own admission this is largely anecdotal and lacks the rigour and detail required to facilitate a clear understanding of the true picture. For example, BCOMS acknowledge that their research neither accounts for production roles (those 'behind the camera' or in the industry's newsrooms) nor differences within the industry's hierarchical structure (whether diversity declines as the seniority of roles increases).

However, while a comprehensive understanding of the number of people from minority backgrounds working within British sports journalism is vital, it is also important to understand the *quality* of their experience. Therefore, this project will also explore the struggles and opportunities faced by sports journalists from minority backgrounds. Lastly, it will interrogate how industry leaders approach their roles, particularly in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity within their organisation.

Thus, driving this research are three key questions:

1. What is the social composition of the British sports media workforce? Are there any imbalances in terms of diversity at any level of the industry or within any of its constituent departments?
2. What is the experience of sports journalists from minority groups within the industry? To what extent does the industry's workforce profile and practices hinder (or not) journalists from minority groups?
3. Does the understanding of senior leaders within the industry tally with the quantitative findings of question (1) and the qualitative findings of question (2)? How does this inform their leadership practice?

### Methodology

To answer these questions, a mixed-methods approach will be employed. Firstly, an anonymised survey will be conducted to profile the respondent(s) according to a number of variables including, for example, the sector they work in, nature of employment, length of time in the industry, gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability and class. The survey will be conducted online (for example by using Microsoft Forms, for which Northumbria has a licence) and promoted through Northumbria and BCOMS' pre-existing networks.

This quantitative research will inform and be supplemented by semi-structured interviews with media professionals from minority backgrounds working in print and broadcast sports media in order to more clearly understand the perceived barriers to entry and impediments to progress for minority groups within the UK sports media. The interviews will be discursively analysed for key themes, using qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, for which Northumbria has a licence.

In turn, these will further inform and be supplemented by semi-structured interviews with sports media professionals holding leadership positions within the profession, to gain insight into their perceptions of both the level of diversity (or lack thereof) with the industry.

**Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:**

*(Maximum 200 words)*

	£
Travel for annual all-group meetings x 3	2000.00 (NBCDTP)
Travel for London research trips x 5	1500.00 (NBCDTP)
Travel for Salford research trips x 3	750.00 (NBCDTP)

**Rationalisation for above costs:**

Annual in-person meetings between the collaborative partner, student, and internal and external supervisors will ensure that clear objectives are agreed prior to, and adhered throughout, the project.

The scope and efficacy of the research will be greatly enhanced by the opportunity for the student to undertake regular travel to meet with members of the collaborative partner who are based in London plus to conduct face-to-face interviews with appropriate members of the UK national sports media, which is primarily centred in London and Salford. These costs would be covered by the NBCDTP. The student can apply for up to £1,500 of QR funding during their studies from the Department of Arts (Northumbria University) to cover any additional expenses.

Training in key methodologies relevant to the research project (i.e. survey design and interviewing methods) will be provided by the supervision team and through Northumbria's established PGR training programme, compulsory for all students.

**Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:**

*(Maximum 200 words)*

The overall co-ordination of the project will be undertaken by Dr Roger Domeneghetti, who has a long and engaged working relationship with BCOMS (3 years).

An initial meeting involving the candidate, the academic supervision team, the BCOMS representative and the external advisor will familiarise all with the process and agree milestones. Subsequent progress will be monitored through quarterly meetings involving all the above to be held online with one annual meeting, at the start of each year within the project, to take place in person at BCOMS' office in London.

The candidate will meet their lead supervisor monthly at Northumbria, thus ensuring the study's academic integrity and that the candidate achieves Northumbria's standard PhD milestones.

The candidate will have access to mentoring by BCOMS staff. The frequency of this may vary throughout the project, as required by the candidate and/or the stage of the project.

A shared strategy will be developed to ensure effective communication of the project outcomes (see section on benefits for details of the form this may take).

