



Emerging skills for journalists



An independent research
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Contents

ON
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Executive summary	4
1 Introduction	6
2 Drivers of change	7
2.1 Developments in the business environment	7
2.2 Leveson	9
2.3 Change to IT and digitisation	11
3 Impacts	13
3.1 Impact on employment levels	13
3.2 Changing sectoral employment of journalists	14
3.3 Changing age balance of journalists	17
3.4 Maintaining quality	18
3.5 Working across different platforms	23
3.6 Relationships with the audience	24
3.7 Photographic skills	26
4 Continuing skills and professional development	27
4.1 Entry into journalism	27
4.2 New and enhanced skills needed	28
4.3 Provision of training	29
4.4 Consultation on training provision	30
5 Conclusions	31

Executive summary



Background

The world in which journalists work is fast-changing. This research project has been commissioned to identify the issues that are affecting journalism and the impacts that these changes are having. The research will feed directly into the provision of journalism training, via the NCTJ's development strategy and five year plan, but is also a contribution to the wider discussion on the development of journalistic skills.

This project is a qualitative research project, which has identified (i) the factors driving change in the journalism profession, (ii) the impacts of these forces, and (iii) the implications for continuing professional development and training of journalists. The research process included the drafting of an initial 'issues paper', following this with a consultation paper, which was circulated across all parts of the publishing and broadcast industry. This yielded some 20 responses, from educators, employers, employer representatives, and representatives of individual journalists which have been gathered together, along with the earlier inputs, into this final report. The advantage of this approach is that it has allowed respondents to fully consider their responses to the complex issues that are at play.

The report discusses (i) the drivers of change (those factors which are behind much of the change in the industry); (ii) the impacts (the changes that we are seeing in journalism as a result of the drivers of change); and (iii) continuing professional development and training (the implications of the drivers of change and their impact on the training of journalists).

The drivers of change

The drivers of change identified in this report include:

- the **business environment**: the business model underpinning most forms of publishing has come under pressure from the alternative options provided by development of the internet. Circulation sales have fallen as more people seek their information on-line and (for regional and local newspapers) because of the growth of free newspapers. Advertising revenues have diminished as much classified advertising has migrated to the internet, particularly house sales and recruitment advertising. There is little doubt that for the regional and local newspaper sectors times have been very hard, and as a result, there has been cost cutting and falling investment. Some of the developments in the broadcast sector have been similar to that of publishing, with commercial broadcasting subject to the same pressures brought upon by the recession (falling advertising revenues, etc), but not the same technological changes that have put publishing under such pressure
- **Leveson**: hanging over much of the publishing world is the impact, if any, of the implementation of the recommendations in the Leveson report (and the associated political debate). Although the full implications of the changes to the regulatory systems have yet to be seen there are already divergent views emerging. At the one end, the view is that it will lead to risk-averse journalism, with journalists being 'cowed'. On the other hand, some consider that the Leveson inquiry may have already improved journalism practices – the need to better articulate the public interest acts as an extra discipline, which (some argue) is healthy, that checks on journalists' behaviour and may lead to journalists being more thoughtful in their investigative behaviour
- **IT and digitisation**: changes to IT and the move to digitisation has impacted on the way that journalists work in two main ways:
 - an increase in the range of platforms on which to publish their output. There is a rapidly emerging need for bespoke, on-demand news services, with stories being constantly updated to be accessed by the 'user' in a variety of vehicles – tablets, laptops, mobile phones, etc. The development of content for these different platforms require different skills – journalists now have to be able to write and produce for these different media
 - the use of online methods to gather information, including (i) social media and (ii) statistical data

These forces have created, and will continue to create, dramatic changes within journalism.

The impacts

The core skills of journalism remain the same – find the story, check it, double-check it, simplify it, put it into context and communicate it in a way that interests the consumer. But, the way that journalists do their jobs is changing as a result of the ‘drivers’ we have identified above. Particular impacts are that:

- whilst the number of journalists has not decreased as much as is popularly believed, there have been declines in specific sectors counterbalanced by increases in employment elsewhere as journalists (i) move into self-employment/freelancing and (ii) move into PR and corporate communications. This pattern is clearly not one that exists across the entire journalism industry. Both the data and the consultation respondents confirmed that over the last few years, there have been substantial cuts in the workforce size of regional and local newspapers
- there is a changing age balance of journalists, with older, more experienced, journalists being replaced by younger workers. This is driven both by costs (younger journalists being, on average, cheaper) but also by the different skill-sets, with younger journalists being seen as having greater levels of IT and digital skills
- issues are arising on maintaining the quality of journalism, caused by (i) the increased use of non-journalists to develop content, and (ii) intensification of work
- journalists are increasingly working across a range of platforms and need to have the skills to produce output specifically tailored to each of these different platforms. It could be argued that digital skills have become one of the core journalism skills. New entrants to journalism will have to be ‘digital natives’ and be completely at home with social media. The levels of skills needed are beyond that of being a technology ‘user’, but of someone who can work with the technology. This is because the digital platforms will change and whilst we do not know (possibly cannot know) what the new platforms will be, the key skill will be that of being able to adapt to it. Journalists will have to be ready and able to absorb each change
- journalists increasingly need to develop different relationships with their audiences, being increasingly engaged in a two-way discussion
- photographic and video skills are increasingly needed by all journalists as part of their multi-skilling

The implications for continuing and professional training and development

The implications of these changes appear to be that:

- the traditional model of entry into journalism via regional and local newspapers is questionable. Consideration needs to be given to whether entry to being a qualified journalist can be achieved in a non-newsroom environment
- new and enhanced skills are needed in the areas of (i) ethics, (ii) quality control and fact checking, (iii) IT and digital skills, (iv) PR and communication strategy skills, (v) entrepreneurialism and freelancing, (vi) time management and managing workload skills and (vii) communication and ‘audience relationship’ skills
- the speed of change throws ever-greater emphasis on the need for access to quality training for all journalists, but there are concerns about potential biases restricting training to some (and not to all) and the quality of that training
- whether the longstanding arrangements in place for consulting about the content and coverage of training remain robust

Conclusions

Change happens to all jobs over time. For some occupations, the change is such that the job all but disappears from the economy, to be replaced by jobs that emerge. For other jobs, such as journalism, it is the nature of the job that changes. But the inevitability of the change does not mean that we should not try to understand, prepare and facilitate it.

1. Introduction



The world in which journalists work is fast-changing. This research project has identified the issues that are affecting journalism and the impacts that these changes are having. The research will feed directly into the provision of journalism training, via the NCTJ's development strategy and five-year plan, but also as a contribution to the wider discussion on the current and future employment and use of journalistic skills.

This project is a qualitative research project, which has run through a number of stages designed to identify (i) the factors driving change in the journalism profession, (ii) the impacts these forces have and (iii) the implications for continuing the professional development and training of journalists. These stages included:

- drafting of an initial 'issues paper', based on an analysis of literature (including the Journalists at Work, 2012) and discussions with experts in the field (including educators and employers)
- drafting of a consultation paper, which highlighted a number of research questions where we needed to develop our understanding further. This paper, together with a link to the original issues paper, was circulated across all parts of the publishing and broadcast industry. As well as a direct emailing across the industry, the consultation exercise was publicised widely and no potential respondents have been excluded from it. This yielded some 20 responses, including those from educators, employers, employer representatives, and representatives of individual journalists
- gathering together these various inputs into this final report

The advantage of this approach is that it allows respondents to fully consider their responses. In a quantitative research project respondents are asked to give an immediate response to a pre-formed question. This works well where that response is a factual matter, but less well when the response needs consideration. Complex issues and the impact of those issues lend themselves better to a qualitative research approach, such as that used here. It allows an analysis which goes beyond an identification that something is happening to a discussion of what that 'something' may actually mean.

The remainder of this report is structured such that we discuss:

- the drivers of change: those factors which are behind much of the change in the industry
- the impacts: the changes that we are seeing in journalism as a result of the drivers of change
- continuing professional development and training: the implications of the drivers of change and their impact on the training of journalists

2. Drivers of change



It is a considerable understatement to say that journalism is an occupation which is seeing a great deal of change. This is being driven by a combination of forces, which we discuss here under the groupings of (i) developments in the business environment, (ii) the Leveson inquiry and (iii) IT and digitisation. Of course, all these forces interact, but we disentangle them and discuss them separately below.

2.1 Developments in the business environment

To understand what is happening to journalists, we first need to understand the changes impacting on the businesses in which they are located – to put the use of journalists and journalism skills within an overall business context. Good journalism costs money and the business model has to provide the money to allow good journalism to be delivered.

