

## **Chartered Institute of Journalists—written evidence (FOJ0071)**

### **Submission to the House of Lords' Communications and Digital Committee: Inquiry into the future of journalism**

The Chartered Institute of Journalists and its sister organisation, the Institute of Journalists (Trade Union), welcomes the opportunity to respond to the HoL Communications and Digital Committee consultation on the Future of Journalism.

The Institute represents staff and freelance journalists in every sector of the industry including local and regional newspapers, periodicals, television and radio broadcasting.

The Institute recognises that there are many complex issues involved in considering the future of journalism and the impact that new technology has had.

### **How should journalism be defined and what is its value to society? What is the difference between 'citizen journalism' and other forms of journalism?**

The Chartered Institute of Journalists is committed to promoting and advancing qualitative and responsible professional journalism. This performs a vital constitutional role in a democratic society by providing an accurate public record of news, current affairs, culture and entertainment, while also holding those who exercise power to account. A fully functioning free press promotes liberty, supports democracy, and protects freedom of speech and expression.

The term 'citizen journalism' usually refers to non-professional journalists who use media platforms to express themselves. It can also be a term used by publishers who take, and use, copy from unpaid sources. At face value, it can seem that contributions from this type of support network may be helpful to a struggling news outlet. However, we would highlight the fact that they are untrained and know little about the laws to which journalists must adhere while going about their lawful business. This can, of course, place an extra burden on an already stretched workforce, especially in local media offices.

The Chartered Institute is dedicated to representing and advancing the interests of professional journalists, not untrained and inexperienced amateurs.

### **How have digital technologies changed the consumption of journalism?**

We think the answer to that question is obvious. You will have access to substantial sources of data on the differences in the pattern of journalistic consumption between print newspapers, radio, television, what are described as 'social media', the Internet and other online platforms.

The problem for professional journalism is that the journalism industry has not successfully achieved a viable model to sustain and expand the infrastructure of professional journalistic employment in online digital platforms only.

Worse, it has generally neglected to invest in and promote the print form that for most media corporations continues to guarantee the most reliable income. Fundamentally education and culture have not encouraged and advanced to the younger generations the qualitative value and advantages of the print form in newspapers and magazines so those audiences have grown older and older and are dying off.

The subscription model run by the Times, The Economist, Financial Times and Telegraph has varying success. The Guardian operates a donation/membership system similar to the pledging that operates for US public radio and television. It requires the insertion of large begging style texts on its online postings/articles. The methodology has also been introduced by the Independent; not necessarily with the same success as the Guardian.

### **How can public policy improve media literacy, particularly among those who have a low level of digital literacy?**

With respect, there are two questions here and they are not necessarily connected.

We believe the idea of media literacy should imply educating and advancing, from the youngest age, the advantages, value and importance of print media. Much as this is done in relation to books. Newspapers and magazines should be present and referred to from primary schooling upwards.

There has been a growing consensus in industry and higher educational research that print is an obsolete anachronism, with an inevitability of termination. This has been a tragic mistake but there is still time to reverse it.

The very fact a cabinet minister was telling the public to 'continue buying newspapers' in order to save journalism this week is evidence of something that politicians, opinion formers and the industry itself should have been doing for the last 30 years.

We have a very simple test to distinguish the intrinsic cultural value between the digital and printed form. If your son or daughter had been interviewed in a local, regional, or national newspaper (or national magazine) about a significant achievement and success, which would you rather keep for a later date? An online page that might be deleted sometime in the future (or become unavailable because of a url address change)? Or a paper copy of the original - something that can't disappear when somebody disconnects a computer? We would argue the latter and believe that there is still an intrinsic value of the hard copy newspaper, especially at a local level.

The issue of people having a low level of digital literacy is something of a moot point. Obviously older generations, not brought up in the digital age, have a varied level of digital literacy. This is something that investment and support for adult education could address.

