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Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications and Digital inquiry into the future of journalism.

Committee's key questions:

- How have digital technologies changed the consumption of journalism?
- How can innovation and collaboration help news organisations to maintain sustainable business models?
- Do journalists have access to the training opportunities necessary to adapt to the digital world? How could public policy better support the training of journalists?
- Why has trust in journalists declined? How could it be improved?
- Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population?
- How can journalists better understand and convey the concerns and priorities of people who do not live in London or other metropolitan hubs?

This submission is focused on the training of journalists and on diversity in recruitment – both areas where university training courses have a key role to play – with some further general observations at the end.

Training

University journalism training is often misunderstood or mischaracterised so we thought an overview of how one of the UK's leading university departments approaches training would be helpful to the committee.

Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture is one of the oldest established journalism schools in the UK, founded in 1970 by Sir Tom Hopkinson, a former editor of Picture Post. As a Russell Group university with a significant international research reputation it offers a range of undergraduate, postgraduate and research pathways.¹ The school offers both vocational and academic courses but makes a clear distinction between them. (Of the approximately 70 journalism courses offered by British universities it is not always clear to applicants whether they are vocational or social science degrees – we believe a clear distinction is essential).

The School's research has directly influenced UK media with multiple reports for the BBC, Ofcom and significant projects supporting the wider creative industries.

This submission is concerned with our vocational courses which are all postgraduate Masters courses. We have three courses accredited by the appropriate industry bodies: News (accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists - NCTJ), Broadcast (accredited by the Broadcast Journalism Training Council – BJTC) and Magazine (accredited by the Professional Publishers Association – PPA) These are aimed at students intending to work in the UK media and include UK media law and regulation.

We also offer two non-accredited vocational journalism courses – an MA in International Journalism, and an MSc in Computational and Data Journalism (offered jointly with the School of Computer Science.)

¹ <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/journalism-media-and-culture>

We also have an MA in International Public Relations and Global Communications Management, accredited by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and an MBA in Media Management offered jointly with Cardiff Business School designed for those entering management roles within media organisations. These non-UK focused courses are open to all but attract a significant number of international students intending to return to work in their home countries.

The School is in continuous dialogue with the accrediting bodies and with a wide range of industry organisations – both traditional and digital media – and the content of all courses evolves and flexes to ensure it is relevant and up to date in equipping students to work in today's newsrooms and media organisations.

Our vocational courses, and in particular the accredited pathways, have core skills modules which evolve but remain keystones in the course. These include:

- Media Law, designed to provide the essential underpinning knowledge that journalists need when they enter the industry.
- Public Administration – a basic understanding of how government, local government and public institutions like the NHS work.
- Ethics and regulation – delivered largely through case studies and guest lectures. High professional standards are becoming more important in an environment which blurs the distinction between professional journalism and 'citizen journalism' or advocacy. We cover all the relevant ethical codes including Ofcom, Ipso, Impress and the BBC. We also encourage individual reflection and critical thinking to help students develop their own sense of values which they may need in a highly competitive marketplace.
- Data Journalism – added in the last four years as understanding and handling data has become more central to everyday journalism.

In addition to these are production modules which have become increasingly digitally focused. Video skills, social media and online production and analytics are now key on all vocational courses.

The school also places a premium on practical experience offering more "news days" (where students work in a live news production environment) than the accrediting bodies require and more than many other university courses. This allows for real-time feedback and learning through practise.

All teaching staff have professional experience and the School is careful to ensure an appropriate mix of up-to-date skills. Staff all maintain their own current industry networks to ensure teaching is delivering what employers require in terms of skills. The School has responded to the changing nature of journalism in a number of ways:

- Continually updating and integrating digital skills into its courses
- The launch of specialist courses such as the MSc in Computational and Data Journalism which combines coding and development with journalism
- The launch of the MBA for students intending to enter management roles within media organisations, offering a specialist approach to the MBA curriculum
- The launch of new modules such as "Enterprise Journalism" reflecting the increasing number of graduates who will need to develop freelance careers and who will need to develop collaborative skills working in tech industries as well as media.

Employability is a major concern for our students and therefore for the school. It is harder to gather accurate data for international students, but for the UK students on the accredited courses we have consistently had 95% of graduates earning their living from

journalism in either staff, contract or freelance roles within 6 months of graduation. This is achieved largely through the close liaison between the school and employers and building a reputation and track record for high quality graduates.

These roles are often traditional reporter, sub-editor or producer roles in newsrooms. However we should note that increasingly there are a raft of new digital roles that graduates enter which are not always recognised in the continuing narrative about loss of journalism jobs. These might include job titles such as mobile editor, product or digital development, social media producer, audience analysis, community manager, audience writer, podcast producer, data journalist and more. Increasingly these new digital roles offer opportunities for career entrants and are core journalism functions, though perhaps not always recognised as such outside the industry.