We know that the business model underpinning most forms of publishing has changed. The income generation model has come under pressure from the alternative options provided by development of the internet, such that:

- circulation sales have fallen as more people seek their information on-line and (for regional and local newspapers) because of the growth of free newspapers
- advertising revenues have diminished as much classified advertising has migrated to the internet, particularly house sales and recruitment advertising

To address the issue of falling revenues, newspapers are exploring different ways of erecting ‘pay walls’ in order to raise digital revenues – but it is by no means clear what the best model for this is. The most common method is the ‘metered model’, which allows people to access a limited number of articles for nothing before they are required to pay a subscription. Some publishers have put all content behind a pay wall and people have to pay to read any content. Some have adopted a ‘mixed’ model, allowing access to website content for free, but have a paid access to an on-line version for iPad, Kindles, etc. With hindsight, it could be argued that such pay walls should have been introduced from the outset, and the failure to do this has contributed to the revenue problems. Moving forward, it may be hard to change this behaviour – once people have become used to receiving material for free, it can be hard to persuade them to start paying. But there are examples where people can be persuaded to pay for something they have always had for free (bottled water for example), if they believe that the quality is better.

The ongoing issue is a seemingly increasing expectation amongst consumers that information should be/will be available for free. Given that the content is not costless to produce a new business model needs to be created around either (i) convincing people that they need to pay for content or (ii) monetising services added on to the free information.

There is little doubt that for the regional and local newspaper sectors, times have been very hard, and as a result there has been cost cutting and falling investments. But even here, looking forward, there are many who see opportunities – a chance for re-invention of local and regional newspapers online – the development of strong, trusted brands with almost limitless reach. Regional and local newspapers can now compete because they don’t have to wait until the next day to print – the web allows them to be ‘out there’.

There were some very serious difficulties but the recession has forced modernisation across the media with new processes and styles of employment. There will be more opportunities as growth returns. Employer representative

The situation may be more nuanced than simply a closing down of newspapers, but may also be a concentration of activities, which may retain a title, but moves the generation of content for that title further away from the areas they are supposed to serve.

There has also been an increase in the pattern of regional hubbing that has seen editorial jobs, particularly in production, lost in local communities and smaller numbers of roles created in hubs much farther afield.

Journalist representative

Some of the business developments in the broadcast sector have been similar to that of publishing. Commercial broadcasting has been subject to the pressures brought upon by the recession (falling advertising revenues, etc), but has not been facing the same technological changes that have put publishing under such pressure – indeed many in the broadcasting sector have now fully embraced the digital future as a great opportunity in a way that the newspaper sector has yet to do. The BBC has been subject to budgetary pressures as part of the general ‘austerity’ measures throughout all of the public sector and this has certainly impacted upon the number of journalists employed. Whilst audience figures for local radio, both commercial and BBC, remain high (although people are listening for less time), the development of local television is still an uncertain area. The maintenance of local news is key to a healthy society and democracy, but if the commercial model to support it fails should, or will, the public sector broadcasters step in to fill the gap? This is a model currently being advocated by the government and explored by the BBC. This central role of the BBC is, however, an issue – the sheer size of the BBC is now becoming a matter of debate in the run up to Charter renewal.

It is worth emphasising the **extent** of change that has swept across the journalism industries and the **speed** at which this change has taken place. This has not been the more normal, gradual change that affects nearly all industries and occupations, but a rapid and extreme set of circumstances:

The industry has changed enormously: it’s not a ‘natural’ change or an evolution: it’s a massive sea change.

Journalist representative

Looking forward, there is no real consensus amongst the commentators as to whether the rate of change in the publishing and broadcasting sectors has slowed, and will continue to slow over the next five to 10 years or whether it is still happening. The question remains as to whether the ‘change’ happened and we are now in the ‘settling down’ period, or is it still happening? Or, indeed, have we now moved to an era where change becomes the norm?

Some see that the pace of change may be slowing, allowing business models to settle down:

It is settling down, but it is still in a period of change. But it’s possible there is a slowing down from the constant rate of change. The business model does not have to be so jumpy if it does. From a business point of view, it’s just about making sense again: people are not so much running around like headless chickens.

But it’s too early to say what’s coming around the corner – someone may be developing something as we speak which will be the next big thing. And we just don’t know. **Journalist representative**

Others take the view that change is continuing and will do so for the foreseeable future. This is the view that the continuing developments in digital technology, innovation, changing business models, cost cutting, etc, will continue to drive a fast pace of change:

We are not yet at the middle of the ‘digital revolution’ in the sense that direct access to the internet is still, globally, a minority privilege. The next big wave is automation of services, which will continue to eat into the commoditised end of journalism, whilst also making many forms of ‘original’ journalism look more attractive. **Educator**

There is still considerable change ongoing across all sectors of the industry. **Journalist representative**

It will continue apace as innovation progresses. **Employer representative**

Declining circulations mean we’re not settling down, and some companies have made dramatic changes which have yet to be assessed. There has been speculation that circulation of newspapers would reach a bottom level where it would be stable, but no sign of that yet. **Educator**

Indeed, some commentators believe that change has now become the norm and this state of constant change is something that the industry will have to learn to live with:

Change has become the norm and technological development and speed of change underpins this – it’s an industry that is constantly evolving and debating its relationship with social media/technology/audience – but this has to be a positive thing, although a challenge too. Educator

Change is the norm. It will be driven by technology and consumer demand. I certainly don’t think we can say change is over. Educator

But of course, as with all such future predictions, many commentators caveated their comments with a statement of doubt, confirming that there is a great deal of uncertainty on this.

This is extremely difficult to predict. Did anyone see Twitter and Facebook making such an impact? Employer

Everything in the discussion has to be seen in the context of a caveat that the newspaper industry is still in the process of rapid change, and that they just do not know the outcome yet. Educator

There is no one model for the future of journalism – there will be many more experiments before we see anything like a sustainable model. Educator

2.2 Leveson

Hanging over much of the publishing world as we write is the impact, if any, of the implementation of the recommendations in the Leveson report (and the associated political debate).

Although the full implications of the changes to the regulatory systems have yet to be seen there are divergent views emerging. At the one end, the view is that it will lead to risk averse journalism, with journalists being ‘cowed’. On the other hand, some consider that the Leveson inquiry may have already improved journalism practices – the need to better articulate the public interest acts as an extra discipline, which (some argue) is healthy, that checks on journalists’ behaviour may lead to journalists being more thoughtful in their investigative behaviour.

All the balls are very much still in the air, but it has had a big effect on the industry - people are behaving themselves better, being more diligent with the backing-up paperwork. But there is considerable hesitancy, people are very cautious. Every now and again a newspaper will ‘throw one out’ and be big and bold, but the rest don’t. In many senses they are still testing the public’s interest and willingness. Journalist representative

Leveson has already had a huge impact, particularly on national newspapers especially, in terms of how journalists find their stories. The danger is there could be over-caution. Also now as IPSO is clearly the way forward there is a danger that bureaucracy, and its costs in terms of time and money to ensure good governance within media companies, could inhibit journalism. The best way to restore public confidence is to continue to investigate and break important stories at every level that the public clearly have a right to know. Employer representative

I am concerned that it will lead to ‘things dropping off at the edges’ – ie the difficulties encountered by investigative reporters/crime correspondents in securing stories and utilising their sources means that these areas of journalism might suffer – it remains to be seen whether stories that should have been told remain untold as a result – but it is important that the public does not mistake content, Wikileaks and whistle blowing for investigative journalism – the crafted, carefully researched and trusted reporting in this arena, the stories with salience, might become harder to find, to substantiate and to tell. This is then an issue for a democratic society and a free press. Educator

Commentators stress that the need for behaviour change was only needed by a minority who transgressed ethical boundaries, and that these were most likely to be found in the national press (particularly the tabloids), with regional and local newspapers thought to be largely exempt from such behaviours:

But it does need to be recognised that there were only ever a very small minority who did not behave themselves and that these were breaking the law. Journalist representative

They are already changing and the IPSO requirements will help to ensure they are in place. The regional press already has its house in order. It is the nationals which will have to demonstrate change. Employer

As a result, commentators note that the impact will be felt only in certain areas, namely the national press and not the regional and local press.

Leveson will not impact too heavily on the regional press because practices have never been in question. There will be a need for more ethics and media law training and editors will need to spend time showing that they have their house in order and demonstrate transparency in practices. Employer

Hard to tell yet what the impact may be – minimal I suspect for local and regional press, for which the PCC was very effective. Educator

Some change has already taken place. It is certainly the case that the NCTJ had to respond to the Leveson report. A continuation of the status quo, with mandatory teaching and assessment of regulation and voluntary teaching of ethics, was no longer acceptable. The NCTJ's remedial action of the introduction of a mandatory module on ethics enables trainee journalists to recognise when an ethical issue has arisen, understand how it affects people's rights and understand the impact on individuals and businesses.

