

# Journalism education development in the UK and its move to the academy

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## Abstract

Education and training are central to improving standards of performance in skill or knowledge-based activity, so it is no surprise that journalism training and education has developed over the past 150 years.

There are four identifiable stages of educational development in the UK. Formal journalism training is relatively recent in the UK. Journalism courses were first introduced 100 years ago in the early 1920s, but it was not until the 1950s and the introduction of the National Council for the Training of Journalists that training was put on a more formal footing and the first undergraduate programmes only started in the UK in 1991, a mere 30 years ago. Until very recently, many commentators still claimed that the best way to learn journalism was by doing it and that university courses were not just a waste of time but were actually counter-productive.

This paper examines the four eras of journalism training that take modern UK journalism to a highly skilled occupation showing how each era had a specific importance for, and effect on, the journalism of its time.

# Introduction

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

The early years of journalism were driven by a mix of entrepreneurs, campaigners and enthusiasts, much like today's bloggers, but as technology allowed wider circulation of more topical news and papers became more business-like, so they needed more professional journalists. At first, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, these needed only to be people of sound education and good general knowledge, largely men. But as the media carrying journalism became more technical, the job more skilled and the pressures more intense so the needs of employers in terms of training developed.

This paper identifies four key stages in the development of journalism training in the UK over the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries.

## The early days of journalism training

Training of the growing band of early professional reporters was limited to learning as you worked. There were no training schemes and precious little in the way of support. Few books were available to lead the way for the new reporter. One of the first books to be published about journalism in the UK was the *Reporter's Guide* (Reed: 1873) a delightful but small publication full of detailed advice for the budding reporter. A further book *Newspaper Reporting: In Olden Times and To-day* (Pendleton: 1890) also throws some interesting light onto reporting in the early days of telegraph, but before the motor car. Pendleton describes the down-side of the job:

*"...one of the most detestable of reporting experiences is to attend a similar political meeting far away and be obliged to get back the same night. It is head-aching, eye-straining work for the reporter to transcribe his shorthand notes, for instance, in the guard's van of a fish train jolting over forty miles of railway, especially when he is expected at the office soon after midnight with his copy 'written up' ready to hand to the printers." (Pendleton 1890: 188)*

Further on Pendleton describes the adventures of two reporters trying to track down a reported rail crash by horse-drawn hansom cab in the early hours of the morning in a snowstorm. After trailing around the countryside in the blizzard seeking the train, their horse becomes exhausted. They trap on by foot, to eventually find that two freight trucks have bumped each other and one has jumped the track. Nowadays, of course, such an event would be merely a phone call.

Both these books tell tales of working with pens and ink in the days before typewriters in a world where much was changing, particularly in the world of politics and reporting. The House of Commons burned down in 1834 and with the new building, Pendleton tells us, came a new breed of reporters. Despite continuing attempts by some members of parliament to resist the reporting of parliament, Pendleton reports that Macauley spoke the sentiments of the country when he said: ... "The gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm. The publication of the debates, a practice which seemed to the most liberal statesman of the old school full of danger to the great safeguards of public liberty, is now regarded by many persons as a safeguard tantamount, and more than tantamount, to all the rest together. (Pendleton 1890: 78)

When it comes to the practice of journalism and advice given in books of the time, both Reed and Pendleton are united that shorthand is one of the key skills of the reporter together with the capacity to transcribe it in a good hand.

*"It is impossible to report verbatim a speech, for instance like Mr Gladstone's on the Home Rule question without the help of shorthand..." (Pendleton 1890: 121)*

So important is the verbatim speech to newspapers of this time, that reporters covering a major speech would combine together to form "a ring"; up to eight reporters would combine their talents to each take a two-minute report transcribed onto flimsy. Pendleton is not specific about what happens after, but presumably each reporter transcribes his notes and shares them with the colleagues in the "ring".

Few other skills are mentioned as being needed by a reporter other than to be "courteous to high and low"

(Pendleton 1890: 158). Pendleton quotes Charles Dickens speaking at the 1865 Newspaper Press Fund dinner:

*“I have often transcribed for the printer, from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour.”* (cited in Pendleton 1890: 166-167)

Journalists of this early period clearly took their work seriously, but whilst they worked hard, there was not the need for much skill other than a reasonable general education and shorthand. Technology was limited to the telegraph and a coach and horses.

