

# **Journalism training and education and its part in the culture, practices, standards and ethics of the press**

## **Evidence from the Association for Journalism Education**

### **Introduction**

The Association for Journalism Education represents approximately 60 Higher Education institutions in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1997 to help advance journalism education by upholding standards, providing a voice for those involved in journalism training and education in Higher Education and to promote and support research into journalism. The need for the AJE arose out of the rapid increase in undergraduate journalism programmes throughout the nineties building on an earlier growth of postgraduate courses that drew scores of experienced journalists into the academy where they had to rapidly learn how to survive in Higher Education. The Association is a membership organisation with all journalism staff within a member institution able to access its networks and services.

The Association runs regular conferences and seminars for its members, usually three a year, examining such matters as journalism research, delivering journalism education and training, including ethics and curriculum development. It is likely, for instance, that at the AJE conference to be held next September the central topic will be the ethics and standards curriculum to coincide with the Leveson Inquiry findings.

All the journalism courses provided by AJE members whether undergraduate or postgraduate are validated by their own institutions so all are slightly different offering a range of strengths. However, all AJE members take their courses very seriously and share ideas and

developments with other AJE members and with local industry, involving local newspapers, radio, TV or news-based websites.

AJE members are usually former practitioners who switch to education in mid-career. Whilst experienced as journalists, many find the switch to teaching and research tough and the AJE aims to help members pursue the highest possible standards of journalism training by allowing debate, discussion, networking and training.

Universities are also there to research journalism as well as to teach it. Again the AJE does what it can to develop its members academic research capabilities keeping us, our students and the industry up to date with what is happening in a fast-moving world driven by fast-developing technology.

The AJE also keeps members in touch with what is happening around the world and helps involve members in international and national debates by representing members views in a variety of fora.

## **Evolution of training in the UK**

There have always been people who have become journalists with no formal qualifications and whilst this is rarer now than 20 years ago, journalism is still seen by some as a job that can be done by anyone with a reasonably broad education and a willingness to learn and there is considerable resistance to the idea of a required qualification for journalism. However, most people now entering the industry have at least a first degree (in journalism or something else) with many also adding a postgraduate diploma or even a masters degree in journalism.

Practical journalism skills, including shorthand, are central to most courses along with media law, ethics and public administration. Many also offer specialist modules, or more general modules on media history, politics or sociology.

Journalism training in the UK has developed organically over the years responding to the needs of the industry for employees with particular skills. The early years of journalism in the

were driven by a mix of entrepreneurs, campaigners and enthusiasts, much like today's bloggers but as technology allowed an explosion of newspaper production through the late 1800s and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century newsrooms became more professional requiring better-trained journalists.

This was mainly carried out in the newsroom, and although some courses started as early as the 1920s, by the 1970s there were still only a handful of college courses.

With the changes introduced by the Thatcher government, the eighties were a period of rapid and dramatic change. Universities developed newspaper postgraduate courses building on their experience with pre-entry programmes and their Broadcast PG courses. These were given a massive impetus as the industrial changes sparked by the Thatcher era came in. First the abolition of the PPITB left newspaper proprietors keen to reduce their spending on training following the withdrawal of state funding (Cole 1998: 70). These changes in funding led to students' needs becoming paramount and universities led the substantial growth in graduate entry to journalism.

The ending of the provincial newspaper National Agreement between Newspaper Society members and the National Union of Journalists in 1987 (Gopsill and Neale 2007: 124) saw an end to the proprietor's obligation to train and whilst many continued with existing training schemes, for a while at least, slowly fewer and fewer upheld the tradition of employing apprentices and ensuring their training as outlined in the former National Agreement. Some big employers such as Westminster Press, Mirror Group and Thompson Regional Newspapers started their own training schemes moving away from the training that until then had been organised on the job by the NCTJ (Gopsill and Neale 2007: 230) and the PPITB. Others relied on recruiting student from the new courses at university to get bright young recruits with university degrees and a year-long journalism training course. These new university courses contained the elements required by the NCTJ to ensure engagement with the traditional skills

taught to journalist but that were more intellectually challenging and better suited to a graduate.

With the market place filling with well-qualified graduates, many more newspaper groups saw an opportunity to save money by ending their training schemes and recruiting direct from universities. Only a small number of training courses are now run by newspaper groups, mixing basic journalism training with company induction.

It was not long before this student-driven desire to be trained as a journalist no longer linked directly to employment was converted by universities into undergraduate programmes. Lancashire Polytechnic, City University and London College of Communications were the first in the UK to launch a degree in journalism with each launching courses in 1991. These were popular with students from the start. Nearly 2,000 candidates applied for the 40 places in journalism at the University of Central Lancashire [formerly Lancashire Polytechnic] in the early nineties. These numbers persuaded universities already running journalism post-graduate courses to launch their own journalism under-graduate courses and now more than 50 UK institutions offer journalism at undergraduate level.