Hopefully because of this, new journalists will enter the world of work with (a better) understanding of journalism ethics, but need to be able to keep it up to date. This will be best done in an environment where new journalists will get support and continuing training. Good employers will set supporting processes in place, to create the right environment and foster a culture where young journalists can develop in the right way.

The NCTJ has made great strides in the area of training and good practice. Employer representative

Already, we have seen an increased focus on ethics at pre-entry/trainee level. Employer

Many commentators feel that a positive outcome has been to identify poor management practices in newsrooms in parts of the industry (as described above), which have led to the transgressions in the first place. Thus, as well as a need for contributing journalists to be more aware of ethical and legal issues, there is also a need for changing management practices – both in a need for greater levels of supervision, but also for some employers to review management practices and their newsroom cultures.

The inquiry highlighted a number of problems that have gone unchecked in the industry – problems of bullying and pressure in the workplace; the unethical practices that can take hold in such a dysfunctional working culture; a lack of genuine accountability and responsibility to the public; the unchecked power of owners in the regulatory framework. Journalist representative

Journalists do not work in a vacuum, and it is editors and owners who hold the responsibility for how the working culture of their newsrooms operate. Journalist representative

But as to whether improvements have actually happened, opinion remains divided. Some argue that in reality little has changed:

Little has changed in the way of management practices and cultures, particularly in national newspaper newsrooms and also at the BBC. Workplace cultures are a critical component of the debates being had – and they are led from the top. Journalists often do not have a genuinely independent organisation to turn to at work, for assistance on issues like bullying and unethical practices. Journalist representative

I'm not aware of significant changes to management practices at the employers I deal with – far from it, to be honest: staffing levels are so low that they cannot be expected to see beyond their next deadline. Educator

I am not sure that all newsrooms 'get' this yet and that is largely a result of financial constraint, lack of time and stretched resources – which is why ethics has to be invested in individuals so that they know how to engage with newsroom cultures – and how to work to change them where necessary. It is a work in progress. Educator

Other trends in the industry, including the greater use of non-journalists to develop content (discussed further in section 3.4 below) and the growth of casualisation, has made the situation worse: it is difficult for someone who is not on a permanent contract to take a stand on any ethical issue without them endangering their employment opportunities:

The growth of casualisation of work has also made it harder for individuals who are freelance or on casual shifts to stick their head above the parapet and raise concerns, for fear that they will see their work dry up as a consequence. Journalist representative

But the debate on Leveson has by no means finished and the final outcome is not yet decided. Many are pessimistic, feeling that the lack of real change in the regulation of newspapers will merely lead to a continuation of a status quo, with a return to this issue happening at some time in the near future:

I am pessimistic that in the long run there will be much of an impact at all. I see no recognition among the IPSO members of the need for real independent accountability. I think political will to force it has waned and the public – outside of campaigners – has moved on. I suspect there will be another crisis in a decade or so. Educator

It looks to me as if the press's refusal to play ball with Leveson and the government will again result in the press re-designing their own regulatory system. If it is done as badly as it was last time and the time before that, the system will break down again. From a self-interest perspective, you would think that professional journalism would want to be on top of its game with regard to ethics and standards, but this remains a controversial point with the people who count. Educator

2.3 Change to IT and digitisation

Changes to IT and the move to digitisation has impacted on the way that journalists work in two main ways:

- an increase in the range of platforms on which to publish their output
- the use of on-line methods to gather information, including (i) social media and (ii) statistical data

2.3.1 Increase in range of platforms

The Journalists at Work¹ research confirms that journalists are working across a number of different platforms. There is a rapidly emerging need for bespoke, on-demand news services, with stories being constantly updated to be accessed by the 'user' in a variety of vehicles – tablets, laptops, mobile phones, etc. Journalists must expect to put their content out via tweets, Facebook, LinkedIn and whatever is the new and developing medium. The role of these outlets is to attract and drive traffic to the website, where the revenue is generated, or to the broadcast platform as part of the battle to hold audiences. But the development of content for these different platforms require different skills – journalists now have to be able to write and produce for these different media – the print newspaper, the broadcast, uploads to the website, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

There are now so many ways to publish content – blogging, e-magazines, apps, and no one form is dominant at the moment. Some may die away, but at the moment most are still in play. If you join any publication now you will be expected to produce different outputs for different audiences on a range of platforms – online, print, video, photographic. But this is why the business model has started to catch up. Journalist representative

¹ *Journalists at Work, 2012, NCTJ*

Companies have reacted at a different pace and with varying approaches to the opportunities that working on a multi-platform basis provide. Some have seen it as an opportunity to improve the breadth and quality of content – and to do this well requires skilled journalists and adequate resources. Others have seen digital content as a way of cutting corners and creating content on the cheap. Journalist representative

2.3.2 Impact on information and data gathering

Online tools have a vital role for investigators, but whether journalists currently have the skills to use these effectively is a moot point. Certainly bigger, better-resourced organisations have staff with these skills but whether smaller organisations or self-employed journalists do so is more doubtful.

Newsgathering is now done using the new technology for example phones, email, crowdsourcing online, etc. New skills need to be learned to adapt to this. Employer

Need to know how to search the web effectively. Employer

Yes, journalists do, like all citizens, get more information from the internet than they used to do. It is often said that they have less face time with contacts/others and this is no doubt true, though it should not be excluded that social media based contact can (in some cases) also be quite direct and personal. The more contact time a journalist has with relevant and knowledgeable sources the better the journalism ... but this is not a straightforward old world/new world shift. Educator

Part of this will be specifically about understanding data sources and statistical materials and being able to manipulate and analyse such data to identify and generate stories:

Journalists increasingly need the ability to analyse and understand data and statistics. There is a huge amount of data online from various sources that can be used to create maps and graphics (and stories) for both online and paper. Employer

Today, the sources of insight are more numerous and, potentially, scientific. The journalists/news organisations which are good at this science of data analytics will have a big advantage although creatively mercurial data-ignorers will continue to have a lauded place in this world. Educator

The increasing importance of the role of understanding data is emphasised by the emergence of courses which combine journalism with IT and computing, journalism and computer science or specialise in data journalism.

It could be argued that digital skills have rapidly become one of the core journalism skills – increasingly new entrants to journalism will have to be ‘digital natives’ and be completely at home with social media. The levels of skills needed are beyond that of being a technology ‘user’, but of someone who can work with the technology. This is because the digital platforms will change: currently these are Facebook and Twitter, but what will it be in two or five years’ time? We do not know (possibly cannot know) but the key skill will be that of being able to adapt to it. Journalists will have to be ready and able to absorb each change.

They need to embrace new technology. They need to take time to find out what it does, what its capabilities are and how it can help them. They may never use some (or a lot) of what it offers, but at least they know if the need ever arises.

They need to be open-minded about technology. They should never be scared to experiment with new tools. What works best? Employer

3. Impacts



The core skills of journalism remain the same (find the story, check it, double-check it, simplify it, put it into context and communicate it in a way that interests the consumer) even in a time of multiplying information sources. But, the way that journalists do their jobs is changing as a result, both as a result of the commercial pressures of the business environment and because of the implementation of IT and digitisation – what we could call the ‘micro’ level impact on the way in which journalists actually do their job. Ways in which this happens may vary:

- new jobs and roles may be emerging within the ‘journalistic’ sphere and within the publishing sectors – do we know what they are and what skills these entail
- new skills may be needed to undertake tasks that have emerged
- skills which were previously needed to undertake tasks have now become downgraded by IT developments

3.1 Impact on employment levels

Despite all the business, IT and digitisation developments discussed above, the official data shows (somewhat surprisingly) that there has been no decrease in the number of people who say that they are journalists working in the economy. This has been noted in two pieces of work:

- research by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (*op cit*) noted that over a 10 year period (2002 – 2012) the number of journalists had remained roughly constant
- data from the Office for National Statistics, analysed and reported by the Press Gazette² shows that the number of journalists has been steadily increasing from a low of 58,000 in 2009 to a high of 70,000 in 2013

But this pattern is clearly not one that exists across the entire journalism industry. Both the data and the consultation respondents confirmed that over the last few years there have been substantial cuts particularly in the workforce size of regional and local newspapers.

There have been significant job losses in editorial areas in recent years. Even in groups that were still maintaining profits at the outset of the credit crunch, there were sizeable redundancies and cuts to budgets as companies sought to take advantage of the worsening economic climate to push through opportunistic cuts that in other circumstances would have been harder to implement. The waves of redundancies and contraction of jobs has continued in the years since. Journalist representative

There have been drastic cuts in local newspapers – and journalists have not escaped redundancies at all. Not denying that back office staff have been hit, but journalists have not escaped it. Journalist representative

This differential pattern of changing employment is discussed further in section 3.2 below.