The younger generations are immersed in digital communications and consumption culture. Aligned with our arguments above, with regards to print media, we would urge for some level of support through schooling which would allow them to distinguish from fake media and a well-researched piece of journalism.

### **How have digital technologies changed the production of journalism? Do journalists have access to the training necessary to adapt to the digital world?**

The pressures and stress on journalists in terms of demands in productivity and the expectation of being flexible in terms of multimedia have been immense. Journalists, particularly in local and regional newspapers, have, for some time, sent stories to web-based publications first, which are then pulled for the printed publication later. They are also expected to supply digital images in many cases. This puts an inordinate pressure on journalists to get their work right first time.

Unfortunately, there has certainly not been any concomitant increase in the reward of pay and conditions. If anything, the value of salaries in most levels of journalism has declined vis-a-vis other professions and so has the problem of precarity.

The quality of training and education in UK journalism at further and higher educational level, and in terms of in-house apprenticeships, is very high indeed. The accreditation and resources of the National Council for the Training of Journalists and Broadcast Journalism Training Council are very high, supportive, and pioneering. The UK now has HE and professional journalism education and training that is world class.

However, we should highlight that training in new technology is less available to the freelance journalist sector.

### **What qualifications do professional journalists need? How could public policy better support non-degree routes into journalism?**

Most journalists are now graduates and the larger proportion have postgraduate degrees. Many of those degrees are now journalism practice and theory specific. There are also professional modules/courses and apprenticeships accredited by the NCTJ, which are sophisticated and comprehensive. Additionally, there are a number of private financial funding methods to support the disadvantaged with access to some of this training. However, public policy could certainly support this effort with grants and loans to support this work further and encourage the non-degree routes into journalism.

### **What are the main challenges for freelance journalists? How could public policy better support them?**

The main challenge for freelance journalists is that the market for paid employment has been shrinking, while payments have become more insecure in terms of promptness and fairness. Too many online platforms, particularly in the counter-culture, non-mainstream and so-called 'citizen journalism' arenas, expect professional journalists to write and contribute content for nothing as though mere publication is some kind of reward. This is also a growing problem in mainstream journalism.

### **Why is the journalism profession not more representative of the population? How could this be addressed?**

The answer to this question is, of course, inevitably complex. Role models and visibility of representation is, of course, encouraging. Lack of equality of opportunity is usually a factor in leading to socio-economic discrimination and inequality. The increasing closure and shrinking of local and regional publications reduces the opportunity for a living, professional path of employment in local, community-based and regional publications.

Inevitably this means that the access points become more and more national, and this will favour entrants from affluent backgrounds with families able to support non-paid work experience and internships, and fund enrolment on prestigious undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of journalism and practice media specialisms.

This could be addressed with the availability of professional career grants that could support applications, and sponsorship, based on merit, and could underwrite participation in industry apprenticeship schemes as well as further and higher education. Tax breaks on profits available for supporting diversity of entrants to professional journalism could also advance more diverse participation in the profession.

## **Why has trust in journalism declined?**

We think some caution should be exercised with accepting this as a given assumption.

Overwork, the decline in the infrastructure of subbing, editing and fact-checking could be contributing factors. The appalling mistakes of a generation of editors who allowed phone-hacking to be a nefarious practice of news and information gathering, has become a hangover of shame and stigma that will still take a long time to be forgotten. This is not helped by the continuing exaggeration of its failings by public figures, lobby groups and politicians with various agendas.

Increasingly, we have seen attacks on journalists from politicians who dislike being questioned too closely – for instance the thinly veiled threats currently being aimed at the BBC funding by government officials which is based on a disagreement in media policy. We have also seen attempts to control access to media briefings. This behaviour by senior figures in the public arena does nothing but damage an already fragile situation.

## **How could it be improved?**

We would urge the House of Lords to immediately call for the cessation of such nefarious practices. The continued practice of opinion leaders who label news they don't like as 'fake' or who accuse journalists of asking inane questions, merely in an attempt to stifle questioning, should cease immediately.

