

1-2000

The changing face of journalism education in the UK

J. Herbert
Staffordshire University, UK

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme>

Recommended Citation

Herbert, J., The changing face of journalism education in the UK, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 8, 2000, 113-123.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss8/10>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

The Changing Face Of Journalism Education In The UK

The first discussions about a university course in journalism were held in 1908, the year that journalism education started in the United States. It took until 1919 for a course to start in London. 20 years later it stopped and there was nothing until 1970. British journalism might have been at the root of the western and colonial tradition of newspapers and broadcasting, but its imperialism didn't extend to journalism education. Now Britain is fast rediscovering the importance of university journalism education as opposed simply to on-the-job training, and the whole of journalism is as a consequence being put under the journalistic research microscope. This essay examines the way journalism education is progressing in Britain and argues for a new approach to curriculum that would strengthen the professional education of media and communication practitioners by taking due account of what is to be learned, who is to learn it and the context in which they have to do so.

John Herbert

Staffordshire University, UK

Britain has been at the forefront of journalism for centuries. It provided the beginnings of journalism to all the colonies and the United States. This means of course to almost all the Asia Pacific rim countries. But something went wrong when it came to journalism education, where Britain was remarkably behind other countries in Europe, Asia, Australasia and the United States. Britain distrusted journalism education, much preferring on-the-job and apprenticeship training for its journalists and editors. The end result of this was that the attitudes and approaches of American journalism education in particular found its way to many parts of the world, particularly the Asia Pacific countries.

But after this slow start, British journalism education is now changing rapidly. New entrants to journalism are now better educated than in times past. The local and regional media -- press and broadcasting -- continue to be a major provider of on-the-job

©AsiaPacific
MediaEducator
Issue No.8
January-June 2000

training for new journalists. 65% start this way (Delano and Henningham 1995:16). But increasing numbers are also attending university first, either to do specific journalism courses or to study something else and follow that with a postgraduate course in journalism or broadcast journalism. More university courses are starting every year in many specific and general forms of journalism to cope with this new awareness of the need for journalism education.

Thirty years ago the proportion of graduates to non graduates was 30:70. Today it is precisely reversed; there are about 70% of journalists either working or being educated at tertiary institutions to degree level. However only 2% of graduates have done an undergraduate course in journalism. 17% have a postgraduate qualification in journalism. Henningham and Delano (1998) describe this increase as one of the most significant changed elements in the profile of the British journalist.

Skills And Education

It's often said that until 1970 there was no university education for UK journalists. This is not altogether accurate. A course was proposed for Birmingham in 1908, the same year journalism education started at universities in the United States, but the course never got off the ground. It was not until 1919 that a Diploma for Journalism got underway at London University with no lecturers, no journalism teaching and students attending BA Hons courses (a dozen ladies subsequently made names as novelists: from Elizabeth Bowen to Penelope Mortimer) and, says Fred Hunter (1982) no journalism exams were set until 1927 when a part-time lecturer from the *Times*, F. J. Mansfield, gave a weekly lecture and wrote the first exam papers. His lecture notes became two books which were in print for nearly forty years and helped train generations of British journalists.

The first full-time director of practical journalism appointed at King's College, London in 1935, Tom Clarke, re-jigged the course to be more liberal arts based, attuned to giving would-be journalists an introduction to the skills and practices of journalism in the widest sense (Hunter 1982). This of course was the way journalism education had moved in the United States. Then everything went quiet until 1970 when the University of Wales in Cardiff began postgraduate diplomas in print and later broadcast journalism. Even at this stage the emphasis was not on preparing students for jobs but giving them an academic introduction to journalism studies. Today there is an increasing awareness of the need for well constructed vocational courses that will prepare students for work in journalism as well as giving

them the more traditional university lifelong skills in many transferable skills.

Some courses are contained within more general media or communications studies programmes. But four journalism whole degrees in journalism now exist which have industry accreditation and aim to prepare students for work in local and national newsrooms. The courses at the four universities in the UK with BA(Hons) journalism degrees accredited by the National Council for Training of Journalists (NCTJ) are at Bournemouth University, Staffordshire University, the University of Central Lancashire and the University of Sheffield. Their courses are broadly similar, with about 80:20 practical to theory.