**What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?**

*(Maximum 300 words)*

The student will accrue hands-on experience of working directly with BCOMS, the only organisation with a specific remit around diversity in the UK sports media. They will benefit from frequent access to BCOMS staff and board of trustees, ensuring strong mentorship and specialist insights into the British sports journalism industry. The student will also be embedded in BCOMS' professional network, linking them with organisations including, but not limited to, BBC Sport, ITV Sport, BT Sport, News UK, Meta and Nike.

In turn, the partner organisation will gain an evolving expert who will provide them with (1) a clear picture of the level of diversity in the UK sports media both in general terms and within different sections and at different levels of the industry, and (2) a detailed understanding of the attitude towards diversity (or lack thereof) and strategies employed to promote EDI (or lack thereof) among senior managers within the industry.

BCOMS have in the past produced limited, rudimentary research in the area, however the organisation acknowledges that this lacks the rigour and detail that the proposed study would provide. The proposed partnership between Northumbria and BCOMS would facilitate the type of sustained research that BCOMS believes is vital for their work, but which it is unable to undertake due to a lack of both staffing capacity and necessary analytical skills and experience. In consultation with BCOMS staff, the student will produce a strategy for disseminating the project's key findings and

recommendations to relevant sports media and political stakeholders, for example through press releases and briefing notes. As such, the project will impact and inform decision-making processes and policy outcomes in relation to diversity in the sports media.

**State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:**

*(Maximum 100 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

BCOMS will provide the following in-kind contributions:

- Access to the expertise and insights of BCOMS' management team and board of trustees;
- Access to BCOMS' professional networks, in particular senior leaders of relevant sports media outlets;
- Desk space at BCOMS' London offices, including access to office equipment (PC, printer, scanner).

The candidate will also benefit from the opportunity to present the outcomes of their research at BCOMS' annual D Word conference as well as produce articles for the BCOMS' website. BCOMS staff will also provide guidance and support on how the student can best leverage and communicate the outcomes of the research to relevant sports media stakeholders and policy makers.

**Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:**

*(Maximum 300 words)*

BCOMS are already attuned to working with academics and are currently collaborating with Domeneghetti on the AHRC-funded Sports Media Identity Network. Although the student will primarily be based at Northumbria University's Glenamara Centre, which is for postgraduates in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, they will also have dedicated desk space at BCOMS' London office throughout the project. (Should it be more convenient for any reason, they will also have access to hot desk space at Northumbria's London campus.)

On site, the student will be supported by Andrew Ducille, BCOMS' operations manager. They will also benefit from regular meetings (the frequency of which will be determined by the students' needs and the stage of the research process) with Leon Mann, BCOMS' founder, and other BCOMS trustees as appropriate. They will provide guidance and insight to ensure that the research has relevance to appropriate media, sport and leisure policy makers and practitioners. BCOMS will also provide access to its professional networks of sports media organisations and, in particular, staff at leadership level.

The student's research and accrued expertise will enable them to work with BCOMS to inform their future advocacy work and their masterclass programme (run in partnership with Nike, Meta and BBC Sport) which is focused on sharing pathways into the sports media industry with young people and creating experiential and networking opportunities. They will achieve this through informal presentation of their research in progress to the relevant BCOMS staff.

BCOMS is a public advocacy group and, as such, will work with the candidate to support and provide appropriate platforms for the dissemination of the research. These could include, among other things, blog posts on the BCOMS website, and an opportunity to present at the organisation's annual D Word conference, and other events. The above activities will enable the student to build a comprehensive portfolio of professional experience during their PhD studies.

### SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

**Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:** Dr Roger Domeneghetti

School or Department:	Department of Arts, Northumbria University	Email Address:	roger.domeneghetti@northumbria.ac.uk
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**Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:** Dr Aarti Ratna

School or Department:	Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University	Email Address:	aarti.ratna@northumbria.ac.uk
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**Name of the Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:** Leon Mann MBE

Organisation/Institution:	BCOMS	Email Address:	Leon@leonman.co.uk
Organisation/Institution:		Email Address:	
<b>Name of Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:</b> Prof Anamik Saha			
Organisation/Institution:	Leeds University	Email Address:	a.saha@leeds.ac.uk

**Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate:**

*(Maximum 500 words)*

[Dr Roger Domeneghetti](#) (principal supervisor) is an Assistant Professor in Journalism at Northumbria University and has an international profile as a scholar in the history of the sports media and the sports media's (re)presentation of identity. These interests will inform the supervision of this project. Domeneghetti has experience leading large-scale research projects involving sports journalists and sports media advocacy and educational organisations, in particular as PI of the AHRC-funded Sports Media Identity Network project (2022-2024). His sole-authored monograph *From the Back Page to the Front Room: Football's Journey through the English Media* (Ockley Books, 2014, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 2017) which drew on semi-structured interviews with football media professionals is particularly pertinent to the themes and methodologies of this research. So too is his edited collection *Insights on Reporting Sports in the Digital Age: Ethical and Practical Considerations in a Changing Media Landscape* (Routledge 2022) and more recently, his sole-authored monograph *Everybody Wants to Rule the World: Britain, Sport and the 1980s* (Yellow Jersey 2023). Prior to joining Northumbria University, Domeneghetti worked as a journalist for more than 20 years. He has supervised two PhDs to completion and has one current supervisee. He is therefore well-situated to advise the candidate and undertake the management of this CDA.

[Dr. Aarti Ratna](#) (second supervisor) is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Northumbria University. Her scholarly expertise focuses upon sport, inequalities, and intersecting identities. As the author of *A Nation of Family and Friends* (Rutgers University Press, forthcoming 2024), *Race, Gender and Sport* (Routledge, 2018), and *Community and Inclusion in Leisure Research and Sport* (Meyer and Meyer), she is well placed to provide theoretical and methodological insights about sport, media and society. Indeed, as Co-I of an AHRC networking project entitled 'For the Love of the Game?' she has used theatre-based research strategies to tackle hate in the game. Aarti has supervised five PhD students to completion and has one current supervisee.

[Leon Mann MBE](#) has worked as a sports broadcaster for more than 20 years. He is the founder of BCOMS, a member of Sky's Diversity Advisory Council, and is vice chair of the Sports Journalists' Association. In 2018, he was awarded an MBE for his work promoting diversity and equality in sport and the media. He will therefore bring a strong industry perspective to the project, including networks built through his professional and advocacy work. Mann is attuned to working with academics through his roles as an Honorary Visiting Fellow at the University of East London and advisor to Domeneghetti's AHRC-funded Sports Media Identity Network.

[Prof Anamik Saha](#) is Professor of Race and Media at Leeds University, with a particular focus on issues of diversity in the creative and cultural industries. His previous research focused on diversity within the British publishing industry—*Race and the Cultural Industries* (Polity 2018) and, with van Lente, *ReThinking Diversity in Publishing* (Goldsmiths Press 2020)—displays affinities with this project's thematic and methodological concerns. In particular, he will be able to advise the candidate on designing and conducting survey research to determine the industry's workforce profile.

#### SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

**Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:**

*(Maximum 500 words)*

The student for this CDA will benefit from being becoming a member of the [Sports Media Identity Network](#) (SMIN), led by Domeneghetti on which BCOMS collaborate. Chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, SMIN is an AHRC-funded network that links theory with practice by bringing together academics, sports media practitioners and

stakeholders to better understand sports media practice with regard the (re)presentation of identity within sports media. The network will continue after the funding period (2022-2024) to ensure a dynamic forum for dialogue among and between public, practitioner and professional communities. Members include representatives of organisations such as Sports Media LGBT, The Ability Group in Sport, the National Council for the Training of Journalists, the BBC and Channel 4. Thus, the emphasis of this CDA project echoes the focus of SMIN's activity.

The student will benefit enormously from joining a rich research culture in Northumbria University's Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences at Northumbria. In particular, they will be located in the [Department of Arts](#), which has a flourishing postgraduate research culture. PhD awards in the Art and Design UoA at Northumbria have increased from 39 reported in REF 2014 to 87 in 2021, of which 20 were awarded in the final year of the last cycle.

