

## **JERAA@40: Towards a history of the professional association of Australian journalism academics**

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### **Abstract**

The professional association representing Australian journalism educators was established in 1975. This article, on the occasion of the association's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, traces the history and evaluates the role of the Australian Association for Tertiary Education in Journalism (AATEJ) and its successors, the Journalism Education Association (JEA) and the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA). It finds collegiality and a desire to improve standards of journalism teaching have endured as key features of the group's ethos. More recently, the association has taken a leadership role in the contested area of research development and, less consistently, adhered to a founding objective to champion free expression. This repositioning of the association beyond its capacity as a support group for journalism educators raises the question of whether the time has come to renew the traditional mission statement and rejuvenate JERAA's public profile to account for its newfound disciplinary leadership.

### **Introduction**

This history begins in December 1975, when 13 journalism educators meeting at Mitchell College of Advanced Education in the New South Wales regional city of Bathurst created the Australian Association for Tertiary Education in Journalism (AATEJ) ("Journalism Educators", 1976).

From the outset, the association's driving ambition was to make journalism education a respectable academic pursuit *and* an accepted part of the growth of professionalism in the Australian news industry (Potts, 2015; Gompertz, 1976).

This article explores the origins of the AATEJ, contextualising its work by reference to literature on professional associations, and the work of similar bodies such as the United States of America's Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the British Association for Journalism Education (AJE) and the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC). It then offers a report card on the association's achievements after forty years.

The aim of studying the association's work over 40 years is to understand how members have organised themselves to achieve the twin goals, and the consequences of their efforts for journalism as a discipline and a profession. It addresses a range of issues relating

to the role of professional associations as agents of both continuity and change, using particular examples of the AATEJ's (1975-1980) activities, and the subsequent work of its successors, the Journalism Education Association (JEA) (1980-2014) and the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) (2014-present).

Collegiality is the association's trademark, and one of its two enduring features across 40 years. The other is the association's mission statement. JERAA's (2015) aim to raise standards in teaching journalism reiterates the AATEJ's original aspiration, formulated back in 1975 (see "Journalism Educators", 1976). Conversely, the most notable changes in the association are its recent rebranding as a journalism education *and* research association, and its membership profile, which now includes over 60 academics with PhD qualifications, and is more diverse and outspoken than the original AATEJ group. Today, the JERAA defines itself as a representative national peak body, and issues forthright public statements on journalism research, academic independence in the face of news industry criticism, and public speech controversies. This is one of the ways the association strives to respond to new imperatives in the university and news media environment despite its small membership base and lack of paid secretariat, factors that have constrained the association's activities and public profile.

As JERAA celebrates its 40th anniversary, we suggest the association's recent repositioning beyond its capacity as a support group for journalism educators would be strengthened by renewal of its traditional mission statement and rejuvenation of its public profile to account for its new focus on disciplinary leadership.

### **Thinking about professional associations**

This article is the first attempt in the association's 40 years to detail its history. Whilst the broader history of journalism education in Australia has been documented in several publications (see, for example, Woolford, 1983; Fell, 1987; Coleman, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Stuart, 1996; Patching, 1997; Sheridan Burns, 2003; O'Donnell, 2006, 2014, Hirst, 2010), the history of JERAA and its predecessors has received scant interest.

Our particular interest is to examine the role of the AATEJ and its successors in the development of journalism and the profession. This subject is little debated and rarely researched, so our analysis draws on the literature on the role of professional associations in academic disciplines. Current research on this subject suggests professional associations can play an important strategic role in the process of professionalisation of occupations, such as journalism, by strengthening their claims to professional status (Thomas & Thomas, 2013).

What is meant by the term ‘professional status’ varies widely. This ambiguity has been attributed to both unresolved debate about the notion of ‘profession’ in the social sciences, and disagreement in journalism studies as to whether the term ‘professional journalism’ refers to a descriptive or normative concept (Waisbord, 2013, p. 6). We define professionalisation, following Waisbord (2013), as ‘a process by which occupations claim jurisdiction over a field of practice’ (p. 15), because this approach opens up productive discussion about the role of professional associations in the definition of journalism’s occupational boundaries. At the same time, we acknowledge there is little agreement amongst journalism scholars (and others) on the social purpose, desirability, or contribution that professionalism in journalism makes to democratic communication and citizenship, particularly in the digital media landscape (Waisbord, 2013, Lewis, 2012, Reese & Cohen, 2000).

