
Keeping it real as Covid-19 pandemic forces new ways of teaching and learning

For many journalism educators (if not all) the last few months have been a torrential mix of hard work, panic and revelation. For many the final few weeks of the academic year are the ones where students work on their major projects, allowing them to develop the skills they have been learning and showing that they are ready for the world of work. For MA students and many third-year undergraduates it is a time of considerable pressure and anxiety - the last thing most needed was to be told they could not use the university facilities that they had joined their course to learn about.

Despite this anxiety, they got to grips with the new ways of working and many showed real resourcefulness and creativity when properly supported by their tutors. Here four lecturers in different universities, *Jonny Greatrex*, *Emma Hemmingway*, *Zahera Harb* and *Claire Wolfe* describe their reimagining to ensure their students were not disadvantaged and made the best of their time on the course even when working from their bedrooms connected only by their phones and the internet.

The experience of moving MA Broadcast news days online: teaching resourcefulness and creativity

Emma Hemmingway, Nottingham Trent University

The primary purpose of the MA Broadcast news days is to provide a chance for students to work in a simulated “real news” environment and it is a very attractive though demanding part of the MA course. The student cohort prepares for these days by learning all the required radio, TV and online news production skills in the four months prior to the news days starting in March of the academic year.

For the students the main attraction of the days is being allowed to learn what “being a journalist” is like in a real newsroom, TV studio and gallery. They undertake all roles from News Editor to studio camera operator, sound engineer to TV studio director, news presenters, to radio and TV reporters.

Each student will perform at least eight or ten different newsroom roles throughout the course of the 15-20 news days and be assessed on each role. In addition, all of the work handed in for assessment must be completed under news day conditions and broadcast live in the radio or TV shows scheduled each news day.

From a University standpoint news days are integral to the accreditation of the MA course and are monitored closely by the Broadcast Journalism Training Council [BJTC] so they have to be up to current industry practice and standards.

It was thus an onerous task to move a converged TV, radio and online news day to a remote online setting as immediately we were losing key elements; mainly the newsroom and studio production facilities and what these afford the students in terms of working in “real life” environments.

From the beginning as tutors, we had to be open and honest with the students about what was changing with regards to the provision. We had to recognise what we couldn't offer as much as what we could offer, and to be clear about that. It would have been harder to engage the students and get them on board with new working practices had we not been absolutely straight with what we couldn't now provide - namely everything the facilities afforded - the production of TV and Radio in a studio and news room setting.

But we emphasised what we could offer as different “extras” in terms of provision, and as this is an exercise in simulating the real world, we needed to show them what the main broadcasting organisations like the BBC or ITV or Sky News were doing and how their journalists across the world were now reporting; how they were moving online and with what varying degrees of success.

The secret of our “Success”

I would conclude that our online, remote news days were a success and that success was founded on four main principles.

The first was the careful managing of student expectations and the clear communication with them about how the module assessment points were being changed to correspond exactly with the new news day model. Students want to do well. They had to be convinced they could still succeed under these conditions. They also care that they are learning skills that will equip them in the news environment in which they will be competing for jobs. So we had to show them that they would learn brand new skills and technological applications that would be crucial to new working conditions for all journalists going forward.

The way in which we got students fully engaged with the new model was in thoroughly preparing them for the news days in advance. There were many who felt very unconfident about working remotely and autonomously so they had to feel supported throughout.

We held three planning meetings prior to the news day with whole student cohort on Microsoft Teams. We used Microsoft Teams as our primary means of communication throughout and we set up numerous channels for each section of the news day, from preparatory newsgathering meetings, online folders for story ideas, channels for each individual news day, channels for communication with separate clusters of people in the team and separate channels for staff to speak to staff and for technicians to talk to students. We also ensured that the student rotas for each news day were uploaded here in advance of the entire run of news days so students could see what they were doing on each day and prepare well for the role.

On the first news day at the very first prospects meeting held on Teams at 9am everyone was well prepared.

Success going forward with delivery

Connection

Students obviously needed to be fully connected via technology - any technological issues with students who may have been joining the teams from different parts of the world had to be managed prior to the news day. We had two students in India and one in self isolation in a facility in Slovakia. Our technicians worked tirelessly with every student to ensure their internet connection would be adequate enough to fully partake in the news day. There were some connection issues in Lincolnshire and some sporadic power cuts in Mumbai, but we managed to keep everyone connected pretty much all of the time!