And it may yet turn out to be the case that if the business models being developed are not successful, then some further reductions in staff numbers may yet be seen:

I think most of the severe cuts have been reached, but journalists need to be aware that if the new media model of publishing does not attract advertisers then further cutbacks may be inevitable as employers face the prospect of having to slim down further. Employer

² Labour Force Survey suggests surge of 12,000 in number of UK journalists since 2009, Dominic Ponsford, Press Gazette, 14 January, 2014

Looking to the future, although the number of journalists in newsrooms has been reduced (on average), it is also the case that the newsroom has (probably) avoided the worst of the cuts – which have fallen disproportionately heavily on the production and back office staff (sales staff have also been protected to some extent). However, if revenues do not increase, there is little scope for more cuts in these areas and further cuts may have to fall on journalists. The implication of this is that publications could be put out with limited content, involving only a small number of journalists. However, will customers be willing to pay for this in news – will they perceive these publications to have little content and therefore little value? The market may divide, with different models of publications for different segments of the market.

Looking forward just does not see the possibility of losing anymore journalists in local newspapers – the numbers have been cut to the bone. But, at the end of the day, accountants run the businesses and good journalism costs a lot of money. They may want to rip them out without understanding the consequences. It will be an ‘interesting’ exercise if there has to be another round of redundancies: standards will fall, they may have reached a tipping point.
Journalist representative

I think that the worst has passed in terms of job numbers in journalism, unless you take a very narrow definition of a journalist’s job. Educator

This is driven by a realisation and recognition that journalists are the central core of their businesses:

Nearly all publishing (and broadcasting) businesses have reached the conclusion that they need proper content and to do that they need journalists. There are increasing pressures on journalists on how they get it ‘onto the page’, but businesses still need content.

A big danger here is that there are increasing numbers of agglomeration sites, which are completely cannibalistic and produce no content at all (Buzzfeed, Twitter). All these do is provide links to content provided elsewhere, but there is growing confusion in the public eye that they are actually content creators. Educator

I also think that the value of high quality content is now recognised where at one stage it was not. Educator

3.2 Changing sectoral employment of journalists

Whilst the number of working journalists may not have fallen, what is clear is that they no longer work in the same places that they used to. The employment of journalists has dispersed away from the ‘core’ or ‘mainstream’ sectors of newspaper publishing, magazine publishing and broadcast journalism to include those working in PR and corporate communications.

PR in particular is becoming a very common second career destination for graduates – and sometimes the first job after graduation. Educator

This move is mainly thought to be driven by a lack of opportunities for new, younger, journalists to be able to develop a career and to earn what is thought to be a reasonable salary:

The issue is whether you can sustain a career (and a lifestyle) on the salaries that are paid. This drives people to move into PR and corporate communications; three or four years into a journalism career and they move into a better paid job. Educator

Young, trained (and cheap) journalists can usually get jobs OK – but as structures have flattened there is less of a career structure and those that don’t progress are tempted to leave mid-career – into PR, marketing or similar roles. Educator

This 'dispersion' is not an unusual trait, nor one that is unique to the journalism profession. A number of occupations, whilst retaining a core sectoral base have found that the skills that its members have are valued across a range of sectors and so the employment wider across the economy. Thus, less than half (73,000 of the 197,000 working accountants) are employed in the core accountancy sectors of 'Accounting and auditing activities and tax advice'³ and about three quarters (85,000 of the 118,000 working solicitors) are engaged in the core 'legal activities' sector⁴. Where individuals working in an occupation have skills which are transferable then they can be used in other sectors beyond those which they were possibly designed to be used in. Thus in a modern communications age, where the ability to tell a 'story' clearly and precisely, in a way that is attractive to the recipient, is a desirable skill, we should perhaps not be surprised that journalists find themselves employable elsewhere.

This is undoubtedly a phenomenon. It makes journalists less of a 'race apart' or 'special breed' but it also socialises them in ways that have some positive effects too. There are pluses and minuses emerging from this aspect of change – we should embrace that. Educator

Perhaps the issue is somewhat different here as journalists are probably not becoming 'generalists' but specialists working in another sector, using the same skills. Also, the ONS data source is called the Labour Force Survey, in which individuals are asked what job they do and they self-classify. Whilst these individuals may still regard themselves as being journalists, is the job that they are doing a journalism job?

The question arises whether the journalists in these sectors (who clearly still regard themselves as journalists) use the same skills, or have some become redundant; whether they need additional skills to complement the traditional journalistic ones and, if so, what these are.

There are additional skill requirements (eg PR strategy, internal communications etc) but they also necessitate and are complemented by many skills in more traditional journalistic sectors. Our code of conduct applies across all sectors. Journalist representative

The core skills of journalism are in demand in communications departments in every and any organisation. The demand for communication skills is growing – but not in traditional journalism roles. This has implications for the independence of journalism and how the public views journalism versus marketing or PR. Educator

Yes, but need to recognise that one PR job is not the same as another. The head of corporate communications for the National Trust will essentially be a 'journalist' job. Another job writing corporate communication manuals might be using writing skills, but not journalism skills. You need to know what they are employed to do, what is the background. For some, you have to recognise that it's not necessarily about facts anymore, it's about selling. Journalist representative

The lines between journalism and PR, and between news and advertorial features, are more blurred than ever – this is more of an ethical/legal issue than skills. Educator

A consideration here is that whilst individuals who move to PR and corporate communications retain their journalistic identity, in the longer term as those 'journalists' retire and need to be replaced, will they be replaced by other journalists recruited from publishing or broadcasting (as the move from journalism into PR perhaps becomes a more recognised career path)? Or will they be replaced by others who may not have that particular background and training? In the first instance, this has continued implications for local and regional newspapers who may continue to be the entry (and training) point for new entrants into the profession, but with a level of turnover built in and expected. In the second, the numbers of journalists will eventually fall, and the current stability in numbers simply disguised by the retention of a 'journalistic' title even though the numbers doing a 'journalistic job' has fallen.

There will be more subtle change in the nature of the jobs done which will not be picked up by the national data sources. On an occupational level, all journalists are classified as that – journalists – with no distinction between seniority or between different job roles within the entire journalism occupation. It seems likely that the balance between job roles has been significant, with the decline of some roles such as sub-editors:

³ SIC code 69.20

⁴ SIC code 69.10

Reporters have avoided the worst of the cuts, and will probably continue to do so. However, sub-editors in particular have suffered devastating cuts, and indeed the job title has now disappeared from many newsrooms. Employer

I think part of the problem is the definition of journalist. The skills journalists have in gathering, assessing, processing and presenting information are in more and more demand – but not necessarily in traditional journalism roles. So I see growing demand for those skills, but the jobs are in flux and traditional “journalist” jobs such as reporter and sub-editor may decline where new roles like digital content manager or community manager – which require similar skills – will grow. Educator

There are new roles emerging all the time in the digital space – and need for new skills. For example the debate over whether some journalists should learn to code. The answer is some yes and some (most?) no! Educator

There is also an increase in the number and proportion who the official data locate in the sector ‘Artistic Creation’⁵, which is the grouping in which ‘independent journalists’ are assigned to. So a key part of this changing sectoral balance is actually an increase in self-employment, with freelancing journalists used to provide specific content as and when it is needed. Again, there are the implications of employers moving to a more ‘flexible’ workforce: managing an externalised workforce can be difficult requiring greater levels of planning and supervision to ensure that legal and ethical boundaries are not crossed.

The pattern has increasingly been one of casualisation. This brings with it a range of concerns for both the individuals – who often reap no real benefits from the “flexibility” – and for the organisation. Journalist representative

More and more journalists are now freelance – either by choice or through redundancy – and I expect this trend to continue. Employer

There is a growing use of freelancers and a decline in long-term staff jobs. This is partly for financial reasons, to reduce overheads, but also to provide greater flexibility in staffing. Many freelancers move from job to job and organisation to organisation and are not as steeped in the values of any individual employer. Educator

Although the number of self-employed journalists has increased, it is clear that they have also not been immune from the changes affecting the industry. Freelancers are often amongst the first to be laid off, indeed acting as a buffer to allow the business to absorb fluctuations in demand.

Critically it is not just the headcount of staff journalists that has been hit – freelance journalists are often the first to suffer as budgets are cut. Journalist representative

This clearly raises a skill and training need:

In terms of training, the NUJ has sought to broaden the skills base of journalists who have been made redundant – often to pave the way for a more casualised approach by companies – in order that they are as equipped as possible to find alternative work. Courses on entrepreneurial journalism have proved very popular amongst those seeking to freelance or build up a “portfolio” career. Journalist representative

Looking more widely, it is worth noting that the move to greater levels of self-employment is not something that is limited to the world of journalists alone. The numbers of self-employed have increased from 3.7 million in 2009 to 4.5 million in 2014, an increase of 22 per cent: on this basis alone, it would be surprising if the numbers of self-employed journalists had not also increased.