The role of professional associations in academic disciplines has been recognised as pivotal in the development of excellence in research and teaching (Hitchcock, Bland, Hekelman, & Blumenthal, 1995; Yungmeyer, 1983). As Yungmeyer (1983) detailed, disciplinary-based professional associations promote excellence through their activities, including programming of conferences and meetings; sponsorship or conduct of education-related research; publications; continuing education opportunities; certification of members and the development of standards and an accreditation program (p. 264). Hitchcock et al.’s (1995) research extends this line of inquiry by exploring the role of collegiality in improving academic performance. Professional associations were found to offer a more important source for developing productive colleague relationships than an academic’s own institution, in part because they generated ‘collective creativity’ (p. 1112). The importance of collegiality is further defined in Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings’ (2002) study investigating the ‘collective structures’ of professional associations as potential enablers of institutional change in academic fields. They found associations foster innovation via intraprofessional communication practices, described in this study as ‘theorisation’ or ‘normative justification’, that create productive consensus across the field on the acceptability of new ideas and practices (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002, p. 75).

Conversely, in critical accounts of journalistic professionalism, consensus-building of this kind has been viewed somewhat pejoratively as ‘boundary work’ to maintain jurisdictional claims, that is, in other words, organised efforts by professionals (and academics) to reinforce their control over expertise by co-opting innovation (Waisbord, 2013; Lewis, 2012). This literature draws attention to the conservatism of professions in the face of wide-ranging and growing external pressures that threaten their autonomy and privilege:

‘Professions are conservative. They deploy several tactics to resist attacks and seek to protect jurisdictions and privileges’ (Waisbord, 2013, p. 213). In journalism, this conservatism is seen to cogently express itself in occupational resistance to citizen journalism despite its self-evident ‘democraticness’ (Waisbord, 2013, p. 206). In the same way, attacks on journalism education for its failure to develop as a conventional academic discipline (Turner, 2011; Hartley, 1995) can be seen as one of the forms conservatism takes in the Australian academy. Critical accounts of this kind extend debate on the role of professional associations of journalism educators by reminding us of conflicting stakeholder perspectives on the professionalisation of journalism, the inherent difficulty of overturning entrenched patterns of journalism training and professional education, and, therefore, the structural limits to the strategic role of any one organisation or association in the field. Moreover, as Deuze (2006) indicated, journalism education worldwide continues to struggle for acceptability. Efforts to extend research and debate on this subject typically require preliminary consideration of the fundamental and persistent question of whether journalism education ‘should *exist at all*’ (Deuze, 2006, p. 21, emphasis in the original; see also Zelizer, 2004).

This effort to record in some form the development of the Australian journalism educators’ association is therefore timely, as the authors have identified the need for further study of the role of professional associations of journalism academics, and a gap in the historical record in relation to this important dimension of Australian journalism education. Very few original documents have been retained and a number of founding and early members have passed away. Early publications of the Association are in part or entirely missing from library shelves. For example, the five editions of ‘*Journalism Education*’ published from May 1976 to October 1977, which provide some record of the AATEJ’s early years, are now only held at the University of Queensland library. In addition to the available documentary evidence this article also draws on interviews with surviving founding members, which provide more intimate if anecdotal accounts.

### **Towards a history of professional associations of journalism academics**

The American Association of Teachers of Journalism was the first professional association of journalism educators; it was formed in the United States at a conference in Chicago in 1912 (AEJMC, 2012). By the 1920s the association was drafting standards for journalism education and, in 1928, began publishing its first journal, *Journalism Quarterly* (AEJMC, 1987). Now known as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

(AEJMC), the association has grown to be an international organisation with almost 4000 members from 50 countries (AEJMC, 2015).

Meanwhile, an association representing journalism educators in the United Kingdom was not formed until 1997, echoing the global disparity in the development of tertiary journalism education. Reflecting its later origins, the Association of Journalism Educators (AJE) began with a strong commitment to research development, in addition to other core activities of developing and maintaining pedagogical standards and seminar and conference planning (AJE, 2015).

Elsewhere, national associations representing journalism educators have formed in around 30 countries. Since 2007, when representatives of 28 national associations met at an inaugural conference in Singapore, the global ‘voice’ of tertiary journalism education has been corralled under the World Journalism Education Council (WJEC). JERAA was represented at the 2007 Singapore conference and is now one of 32 affiliate associations (WJEC, 2015). A review of these associations’ histories reveals that like the American and British associations, their genesis is nearly always within a few years of the onset or expansion of tertiary journalism education in the host country (WJEC, 2015).