By 1995, the Guild of Editors had found that the typical entrant to journalism was now a middle class graduate (Cole 1998: 73). This was not welcomed in many newspaper newsrooms, and the start of undergraduate programmes in journalism brought these long held prejudices against academics and academic journalism in particular to the fore (Gopsill and Neale 2007: 238; Cole 1998: 67). Many fulminated in public and in private about the “Mickey Mouse” nature of journalism degrees, the view being held that training for journalists was of limited value and certainly that a degree in journalism was largely pointless. It is difficult to discover why those who applaud the study of classical literature despite its present limited popularity belittle the study of the mass media whose opaque, coded messages are consumed by so many. For many journalism educators there is the

suspicion that some editors feared journalists being trained in universities for concern at what intelligent external scrutiny might reveal. There is also the possibility that there was (and possibly still is) a general feeling of intellectual insecurity among some senior executives, particularly as so many of them did not themselves have degrees, or in many cases formal journalism training of any kind.

Whatever their concerns, the tide of journalism degrees was unstoppable; young people wanted to be journalists and they expected to get a degree so the choice of gaining a journalism degree became increasingly popular.

### **Educating journalists**

Education and research can and should play an important part in the ethical training of the journalists. Until the early sixties, virtually all journalism training in the UK was done in and by newspapers themselves (radio and TV relied exclusively on journalists trained by newspapers until they started their own schemes by the 1970s). With little published material on ethics in the UK and few training courses, there was limited discussion of ethics within the profession before the sixties.

It is the growth in undergraduate courses, the development of masters programmes combining theory and practice and the consequent expansion in the number of journalism departments that has done the most to advance thinking about ethics in the educational establishments and this is bound to have had some effect on journalism. A three or four year course allows time to develop students' thinking about ethics and their critical discussion of standards in journalism alongside all the other elements of a good journalism course. It is also in the nature of academic study to ask questions of everything, a trait it should share with good journalism.

The tradition on the one year courses, whether diploma courses run under the auspices of the NCTJ or post-graduate courses run at various universities, was for a practical approach with students spending much of their time learning to write news reports from exercise briefs or

(towards the end of the course) going out and gathering stories. Law and politics were usually taught in an academic style, but there was little discussion of ethics as these were introduced in the practical sessions to be linked to problems as they arose. Discussion, for instance, about intruding into someone's privacy might be raised during an exercise that involved interviewing someone for a story. However, since it is difficult to devise exercises that challenge students ethically, more complex matters were often wrapped around a discussion designed to fill an afternoon when nothing else could be arranged and were rarely a significant part of the course. The PCC and NUJ codes of practice were a help here as they gave something concrete to use as a teaching aid.

Whilst more latterly, some Masters degrees have required an intellectual engagement with journalism as well as practice enhancing ethical decision making, the more traditional course often left students believing that ethical problems were rare and involved lengthy debate instead of being pervasive, often requiring instant decision against deadline. This can be identified from the books produced to initiate discussion and support the teaching of ethics both in the profession and for students.

A typical example of an early journalism textbook is *Practical Newspaper Reporting* by Geoffrey Harris and David Spark which was the standard primer during the eighties and nineties. This was first written in 1966 for the NCTJ. A second edition was published in 1993 (and reprinted in 1994). By then the PCC had been launched and with it, an industry Code of Practice.

This was included as an appendix in the book and a new chapter 19 had been included on ethics. It was entitled "A Note on Ethics" and was just two and a half pages. The first page is largely about the new PCC the subsequent pages bring up issues raised by PCC complaints covering issues such as addresses, freebies, illustrations, plagiarism and promises. This is not to criticise the book, which was typical of its type and entirely appropriate for the time, but is

to draw some conclusions about the current general view of journalism ethics only 15 years ago.

Undergraduate courses started to develop modules in ethics from the beginning. These were initially rudimentary. However, modern UK undergraduate journalism courses carry much more in terms of ethics and the better courses now have quite significant modules teaching ethics and press freedom (see Liverpool John Moores University, Lincoln University, Sheffield University, City University, University of Sunderland, University of Strathclyde, Napier University, University of Central Lancashire, Nottingham Trent University and many others).