Related to this and equally important was recognising that students needed to feel emotionally connected to one another and to the University as a result of that technological connection. Technology was a key player in the success of these online news days; something we as media academics have for years perhaps been underplaying in our explorations of media practice.

Communication

Students were able to communicate at all times in a number of different ways. Microsoft Teams and the way we have it set up gives them at least 3 different channels to do so. Clusters of students who are key to roles through the day, a separate channel for Editors to communicate with teams, a separate technical channel for all technical questions, a separate channel for communication with the tutor on the day and also crucially a PRIVATE space of their own where they can talk/ let off steam/complain. We made sure that final one was not monitored or encroached on by any staff. My students did this separately on What's App, though it was interesting because as the news days became more "normal" they abandoned this channel and simply communicated openly on Teams.

Community

Once the two previous provisos of connectivity and communication had been successfully established then a sense of community followed on quite naturally. If students feels they are in a learning community they value, they will invest in it... and this happened throughout the day and levels of adherence and loyalty to this community and a sense of pride in this also grew throughout the news days as they became more of a normal way of life! One of the main ways we also helped to develop this was by inventing a role whereby the two news editors on any day then pulled together all of the stories published on the web site and created a separate "news digest" on Shorthand.com which is a smart online platform where students can be more creative with production than on a word press site which out basic web site runs on. This way they created a "show-reel" for the day. It was also an assessment point so they invested in it, but in addition it gave them something to put forward to the news industry for job applications as well as sharing on social media platform and gave students an added sense of pride in the work achieved as a community.

It has also given us department portfolios for any industry awards such as BJTC and RTS.

Collaboration

This is essential so that weaker members of the team did not feel left behind or marginalized and stronger ones could do above and beyond what the remit or task outlined for them was. With online journalism there is so much scope for collaborative work as we had students sharing story ideas, video or audio inserts, infographics, data, information and even methods of using the technical software platforms we gave them. We made sure they were given anything we could lay our hands on in terms of technical applications; KapWing, Adobe Spark, Canva and even an online autocue application known as BigVu which meant they could do Facebook lives or news presenting from their bedrooms and we could make sure we retained the crucial broadcasting elements of the news day, as opposed to only developing online skills.

This collaborative work deepened their individual experiences and brought added dimensionality to the work as well as showing them how this is an essential component of online work in the "real world."

Challenges and the future

The main challenge was to make sure that students kept in touch remotely and weaker students did "go off radar" from time to time and were harder to track down than if they had been physically present in a newsroom. To avoid this we did set on the day staggered deadlines and had a final publishing deadline by which all material had to have been submitted, seen and subbed by editors and then by a staff member and published in time for a 4pm deadline. If work was not published in time (and some wasn't) it could not be handed in for assessment. The newsgathering side of things went surprisingly well even given the challenge of finding interviewees without students leaving bedrooms or houses! The students seemed to have more confidence in ringing and approaching people for interviews remotely than they do in a newsroom where the feel watched or monitored or even judged by their peers. This was a surprising discovery and one which we can work with for the future in building up student confidence in the early days of newsgathering.

I will certainly be building remote news days into my teaching curriculum going forward, even when and if we do return to teaching news days in a newsroom environment. These days teach students how to work autonomously; how to be resourceful and creative working alone out in the field. I believe that more remote working will certainly be a common practice within the industry for all journalists and many of our students have now developed crucial skills on more online applications geared to remote working than many professional journalists already working in established broadcasting organisations.

MA student newsdays: Doing it for real in Covid's new normal

Jonny Greatrex, Nottingham Trent University

Newsweeks on the MA News Journalism course at Nottingham Trent University are an integral part of our teaching toolkit and student experience. Our students spend eight intensive months learning the skills and knowledge they need to successfully run a live digital news brand and its accompanying social media channels across two weeks in May. They take on different roles working as reporters or on newsdesk. We try to make the experience as “real” as we can, to give them an experience close to working in a professional newsroom.

The UK's coronavirus lockdown presented several challenges which threatened to undermine this experience for our students. These ranged from pedagogical concerns about whether learning outcomes could still be met and assessments still completed with the necessary rigour, to the more hearts and minds issues around getting students to engage with a process which would be inherently different to the one they and their tutors expected.

There were also the more mundane but equally important issues around whether our technology and workflows would function well enough to allow for cohesive teamwork and what exactly students who could not leave their homes would report on. We considered postponing or even cancelling the newsweeks however we chose to run them remotely online. It was the right decision.

