

16th January, 2012, updated 8th February 2012

FROM: Professor Máire Messenger Davies, University of Ulster

I would like to make brief comments on the question of journalism training, in response to the point from your FAQs below. Apologies for not getting these remarks to you before the end of December:

FROM YOUR WEBSITE: *'6. One seminar attendee suggested that the National Council for the Training of Journalists does not teach ethics. The Inquiry would be interested in experience of how ethics are taught and promulgated amongst journalists.'*

POINTS

1. It is true that the NCTJ training programme does not include Ethics, or other aspects of journalism studies that would raise critical questions about the operations of the press, for instance the study of the history of newspapers, and the historical discourses underlying assertions about press freedom. To remedy this lack, at least partly, journalism training could not do better than to make Prof. Julian Petley's witness statement to your Inquiry, required reading for all trainee journalists, and their instructors, and indeed for business and management students and staff.
2. I have worked in two well-thought-of University departments where journalists are trained on courses validated by the NCTJ. In one department, the training

was at Diploma level and the modules were all vocational. There was no traditional academic content that is, no modules on ethics; journalism history; the study of audiences and readerships; research methodology, including the principles of working with human subjects, and so on. In the other department, where I currently work (at the University of Ulster) NCTJ courses are part of Masters' programmes, which means that students have to do some academic units, and must also do an academic dissertation, which requires research methods training, including the ethical principles of working with human subjects. I think that more could be done to incorporate critical ethical and scholarly training into these NCTJ courses, particularly those conducted in universities, where academic expertise in this area is readily to hand.

3. This is a new point, not included in my initial submission. It is a simple one and something that could very easily be implemented by the NCTJ and within the profession as a whole, without requiring any statutory interventions. As someone who was trained not only as a reporter, but also as a sub-editor, and who has also worked as a sub-editor, I suggest that basic training in subbing would give journalism trainees more respect for factual accuracy, conformity to media law, precision of expression, and clarity of information, than just being trained in the basics of reporting. Accurate shorthand and touch typing are a start, but only a start – these *are* included in NCTJ training. In other words, a general thorough grounding in precision of language, factual accuracy and close attention to detail, all qualities particularly required by subeditors, would improve the

culture of journalism training considerably. They are also highly employable skills.

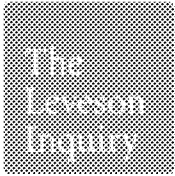
4. Many journalists working in 'Fleet Street' and certainly in the entertainment end of the sector, have not done NCTJ training, nor have they experienced the usual sequel to this: the experience of working in local newspapers. Local journalism tends to require more principled ways of working because local reporters rely so heavily on the goodwill and co-operation of their local communities, whom they are likely to meet in the street or at their children's school. NCTJ courses often require work experience, which is likely to be on local newspapers or other local media outlets, such as radio stations. It might be instructive to look at the career patterns of some of your key witnesses from the press to check this point.

5. My final point concerns union membership. Many of us in the academy, and in journalism, believe that there needs to be a 'balance of power' in newsrooms, and that union membership is one source of this. Journalists who wish to resist unethical demands need to be supported in doing so, and the call for commitment to the NUJ Code of Conduct, including a conscience clause in journalism contracts, would seem to be one way of clearing up some of these problems, short of statutory regulation (which, however, I am not opposed to so long as it is *enabling* regulation, c.f public service broadcasting – again, see Petley). Young trainee journalists need to be taught about their rights as employees and what they can legitimately do, or refuse

to do. One example of a lack of awareness of their professional rights, is the current trend towards unpaid internships, where students, or recent graduates, are effectively doing a full-time reporter's job for nothing. This is wrong for them, wrong for poorer but equally talented students, whose parents can't afford to support them while they work for nothing, and wrong for qualified journalists whose jobs they are taking.

Nobody should be denied the right to join a trades union, as happened at News International. (How ironic that the people sacked from the News of the World turned to the NUJ to help them). As a former journalist, and also in my current post as a university teacher, I have very positive experiences of union support both for myself and for more vulnerable younger colleagues, during my career. The witness statement from Michelle Stanistreet of the NUJ would also be a useful document for teachers to use in journalism training. Indeed the whole of your inquiry consists of material that would be extremely useful to any university or college lecturer interested in improving their journalism courses. I hope that this might be a recommendation and that the Inquiry material, with its unique body of witness statements, from the subjects/victims of press attention, from reporters, from senior managers and other relevant parties, will continue to be publicly available.

I hope these comments are useful.



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Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed

Date ...February 8th 2012