The department houses a cross-subject grouping of researchers (including staff and PhD students in Film and Media, Visual and Material Culture, Theatre and Performance, and Fine Art) at difference stages of their careers who have specialisms which overlap with the concerns of this project. Aside from the proposed supervisors, these include, for example, Professor Clarissa Smith, Professor Gavin Butt, Dr Rachel Hann, Dr Victoria Horne and Dr Steve Jones, (gender and sexualities), Dr Sanghita Sen and Dr Jamie Sexton (race and ethnicity), and Dr Patrick Duggan, Dr Kay Hepplewhite and Dr James Leggott (class). There are also a number of researchers in the Department who have expertise in interview methodologies (Professor Clarissa Smith, Dr Kate Egan and Dr Martyn Hudson).

Furthermore, the student will also benefit from being a member of the [Moving Image Popular Media and Culture Research Group](#) in the Arts department and the [Power, Culture and Identities Research Cluster](#) in the Social Sciences department. Both groups convene regular seminars from expert speakers from within the groups and from other universities in the UK and beyond, thus serving as a platform for showcasing cutting-edge research from theoretical, historical, practice-based, industrial and empirical/sociological perspectives. The student will therefore be developing their research at an institution which holds a wide range of research events and symposia on these topics, debates and methodologies, and which feed centrally into the Department's and Faculty's research training programmes.

The student will also benefit from being a member of the [Informing Practice and Policy](#) research group in Northumbria's [Department of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation](#). This inter-disciplinary group draws on a range of methods and theories to examine the challenges and dilemmas associated with professional practice and the formulation and enactment of, among other things, sport and leisure policies. Membership of this group will support the student in ensuring that their research outcomes have impact.

## SECTION 5: RECRUITMENT INFORMATION

In the event that your project is successful it will be advertised on the Northern Bridge Consortium website to aid recruitment: <http://www.northernbridge.ac.uk/applyforstudentship/cda/>

Please therefore complete the following Applicant Criteria so that advertising can begin immediately following the outcome of the competition:

<i>For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an Expression of Interest, please contact:</i>	
Lead Supervisor (or Alternative Contact):	Dr Roger Domeneghetti
Email:	roger.domeneghetti@northumbria.ac.uk
Expressions of Interest must be received no later than:	15/01/2024
Expressions of Interest must take the following format:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a personal statement;</li> <li>• 2-page CV</li> </ul> <p>We strongly encourage you to make contact with Dr Domeneghetti to discuss the project at an early stage.</p> <p>You must first complete Northumbria's online <a href="#">postgraduate application form</a> by the <b>closing date of 15 January 2024</b>. On the application form under 'Studentship / Partnership Reference' and 'Who is your sponsor / funding body?' please include the code "NBC24/DOMENEGHETTI".</p> <p>Your application should discuss your academic and/or professional experience and describe how this has prepared you to undertake this project. The 'Research Proposal' should be based on the advertised project and should set out what your proposed approach to the project will be.</p> <p>If your application is successful and you are invited to interview, the project supervisor may ask for additional material to be submitted.</p> <p>We expect to hold interviews for these studentships in <b>February 2024</b>. Studentships will start in <b>October 2024</b>.</p> <p><b><u>The project team is committed to equality and diversity and encourage applications from under-represented communities.</u></b></p>	
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:	February 2024

### APPLICANT CRITERIA

*Candidates must also meet the criteria for acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service. The successful candidate will be required to submit a postgraduate application to their host institution following notification that they are to be awarded a conditional CDA studentship, and meet the conditions of the offer of a place on the doctoral programme.*

Education and Professional	Essential Criteria	Undergraduate 2:1 or above in a related discipline. MA/MRes in a related discipline
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<b>Qualifications</b>	Desirable Criteria	Undergraduate 1 <sup>st</sup> Class degree.
<b>Research and Impact Experience and Training</b>	Essential Criteria	n/a
	Desirable Criteria	Some familiarity with the key ideas or methods of survey and interview research (this is not essential as full training will be provided).
<b>Professional Practice and Job-related Experience</b>	Essential Criteria	n/a
	Desirable Criteria	n/a
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	Essential Criteria	Good communicator Good people skills



	Desirable Criteria	n/a
<b>Other Factors</b>	Essential Criteria	Academic or professional knowledge of sports media and debates pertaining to diversity and inclusion in that sphere.
	Desirable Criteria	