The module learning outcomes and assessments issues were quickly overcome. A close reading of the module spec showed all outcomes could be met by students working remotely. As a news journalism course focused on digital-only publishing we do not require specialist teaching spaces to produce our journalism. The original assessment needing tweaking, particularly around requirements for original video and stills, however the briefs which were set at the start of the year still held.

Winning the hearts and minds of students was a bigger challenge. The cohort was not inherently hostile to remote online newsweeks, however as their course leader I sensed a degree of anxiety when first explaining how, to quote a former prime minister ‘nothing had changed’. This was overcome in several ways. We ran detailed briefing and preparation sessions including clear descriptions of roles, expectations and workflows with shared online documents outlining briefs and rotas in our virtual learning environment NOW and on a dedicated Google Drive. Students were offered increased 1-2-1 tutorials to help them prepare their newlists before the newsweeks started. It was explained to students they would be operating the same way as thousands of journalists who were now working remotely.

These extra preparation activities allowed us to test tech we would rely on – our university uses Microsoft Teams – for communication while also acclimatise to the new rhythm of our learning, which was broadly, meet, discuss, go away and work independently, meet, discuss and review (an unexpected benefit from a tutor perspective was punctuality for online sessions was much better than the face to face ones they replaced). Finally, students were assured there was no shortage of news to cover in Nottingham. It might be different to previous years, but there was plenty happening.

The newsweeks were not without challenges. Teaching via Teams – even if it is just running conferences, 1-2-1s and debriefs – was especially tiring. A power cut in Mumbai left one student cut off from us for a day. Another student's laptop and wifi only just held-up. And of course, we would much rather have been in our busy student newsroom working side by side as a team.

However, what was remarkable was how “normal” the operation felt just a couple of days into the first newsweek. We followed the same routine as if we were in the newsroom. We stuck to our usual schedule with conferences in the morning and afternoon. Guest editors joined us for these then occupied a “room” in Teams where students took turns for 1-2-1s to discuss their work. Our early guest editors included recent

MA News graduates now working as reporter for regional titles using their laptops and wifi from home. This was a usual reminder to students that the way they were working matched the real world. We decided being on a perpetual videocall together would be too draining so instead communicated (almost constantly) via the group chat function in Teams. This meant tutor feedback to one student was seen by the group. When students needed individual help tutors or guest editors were available instantly via video call. Students said they felt well supported through the two weeks.

There were also some unexpected positives in this approach. A key part of newsweeks is building students' confidence and ability to work effectively with limited supervision. The increased challenge the students faced working this way was rewarded with an even greater sense of achievement and boosted confidence. Similarly, they were working alone, without distractions, with just their journalism to focus on. There is sometimes a temptation for students to coast during newsweeks, letting others take the strain. This is less easy when you know you will be on a videocall in an hour outlining the progress you have made since the last conference (this is a small cohort MA, this might not translate well to large undergraduate programmes). And, the most terrifying activity a student journalist faces, making phone calls in front of peers, became, making phone calls in your bedroom. We suspect students made many more phone calls than usual. These unexpected positives mean we will consider – pandemic or no pandemic – running at least some newsdays in this format for future cohorts.

Crucially, the students were able to meet their learning outcomes and fulfil the assessment requirements. Just like audiences for real news outlets, no-one would know the work they saw on our platforms was done via webcam and wifi with people spread between Wolverhampton and Mumbai. We would never have chosen to do it this way. It was not a normal experience, but we did manage to offer students their first taste of doing it for real in the new normal.

Seven points to consider when teaching journalism practice online

Zahera Harb, City, University of London

On March 16, City, University of London decided we are moving to online teaching. We, on the MA International Journalism programme, had two weeks left of our term two and were looking forward to term three, when seven weeks of news production take place.

Much speculation about what we could do and not do were surfacing among colleagues from inside and outside City. Students anxiety levels were rising and emails of panic started to ping into our inboxes questioning our decision to switch practice teaching to online and not postpone it. The uncertainty that surrounded us on different levels guided us as a team to go ahead with plans to substitute studio-based broadcast production with online remote production of multimedia websites embedding the broadcast component of the course within the suggested multimedia production.