We have found innovating around these functions has strengthened employability for our graduates. Offering Data Journalism as a core module has, we are told, made our graduates more employable. Graduates of the MSc in Computational and Data Journalism are in demand each year for their combination of editorial and coding/development skills – although it is a smaller cohort than the other more conventional journalism courses.

Diversity

Diversity remains a continuing concern for recruitment to our courses as it is within media organisations. There are a number of dimensions to this. Social diversity is perhaps the most pressing area. In the past, there were more training courses, and apprenticeships (or indentures), offered directly by employers. By the 1990s many of these had been cut and training effectively outsourced to higher education as a way of offsetting costs. We are now recognising that one effect of this is only those who can afford some form of higher education can obtain the qualifications to enter journalism. Many of these are through vocational BA or MA courses – although there are still non-university diploma and accredited short courses available. However it has meant a drift towards journalism becoming a middle class profession which is not in it or the public's interests,² seen by many as "an elite profession"³. In addition there are insufficient role models in media for BAME students or entrants and some cultural barriers exist ("it's not a job for people like me"). Gender is less of an issue. The Sutton Trust has undertaken insightful research in this area.⁴

To make a significant difference on BAME recruitment, we believe routes to training need to be started at GCSE age ideally for economically and ethnically diverse individuals to help them move through A-levels and then through a university education, supported by mentors as well as financially. As yet there is insufficient mentoring or financial support available.

Journalism isn't always a young person's game either, so more needs to be done for older people wanting to retrain who may already have working expertise in STEM, business, finance etc. Their professional experience would also strengthen the rigour of certain areas of reporting.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/media/media-blog/2018/apr/29/journalism-class-private-education>

³ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/study-reveals-drop-in-privately-educated-journalists-at-top-of-media-over-last-five-years/>

⁴ https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/APPG-on-Social-Mobility_Report_FINAL.pdf

Unpaid internships prevent access to journalism, they don't increase it⁵. In addition, minimum wage internships of 3-12 months are increasingly replacing what were full-time junior positions. Most graduates can't afford to take up these internships which often involve the costs of moving to a new city with high rents with only a few months' work guaranteed.

However, work experience - short spells of shadowing and tasks - is more important than ever to provide access to journalism for all. (We are seeing increasing examples of employers only accepting BAME candidates for work experience and internships. We suggest this is an unhelpful and knee-jerk reaction to a more deep-rooted problem. Media organisations need to engage much earlier with under-represented groups if they wish to redress their staff balance.)

It should also be noted that new working patterns by employers - flexible working, remote working - was already having a negative impact on opportunities to get crucial experience in journalism, even before the Coronavirus effect. This disproportionately impacts individuals from poorer backgrounds.

The new landscape of remote working also means training young journalists to work in new ways with more technology and them potentially never having an office to go to or a 'team' to work with in the same ways as before and so missing important opportunities for peer learning and consolidating skills on the job. This is challenging for a young graduate to feel confident in their first working environment.

Scholarships are one way of addressing weak BAME or social diversity - but make a minor overall difference. There is also a tendency for more scholarships to be offered for London based courses - where living costs are higher and which may reinforce some patterns of recruitment. We are seeing more apprenticeships now being offered since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy which is to be welcomed as an alternative route into the industry and a new (or rediscovered) model of training. It is incumbent on both employers and courses to find new and earlier channels of engagement and support for potential recruits from under-represented parts of the community and of the country.

Professional development

Journalism has traditionally identified itself as a trade, not a profession - largely in order to prevent standards being set by external bodies and so preserving independent, free and open access to the press. However it was clear from the Leveson inquiry, and more generally, that this approach has in some cases led to bad practise, toxic cultures and has hampered professional development in many areas. It is entirely possible for professional development to be encouraged and institutionalised in journalism, much as it is in teaching, law and other professions, without the external licensing or standard setting the industry so fears.⁶ Given the pace at which journalism is changing, and the rapidly shifting skills mix required, it seems uncontroversial to suggest the industry should more readily adopt standards of continuing personal development (CPD) for its staff in line with other public interest professions overseen by a representative body of some kind (perhaps an extension of the NCTJ). Costs of training in an industry under commercial pressure are a common argument against this - it is arguable that the opportunity costs of not ensuring staff have updated relevant skills may be greater. Currently newsrooms are losing mature staff with editorial judgement in order to recruit inexperienced staff with new digital skills. CPD would allow a balance to be more easily achieved and experience retained.

⁵ <https://presspad.co.uk/making-the-case-for-diverse-newsrooms/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/mar/04/leveson-report-polls>
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/mar/05/leveson-report-lord-justice-leveson>

Recommendations:

- *An end to unpaid internships (as opposed to work experience)*
- *Greater engagement between newsrooms and schools (potentially with university outreach teams)*
- *Fresh targeted support to improve BAME and social diversity from school through to training and employment*
- *Commitment to continuing personal development for newsroom staff*

Concluding thoughts

We have three further thoughts.