Very little seems to have been written about journalism from the late 1800s until the Second World War. Things were changing, but the pace was slow. *Modern Journalism* by Carr and Stevens (1931), *The Complete Journalist* by Mansfield (1935) and *Practical Journalism* by Baker (1931), were the main books written about the craft during this period.

It is a period of considerable development: a diploma in journalism was started in 1919 by the London University with a course in practical journalism and English composition with optional choices in the fields of politics, economics, literature, history or modern languages. It is notable for its intention to add to the simple reporter skills of note-taking and office practice by introducing options that would widen the reporter’s horizons and improve their analytical and support skills; a divide that becomes clearer 70 years on as training moved on from the simple skill-based course of the NCTJ to university programmes.

Carr and Stevens were much impressed with the course:

*“The lecture courses are comprehensive and that in practical journalism is one of great utility to the journalistic beginner. A recent syllabus shows that the subjects include the following: ‘news collecting and writing’; ‘The function of the sub-editor’; ... ‘Organisation of the newspaper office’; ‘General reporting: the field work’; ‘Reporting in the courts’; ‘Typography’; and ‘the work of the sports reporter.’ The lectures which come under these headings last for an hour, and a second hour is devoted to practical work connected with the subject of the lecture.”* (Carr and Stevens 1931: 10-11)

Despite this development, very few books about journalism were written in the UK during the first half of the Twentieth Century, although this was not true of the US where degree courses were being started as early as 1913, notably by Dean Williams in the University of Missouri (Ibid. 9).

Charles Pilley, a barrister, produced *Law For Journalists* (1924) and this ran to several editions.

FJ Mansfield’s *The Complete Journalist* (1935) was one of the few UK books on journalism to be written in the first half of the twentieth Century. A foreword written by the former prime minister the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George expresses his astonishment that this should be the case:

*“Men who devote themselves to a calling so far reaching in its influence upon the nation clearly deserve the most careful training and preparation, the fullest literature of instruction, that can be provided. Yet it is an astounding fact that only in the most recent years have courses in journalism found their way into the curricula of a very few of our universities, while there are hardly any really good textbooks giving an adequate survey of this field of crucially important activity.”* (Mansfield 1935: viii)

Mansfield’s book took an impressively broad sweep of the training needs of journalists with chapters on the make up of the press, reporting, sub-editing, speciality reporting and the law. However the profession was still heavily male dominated (although Mansfield emphasises the growing requirement for women journalists) and traditional in approach. Ethics is hardly mentioned in Mansfield’s book, although he does talk about a code of honour. The late thirties were starting to show some of the same ethical cracks that we see today and the debate around Bills calling for the registration of Journalists, and a suggestion for a “Truthful Press Act” was a live issue. Walter Lippman called for professional training while H.G. Wells suggested that: “a well-paid and well-organised profession of journalism is our only protection against the danger of rich adventurers directing groups of newspapers” (Mansfield 1953: 372)

Newspapers remained unchallenged as a news medium until the serious advent of radio in the 1930s so although there was a wider use of typewriters than in Reed’s day, and the new journalism was starting to add more interpretation into stories than had been the case before but there was still little change in the way

that the journalism was taught.

## After the Second World War

The London University journalism diploma did not survive the Second World War (Bundock 1957: 67). The immediate post-war period, therefore, also lacked almost any kind of formal training or education for journalists in the UK. This was in stark contrast to the US where there had been Journalism Colleges for more than 40 years. It was a contrast that did not go un-noticed for long:

*“... Newspapermen do not have to pass examinations. Universities do not grant degrees in journalism, and the diploma course which existed at London University before the war failed because of its lack of practical instruction. Only one technical college in Britain has so far established part-time courses. Equally strange for such a great calling, there is little literature on the technique of modern newspaper work.”*

(Kelmsley 1950: v)

In 1950 it was decided by Lord Kemsley that it was time to take a more serious approach to training. He decided to run the “Kemsley Editorial Plan” an ambitious programme of training that would develop talent within his newspaper group. It was supported by The Kemsley Manual of Journalism (1950).

The Kemsley Editorial Plan intended to:

*“secure that in every stage in the editorial hierarchy, at first by direct instruction and later by conference and discussion, all shall be equipped to perform their immediate tasks in the most satisfactory manner.”*

(Kemsley 1950: 388)

It did this through the Manual and a series of four- and five-day courses for all levels of staff. The manual was one of the first systematic books designed to train journalists with 43 chapters arranged in eight separate “books” including one chapter by Ian Fleming then foreign manager of Kemsley Newspapers, just a year or two before the publication of his first James Bond book.