Hence, the formation of an Australian association in 1975 was characteristic of the growth of tertiary journalism education worldwide, coming four years after a major shift from industry to university and college-based journalism training. Although a journalism program had been run at the University of Queensland since 1921, it wasn’t until the late 1960s and 1970s, with the emergence of programs in the newly created colleges of advanced education, that tertiary journalism education in Australia experienced significant growth. By 1975, one university (Queensland) and 10 colleges of advanced education offered some units or full courses in journalism in all states except Tasmania and the Northern Territory (Stuart, 1996). And today, in 2015, JERAA lists 29 universities across Australia and 2 private colleges as offering journalism education courses (“Courses”, 2015).

At Mitchell, David Potts was one of two journalism educators. After beginning his career as a journalist in Western Australia, Potts had worked for Australian Associated Press and in public relations before arriving in Bathurst to launch the college’s inaugural journalism and public relations degrees in 1971. With no experience in setting up a journalism school, Potts brought out Professor Ralph Izard from Ohio University’s prestigious school of journalism (later to be known as the E.W Scripps School of Journalism) for six months in 1972. Three years later, Potts made a reciprocal visit and, after teaching at Ohio for six months, returned to Australia, keen to share his newly acquired knowledge with

his Australian colleagues (Potts, 2015). He reminds us there was neither a recognised body of knowledge about Australian journalism nor an Australian model of journalism education in 1975. Potts' subsequent decision, to invite journalism faculty from the nine other institutions for an inaugural national meeting, led to the first annual conference of Australian journalism educators.

### **Australian journalism educators band together**

The three-day gathering, from 15 to 17 December 1975, brought together 14 men, many of who had only recently left jobs as journalists to become educators. The landslide election of the Fraser Liberal Government, the dénouement of the news story of the decade - the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government - was taking place as many of the diasporic educators travelled to Bathurst. According to a report from the time, in attendance were: John Avieson (Gordon Institute of Technology); Bill Barnes and Don Woolford (Murray Park College of Advanced Education); Graham Deakin (University of Queensland); Maurice Dunlevy (Canberra College of Advanced Education); Howard Gaskin (Western Australian Institute of Technology); Ken Gompertz (Queensland Institute of Technology); Geoff Hasler (University of Western Australia); Rod Kirkpatrick and John Maittlen-Harris (Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education); David Potts and Robin Mitchell (Mitchell College of Advanced Education) and Lyle Tucker (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) ("Journalism Educators," 1976). Only one institution was not represented, the Sydney-based New South Wales Institute of Technology. Joining the academics was John Armarti, head of the Dubbo-based newspaper group Macquarie Publications (Potts, 2015).

By the end of the three days the group had formed an association and set six objectives:

- Raise the standard of teaching in journalism
- Collect and disseminate information about journalism education
- Develop closer relations with mass communication media and professional associations
- Promote the views of the association
- Foster research and
- Promote freedom of expression and communication ("Journalism Educators," 1976)

The objectives and the new association's name, the Australian Association for Tertiary Education in Journalism, bore a striking resemblance to those of the American association,

formed 63 years previously. Whilst the American objectives were relatively unchanged in 1975, the US association's name had changed from the American Association of Teachers in Journalism to the Association for Education in Journalism in the 1950s (AEJMC, 2012).

Other foundation decisions included the setting of membership rules and fees and the election of office bearers. Full-time journalism academics were eligible to be full members, at an annual fee of \$20, with part-time journalism academy and others eligible for associate membership, at \$15. Ken Gompertz from the Queensland Institute of Technology was elected as the first AATEJ President with Graham Deakin from the University of Queensland as Vice President, David Potts elected as Secretary and Don Woolford from Murray Park College of Advanced Education in South Australia as newsletter editor ("Journalism Educators," 1976).