This is also reflected in the books published on the subject. In 1991 at the start of the undergraduate explosion in the UK the only learning support available were textbooks such as Harris and Spark, general ethics books (e.g.: Harman, G [1977] *The Nature of Morality* Oxford: OUP or Singer, P [1994] *Ethics* Oxford: OUP) or US-based ethics books from writers such as, Clifford Christians, John Merrill or Philip Meyer. Following the introduction of undergraduate courses, there was a rapid increase in the number of very useful books almost entirely about ethics and media responsibility from the following authors:

Matthew Kierans (ed) (1998), Colin Shaw (1999), David Berry (ed), Chris Frost, Claude-Jean Bertrand, Tom O'Malley, and Clive Soley, (all in 2000), Richard Keeble, Raphael Cohen-Almagor, (in 2001), Karen Sanders (2003), Valerie Alia (2004) Harcup (2007) and then new editions of Keeble (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Frost (3<sup>rd</sup>). Half a dozen books on ethics were published in 2010 and at least that many are published or planned in 2011.

Practical journalism books also started to include serious discussion of ethics with either a chapter or two, or at least references in the index: Richard Keeble (1994), David Randall (1996), John Wilson (1996), John Taylor (1998), Jenny McKay (2000), Chris Frost (2001) and (2003). This massive increase in journalism ethics books tells its own story. The

launching of a variety of academic journals at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century also allowed an increase in published articles on journalism ethics. After 20 years of rapid development, journalism ethics was now being taken seriously in universities. This has more impact within the profession than would be expected. Journalism is a profession of young people with the typical reporter in his or her twenties or thirties; 70% under 40 (Spilsbury, M 2002: 4). In other words, many reporters have attended a course on journalism as outlined above, and many executives working in newspapers are also young enough to have attended a course that had some serious ethical input. It is also worth remembering that many graduates of such course may not end up in staff jobs, but will become bloggers or content managers for websites or go into other professions and their understanding of ethics and standards should be of help to them there.

## **Accreditation**

Accreditation of journalism course is carried out by several organisations. These come under the umbrella of Skillset that itself identifies Media Academies that fulfil its criteria. There are three accreditation bodies: the National Council for the Training of Journalists, the Broadcast Journalism Training Council and the Periodicals Training Council. It is possible for a course to be accredited by all three but only Sheffield University does this. Some courses are accredited by two of the bodies, but most accredited courses choose to suit their needs usually depending on whether the course specialises in print journalism, broadcast journalism or periodical journalism. Whilst the tradition of specialising in this way is still standard in postgraduate courses because of the limited time available to train students, many undergraduate courses now try to teach across the print broadcast divide to match the converging agenda of the industry.



## **NCTJ**

The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) was started in 1952 by employers groups, trade unions and editors overseeing training schemes in newspapers – it did not offer training for entry to journalism and sets standards by designing curriculum for course to follow and by examining students. It started to widen its scope with the new converging agenda over the past few years and now claims to accredit journalism courses, not just print courses. However, it still seems uncertain about its role in regard to three year undergraduate courses and still seems more comfortable accrediting the more traditional one year courses in both further and higher education institutions. The NCTJ covers law in its curriculum and exams and expects students to know about the PCC and its code, but there is little emphasis on ethics. Its website identifies that it has two modules on law, one optional on court law and says “All journalists must know the legal and regulatory boundaries of what they can and cannot report. This includes both the Press Complaints Commission and Ofcom.codes of practice.” There is no specific mention of ethics.

## **Conclusion**

The AJE believes that education and training, particularly on undergraduate programmes over the past ten years have made journalists more aware of ethical requirements. There is some evidence that those working in the regional press, where many of these relatively newly qualified journalists will be working, are more aware of ethical issues than more senior journalists working in some areas at least of the nationals. We believe that education and training is central to good practice alongside good working practices in the newsroom, allowing for discussion between peers and journalist and editor. Ethics is not something to be left at the university door with the academic gown but needs to be nurtured and developed alongside other professional skills in the newsroom.

AJE members who have been practitioners (they continue to think of themselves as journalists) are well aware of a difficult double standard. That they should teach what is right, but also teach what is actually done. Honesty to the student requires that they be made aware that while there is a right way to do things, they might well be asked to do something different in the newsroom. This double standard can be reinforced by anecdotes from visiting speakers from the workplace.

We hope that the Leveson inquiry will see that it is important to persuade the industry to pay more attention to training and education both in the academy but also in continuing professional development and that there will also be calls to change the culture in the newsroom to one that is supportive of good professional practice rather than purely circulation chasing.

**For and on behalf of the AJE by:**

**Professor Chris Frost**

**Liverpool John Moores University. Treasurer, Association for Journalism Education**



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**Statement of Truth**

**I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.**



**Signed ...** .....

**Date .....30-1-12.....**

Please be aware that by signing the statement of truth you are confirming that you agree that the contents of the submission/statement are true. Please take extra time to ensure that you are completely happy with your submission/statement before you sign it.