There are 21 tertiary institutions which have undergraduate degrees that include journalism in one form or another. In addition there are several undergraduate degrees in Broadcast Journalism; several in International Journalism; several in theoretical Journalism Studies; and one in Multi Media Journalism. In addition there are a number of postgraduate courses, most of them in broadcast journalism, but also in Online journalism, International Journalism, Multi Media journalism, Electronic Publishing and an MLitt in Journalism Research in Scotland. And this provision is growing.

From next year for example, Staffordshire university will be starting an MA in Journalism Ethics which will sit very comfortably alongside its existing BA(Hons) in Journalism, the BA(Hons) in Joint Journalism; the BA(Hons) in Broadcast Journalism and Politics and the MA in Broadcast Journalism (international or UK routes). Courses continue to develop to meet the needs of the new generation of journalists and the rapidly increasing new technology. For example, the University of Central Lancashire now runs an MA in Online Journalism; and Staffordshire University is about to start a BA(Hons) in Digital Media Journalism in collaboration with its School of Engineering and Technology. Sheffield University has an MA in Political Journalism and Bournemouth is developing Multi Media and Online Journalism at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Thames Valley University in London is planning new journalism courses for next year.

These developments are being underpinned by research of high quality, mostly by journalist practitioners-turned-academics. This research includes a rapidly increasing number of books on the subject, international conferences and impressively qualified practitioners who move into the academic journalism world, while at the same time continuing to practise in one form or another

Research

their profession. This gives university courses in Journalism in the UK a high credibility rating for work-related research and teaching. It also gives the students active and visible role models in their lecturers. Sheffield, Cardiff, Central Lancashire and Staffordshire all have Professors of Journalism who have significant profiles in the industrial arena as well as the academic.

Journalism research is taking off under its own steam and establishing a life of its own with significant books and papers emerging regularly from Journalism departments. It will not be long before all this research activity that is specifically related to journalism bears international fruit in relating theory to practice and divorcing itself from the more traditional media and communication studies research routes.

Out of the UK now come three widely acclaimed international journals, *British Journalism Review* (published by University of Luton Press), *Journalism Studies* (published by Routledge) and *Journalism* (published by Sage). They are all blind peer reviewed with strong international editorial teams.

This research activity fits well into the regular Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) conducted of all university institutions by the research funding body, Higher Education Funding Council. As a result of this regular investigation into the research activity of departments and universities departments the Council gives ratings of between 1-5 (5 being best). This determines the amount of research money each institution and department receives. And of course this figure is crucial to the continued well being of courses. Journalism usually is subsumed into more esoteric categories within Media and Communication Studies (one of the many categories). That means it tends to be seen as media studies rather than distinctively separate.

The next RAE exercise is next year, and universities are currently preparing the inevitable paper trail that the assessors always require. In at least one university, Journalism is being separated from media studies and will present research of its own. In preparation for each research exercise, Departments are divided into active and inactive researchers (a rather invidious separation since everyone is doing some research into something). The criterion is four publications of merit since the last exercise five years ago. Otherwise staff members are branded 'non active'.

The trick with journalism education is of course to ensure that staff members actually produce research into journalism areas rather than into the more traditional media studies/sociology ones. This is the only way in which a proper research culture will grow that makes Journalism a discipline in its own right and not simply a part of media or communication studies.

The upcoming RAE exercise for 2001 has one practitioner

on the panel (the last one had none) and there is a declared intention of establishing a separate sub panel for practitioners. However, the research criteria are so narrow as to make it virtually impossible for practitioners to submit their work for consideration. (Gaber and Phillips 1999:50)

Students perceive journalism courses as a major vehicle for getting jobs within the profession. And they vote with their feet. Looking at the recruitment statistics for the four industry accredited universities the numbers applying for journalism programmes in 2000 were about 20 for each available place. (UCAS 2000). This increasing over-demand for places means that the universities with industry accredited journalism degrees are having to review the admissions requirements every year, making them more stringent as numbers wanting to come on the course increase.