The major issue faced by the early educators was isolation as all journalism departments had only one or two staff. Potts had called the gathering as a means of bringing the educators together. The level of attendance at the first meeting was testament to their need for peer interaction. Rod Kirkpatrick, then from the Darling Downs Institute, drove more than 12 hours to attend the Bathurst gathering (Kirkpatrick, 2015). During the day the educators discussed teaching methods and issues in journalism education, and then socialised of an evening. As revealed by the program for the second annual conference, held at the NSW Institute of Technology on 6 and 7 December 1976, the early educators kept an assiduous schedule. The two-day conference featured three business sessions each day, from 9.15am to 12.15am, then 2pm – 5pm, and 7pm to 9pm. The election of officeholders for the forthcoming year was held during the evening session of the last day. It was not all work - apart from the lunch and dinner breaks, the executive proposed a cocktail party be held on one of the evenings with “friendly professionals” and, if members paid their annual fees at the conference, “we could shout a few” (Gompertz, 1976). In 1975, a dinner trip one night to an eccentric cafe in the old gold mining village of Sofala, 40 minutes away (Potts, 2015), was an unknowing precursor of conference dinners to come.

### **Publications, practical initiatives, and student prizes**

*Journalism Education* was originally set up as a ‘newsletter’ to maintain contact between educators during the year, but from its very first issue it featured articles, albeit written in a journalistic rather than academic style. The first edition, published in May, 1976, was 12 foolscap pages and included articles on “Computer Journalism”, “Journalism Teaching at Ohio University” and “Journalism Education in the Two Germanies” (Woolford, 1976b).

Three issues of *Journalism Education* were published in 1976 and two in 1977. They offer critical insight into the association's initial difficulties in gaining employer and union support for professional education and newsroom openings for graduates. For example, AATEJ President Ken Gompertz's (1976) article, 'The Challenge', detailed the Australian Journalists' Association's (AJA) opposition to tertiary professional education on the grounds it would adversely affect membership, the cadetship system and newsroom work arrangements. It also contested employers' reservations about what they saw as the universities taking control of journalism training and producing 'hot-blooded radicals' who, if hired, would then try to take over the newsroom. Gompertz argued:

The public, the employers, and the AJA can only gain from our participation in the rites of education. Just as we no longer hand-crank presses or hand-set type, nor write with quill nor in long-hand...so we must accept the notion that the development of complex skills and complex educational backgrounds more befits an organisation devoted to this speciality than an organisation which is primarily concerned with delivering a daily product. There are no conflicts - just changes (Gompertz, 1976, p.4).

There is also evidence in these early issues of practical initiatives aimed at pressing the AATEJ's case for industry and academic recognition. Throughout 1976, secretary David Potts held talks with the AJA seeking an agreement for students to be able undertake work experience. The academics also fought an AJA ruling that excluded journalism academics from membership, and sought the creation of a student membership. While the formal talks met with little success, and the AJA remained firm in its resolve that industry training was the preferred method of preparing new generations of journalists ("The A.J.A. Attitude," 1976; Woolford, 1976a), Potts recalls an early and unexpected breakthrough when the Wollongong-based *Illawarra Mercury* agreed to take on work experience students:

The union was dead against this because its view was that our students would be replacing working journalists if they went out on work experience. They did bend a little bit and say, yes, they could go out but in parallel with a working journalist, and then not for publication...My breakthrough came with John Richardson, a wonderful, wonderful journalist, old school. He said, "I'll take a couple of your students", which he did and then he



promptly hired them fulltime. He came back to me and said “if they’re an example, I want to take two of your graduates every year and put them on staff” and that’s what happened and it spread (Potts, 2015).

In another example, journalism student Julianne Schultz at the University of Queensland (UQ) established a national student association to demand AJA membership for journalism students, and to pressure news executives to hire journalism graduates (Woolford, 1976, p. 8). The UQ Journalism Students’ Society hosted a national conference in Brisbane in September of 1976 to put ‘the move to professionalism’, ‘threats to the media’ and related issues on the post-Whitlam political agenda. As Schultz (2015) recalls, senior media figures and academics also attended — including Henry Mayer, Peter Manning, Bruce Stannard, Anne Deveson, Quentin Dempster, Hugh Lunn, Adrian McGregor and John Hoffmann. Their presence guaranteed successful media engagement with the event. New opportunities for graduates and interns began to open up, but not for the ‘high profile’ Schultz: editors at the city’s metro daily and ABC radio station declined to hire her, expressing their reservations about ‘people like you’ and saying, ‘what is it with all you girls, what was wrong with teaching & nursing?’ (Schultz, 2015). Schultz went on to become the founding editor of Griffith Review and a professor in the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research.