We also link our answer here to our previous suggestion about more education in schools. If children were educated about how to engage with news, this would have the effect of providing a greater understanding of the journalist's role and faith in those who produce the news.

## **How can journalists better understand and convey the concerns and priorities of people who do not live in London or other metropolitan hubs?**

This can only be achieved by reviving and expanding the local and regional journalism industry. Journalists who work in this arena are closely linked to the communities they serve.

## **How can innovation and collaboration help news providers of all types to maintain sustainable business models and adapt what they produce to audience demand? What lessons can be learnt from successful innovations, including in other countries?**

We believe that so-called successful innovations and models abroad risk becoming more fool's gold rather than a holy grail of rescue and resuscitation. Media industries and cultures abroad have developed usually in vastly different societies with their own social and political histories. We would caution on succumbing to ethnocentrism, or journalistic survival tourism.

Audience demand can be stimulated and developed as well as discovered. Sustainable business models can be encouraged through legislative incentives and Parliamentary management and the tilling of commercial potential.

All forms of direct subsidy linking journalism to public bodies and government of any level must be avoided. We fear that arguments for public interest commissions with state funded bounties for a perception of 'worthy applicants' will always be prone to cronyism, corruption, and unconscious bias in selection and preferential awards.

It has now been accepted that large online digital processing platforms such as Google, Facebook and Twitter have enjoyed the benefits of professionally produced journalistic content without paying for it. They have garnered huge profits from the advertising spectrum that has been somewhat predatory on the older analogue media spheres. There must be a substantial levy imposed, we would argue, from copyright licensing distribution, based on the data that must be available on the way that professional news and journalistic media is linked to and consumed on these platforms. This is where we can learn and follow the countries whose governments have decided to legislate, such as France and Australia.

We believe the UK Parliament could substantially expand the legal obligations for buying advertising on public record events, decision-making and information distribution thereby ensuring more transparency of the public record, which also becomes an invaluable historical resource that invests in community, family memory and identity. For example, all public authorities should be allocated much greater funds for public information advertising and notices with legal obligations to use these in relevant local, regional and national media. The allocation of an obligation to buy a £100 notice for any property transaction would not only advance transparency and public knowledge of property ownership, but also create incentives for investment in local and regional newspaper publications. The same could be said for other important events and decisions taking place in society. This would invite and incentivise more local coverage.

The UK profession of journalism, particularly at the national level has been blighted with a costly indemnity on breaches of privacy through phone-hacking taking place more than 10 years ago. This has cost the industry more than 1 billion pounds in damages and legal costs. It is terrible that this amount of money was not available to employ more entrants to the profession and indeed the vitally needed research and development into the analogue transition to and symbiosis with digital publication. Why should the contemporary generation of journalists who had nothing to do with this scandal continue to pay for the crimes and civil and legal wrongs of their predecessors - most of whom have left the stage?

We recommend a statute of limitations on privacy actions to be equivalent with libel; namely one year, albeit with the High Court to have a discretion to allow, in exceptional circumstances, out of time litigation.

We also recommend the abolition of the Press Recognition Panel and the abolition of the Royal Charter set up to create it. The operation of IMPRESS serves little purpose, does not command any support and participation of serious and significant journalism publishers and does not merit any legitimisation by the State; particularly by a quango receiving public funds that would be better directed toward grant funding to enable people from diverse backgrounds to improve better representation of disadvantaged communities in journalism. If the micro-publishers operating with IMPRESS regulation wish to continue, they can do so with a body operating on a contractual basis such as IPSO.

**Are there any other ways in which public policy could better support journalists and news organisations, now and in the future? Are there examples from other countries from which the Government could learn?**

We would certainly recommend legislation that prevents advertisers from applying 'ad-blocking or 'blocklisting' in online campaigns and digital media - thereby separating and distancing commercials and sponsorship from news content. This practice is repugnant, discriminatory and based on prejudice. It is a form of indirect censorship. It must be made unlawful.

As for other issues arising from this question, please see our answer to the previous one.

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