

'There will always be print' – Catriona Innes, Cosmopolitan's commissioning director

By **Phoebe Leonard** -



"I've always wanted to work in magazines" (Image credit: Catriona Innes)

From writing for B2B to tackling investigative features, Catriona Innes has worked across the industry. Here she talks to Phoebe Leonard about her journey to becoming Cosmopolitan's commissioning director.

How did you decide to become a journalist?

I've always wanted to be a writer. My family are writers, and I loved magazines growing up. They brought me so much joy. So, I've always wanted to work in magazines.

What has your career path been like?

I studied journalism at the University of Sheffield. I thought that maybe I'd want to write about fashion, I didn't really think about features at the time. After university, I actually worked in London unpaid for a year before I got my first paid job. Luckily, I didn't have to pay rent because my flat had a hole in the ceiling.

Then I worked on a B2B magazine about hairdressing, before moving to the brand magazine at Weight Watchers. It was there that I became interested in features because it was a small team, so I did a lot of different things. When I was working

there, a friend worked at Look Magazine. She got me a week's worth of desk cover with the features team, meaning I covered someone while they were on holiday. I quit my job to go there, which is crazy. But thankfully, they really liked me because I worked hard, so I stayed there for a while.

How did you get your current role at Cosmopolitan?

I've worked at [Cosmopolitan](#) for eight years now, and I got my first job by writing an impassioned cover letter to the editor and doing an interview. I started as a senior editor, working on the regular pages in the magazine, like the careers section. Then I became features editor. I looked after all the sections that weren't beauty, fashion or entertainment, and managed a team of six people. It was an amazing job, but I wasn't getting to write as much as I wanted. So I became commissioning director part-time, and I also work as a freelance writer.

What does your job involve day to day?

As commissioning director, I look after the long-read investigations and features that go into the magazine and online. I brainstorm ideas for the features, hold meetings with the team, and create contacts with freelance journalists who could write for us. If someone else is writing a piece, I write a brief of what I want the article to say, but quite often I'll be writing them myself. After that I'm editing the articles and deciding which will go into the magazine with the help of the editor.

How do you decide which features go into each issue?

There are three features in the magazine, so I'm looking for a set that have a good balance. I want at least one that's more cheerful, and then another that's a bit deeper. You can't have three very deep articles in one issue because it's a bit too much for the readers. The balance is important.

Which articles have stuck with you?

One I wrote that I'm very proud of was about domestic abuse. I spent time at a workshop for men who had committed domestic abuse crimes and the purpose was to teach them why what they did was wrong. I also spoke to survivors about how lots of domestic abuse shelters are closing down. It sort of became a debate piece about whether we should be giving money towards helping the men who were the perpetrators. It's stayed with me because it approached a topic that we've talked about a lot but in a completely different way.

There's also a piece I commissioned where the writer had discovered some forums online. Men discussed the most likely places for women to be drunk; they were hoping to get them wasted and then sexually assault them. She went out into nightclubs with police forces who were trying to help stop this issue and they watched the women. It feels similar to the film *Promising Young Woman* because it took this

quite shocking thing and made it very personal by having her there. I think in-person elements are really important for our articles.

**How do you look after yourself and your writers when dealing with heavy topics like that?**

When I know I'm going to be dealing with difficult topics, I make sure to do something the day after that would help get rid of the energy. When I was working on a heavy piece recently, I booked a swim for the day after. And with the writers, we have to safeguard them as much as possible. I've accompanied writers when they've had to go places to make sure they're okay. We once did a piece about online forums where men encouraged women to kill themselves, and we gave the writer a separate phone. She could only message them when I was with her.

But it's not just the writers you have to look after, because you need to consider the people you're interviewing. It's a lot to recount your story and share it with someone. So it's best to ensure that they feel safe in your company if you can, because their mental health needs looking after too.

Where do you see yourself in the next five years?

I'll definitely be storytelling in one way or another. I'd love to find a way to take these long-read investigations and create more of a podcast format, because that's an area I find really interesting. I also want to get a second book published, because I have one out currently. But I'm not much of a career planner. I kind of just take on projects that I enjoy and make sure that I'm following whatever I find interesting.

What do you think will happen to the industry in the future? What kind of challenges will it face?

We've been in a deeply challenging time for about ten years because we've been figuring out how to make money from online content. Now that more work is online, it can be a lot harder to get people to care about our words. They don't realise that we need money to break these stories and don't want to pay. So we have to give the reader the content in different formats, like taking a feature and making it into a TikTok. It can be hard to do that when something takes up a lot of pages in the magazine and you're trying to condense it.

With print, I know people say it's dead or dying, but people still want to read our magazine. I might be overly optimistic, but I think there will always be print. Especially because people are becoming more aware of how damaging it is to be on your phone and online all the time. I think we might begin to have a bit of a print renaissance.