We completed seven weeks of broadcast and multimedia production module remotely. 43 students were engaged in producing two multimedia websites, including the production of 16 live streaming TV and Radio news bulletin. Following every day of production, students' anxiety in regard to learning outcomes were significantly calming down. They became excited and fully engaged in every step of the news production process. By the last two weeks of production, the culmination of their hard work and preparation manifested itself. They were in control of running their websites three days a week over two weeks, producing new content and updating available content. Excitement grew higher for what we call production fortnight (weeks six and seven) and students successfully met their goals. However, to be able to achieve this, huge effort by staff and additional tech resources had to be put in place and above all that students' willingness to learning

and to adapt to new mode of receiving it.

Much of what I have read on teaching online, relates to lecture based modules, which have little to do with running editorial meetings, engaging with student discussions about ideas, layout, sounds, footage, supervising editorial content and bulletins running order and making sure reporters, editors and producers meet their deadlines, etc... here are a few things I learned through that experience.

Teaching practice online requires more resources in staff numbers and in tech equipment and software.

If we are to deliver good quality journalism practice teaching, hold to our reputation and meet students' expectations to a large extent, we need to enhance our tutor hours and not decrease them. We need to enhance our technical resources and not cut them.

Practice teaching can only be efficient if done in small groups, where students are able to get one to one feedback on work they produce.

To assess teamwork and to be able to step in if a crisis happens means tutors need to be part of several groups of communication and lines of news production. The time designated for contact hours becomes blurry and irrelevant.

One platform of communication is not enough. We have been utilising Zoom and Microsoft Teams at the same time and in addition students have established a third line of communication via social media the like of Facebook and WhatsApp. Moodle has been used as a place to share resources, but in many cases that role was taken over by Microsoft Teams. Students endorse easy access platforms of communication. They go with the familiar most of the time.

Students online need individual attention. They appreciate the fact we are showing we care by setting individual meetings, when one slips off the radar. The personal connection, assurances and support we offer students face to face become harder online. Hence more time and effort are needed to pay attention to individual grievances.

Attending to details, making sure they can access the online sessions, being patient with technical hiccups, with their WiFi not holding up (and ours for that matter), mitigating assessment criteria to fit all of that, making sure they get the best learning experience without forgetting that we are all going through a global crisis, are all draining emotions tutors have to endure on daily basis and I cannot see that being sustainable on the long run.

The hardest encounter of all was not been able to reassure two of my British students, whose very old laptops could not cope with downloading editing software. All I could do is direct them to the hardship fund the University has established, which might only cover part of new laptop costs. Students access to the right equipment is essential for their online practice learning experience. To overcome issues with students' technical resources, we asked them to share resources working as pairs (forming a small unit of support), in using their mobile phones to film, to count on their team mate's mobile camera if theirs was not good enough for example. Students technical resources are crucial for their online learning. We had to buy a new light weight editing software to address some of these issues, which had to be emailed individually to each one of them. We ran online training sessions on how to use the software, but that would have been more complicated and time consuming if students had not already had training on Premier Pro software in the department newsrooms earlier in the year. To enhance their live broadcast production, the department bought two live streaming apps for the tech team to form live hubs and run it from their home computers.

Student feedback, which the seven learning points listed above incorporate, expressed satisfaction with the skills and knowledge they learned. Many withdrew the cynicism they expressed in the first few days of news production.

We as a team are excited about what students have been able to achieve during these weeks. We were five tutors looking after 43 students, of which some were working beyond their contracted hours, along with four members of the department technical team, making sure we give our students some of the experience in producing broadcast news they were promised when they joined our program. During those seven weeks, we sought input from eight guest speakers via Zoom. Eight journalists shared their experience working remotely during lockdown and gave students extra tips on mobile journalism production and online broadcast and multimedia skills. In addition, we gave students access to several recorded testimonies from journalists, our graduates, on how to overcome the challenges of producing news remotely.

Much of the basic learning and teaching of news production and storytelling took place earlier in the year, I wonder what additional hurdles we could face and if we ought to start the process of learning and teaching broadcast journalism practice online (remotely) from day one.

Fledgling snappers turn to social documentary

Claire Wolfe, University of Worcester

Teaching a year one photography module at the University of Worcester turned into a baptism of fire in more ways than one.

To be suddenly and unexpectedly thrust into teaching the topic after being an enthusiastic iPhone snapper was a challenge in itself. A Nikon D7200 became my new best friend along with a helpful technician.

Brushing up my Photoshop skills was another challenge and I learnt to navigate my way around the various online 'professionals' who either talk to you like a geek or a total gooner. Finding that middle ground, with just the right pace, brought back the horrors of finger thumbing and window gazing as a young pupil - a lesson in itself!