In addition of course part of the admissions requirement of those universities with industry accreditation is for a formal interview and pre-selection test of current affairs/writing of which one panel member at least must be a senior member of the journalism industry (it is usually one of the local newspaper editors). As far as university authorities are concerned, ever vigilant about new ways of attracting students, this very high level of recruitment is music to their cash-strapped ears. Particularly since they also fall into the second highest funding level (which means more cash from the government per student than in the less technology intensive subjects).

This means that journalism departments faced with this high over recruitment ask for and usually get higher levels of new equipment to cope with the increased numbers. At least one university this year (Staffordshire) more than doubled its journalism places to cope with demand. This means increasing the staff and newsroom spaces to accommodate the increase in students. (Staffordshire for example has built a second newsroom). The trick of course is not to increase students without extra resources. And this is where industry accreditation helps: the industry bodies won't even consider a course unless this shows evidence of sufficient staff and technical resources for the students.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service for higher education institutions throughout the UK. It's an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education. Its main job is to review the

Student Recruitment

Maintaining Quality

performance of universities and colleges of higher education by visiting them to audit their overall academic management, including arrangements for collaboration with overseas partners and to assess the quality and standards of teaching and learning at various subject levels. They then issue reports that are immediately made public. They can be seen on their website.

The Agency works with universities to promote and support improvement in academic degrees; it facilitates the development of benchmarks to guide the standards of individual subjects; it promotes codes of practice and gives examples of good practice; and it reviews performance at institutional and subject levels. When it issues a report it gives marks from 1 to 4 (4 being excellent). It then either approves or doesn't approve the course. The Report makes comments and recommendations in the following areas:

Aspects Of Provision	Grade
Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation Teaching, Learning and Assessment Student Progression and Achievement Student Support and Guidance Learning Resources Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAA 2000)	

Together with this debate is the need to decide on what is called the benchmarks that typify journalism. The idea is to write a programme specification which will enable anyone to look and say: 'that is what constitutes journalism'. The programme specification provides a concise statement about the learning outcomes which students will get out of a particular degree programme. The learning outcomes are linked to the various assessment criteria for each module in the degree programme so that students can see the levels of achievement expected to gain the qualification. (QAA 2000) The programme specification also includes information about the teaching, learning and assessment methods used to enable the learning outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated. It shows how the modules and units of study that make up the degree programme are related to the levels of achievement recognised in the benchmark standards, also currently being developed for journalism (as they are for all other university disciplines). The benchmarking exercise for journalism is about to commence, and should be complete by 2002. It will be produced after wide consultation with journalism educators and

industry training bodies. The eventual benchmarking statement will include such elements as defining principles, the nature and scope of journalism as a subject of study, the subject knowledge and skills, key subject specific skills, generic and graduate skills, teaching, learning and assessment, and the minimum threshold standards which honours graduates will achieve when they have completed their degree.

There are of course in addition to the universities and colleges several industry training bodies. There is the National Council for the Training of Journalists which accredits relevant journalism degrees and lower level courses throughout the country; there is the Broadcast Journalism Training Council, which does the same for broadcast journalism courses; and there is Skillset, which is the training organisation which polices lower level media industry training. These fall into the category of vocational qualifications and related vocational qualifications and they relate specifically to purely vocational courses. Industry accreditation is an important part of the UK journalism and broadcast journalism educational framework.

There are various ways in which prospective journalists can get themselves into the industry in the UK. Some are recruited directly by regional or local newspapers and carry out their basic training under the terms of a training contract. This is known as direct entry. Within this category are those who may have secured employment with a newspaper company who runs its own training programme.

However most trainees are recruited after attending full time vocational training courses for post A-level students and graduates. Such courses are generally held at colleges accredited by the NCTJ. Some are for graduates only. This is called the pre-entry route.

This is for students recruited into the industry from school or university. Most companies expect students to enter into a two-year training contract during which time they receive basic training. The first six months is likely to be a probationary period during which they decide whether they will make a successful journalist. During this time most trainees are registered with the NCTJ and receive a distance learning foundation course to study. After the probationary six months, trainees then have to attend a block release or day release course at college during which time they sit the NCTJ preliminary exams. Some trainees are recruited by in-company training schemes and they undertake their off-the-job training at company training centres. The NCTJ currently

Training Bodies

Direct Entry

accredits one in-company training scheme, the Midland News Association in Birmingham.