The Plan was launched in 1947, but neither the courses nor the book seemed to take training of journalism very much further than those books published 20 years previously. There was now much more attention to the work of the production journalist, however, indicating the increase in technology and its application to journalism.

The Kemsley Manual also mentions the Diploma Course in Journalism that was run at the Technical College in Cardiff. This was the first course of its kind since the war. It offered five hours of evening classes a week over three years. Students took practical journalism each year and shorthand in one year of their choice.

Then in each year, they took one of section B and one of section C:

Section B: Current affairs for journalists; English lit (drama and novel); English lit (poetry) or; English lit (Shakespeare)

Section C: English composition; elements of economics; public administration; Economics and social history, or psychology. (Ibid 396-7)

Journalism was still seen as a job that could be done by someone with a reasonably broad education and a willingness to learn. Shorthand and some practical journalism was taught in courses, but was more generally picked up on the job, either in schemes like those run by Kemsley’s newspapers or the more usual apprenticeships run by his competitors. Shorthand was learned either from a book, or more often from night classes in the local technical college. This would involve the young journalist joining a secretarial class for shorthand tuition.

The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) was started in 1952 by employers’ groups, trade unions and editors under the grand title of the National Council, overseeing training schemes in newspapers – it did not offer training for entry to journalism.

On the back of this steady formalisation of journalism training, the early sixties saw a sudden flourishing

of books about journalism with offerings from authors such as John Dodge and George Viner, (Then Director of the NCTJ and the NUJ's training officer respectively) Rodney Bennett-England (a former long-standing NCTJ director) and from Dudley Barker (another journalist) all produced within months of each other.

This in-newspaper training continued into the seventies with the NCTJ encouraging and sponsoring the publication of a number of books. Many journalists who were trained in this era fondly remember the series produced by former Sunday Times editor Harold Evans. His books *Newsman's English* (1972), *Handling Newspaper Text* (1974), *News Headlines* (1974), *Pictures on a Page* (1979) and *Newspaper Design* (1973) are classics and many still use them today.

Training during the decades from the fifties to the eighties remained largely in this mould, led by the NCTJ and developed in provincial newspaper in-house schemes. These were funded and driven, to a large extent, by the Printing and Publication Industry Training Board: a quango set up to oversee training in those industries. In the seventies and eighties block release courses and then pre-entry courses were introduced operating to the NCTJ's syllabus.

Broadcasting was largely run by the BBC until the middle of the seventies but the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) introduced Independent Local Radio and by 1977 there were 19 stations (Crissell 1997: 187). The BBC was also building its local radio network through the seventies and eighties (ibid. 143). Broadcasting had long insisted on taking only graduates as recruits unless they had considerable experience already as newspaper journalists and in so doing had often taken excellent recruits who did not want to work in local newspapers (Cole 1998: 69). This demand for additional journalists to feed the growing number of broadcast stations led universities to start Broadcast Journalism post graduate courses.

## Training moves away from the workplace

The eighties were a period of rapid and dramatic change allowing universities to develop newspaper post-graduate courses building on their experience with pre-entry programmes and their Broadcast PG courses. These were given impetus as the industrial changes sparked by the Thatcher era came in tempting employers into cost-cutting. First the abolition of the PPITB left newspaper proprietors keen to reduce their spending on training following the withdrawal of state funding (Cole 1998: 70). These changes in funding led to students' needs becoming paramount and universities led the substantial growth in graduate entry to journalism.

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

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

This growth in journalism education through the eighties and early nineties led to a burst of new books aimed at the increasing numbers of students of journalism. Mainly practical, these were about introducing the new postgraduate influx to universities to the arts of journalism. Focal Press was particularly active in publishing a range of journalism books.

A typical example of a late 20th Century journalism textbook is *Practical Newspaper Reporting* by Geoffrey Harris and David Spark which was the standard primer during the seventies, eighties and nineties and beyond. This was first written in 1966 for the NCTJ and is now in its fourth edition.

F. W. Hodgson was another early author producing several books including *Modern Newspaper Practice*:



*A Primer on the Press and Subediting: A Handbook of Modern Newspaper Editing and Production* (1987). McNae's *Essential Law for Journalism*, well known to journalism students and practitioners in its latest edition, had replaced Pilley in 1954 and books on Teeline shorthand were also books that could be (or should have been) discovered in any journalist student's bag.