Interestingly, the AATEJ held the first awards for student journalism in 1979. Awards varying from \$250 to \$600 were given in four categories, best-published print, radio and television stories, as well as the best news story on a topic set by the association (“AATEJ offers awards”, 1979). The awards became known as the JEA Osmar White awards following the celebrated journalist’s death in 1991, and a bequest from his daughter, Sally White (Patching, 2015). In 1995, the awards title was changed to the Ossie awards, and today there are 15 award categories recognising the multiplatform nature of contemporary journalism, as well as separate prizes for undergraduate and postgraduate students (“Ossie Awards”, 2015).

### **‘Fight better and be bolder’**

Returning now to the association’s publications, in 1978 the *Journalism Education* newsletter’s title was changed to *Australian Journalism Review*. The new title more accurately reflected the publication’s style which continued as a ‘review’ of journalism, journalism education and books until the July edition of 1979, when the first academically-structured articles were published: Shelton Gunaratne’s (1979) discussion paper on

introducing social science tools into journalism teaching, Murray Masterton's (1979) findings from an audience survey showing radio journalists needed to pay more attention to news accuracy and balance, and John Henningham's (1979) blueprint for professionalising Australian journalism.

Looking back, this scholarly turn can be seen as a decisive moment in the association's history, when journalism educators as a group moved to more formal discussion of teaching and research priorities, identified change in education, news industry and journalistic practices as their common cause, and asserted the importance of research in educating new generations of journalists. As Henry Mayer (1979) noted at the time, this was a move in the right direction, as upgrading journalism education and its teachers would allow them to 'fight better and be bolder', particularly in the face of AJA opposition to professional education (pp. 10-11).

The association's research profile developed through the 1980s. John Henningham was elected AJR editor in 1983 and introduced an editorial advisory board, peer-review of articles and distribution of the journal to libraries and a readership beyond the association, which by then had renamed itself the Journalism Education Association (JEA). Henningham was Australia's first PhD in journalism in 1984, and the first journalism professor at the University of Queensland, appointed in November 1989, three months before Clem Lloyd took up his position of journalism professor at the University of Wollongong in February 1990 (AJR, 1989). Henningham's view of journalism schools as 'the academic wing of the profession' (AJR, 1989), and accreditation as the best way of raising teaching standards, held wide currency in the association, and across Australian journalism education, during the 1980s.

Yet, controversially, in 1990, Len Granato of the Queensland University of Technology was voted in as the new editor of the *Australian Journalism Review* at the association's Annual General Meeting at Bond University. Henningham (2015) still recalls the 'hurt' of losing the AJR editorship, but went on to found *Australian Studies in Journalism* (ASJ) in 1992 and *Australian Journalism Monographs* (AJM) in 1998. *ASJ* featured a yearly index of Australian journalism research, organised by subject, and chronicles of developments in the news media, while *AJM* is an annual publication featuring longer research reports that is now published by Griffith University in association with JERAA. Henningham edited the two publications until he left the university system in 2000 to open a private college, called J-School. In 2001, *ASJ* was briefly incorporated into *AJR* before three

University of Queensland academics, led by editor Rod Kirkpatrick, re-established the journal in its own right in 2002 (Kirkpatrick, 2015). *ASJ* continued until 2006.

JEA's first female president, Lynette Sheridan Burns, who became Australia's first female journalism professor through promotion in 2006 at the University of Western Sydney, recalls the *AJR*'s change of editors in 1990 as a divisive moment in the association's history. Yet, she believes it subsequently fostered 'a real time of building that community of scholars' (Sheridan Burns 2015). She says the association's annual conferences became a testing ground for research, prior to submission to the *AJR*, and publication in the journal became a crucial step in launching the research careers of new journalism academics (Sheridan Burns 2015). Moreover, these new academics were interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning, and from 1992, annual conferences considered ways of integrating critical thinking, reflective practice, problem-solving and the internet into journalism education (Sheridan Burns, 2003; Meadows, 1997; Pearson, 1994). These innovative pedagogical projects developed in the context of high student demand for journalism education in the 1990s, which saw the rapid expansion of journalism programs, increased employment of journalism academics, and growing numbers of female academics and students (O'Donnell, 2006, 1999). These developments were the direct result of the Hawke Labor Government's reform of higher education that created a unified national system of 37 universities (Putnis et al. 2002). They also reignited the debate that started in 1980 (Cole, 1980) on the potential oversupply of journalism graduates (Molloy, 1990; Patching, 1996); and raised awkward questions about whether Australian universities were 'deceiving' prospective journalism students about the chances of a career in journalism (Cullen & Callaghan, 2010; Putnis et al. 2002). JERAA has acknowledged that journalism education means more than getting a newsroom job, and, indeed, has argued this case with critics many times (see, for example, Ricketson, 2014). This raises wider questions about the relationship between journalism education and graduate employment, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