A relatively new and innovative way of entering the profession is through what is called modern apprenticeships. This is an alternative form of direct entry and enables employees of participating companies to undertake relevant training leading to a qualification in newspaper journalism; writing; news and features.

Currently training courses lead to a variety of qualifications. All NCTJ courses cover those aspects of law, public affairs and newspaper journalism necessary to enable a journalist to perform competently by the end of the training period. They also have to achieve 100 words per minute shorthand (teeline).

So the system of journalism training and education in the UK falls into the following categories:

Block release (four colleges)

Day release (2 colleges)

Degree (four universities)

Graduate (one year)(8 universities)

Graduate (fast track)(4 colleges)

Photo-journalism and press photography (1 college)

Pre-entry academic year (13 colleges)

Pre-entry calendar year (2 colleges)

Two Year Higher National Diploma. (2 colleges)

The Thomson Foundation gives practical, intensive training both in the UK and abroad for journalists, managers, technicians and production staff in television, radio and the press.

The National Council for the Training of Journalists is the newspaper's own national awarding body for journalism training and education. Accreditation by this body ensures that the course adheres not only to the university requirements but also to those of the newspaper industry. There are certain required subjects which must be taught in order to achieve accreditation. And there are certain exams which must be passed in order to achieve the NCTJ pre-entry certificate. These basically fall into the following categories: Law, Public Affairs, Shorthand and Newspaper Writing and Reporting. Each of these areas has its own individual syllabus and students on accredited courses must take the required exams in these subjects as approved by the Council.

There are in fact 6 of these exams, Law -- Parts 1 and 2; Public Affairs -- Pparts 1 and 2; Shorthand (students must achieve 100 words a minute); and Newspaper Reporting and Writing. They cover reporting and writing skills, knowledge of media law and ethics, public administration and government, as well of

Industry Accreditation

course as shorthand.

The Broadcast Journalism Training Board (BJTC) has similar accrediting procedures. The BJTC aims to establish and sustain common vocational standards in the delivery of radio and television journalism training in universities and colleges in the UK. The Council is representative of those who deliver the courses: the broadcast industry, the BBC, ITN, IRN, Channel Four, the NUJ and also independent broadcasters. It validates three types of courses:

(a) Broadcast Journalism (which concentrate on the delivery of core journalism and broadcast skills with a clear emphasis on one medium, most probably radio)

(b) Bi-media Journalism (courses which deliver core journalism skills, but offer two elements to examination standard. These may include radio, television, on-line or newspaper journalism.

(c) Multimedia Journalism (broadly based courses offering training in core journalism skills and their application to a range of traditional and new media, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, on-line and multi-media, with each chosen module taught to exam standard).

The recognition process for both the NCTJ and BJTC are rigorous and broadly equate with the validation processes which each UK course must go through before approval by the university. For Broadcast Journalism courses there have to be required amounts of practical training (a minimum of 12.5% of the course has to be a rolling news day); spoken word; news values; health and safety requirements; news sources and research; newsgathering and reporting skills; interview techniques; bulletin editing; actuality and news packages, features and documentaries; technical proficiency; voice work to an acceptable standard; IT skills and a mandatory work placement period.

Professional Studies include ethics, law, regulatory issues, public administration; knowledge of economic, business and industrial relations; awareness of contemporary social issues; structure and ownership of the British and European media.

At least 40% of total tuition time (i.e. two days in five) must be taught by tutors with personal, recent experience in broadcast journalism professional practice.

The industry training bodies which accredit the courses insist that teachers on accredited courses are experienced journalists. Unlike American journalism schools, for example, almost none gets hired to an accredited journalism course in the UK because of their academic qualifications and research potential. They must have at least five years practical experience.

Journalism education in universities in the UK, whether

accredited or not by the industry, tend to have similar curriculum structures. They aim at a broad basic general knowledge, professional reporting and writing ability and an independent thinking and a sense of news judgement and ethical reporting. Students should learn, in one way or another, reporting and writing, editing and production, ethics and law, how the press and broadcasting work, shorthand, what is happening in the news locally and internationally, how society works and where journalism fits in, the elements of photojournalism and magazine journalism, and the latest new technology and online.