There are numerous indications that the move towards greater self-employment is a feature of the labour market generally, not just for journalists. Educator

⁵ SIC code 90.03

3.3 Changing age balance of journalism employment

It seems clear that within the journalists employed, there has been a re-balancing from older to younger journalists.

Headline job totals at employers don't reflect the fact that the average age, and hence experience, of newsrooms has reduced. Most journalists of my age are now either in PR or education. Educator

There is an element of natural wastage, shipping some old journalists out, new ones coming in. Journalist representative

Two factors are given for this trend: either a cost-based one with the replacement of expensive (older) journalists with cheaper (younger) ones (with the obvious implications for wages and wage costs), but also a skills reason, with the change driven by the need to recruit the different skillsets that younger journalists may have (greater awareness of IT, social media, etc).

Those who see it as a cost-cutting exercise, clearly see the bringing in of younger journalists as a cost-cutting exercise, part of an attempt to reduce the cost structures of producing content:

We have certainly experienced older – translated as more expensive – journalists losing their jobs.

There have been attempts in some parts of the industry to undercut existing pay structures by hiring younger staff, on poorer terms and conditions and salaries. Journalist representative

Those who see it as skills-driven change note the impact of younger journalists' skills base, bringing innovation to the increasingly online publications:

All news organisations and publishers seem to want to recruit young journalists particularly to bring innovation and skills to their web presence. Educator

I'd be astonished if there was not a move to younger, if only for the need to hire born-digital or digitally expert, along with the ability in journalism. Educator

And some do not see it as an 'either/or' but that both forces are at play:

Yes, that was bound to happen for two reasons. One being that older journalists tended to be naturally better paid and, two, methods of delivery of news has required more versatile journalists who are capable of adapting to new methods of delivery and indeed of finding new ways of delivery. Employer representative

Yes, the age profile has changed, partly because of technological skills younger journalists may have but mainly because they are cheaper. Educator

There has been some substitution, with newspapers ridding themselves of experienced heads and replacing them with multi-skilled youngsters. This may partly be due to reasons of costs, but also because of reasons of skills – they can just do things that the older journalists cannot. Educator

Of course, a reasonable response to the 'older' journalist not having appropriate skills would be that they receive training which would allow them to upskill as necessary. However, as we shall see later (see section 4.3) there are issues with the levels and dispersion of training which may lead to this substitution of young for old:

The industry has been poor at investing in in-house training, so rather than trying to upskill people, it is easy (and cheaper) to get rid of the old and bring in the new, and the substitution seen above is a continuation of that pattern. Educator

It is worth noting, however, that many commentators note that whilst this change may have been traumatic for many, it is also possible that some journalists have taken the change positively, jumping rather than waiting to be pushed:

You also have to recognise that sometimes the journalists themselves are more than happy to go: it's no longer an industry that they recognise, nor one they are comfortable with anyway. They are sometimes content to take the money and go. Is it voluntary or forced? Journalist representative

With redundancy terms under attack, many older journalists have chosen to leave fearing that any future round of cuts might see their entitlements lessen. Journalist representative

And the impact of the change will very much vary depending on who the journalists actually are:

For some individuals, it can have been an absolute nightmare – people have become dinosaurs overnight. But for young people it's so exciting! Journalist representative

However, there are serious concerns about this changing balance of the workforce, with a particular concern that it has led to a hollowing out of the workforce, with a lack of more senior, experienced journalists to guide new journalists in their early years at work. This is thought to be impacting on the way that journalism is carried out, including the maintenance of ethical standards, and can have a damaging impact:

But this does have implications – a loss of editorial experience, leadership and so on. The absence of senior leadership leads to a hollowing out of the editorial base. Young people (the new entrants) often see journalism as a purely technical, practical challenge, and so they need to be embedded in a team which can support them in ethical and public service values. When they first enter, they will practically do anything that a senior editor tells them to do. Educator

This has a knock-on effect on the traditional mentoring/informal training that often happens in newsrooms where older journalists support new and younger recruits. Journalist representative

Most regional titles relied on younger journalists anyway. Voluntary Redundancy scheme have inevitably attracted older (more experienced) journalists and therefore the regional press is now staffed largely by younger people. Employer

3.4 Maintaining quality

Commentators believe that there are now real issues about the maintenance of the quality of journalism.

Maintaining standards of quality journalism has become a real and pressing concern. We need to press home the vital role that local and regional journalism plays in our democracy. The ability of many titles to do this in practice has been emasculated in recent years and this has undoubtedly created a democratic deficit. Journalist representative

The pressures on quality are thought to come from a number of directions, not least (i) the use of non-journalists to develop content, (ii) increasing work intensification and (iii) increasing reliance on sourced materials. We discuss each of these below.

3.4.1 Using non-journalists to develop content

There are anecdotal reports of the use of non-journalists to develop content: to some extent this has always happened, but we do not know (i) what the balance is between the use of journalists and non-journalists, nor (ii) the extent to which this is changing. A particular aspect of this is the emergence of 'hyper-local journalism', although the exact extent of this is yet to be seen, with no real evidence that this is an emerging realistic business model.

In one sense, the use of non-journalists has always happened, with the use of citizen journalists:

In local news there has always been a tradition of using non-journalists for “parish notes” or sports reports etc and this continues. The attention given to so-called “citizen journalism” has allowed some organisations to offer more open and un-edited access (for example upload your story and pictures direct) which I think is a mistake. All content needs a second pair of eyes.

Educator

But what is happening now seems to be a change in scale:

It is certainly a growing aspiration amongst companies, some of which view the prospect of free content as the solution to their commercial challenges. When cost is the driving factor – rather than any creative or editorial motivations – the reality is that this inevitably damages quality and standards. Journalist representative

This is mainly seen as a means to reduce costs:

The accountants love it of course. Content is produced free and can just be dropped onto a website. But they just do not understand the problems that may be caused – and it will only become apparent when it goes wrong. The people running the business models would like to increase it – get a few amateur/citizen journalists, file on-line and fill the paper that way. Journalist representative

The use of non-journalists to develop content brings with it a number of issues, including maintaining the quality of output, whether the non-journalists have received adequate training in the legal aspect and ethical considerations of journalism, how they are supervised, and particularly whether they require journalistic supervision to ensure that legal and ethical boundaries are not crossed.

In a space where there is more content from a bigger more diverse range of individuals, the need for journalistic skills and oversight and expertise is actually greater than ever, particularly if legal and ethical standards are to be maintained.

Journalist representative

Certainly there has been an increase, and the implications are not good. There are some good citizen journalists out there who do a good job and can hold local authorities to account. But there are others and people will get sued. Also there are many who will only write trash because they have some axes to grind. This was OK (in a sense it’s always been like this) but what has changed is that the ‘proper’ journalists do not have the time to challenge and to verify and this is where the problems start.

Journalist representative

Clearly, yes, but there are great advantages as well as dangers. The most important consideration is to maintain good standards of organisation, control and review of copy. Where non-professional journalists are used increasingly it is important that well-trained journalists, at even junior level, need to be more diligent and quicker in the editing process. They certainly need to be aware of the importance of referring questions upwards and non-journalists contributing regularly to newspapers or other forms of delivery need to be given clear guidelines of what is expected of them particularly in terms of the law and good practice.

Employer representative

The practice is increasing dramatically with the role of the journalist moving to some degree from content creation to content curation. It is critical that employers realise the importance of journalists in ensuring all sides of a story are covered and that titles don’t become simply reports of submitted content. Employer

The implications are obvious. Quality will suffer and there will be fewer jobs for qualified journalists. Employer

There are some, however, who think that this trend has been over played:

This depends on the definition of journalism. Real newspapers will more and more regard core journalism skills (from shorthand through to ethical training) as being essential. What has changed is the number of other 'publications' doing stuff which is not journalism. Most of these have very short life spans.

The use of non-journalists to produce content is no more or less true than in the past.
Educator

It could be argued that they are a continuation of the 'village correspondents'. Journalist representative

Though it is fair to say that the balance of views is that it is an increasing trend:

We have not yet reached anywhere near the limit point of 'non-journalists' being responsible for content. **Educator**

Other implications of this trend are:

- can non-journalistic content generators be brought under the same regulatory framework as for more traditional journalists, and if so, what are the implications for their training needs (from a considerably lower skills base)?

It's not easy to see these new players being absorbed into any regulatory mechanism devised by the newspaper publishers. I think this will continue to be messy, but that the new players will have their own version of the need to understand ethical issues and to work within an atmosphere of consent. This presents opportunities as well as challenges – not least for educators and professional associations. **Educator**

- this development of the 'non-journalist' may have impacts both on the numbers and roles of journalists:

The future number of journalists will also be reduced as titles attract users to submit their own content. The role of the journalist may well move towards content curation rather than creation. **Employer**

- the role of qualified journalists may also change to be one where they quality manage and assure the input of these non-professionals, rather than being tasked with generating original content themselves:

The role of the journalist is moving to some degree from content creation to content curation. It is critical that employers realise the importance of journalists in ensuring all sides of a story are covered and that titles don't become simply reports of submitted content. **Employer**

This trend does not, however, only affect journalists, but also other roles.