According to Sheridan Burns (2015), women took a more high-profile role on the JEA executive from 1995, nearly two decades after Val French (Queensland Institute of Technology) and Pat Hudson (Murray Park) became the first women members of the AATEJ in 1976 ("Association Briefs," 1976). Hudson left the following year. Notably, another early member of the association, Julie Duncan, achieved unprecedented industry acclaim for herself, and the sector, in 2003, winning the Walkley for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism ("2003 Winners", 2004). The award acknowledged her contribution to both journalism education — as a journalism lecturer at the South Australian College of Advanced

Education (1979-1986) and University of South Australia from 1991 — and as an editorial trainer at the Adelaide *Advertiser* (1987-1990). This is the only occasion in which journalism education has received such recognition in the Walkley Awards. The association has had three female presidents, Lynette Sheridan Burns (1999-2000), Suellen Tapsall (2003-2004 and 2008) and Anne Dunn (2009-2012), who passed away during her fourth year of office in 2012. As Sheridan Burns indicates, achieving greater gender equity has been an important indicator of the association's growing maturity (see also Bromley, 2012):

When I was elected president, I was very warmly received by the association. There was a real sense of pride and there was a sense that the organisation had come of age because it had a woman president (Sheridan Burns, 2015).

### **Forty years on**

What then has been achieved since 1975? Has the association played a significant role, as hoped, in shaping journalism education and journalism in Australia? Has it succeeded in its twin goals of making journalism education both 'a respectable academic pursuit' and 'an accepted part of the growth of professionalism' in Australian journalism? Is there evidence that standards of teaching in journalism are higher now than 40 years ago, or is this still a work-in-progress? Is there evidence that journalism educators have contributed to the raising of journalism standards?

The analysis that follows does not pretend to offer definitive answers to these fundamental questions, which require systematic investigation and treatment beyond the scope of a journal article. Instead, it focuses on the association's current work on teaching standards and journalism research, as the most recent iteration of long-standing debates within the association about the two key issues, first, teaching standards and course accreditation, and, second, the relationship between journalism, journalism education and journalism research and scholarship.

### **Educational priorities**

Teaching standards have been the association's primary focus for 40 years. The scope and scale of the association's work in this area can be gauged by comparing the key projects of two of the association's forward-thinking presidents, John Avieson (1980) and Anne Dunn (2009-2012).

In 1980, as the JEA reviewed its work over the first five years, association president John Avieson (1980) argued its future depended on delivering educational excellence that met market demand and addressed the political realities of the sector. His most ambitious idea was for the JEA to tackle head-on the union and employers' hold on the cadetship system and set the organisation up as an off-campus training provider, recruiting cadets into a high-quality, cross-institutional journalism studies certificate program. However, as Julie Duncan (1988), then editorial training manager for *The Advertiser* in Adelaide, told a 1987 national forum on journalism education, 'knowing what was needed was a far step from getting it' (p. 100).

Three decades later, in 2010, amidst growing government demands for quality assurance in university research and teaching, association president Anne Dunn argued the JEA had to engage seriously in the research and teaching standards debate ("Minutes of the AGM", 2010). Her most ambitious idea was to secure funding from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (later known as the Office of Learning and Teaching or OLT) to set up a Discipline Network in Journalism, Media and Communication. She also foreshadowed a similar strategic role in the Australian Research Council's 2012 Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) exercise.

The aim of the 'JoMeC Network', as it became known, was productive networking to develop agreed sector-wide minimum learning outcomes for undergraduate degree programs in journalism, public relations and media and communications ("Minutes of the AGM", 2011). The record shows that in this way the association led a pro-active, collective response to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (TEQSA) demands. As Michael Meadows (2006) argued 'pushing the boundaries from within' gave journalism educators 'a ghost of a chance' of achieving recognition and reward for their work in this adverse context; he noted, further, that in the 'new era' of government oversight of higher education, 'short-term, ideologically-driven policy shifts...will affect us whether we like it or not' (p. 201).

