

Strategic Engagement with the Media Industry

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1. Introduction

Summary of aims: to establish and maintain close links with industry, and equip students with the professional skills needed in an evolving marketplace.

Achieved through recruitment of industry practitioners, frequent use of guest lecturers and mentors, work placements and by regularly updating course content.

2. Practice/innovation detail

Journalism, along with the wider media industry, is constantly evolving. The shift to digital platforms, technological innovation and changing trends are having an impact on the number and type of jobs for graduates entering the marketplace. The BA Journalism course needs to keep abreast of these changes to best prepare our students for a successful career in the media industry.

Primarily, we have recruited practitioners with existing or very recent experience of working across different platforms (for example, TV, radio, print and online). This means their skills are up-to-date and relevant. The lecturers' close ties to industry also mean they can keep up-to-date with changing trends and also bring in exciting and inspiring guest lecturers.

The Media School has an annual Media Festival. Recent journalism guests have included Andrew Wilson, Sky News presenter and foreign correspondent, and Bill Coles, former Royal reporter for *The Sun*. In addition, guests are invited to deliver lectures, mentor students, or run workshops as part of timetabled modules. For example, BBC news reporter Steve Knibbs helped at a recent Level 5 news week, and Kevan Blackadder, former editor of *The Gloucestershire Echo*, was a guest editor on a Level 6 news week.

We have also introduced a new module at Level 6 aimed at preparing our students for freelance work and self-employment. This was introduced in response to the changing marketplace and the fragmentation of the jobs market. The module includes taught sessions looking at key areas such as building an online portfolio of work and creating a social media strategy. There are also guest lecturers and mentors from industry. Visitors have included freelance journalists, as well as professionals from sectors outside core journalism, such as content marketing. Students also get expert advice on practical issues, such as tax and finance.

The majority of our lectures are practical and focus on developing core professional skills, such as video, audio, news and feature writing, and magazine production. Although we run simulated newsroom exercises and mock pitches, students are encouraged to test their skills in the 'real world' as early as possible. Many work for websites, newspapers and radio stations at the weekends or when they are not in lectures. They also complete a compulsory work placement module at Level 6.

Students are also encouraged to pitch some of their university work to editors and commissioners. A student on our Level 5 Feature Writing module, for example, recently successfully pitched a piece of work she had written for an assignment to *Cotswold Life*, a glossy lifestyle magazine.

3. Evaluation

We are finding our students are becoming more confident and are better prepared for the workplace and industry placements. Students tell us they are given better and more challenging opportunities when they are on placements because they already have the necessary professional skills and knowledge.

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The feedback we have from employers is positive. For example, an editor of a magazine had this to say about one of our current Level 6 students:

“

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'I think he had a really good foundation to go into design ... and actually came in knowing more of the basic core skills than some pure graphic design students I've had. I was really pleased with him overall.'

Likewise, another Level 6 student who recently went on a work placement at his local paper was told he was the best trainee they have had and he was offered a job.

We have yet to have this year's National Student Survey feedback: however, in a recent accreditation review, our students told the panel they really valued the close connections the course had with industry.

4. Conclusions

Our close ties with industry and leading media practitioners, as well as the teaching of core practical skills, are extremely important. The media industry is changing and we will always make adjustments to reflect this. For example, leading broadcasters are moving towards mobile journalism (the use of mobile devices as a newsgathering tool). We are investing in technology which will enable us to teach this in our modules. In a recent review visit by our accreditation body, the BJTC, our work on mobile journalism was cited as an example of best practice.

From my experience, courses like ours are already engaging with industry. However, my advice would be to keep a close eye on industry developments and reflect these in the teaching of modules. Likewise, the recruitment of practitioners with strong ties to industry really helps with the student

experience and the credibility of the course. Finally, students enjoy meeting and hearing from guests who come in to deliver lectures and workshops. A strong programme of guest speakers can really add value to the course.

5. Further information

Module/Course/Department	Journalism, School of Media
Subject Area	Journalism
Level	n/a
Number of students	85
Academic Year (if appropriate)	
Date of case study	2 February 2015
Keywords	