But it's not only content – they employ designers instead of subs, make it look pretty, but they are not trained to spot errors, to check, etc. **Journalist representative**

3.4.2 Work intensification

A clear finding from the Journalists at Work (2012) research⁶ is the increasing intensification of work – fewer journalists to produce the same (or frequently more) output. This is a trend that is confirmed by the majority of the commentators:

Workloads have undoubtedly intensified. I have spoken to scores of people in newsrooms across the country whobemoan the reduced staffing levels and extra demands. **Employer**

⁶ *Journalists at Work, 2012*, NCTJ

Yes work has intensified. But some parts of the work can also be automated. This is a transitional difficulty, though a real one. Educator

There are clearly implications of this including a general lowering of the quality of work, with less originality and creativity, with less time being made available for 'proper' investigative journalism:

Print journalists are having to produce far more stories than before, so are more reliant on press releases etc and get out of the office far less frequently than before. Educator

Less originality and creativity is the implication. In broadcast it has led to formulaic news bulletins and rather tedious formats. Educator

People have less time to produce more content across a range of platforms. This short-termism, demanding quick turnaround means that less time is available for investigation and checking. There is less time for the unearthing and development of original stories – and as a result there are fewer of these. There is less 'holding power to account'. Time is spent re-versioning for different platforms – which often require considerable ingenuity to produce new, clever angles. But it's not investigation as such. Educator

On an individual level, it has led to greater stress for journalists, which may lead to negative impacts on their health and well-being:

Workloads and consequential stress and health problems have become one of the greatest problems facing journalists in recent years. The toxic combination of overwork and lack of resources is resulting in perilously high levels of stress and the inevitable mistakes and errors this brings – unfortunately many journalists soldier on, and get the work done despite the long hours and pressure put on them, and often do not seek help until it is too late and real damage has been done to their physical and mental health. Journalist representative

Although some would argue that this is just part and parcel of what 'being a journalist' is:

Yes, but good journalists like to be busy. Employer representative

Again we see a trend that leads to trained journalists being curators of information, rather than being generators of new information:

Yes it has intensified. This has shifted much journalism towards "processing" rather than higher quality work. This is true in online newsrooms, 24-hour news channels and the new print subbing "hubs" that are developing. It downgrades the value and quality of production work. Educator

The fact that journalists may have avoided the worst of the cuts (discussed above) may have had a knock-on effect whereby additional tasks have been added to the role of journalists, which previously would not have been covered within their roles. This will have added to the feeling of work intensification, but also adds to the range of skills that they need to do their jobs:

It is right to say that most of the cuts fell on back-office and production staff. But this, in turn, has put pressure on reporters to cover some of the roles done by the lost staff. Reporters are now expected to carry out more tasks than ever before. Employer

Work has intensified and the danger is that quality will be sacrificed for quantity. Fact checking is still critically important – and the loss of the sub-editor means the onus is now on the reporter to get things right first time. There are those who say that more mistakes will creep in. Employer

Print sub-editing has been downgraded by employers, although this has clear dangers – it's happened for cost reasons, not because of digitisation. Educator

3.4.3 Maintaining quality

As might be expected, using non-journalists to develop content, combined with increasing work intensification has raised concerns about the ability to maintain quality. Accuracy is, as it has always been, of key importance – possibly more so given that readers can and will provide immediate feedback online if a mistake is made. However, the combination of the immediacy of online publication, combined with a shrinking newsroom with fewer senior journalists, means that there are fewer checking resources and that the onus for fact checking falls more on the originating journalist.

There is an increasing reliance on being fed information from press officers and corporate communications staff. The increased dominance of the press officer is an issue – they clearly will only pass on the information that they want to be seen. And what will happen if they decide to stop briefing? Journalists have to be willing and able to source the information beyond the press release.

In terms of overall headcount, the pace of casualisation in the industry has quickened. There are significant consequences of such a move on ethical standards and on newsroom culture – with job insecurity and anxiety about sticking your head above the parapet. Journalist representative

Journalists need to be aware of the need for care and accuracy at all times. This has been a valuable benefit internally in news organisations but greater vigilance is required. Journalists also need to be trained to be more versatile in terms of news delivery. Employer representative

The very wealth of information available is such that the journalist has a role in being a filter, in being a checker of the information in order to transform it into reliable, trustworthy and accessible news story reporting. Much of what is presented online cannot be taken at face value and the role of differentiating between truth and fiction will fall to the journalist. The democratisation of ‘news’ where anyone can take photographs and publish news via Twitter, Facebook, or blogging make journalists’ skills more important, not less. The job of journalism is now increasingly about aggregation, curation and amplification; a role of assembling information.

Checking and investigating information and ensuring the reliability of sources is a longstanding journalistic skill. The speed at which stories are often put together, and information collated from sources as described above, makes it easier for mistakes to take place when there is not the time to fact check. Being up against competition in the digital space adds to this. Journalist representative

This is an area where training is vital – along with examples of the inevitable mistakes that can happen and the (legal/financial) consequences when they have. Journalist representative

The issue is that all this available information has to be tested. With Twitter and Facebook you can never be sure who the source is.

It used to be different, with journalists out in the field, hands-on. Now it is much more office-based, electronic gathering – but so much of it is available electronically. Journalist representative

Yes and no. Good journalists always sort out a variety of sources. There are far more sources of information now, some of them more sophisticated. There are benefits and dangers in this. Employer representative

The concern here is that layers of staffing which traditionally have been in place to maintain quality are being stripped away:

Undoubtedly, the jobs and skills of the sub-editor have been downgraded. Indeed, the very job title of sub-editor is now beginning to disappear. Employer

3.5 Working across different platforms

The Journalists at Work research (*op cit*) suggests that journalists are working across a number of different platforms and this is certainly confirmed by the commentators (discussed in section 2.3.1 earlier). There is a rapidly emerging need for bespoke, on-demand news services, with stories being constantly updated to be accessed by the 'user' in a variety of vehicles – tablets, laptops, mobile phones, etc. Journalists must expect to put their content out via Tweets, Facebook, LinkedIn and whatever is the new and developing medium. The role of these outlets is to attract and drive traffic to the website, where the revenue is generated, or to the broadcast platform as part of the battle to hold audiences).

If you join any publication now you will be expected to produce different outputs for different audiences on a range of platforms – online, print, video, photographic. But this is why the business model has started to catch up.

Employer representative

They need to embrace social media. There are many, many platforms out there, it's not just Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. They need to treat these platforms as the modern equivalent of the phone call into the office. Employer

To develop content for these different platforms journalists need to have different skills, with them now needing to be able to write and produce for these different media – printed newspaper or magazine, broadcast, uploads to the website, Facebook, Twitter, and so forth.

It certainly requires more flexibility, but the mechanics of adapting writing to different media can be managed – although it requires real effort. More challenging is to have knowledge of the different regulatory systems used by various platforms. Educator

It should mean that the core skills of writing and storytelling are used to the same effect but in different ways. But the journalists need to understand the platform eg an online feature is different to a piece for a glossy magazine with layout and of course SEO is important so that the stories get read. Then there are ways of presenting blogs and social media so that they are readable, crafted and meaningful – but at heart this is all about good core skills. Educator

Looking forward, we do not know what new platforms are being developed and (perhaps more importantly) which ones will prove popular. Ten years ago, few would have predicted the scale of take-up of Twitter. There will be technical aspects to presenting news stories on these different forms of media, but again it needs to be remembered the importance of core journalism skills – the content will only be worth publishing or broadcasting if the story is good. What is important is the relationship of these core journalism skills and the IT skills and 'tech awareness' so that journalists can adapt to whatever new platforms emerge.

The nature of the content will vary according to the media it is released on. The immediacy of online and digital platforms lends itself to a reporting of the facts, but also means that the content of a printed paper becomes more reflective and analytical. For broadcast journalists the immediacy of TV and radio can be complemented by analysis and context online. A story will break on the website or broadcast, be developed and updated and reflected on by the time it gets to the printed version. This asks more of the writer – it has to be more than a simple 'coverage of the news'. Once a story has been 'broken' journalists will need to have continuous engagement with and monitoring of the way the story is developing across many platforms including social media. In addition, many publishers and broadcasters are struggling to get to grips with the impact of social media, whereby a "story" can quite easily become widely talked about and shared before any conventional journalism has been done on it in terms of verification.