It was not long before this student-driven desire to be trained as a journalist no longer linked directly to employment was converted by universities into undergraduate programmes. Lancashire Polytechnic, City University and London College of Communications were the first in the UK to launch a degree in journalism with each launching courses in 1991.

## Universities and hackademics

The modern era of journalism training was heralded with the introduction of undergraduate programmes for journalism. They were popular from the start with students. Nearly 2,000 candidates applied for the 40 places in journalism at the University of Central Lancashire [formerly Lancashire Polytechnic] in the early nineties. These numbers persuaded universities already running journalism post-graduate courses to quickly launch their own journalism under-graduate courses and by ten years later there were more than 30 HE institutions in the UK offering journalism degree courses and by 2022 there were 582 courses from 100 providers according to UCAS. There is now considerable evidence that demand for journalism courses is now easily filled by supply and universities are not expanding in journalism any longer.

By 1995, the Guild of Editors had found that the typical entrant to journalism was now a middle class graduate (Cole 1998: 73). This was not welcomed in many newspaper newsrooms, and the start of undergraduate programmes in journalism brought these long-held prejudices against academics and academic journalism in particular to the fore (Gopsill and Neale 2007: 238; Cole 1998: 67). Many fulminated in public and in private about the "Mickey Mouse" nature of media, and by extension journalism, degrees the view being held that training for journalists was of limited value and certainly that a degree in journalism was largely pointless.

But the tide by now was unstoppable. Young people wanted to be journalists and they expected to get a degree so the choice of gaining a journalism degree became increasingly popular. There was also a growing realisation that the news business was no longer a simple "minute-taking" exercise of reporting public speeches and events. The modern reporter was expected to understand the background and select appropriate stories and sources and report them with some level of analysis that required additional education. Law, politics and accurate reporting skills were still vital but some of the technical skills beloved of course of the sixties and seventies such as shorthand and typing far less so whilst analytical skills and understanding of issues such as economics, politics, ethics and science became far more important as readers expected tight reports that not only reported what but explained why. The course design team in the University of Central Lancashire (still Press Polytechnic at the time) were somewhat chagrined to find after their first couple of meetings that their must-have plans for their new degree programme would take seven years to deliver! It was a shock that hit many academics leading to many specialist courses such as magazine journalism, sports journalism, broadcast journalism and eventually digital journalism alongside joint honours programmes combining journalism with politics or economics.

Alongside this, newspaper circulations were dipping and into the new millennium more and more journalists were seeking the relatively safe haven of the academy as jobs in journalism became more difficult to obtain and senior jobs suitable for those seeking promotion became even more difficult to find.

This move to the academy led to it becoming a significant employer of journalists with hundreds taking up posts as "hackademics" as they swiftly became known following the use of the term by Mathew Engel (2003: 61 cited by Harcup 2011: 34).

As these newly minted academics made the transition, many became more concerned with the central business of universities: scholarship and research. The traditional newsroom-based postgraduate courses with their heavy emphasis on experiential learning was of necessity morphed into a more mixed course of theory of practice with time spent in newsrooms split with more traditional lectures, seminars and tutorials. This move towards leavening journalism practice with skills of critical analysis and evaluation was demanded both by the universities and their quality assessment programmes but also by the students and in many cases by the hackademics. To be promoted in the academy involved becoming an administrator or a researcher and scholar and for many the administration route was unattractive. To gain respect and advance-

ment in the university requires one to become a researcher (Errigo and Franklin 2004: 44).

So from the mid to late nineties, as journalism undergraduate courses increased in popularity the pressure was on with hackademics deciding to become researchers. To do this, of course, they were obliged to publish and so there was a rapid growth in publishing opportunities.

Journalism Studies (Routledge) and Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism were both started in 2000 offering opportunities for these new as well as existing academics. Growth was fast enough to allow Routledge to launch Journalism Practice a couple of years later. Other journals such as Ethical Space also launched in the early part of the new century. Although UK based, all three are international in scope and Journalism Studies and Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism in particular carry relatively few articles from UK hackademics working in UK institutions.

Despite the increase many hackademics have found it very difficult to get involved in research. Several reasons have been identified for this (see Errigo and Franklin, Harcup, and Greenberg). Fear played some part: "Fear that any topic a mere hackademic generates will be knocked back with scornful disdain, some of which might also be offered by other hackademics." (Errigo and Franklin 2004: 44). Time is another problem for the newly appointed journalism teacher struggling to develop teaching, new modules and dealing with the ever-present administration. However many have made it and this can be identified by three factors:

The rapid growth in the number of journalism professors;

The Rapid growth in the number of journalism books published;

The growth in the number of journal articles and conference contributions.