I determined that this would be an exciting journey for the group. It began with floods. The freak weather sent torrents down the River Severn bringing extensive flooding throughout the city. Our campus was cut off with students stranded in halls on either side of the river. It proved a perfect storm for some dramatic flood pictures, but the main worry was how to enthuse the students without them ending up the subject of a tragic news report. They now understand the importance of owning a pair of Wellington boots.

Some of the excellent images captured included people stranded in cars, young lads fishing in a car park and swans taking over the shopping areas.

With Assignment one successfully out of the way we prepared to crack on with the second, a series of portraits with news story and a stand-alone news picture with copy.

Next came pestilence. Covid-19 brought a sudden halt to sessions with students scrambling to get flights back to the USA, Finland, Poland and the Czech Republic. Home-grown students fled home before total lockdown.

Immediately spotting the potential for social documentary style work I urged them to capture these historic moments. I realised I was being a bit too ruthless when one female advised that she was so upset at parting from her boyfriend she simply couldn't take the photos. Some were in meltdown and fearing the worst.

I hurriedly rewrote the assignment and asked them to focus on the stories of people in their homes. They also needed to be alert with a keen news sense when going for their daily exercise. This proved difficult for some of the international students who had been quarantined. However, one San Franciscan managed to get to the testing centre in a park and took some superb shots. Others unearthed stories of troubled journeys back home, illness, courageous acts and the simple, but effective stories of ordinary humans coping in lockdown.

They appreciated what makes a news story. The captions had a clear news focus. As a group the students achieved mostly grade As and Bs. The work was second marked and the moderator was impressed by the high standards, not quibbling over the grades - in fact suggesting a grade A went up to A+. What was most impressive was that the Nikons took a back seat. Students couldn't physically book them out. I accepted smartphones and arranged for free access to Photoshop.

Teaching them the skill of getting a good idea and framing content well from the start, helped to minimise the need for massive editing. Recognising this helped them to become better 'mobile journalists'. They also learnt how to be creative, with little to work on. They had to talk to their own family members and, in some cases, close friends, in a different, more gentle, probing way to extract good copy. There was a realisation that the intuitiveness of journalists can really 'make' the news.

And what did I learn? It refreshed me on the skills of the newsroom. There is opportunity in every crisis. No blank pages. But most of all it reminded me of how talented young people are. Give them the confidence and motivation to achieve and they really can do great things.

Software used

Moving online obliged the use of new and often unfamiliar software. Here are some of the apps involved:

Microsoft Teams – industry standard videoconferencing app.

Zoom – a widely used videoconferencing app.

KapWing – online creative collaborative platform ideal for infographics.

Adobe Spark – online design package.

Adobe Photoshop – industry standard picture editing software.

Canva - design software that makes design simple, convenient, and reliable.

BigVu – an online autocue app.

Facebook – ubiquitous social media app.

WhatsApp – encrypted message app and communication tool.

Moodle or Blackboard – both are educational information platforms widely used and available in most universities.

Reviews

The reviews pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed, please contact Tor on tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk

The Covid pandemic has slowed the release of new books in 2020 and slowed the opportunity to review books so this edition we take the opportunity to report some of the new releases from major publishers including many by AJE members.

Jukes, Stephen (2020) Journalism and Emotion Sage publications Ltd: London pback: £27.99; eBook: £21.99; pages: 200

Stephen Jukes of Bournemouth University, UK asks how can we understand the complex relationship between journalism and emotion? He goes on to explain that in a world of live-streamed terror, polarised political debates and fake news, emotion has become central to our understanding of contemporary journalism.

Including interviews with leading journalists throughout, *Journalism and Emotion* critically explores the impact of this new affective media environment, not just on the practice of journalism, but also the lived experience of journalists themselves.

Bringing together theory and practice, Stephen explores:

- The history of objectivity and emotion in journalism, from pre-internet to digital.
- The ‘emotionalisation’ of culture in today’s populist media landscape.
- The blurring of boundaries between journalism and social media content.
- The professional practices of journalists working with emotive material.
- The mental health risks to journalists covering traumatic stories.
- The impact on journalists handling graphic user-generated content.

•In today’s interactive, interconnected and participatory media environment, there is more emotive content being produced and shared than ever before. *Journalism and Emotion* helps you make sense of this,