But, most commentators believe that journalists can and have responded positively to the challenges presented by these new platforms:

The majority of journalists have embraced the opportunities that new platforms afford them, as different and more diverse ways of getting their stories across to a wider group of people. Journalist representative

I am not convinced this is a major problem. Good subs and reporters have always been able to apply their skills differently and appropriately to different publications or platforms. It does require some talent – but that’s a good thing! Educator

This is not the most difficult part of the transition. Writing at different lengths and pace for different audiences has always been a big skill in journalism. This is just more so. Educator

There is some concern that the abilities of younger journalists may be limited by the understanding and capabilities of their senior journalists, with the possibility that there may be a need to ‘manage the managers’.

Young people come out of college wanting to do all kinds of multi-media stuff, but some of them do not have all the skills and very often they also do not have the managers who can utilise them properly. Journalist representative

But, again, the ability of journalists to be able to respond to these challenges will be affected by the resources available:

However, the real issue here is not about platforms but about workload. It is only possible to do this work well if there are the resources available. To expect one individual to tailor multiple stories to different platforms without the necessary time or resources is not sustainable. Headcount is vital here. Journalist representative

3.6 Relationships with the audience

The wide availability of news sources means that journalists must develop a different relationship with their audiences. In the past, publications and linear broadcasts have been ‘put out there’ in a one-way communication: now journalists must reach out to their readers and develop conversations. A Twitter report is not journalism per se, but rather the start of a conversation. Developments in new media allow a conversation to develop – replacing the one-way communication whereby newspapers and broadcasters just ‘tell’ readers the news, with (at best) some feedback via letters. With social media there is a potential for a proper conversation, a changed relationship with the reader and audience. In addition there is the potential for readers and audiences to engage with each other and directly with organisations involved in news stories, and journalists may need to be across all these separate conversations.

Of course, there has been a two-way conversation for a while with radio phone-ins and such programmes, but the quality has been variable. When they are working well, phone-ins can change the editorial and change the direction of the programming. Instead of the journalist telling the audience what the main stories are, listeners or readers are allowed to determine the agenda. But this requires the journalist to be able to listen. And when they have listened, journalists will have to orchestrate and conduct, but without attempting to dominate the discussion or desire to be the ‘expert’. Every journalist’s skillset will therefore have to have some expertise in listening, liaising and responding to their audience.

Of course the nature of a more two-way conversation inevitably brings with it some changes in that it allows journalists – and their bosses – to gain reactions to stories in a much more immediate way, and perhaps impacts on editorial judgements and decisions. Journalist representative

The user/reader can now have a say on issues immediately and at the same time get the information from a variety of immediate sources. Print will need to react further to adapt to these changes. The role of the journalist has to adapt to cope with this. **Employer**

The journalist is not 'telling' the story, it is not top down, it is interactive and inclusive – but this is a good thing and I think that journalism has on the whole got this – some broadcast news still needs to sort it out, some newspaper websites are still lacking etc – but no going back on this – we are all part of the conversation, the key is for journalists to help everyone find a way through the noise. **Educator**

Yes. In the past a journalist would put content in a paper and the reader would read it. If they had a problem they would send a letter in to the editor, which could easily be ignored. It was essentially a one-way flow. Now people post comments at the end of your article – they can get in your face and have a row. If you do this on Twitter it's like having an argument which the whole world can listen into if they want. The reader can get to the writer now.

This is a democratisation of the news – it's no longer a simple 'left' or 'right' interpretation. People chip in and say 'this is what is happening'.

This is something that journalists have just got to accept, and some are able to do it better than others, some enjoy it. Others hate it and resent it. **Journalist representative**

Whilst the majority of commentators accept it as a generally positive development, some warning bells are sounded:

Engagement can be a positive thing. However one very concerning development in this has been the huge amount of abuse, some of it sexually threatening and violent, that journalists are expected to deal with in the course of their work. The below the line commentary – often from individuals who are anonymous – provide a disturbing insight into the minds of many readers. Many journalists are encouraged to respond and engage, yet this can effectively be the "feeding of the trolls" that often is counterproductive. Even the very act of reading them can be a hugely stressful experience for the individuals involved. The lack of pre-moderation by many companies means that even foul and obscene abuse remains visible and present, legitimised by its very presence – in a way that of course would never happen in the screening of letters to the editor or even phone-ins where the plug would be pulled on such contributions. There is a need for a more robust response on this from employers in conjunction with journalists. **Journalist representative**

But the general tone of reactions to this development are positive:

Audiences are certainly becoming more knowledgeable and therefore more questioning of journalistic output because they have a wider variety of sources for news. The basic principle that all media organisations need to build and maintain credibility still applies and indeed is of even greater importance. **Employer representative**

Yes journalists now have to be more open about their methods and sources if audiences are to trust them. And they have to be open to challenge from audiences. In the long term this can only improve quality. Whatever we choose to report someone in the public will know more about it than a journalist does. Being open to and tapping into that expertise is a good thing. **Educator**

But not all agree that this is a real development, that it has been exaggerated beyond reality:

This is important, but exaggerated. It seems likely that most consumers of news will continue to be that – they will want informed, editorial choice and they want professional journalists to do it for them. It is not a two-way conversation.

Listening to your readers is good – and IT developments allow this to happen much quicker. They can tell you when you are wrong, they can tell you what is currently of interest, but don't exaggerate it. **Educator**

3.7 Photographic skills

As well as journalists, we also need to consider the changing skills requirements of photographers. Although there is an ongoing need for highly-skilled photographers for published material, online content – which often requires a photograph to tell the story – can possibly be at a lower level of quality, and can be produced with a lower level of skill. The majority of activity on the web now involves pictures, graphics or video as well as text so even the basic journalistic coverage of the news will demand a wide range of skills. In these cases, the photographer and the journalist can be the same person. Is this need for multi-skilling increasing and does the industry recognise this? There is already a model for this in the broadcast world where on occasion video journalists are producing content which in the past would have involved separate camera and sound crews supporting the journalist.

One real concern is the dwindling role of picture desks in some newsrooms and of the axing of photographers as permanent staff and on budgets for photography. Rather than making pragmatic decisions on the level of quality of image needed, the removal of many skilled picture desk staff has taken away the expertise needed to know and judge the difference, and to ensure that photographic standards in a broader sense are injected into the editorial decision making. Images have an enormous role to play in digital content and to think that low-grade snaps will fill that gap is a mistake. Journalist representative

Mobile phones are being used far more now, and websites, blogs and social media are now widely seen as more effective if a picture is used – leading to generic pictures of buildings etc, which add nothing to the story, being used because the website menu demands something. So it's important for journalists to know some basics about still photography – but very hard to find time for more of this in the curriculum. Educator

This is a big change – journalists now take their own stills and create audio slideshows, post pictures on twitter and blogs to illustrate stories – so the role of the photographer has changed dramatically and the craft skills sound/camera crews – there is still room for these skills in for example documentary and film – but generally a flattened out situation, with multi-skilled journalists. Educator

There is a distinction between high quality material and that which is 'acceptable':

The better visual material continues to be captured by professional photographers, but the advent of the smart phone etc, has given non-photographers the opportunity to capture acceptable images in an instant. A news event might well provide many images from readers. Employer

This may go beyond what is perceived as 'traditional' photographic skills, with the use of the new technology that is available:

Smart phones are being used now to capture images as well as video and sounds. The reporter needs to adapt to this and learn new skills. Employer

They now have to be what we term 'multi-media storytellers'. They should be capable of producing complete packages that include, where necessary, video, audio, graphics, etc. Employer

4. Continuing skills and professional development



Whatever the changing media environment, there are some constants of what employers expect from journalists and the core skills of journalists remain as important as ever. Journalists still need, and all indications are that they will continue to need, (i) the ability to write with clarity, accuracy and flair, (ii) curiosity and a broad general knowledge and (iii) the skills to communicate effectively with a wide range of different people.

They need the traditional skills – it's the heart of what they should do. Educator

However, the changes that have been seen do have impacts for the professional development and training of journalists. We have grouped these into a number of areas, which are:

- entry into journalism
- new and enhanced skills needed
- provision of training
- consultation on training provision

4.1 Entry into journalism

The continuing of the traditional route of entry into publishing journalism, via local and regional newspapers is questionable. The shrinking of this sector could be expected to lead to a declining number of employment opportunities to exist in this sector, but at present this shrinkage appears to have been offset by the increase in turnover (with journalists leaving after a few years for more lucrative opportunities in PR and corporate communications).

There does not appear to be any significant reduction in the number of trainee journalists being employed. Indeed, those who show ability and desire and come fresh from courses that have armed them well for the demands of a newsroom in 2014 should be able to find a place in the regional press and elsewhere. Employer

Whether the regional and local newspaper sectors wish, or are able, to continue to be the training ground for the sectors journalists seems to be the issue here.