In the late eighties there was hardly a professor of journalism in the UK but now with about 100 universities offering journalism programmes most of these have at least one professor of journalism, some have more. In the early days, some professors were appointed because of their standing in the industry and it did not signify any research profile. This now happens more rarely, although it is not unusual to appoint a visiting professor from the industry for their standing with the profession rather than any academic reputation.

The growth in journalism research is reflected in the number of books published about it in the last ten to fifteen years. A quick Google search for journalism books produced more than 367,000 results whilst an Amazon search found more than 90,000 spanning technology, journalism practice, law, ethics, politics, foreign news and much more. It is probably fair to assume that at least 10 percent of these, probably more, are produced by UK authors, journalists or hackademics.

## Technology

The development of computer technology has of course been a serious driver for the development of journalism in the academy.

The first degree programmes started near the advent of newspaper technology. Most newspapers in the UK switched to direct input from 1986 but desktop computers were only just starting at the end of that decade. Many university journalism courses used Amstrad PCWs on which to write stories. The necessity to remember to save the story to disk after writing caused many a calamity. Desktop publishing only started in the early nineties and students often had to share one or two scarce machines that were slow running with hard drives of only 10Mb or 20 if you were lucky. Windows 3.1 was only introduced in the early nineties for IBM PC users, Macs had had a graphical OS much earlier.

The need to train student journalists in the technology of digital working, initially for production purposes and then into more complex social media and mobile technology meant training in universities where staff were researching these cutting-edge methods became a necessity. Newspapers and broadcast stations found they needed to join this revolution or risk being swamped by the swathe of digital providers that were fast becoming the norm. Content provision for commercial non-media operations as well as for more traditional news output, albeit in blogs or web news providers was becoming the norm and many students started to graduate into such jobs as the technology developed during the noughties and 2010s. It is often difficult to remember that Wikipedia only launched in 2000, just over 20 years ago. Facebook and Twitter both launched for the public in 2006, Instagram in 2010 and others subsequent to that. These are now dominant technologies for both person to person communication and for news, comment and opinion. A student who can't use social media to find stories, source contacts and interviews and publish is doomed in a world where broadcasting in real-time is struggling and newspaper print circulations are plummeting. National

newspaper circulations have fallen consistently over the past 20 years with key tabloids averaging 14percent in the last year and many papers refusing to divulge their figures. Regional papers have fared no better. The Manchester Evening News, Newcastle Chronicle and Shropshire Star each lost more than 70percent of their circulation from 2012 to 2011 (MEN 74,702 to 22,107, the Chronicle 45,225 to 12,914 (2021) the Star 46,489 to 13,669) while the Yorkshire Evening Post fared even worse losing over 81percent of its circulation in the same period from 31,198 to 5,926. <https://pressgazette.co.uk/abcs-regional-daily-newspaper-circulation-2021/> and <http://pressgazette.co.uk/regional-abcs-only-two-regional-dailies-put-circulation-year-year-brightons-argus-biggest-faller/>.

Digital only papers, content delivery for social media and online are the way forward for most student journalists and the skills they need are what most courses are now teaching.

## The Future

The future is likely to see continuing change, perhaps with more examination of education in other countries (Solkin 2022) although the prevailing introverted approach of the government does not encourage that. It is however certain that the move to a digital future means that journalism education now faces a lurch into another era that coincides with changes in education funding.

Already many have identified that the postgraduate courses that grew up in the eighties are struggling to hold on to their students as fees rocket and many universities have closed such courses. Changes in funding arrangements for higher education that leave undergraduate students with debts of £50,000 or more may well make even undergraduate programmes unattractive and the government is considering even more radical changes in university funding although their aim to support courses that lead to careers could make journalism more attractive even if those careers are undergoing massive change.

Alongside this, consequent falling circulations means journalism will continue to lose readers and so become an even more social media focussed industry.

Research should continue to develop as academic expectations of journalism increase with more and more hackademics studying for a PhD as they seek promotion in the academy to further their new careers.

There seems to be no diminution in a desire to know what is going on outside one's own environ even if there is more desire for news that supports beliefs rather than news that informs beliefs and so there will always be a need for journalists and so journalism education.

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