Conclusion

As the new millennium starts, someone wanting to be a journalist in the UK has the choice of being educated and trained in the following ways. They could do a Bachelor level degree, a Higher National Diploma (HND), a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), or a Business and Technician Educational Certificate (BTEC). If already graduated they can take a Masters level degree or a postgraduate diploma or certificate. They can sign on at a private school of journalism or an employer-approved training scheme to obtain a diploma or certificate issued by that particular institution.

However, almost without exception, today's UK journalists and broadcasters are being trained and educated without any cost whatsoever to the industry in which they are going to work. That is a problem to solve in the future. Journalism education is too important not to be seen as such by the industry itself. And only then will the industry spend its own money in collaboration with the universities to produce the journalists of the future. ■

References

- Boyd-Barrett, O** (1970) "Journalism, Recruitment and Training" in Tunstall, J, *Media Sociology*, Constable
- Bromley, M.**, (1997) *Journalism Reader*, Longman
- Delano, A and Henningham, J** (1995) *The News Breed: British Journalists in the 1990s*. London Institute
- Delano, A** (2000), " No Signs of a Better Job: 100 Years of British journalism" *Journalism Studies*, v.1. no.2 May: 261-272
- Franklin, B** (1999), *Newszak and News media*, Arnold
- Gaber, I., and Phillips, A.**, (2000), "Practicing What We Preach: The Role of Practice in Media Degrees - and Journalism Teaching in Particular," *Journal of Media Practice*, v.1, no.1, 2000
- Society of Editors** <www.ukeditors.com>
- Henningham, J.**, (1993), "Australian Journalists Attitudes to Tducation," *Australian Journalism Review*, 15,2:77-90

- Henningham, J., and Delano, A.,** (1998), "British Journalists", in Weaver, D.,(1998) *The Global Journalist*, Hampton: 143-161
- Herbert, J** (2000), *Journalism in the Digital Age*, Focal Press.
- Herbert, J.,** (1997) "Journalism education at the tertiary level ", *Australian Journalism Review*, 19(1), June: 7-19
- Herbert, J.,** (1998)" Working Towards a Practical-Theory of Broadcast Journalism," *AsiaPacific Media Educator*, 5, January-June: 137-143
- Herbert, J.,**(1996) "Cascade Learning Approach to Broadcast Journalism Education", *Asia-Pacific MediaEducator*, vol. 1:1, September: 50-64
- Herbert, J.,**(2000) *Practicing Global Journalism*, Focal
- Hunter, F** (1982) "Grub Street and Academia: the relationship between journalism and education 1880-1940 with special reference to the London University Diploma for Journalism 1919-1939, PhD thesis, City University, London
- Lee, P.,** (1999), Does Journalism Seek Truth Out? A Typology of Realities in the News Profession, *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(1):92-106
- Lloyd, C.,** (1999), "Journalism and American pragmatism", *Australian Journalism Review* 20(1):1-16
- MacDonald, I** (1999) "Related Vocational Qualifications in Media Practice Education: An Analysis of the Rationale and Historical and Political Contexts" *Journal of Media Practice*, v.1 no.1: 12-22
- McNair, B** (1997), *News and Journalism in the UK*, Routledge
- McNair, B** (2000) "Journalism and Democracy: A Millennium Audit" *Journalism Studies*, v.1 no.2, May: 197-212
- Pavlik, J** (2000) The Import of Technology on Journalism, *Journalism Studies*, v.1, no.2 May: 229-238
- QAA** <www.niss.ac.uk/education.qaa>
- Reese, S and Cohen, J** (2000) "Educating for Journalism", *Journalism Studies*, v.1, no.2 May: 213-228
- Taylor, J.,** (2000), "Problems in Photojournalism: Realism, the Nature of News and the Humanitarian Narrative", *Journalism Studies*, v.1.,no.1, :129-143
- Weaver, D.,** (1998), *The Global Journalist*, Hampton Press
- Wolf, M., and Holly, S.,** (1996), *Broadcast Journalists*, Skillset

JOHN HERBERT, PhD is Foundation Professor of Journalism at Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, UK. He has authored several books on the media and journalism education. Email: j.c.herbert@staffs.ac.uk