With the increase in journalists across related sectors, a question is whether entry to journalism can be via a non-traditional core employer? For example, could a future trainee work towards and gain the NCTJ's professional qualification whilst working in any other environment other than a newsroom? Again, looking at the example of other professions that have been down this route before, accountants can qualify to be an accountant whilst not working for an accountancy firm (although they have to work for an 'accredited training employer').

We may also be seeing the development of new entry patterns into the profession away from the graduate and higher-level degree mode which has come to dominate in recent years. The development of apprenticeship schemes will become important here:

Apprenticeships will become a factor with more employers planning to employ them. This will enable titles to recruit young people from their community rather than rely on people from university courses who do not know the area. This will help create a more diverse workforce. Employer

4.2 New and enhanced skills needed

A constant refrain throughout this research has been that the core skills of journalism remain as important as always. But a similarly constant refrain has also been that new skills are needed. Certainly, the Journalists at Work research found this to be true: the majority of journalists (63 per cent) feel that there are new or additional skills they need in order to be more efficient at their work⁷. In the most instances (39 per cent) these ‘skills gaps’ are in the area of IT and new media, but there are significant proportions who feel that more fundamental skills need improving – in journalism, production, design and photography and general business management. Clearly the skill set of being a journalist is changing:

Being a journalist is no longer just about writing some words and arranging a photo. Employer

They need to be aware of the need for urgency – the deadlines that reporters use for the paper don’t exist on the web. They have to develop the skill of real-time reporting. Employer

The drivers and impacts identified above indicate a range of areas where new and enhanced skills are needed include:

- **ethics:** this has been addressed by the NCTJ by the introduction of a mandatory module on ethics to allow journalists to recognise when an ethical issue arises, how it affects people’s rights and the impact on individuals and businesses. However, there is a question over whether this on its own is sufficient, with queries on whether:
 - sufficient plans are in place to update/strengthen the skills of existing journalists
 - appropriate measures are in place to improve management practices and to help staff deal with management pressures when they could possibly contravene ethical practices
- **quality control/fact checking, journalist as ‘curator’:** with journalists getting their information from an increasing variety of (hard to verify) sources such as Twitter, Facebook, etc, in addition to press releases, and the increase in the use of non-journalists to develop content, more importance than ever is being placed on quality control
- **IT and digital skills:** new journalists need to be able to use and adapt new technologies as they emerge and be able to ally them to their journalism skills. This also puts a demand on their ability to ‘manage upwards’ – not all new journalists will have managers above them who fully understand the potential that the new technologies can offer
- **PR and corporate communications strategy:** to facilitate the move from mainline journalism into these developing sectors
- **entrepreneurialism/freelancing:** the increased number of self-employed journalists means a need for additional skills, in addition to the core journalism skills needed to allow journalists to prepare for self-employment
- **time management skills/managing workload:** to alleviate the negative aspects of the increasing workloads
- **communication skills/relationships:** with audiences to enable journalists to better manage this new relationship

All this emphasises that the skill set of journalists will become wider: as well as the traditional skills, these new skills are increasingly necessary.

No skills have been downgraded, but the reporter is expected to have wider skills. Most are expected to write for print and online and understand mobile/social media etc. The new role is simply a wider role. Employer

⁷ *Journalists at Work, 2012*, NCTJ

4.3 Provision of training

We know, from Journalists at Work (2012), that training activities are high (71 per cent of journalists had undertaken some form of learning in the last 12 months), but also that levels of training have declined. We also know, however, that nearly all of those who had tried to access training/learning to address perceived skills gaps found that barriers existed to them doing so. Significant minorities (about a third) think that the volume or quality of learning provision is inadequate. Issues that are raised on training are:

- provision of training can be skewed: much of it is front end loaded, provided at the point of entry (or immediately afterwards), with access to training declining through an individual's career

Employers need to build professional development into the career structure- not something that journalism does naturally. Educator

- equal opportunities to get access to skills development, with some (part-time, self-employed and freelancers) disadvantaged. Certainly individuals responding to the Journalists at Work (2012) research felt that there were barriers to their accessing training, with many reporting that employers would not allow them time off or would not help pay for training fees. Forty four per cent of journalists who had tried to access learning found that management were not supportive in obtaining learning

In our recent survey on training, one of the many issues that emerged was the lack of training given by companies to its freelance and casual staff - many of whom are working day to day alongside colleagues on contracts, doing exactly the same work. Yet they are not given the training on legal updates or technology that should be seen as a critical part of doing their work effectively. Journalist representative

As previously outlined, freelance and casual workers are often excluded from workplace training which is short sighted and a potentially expensive mistake on the part of employers. Journalist representative

There are some stand-outs who do good training - BskyB, the BBC, but there is an issue of who gets it. They focus all their training on staff they have identified as being long term staff, not on the (more numerous) others. Educator

- whilst we know that there are significant pockets of good practice, some employers don't train

In far too many workplaces, there is still little training. Some that does take place is in the form of circulars/desk drops - box-ticking rather than genuine and effective courses. Journalist representative

Many parts of the industry still really skimp on training and do not approach it as a vital tool that can give them a competitive advantage, particularly in an industry undergoing rapid changes. This is absolutely an area where most companies could do better. Journalist representative

Training budgets have all been dramatically reduced, and the failure to support the NQJ is symptomatic of this. Hands-on training is available from the NUJ, but this is very limited and only in certain locations. Other providers (HE and FE) could supply training, but there seems not to be any funding available from the companies. Educator

- the quality of training: the changing way that training is paid for (away from being mainly paid for by the employer, to be paid for by the individual or supplied free) has coincided with an increase in dissatisfaction with the quality and usefulness of that training. This may indicate that the quality of learning has decreased. This trend needs to be reversed, and it may be that the NCTJ has a key role to play in this

The overall principles and aims of training are very good. But this requires greater investment in initial training and continuous personal development and in the quality of training provision. The NCTJ obviously has a crucial role in maintaining those standards and is well equipped so to do. Employer representative

- whether skills development is recognised. All journalists will be developing new skills (it's an inevitable part of working) but the issue is whether employers recognise that they have

4.4 Consultation on training provision

Given the dispersion of journalists across different sectors of industry, and with an increase in self-employment, the question arises whether suitable consultation arrangements are in place to keep in touch with what the industry needs. Who represents the views of these employers and these journalists when issues such as training and skills issues are considered? The NCTJ has very well-developed consultation processes to gather the views of employers from publishing and broadcasting, but how are the needs and views of employers in sectors which are not covered by the NCTJ and the views of the self-employed and freelancers met?

We recruit members across the journalistic industry - including members in PR and communications, in book publishing and freelances etc. Journalist representative

5. Conclusions



Change happens to all jobs over time. For some occupations, the change is such that the job all but disappears from the economy, to be replaced by jobs that emerge. For other jobs, such as journalism we presume, it is the nature of the job that changes. Journalists at the end of their careers note the extent of the changes in the research techniques, the technology and the structure of the newsroom: it is as likely that when the journalists who are starting out now reach the end of their careers, they will be looking back at the same amount of change.

But this 'inevitability' of change does not mean that we should not try to understand, prepare and facilitate its change. In this report we have:

- identified the drivers of change, including the business environment, IT and digitisation and the Leveson Inquiry. These forces have created, and will continue to create, dramatic changes within journalism
- considered the impacts of these drivers. Here we argue that:
 - whilst the number of journalists has not decreased as much as is popularly believed, there have been declines in specific sectors counterbalanced by increases in employment elsewhere as journalists (i) move into self-employment/freelancing and (ii) move into PR and corporate communications
 - there is a changing age balance of journalists, with older, more experienced, journalists being replaced by younger workers. This is driven both by costs (younger journalists being, on average, cheaper) but also by the different skillsets, with younger journalists being seen as having greater levels of IT and digital skills
 - issues are arising on maintaining the quality of journalism, caused by (i) the increasing use of non-journalists to develop content, and (ii) intensification of work
 - journalists are increasingly working across a range of platforms and need to have the skills to produce output specifically tailored to each of these different platforms
 - journalists increasingly need to develop different relationships with their audiences, being increasingly engaged in a two-way discussion
 - photographic and video skills are increasingly needed by all journalists as part of their multi-skilling
- the implications of these changes for continuing and professional training and development appear to be that
 - the traditional model of entry into journalism via regional and local newspapers is questionable. Consideration needs to be given to whether entry to being a qualified journalist can be achieved in a non-newsroom environment
 - new and enhanced skills are needed in the areas of (i) ethics, (ii) quality control and fact checking, (iii) IT and digital skills, (iv) PR and communication strategy skills, (v) entrepreneurialism and freelancing, (vi) time management and managing workload skills and (vii) communication and 'audience relationship' skills
 - the speed of change throws ever-greater emphasis on the need for access to quality training for all journalists, but there are concerns about potential biases restricting training to some (and not all) and the quality of that training
 - whether the longstanding arrangements in place for consulting about the content and coverage of training remain robust



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