- 1) It is clear that the major challenge to journalism is the erosion of the traditional advertising business model and the difficulty in establishing a new sustainable model. This will have been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic and its economic impact on media advertising. Enders Analysis estimates a loss of some 5,000 journalists across the country.⁷ The impact of this will be particularly felt at local level where newsrooms have already been hollowed out following years of cost cutting, to compensate for declining revenue, or simply closed. This has led in some areas to what has been called a “democratic deficit” with a loss of independent reliable local news to inform communities.

The Cairncross Review⁸ into a sustainable future for journalism made it clear that the market cannot deliver all that is needed. In the United States there is a long-established culture of philanthropy which has allowed a sustainable non-profit, public interest sector to develop (e.g. Pro-Publica⁹, the ICIJ¹⁰, The Center for Public Integrity¹¹) Although some philanthropy exists in the UK it is not sufficiently developed to sustain a non-profit sector in the same way.

One option would be to divert funds supporting the local TV scheme established by the coalition government which has failed to deliver an eco-system of high quality, local news provision as hoped. Therefore, the government might move support for broadcast local tv towards supporting public interest news produced for digital consumers.

These local media co-operatives would have an explicit mission to improve the diversity of the media by training local people to get involved in the media, in a similar way to community radio provision – thus also ensuring communities were better represented in local media.

Charitable status, now available for public interest journalism, will be particularly important for encouraging new philanthropic sources of revenue. As yet, too many small community start-ups struggle to achieve charitable status which would potentially help them become sustainable. In this regard we fully support the submission to the committee by the *Public Benefit Journalism Research Centre* which goes into this issue in detail.

⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/business/covid-chaos-spells-bad-news-for-the-media-p9xdgz73b>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cairncross-review-a-sustainable-future-for-journalism>

⁹ <https://www.propublica.org>

¹⁰ <https://www.icij.org>

¹¹ <https://publicintegrity.org>

Our colleagues, Prof Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Emma Meese have also separately submitted evidence on the importance of supporting the new and growing hyperlocal and community news sector.

- 2) Related to this, we are seeing increasing examples of collaboration between different sectors and organisations – which is unusual in what has been a fiercely competitive business. Examples of this include the Local Democracy Reporters scheme, the Facebook Community Reporters scheme, and non-profit public interest organisations like The Bureau for Investigative Journalism working with a range of media partners. Collaboration is a growing trend¹² and one which helps reduce overheads and costs while increasing the reach of high quality content for different audiences. Greater help focused on supporting collaboration and pan-sector innovation may be worth considering. We should be wary of a handout culture which will not aid sustainability, but a fund – perhaps potentially derived from tax on the technology giants whose business models have contributed to the collapse of local news in particular - could make a substantial difference to both community journalism and to public interest collaborations.

We note the Local Democracy Reporter scheme was initially funded from the BBC licence fee – with the BBC now looking for partners to support and extend the scheme. Recognising funding as an investment in a public resource for long term social benefit (rather than simply a transaction) is an important principle to establish as we seek to rebuild public interest news.

(We will not explore the role of the BBC in detail here other than to say in terms of social cohesion, a commitment to public service, and a force to counter misinformation it plays a hugely significant role – as seen during the pandemic. As such we believe discussions about its funding and remit should be open and transparent – recent licence fee settlements have tended to be “deals behind locked doors” which undermines trust and further politicises the debate about the BBC as a national institution.)

- 3) Finally we suggest the debate should not only be about the supply of high quality journalism; consumers need help to make informed choices. The digital age has seen a major rise in misinformation and disinformation with a consequent collapse of trust in media. Online, trusted, professional journalism can appear much the same as fake sites or advocacy. The public are often unable to discern the difference or ill-equipped to judge on what basis information should or should not be trusted. In addition, low trust leads to political disengagement and a weakening understanding of how government works. In this context, media literacy and civic education become more important than ever (as recognised in Scandanavia¹³ and Germany¹⁴ for example). Media literacy, in the sense of critical thinking, is a topic many support in theory but do little to advance in practise. The UK needs a coherent strategy which joins up initiatives in DCMS, Cabinet Office and the Department of Education to deliver high quality media literacy and civic education into schools as a stronger core part of the curriculum. We live in a world saturated in media, information and messages – some accurate and trustworthy, much not.

¹² <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/global-teamwork-rise-collaboration-investigative-journalism>

¹³ <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/latest/news/three-nordic-countries-increase-mil-among-all-citizens>

¹⁴ https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AR2_Full_Report_With_identifiers_Teaching-Media-Literacy.pdf

In the long term, citizens need the tools to understand what they are consuming¹⁵, who is publishing it and why in order to make properly informed choices. As yet media literacy (and civic education) is not taken nearly seriously enough in the UK.

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¹⁵ <https://www.jomec.co.uk/blog/the-information-smog-tedx-cardiff/>