In mid-2015, the JoMeC Network delivered agreed threshold learning outcome statements (TLOs) for bachelor degree programs across the journalism, public relations, media and communications sector to the Office of Teaching and Learning (Breit et al., 2015; "JoMeC Network", 2015; Romano, 2014).

It did so against the odds not only because of Anne Dunn's untimely passing in 2012, but also the unwieldy, complex, arduous and highly controversial nature of the task: leadership of the JoMeC Network positioned Australian journalism educators at the forefront of government efforts to regulate tertiary qualifications (see, for example, Nicoll, 2013), an

unlikely, and, for some, bewildering development given the association's 40 years of failed efforts at self-regulation via a course accreditation system (see, for example, Green, 2005, 2001; Henningham, 1994; Lawe Davies, 1992; Stuart, 1992; Henningham, 1989). Another layer of complexity was added to the project following the change of government in September 2013, as Education Minister Christopher Pyne rolled out his higher education deregulation agenda, including changes to quality auditing (Pyne, 2014), TEQSA's restructure (Lane, 2014), and the disestablishment of the OLT (Trousou, 2015).

We find the JERAA was able to lead the JoMeC Network because it leveraged its long history of debates about quality in journalism education into effective, if contentious, consensus-building amongst not only journalism educators but also academics in the cognate fields of media and communications. In this way, JERAA executive members Rhonda Breit and Angela Romano negotiated the enormous difficulties inherent in productively networking a large number and variety of stakeholders, with the support of project manager Trina McLellan, and Kerry McCallum and Diana Bossio from the other peak body in the sector, the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA). The result was sector-wide consensus on the TLOs, that is, lists of what graduates at a minimum should do, know and be (Romano, 2014).

Of course, teaching standards are guides not guarantees of good professional education, and views differ widely on whether they really help students decipher course offerings and graduate employability ("JoMeC" Network, 2015). Nonetheless, in this instance, we argue the agreed TLOs have contributed to excellence in teaching in the following ways: first, they allow national and international benchmarking of programs for the first time (Breit et al., 2015). Second, they have already opened up new dialogue between journalism academics and news editors on graduate employability (see, for example, Cullen 2014). Third, there is a sustainable network structure and process in place to continue the dialogue on teaching and learning standards ("JoMeC" Network, 2015). In effect, the project formalised and extended the sharing of notes and curriculum ideas that characterised the initial activities of the AATEJ.

This report card therefore finds JERAA addressing three of its six long-standing objectives: raising teaching standards, developing closer relations with other professional associations, and promoting the association's views – which, in this instance, meant respect for academic autonomy and diversity as the basis for consensus-building (Romano, 2014).

## **Better journalism**

What then of the other goal of fostering journalism research and, thereby, contributing to the growth of the profession and better journalism? The changing focus of the association's work in this area is demonstrated by comparing its research agenda of the early years (Potts, 1980) with the current, recently published, research statement ("Journalism Research", 2015).

In 1980, while reflecting on the JEA's research performance in the first five years, AATEJ founder David Potts (1980) suggested the association should be 'the catalyst' for news media criticism, or what he euphemistically termed, debate on 'issues of importance to the news industry' (p. 15). He conceptualised journalism research as part of a 'circular process' aimed at supporting journalism teaching, improving professional practice and raising standards of journalism (Potts, 1980, p. 15).

This notion has had wide currency across the association (Richards, 1997), right up to the present day (Bromley, 2013). It achieved powerful expression in many high-impact research initiatives, including The Media and Indigenous Australians Project (Eggerking, 1996), Response Ability (Skehan et al., 2009), Reporting the Vulnerable (Richards, 2009), and Reporting Diversity (Phillips, 2011). These were designed to provide solutions to community concerns about journalism's shortcomings, and were endorsed or developed by the association and its members in collaboration with industry. However, as Reese & Cohen (2000) noted, 'while engagement with the media professions can be useful and constructive, it must not substitute for building a stronger sense of academic professionalism' (2000, p. 221). They asked, 'what does it mean to be a professional teacher?' and in response argued the professionalism of scholarship should be the issue at the heart of the debate about journalism research and education (2000, p. 223). Elsewhere, Bromley (2012; 2013) described this process of academic professionalisation as 'academizing' journalism and transforming it into a scholarly concern. He said practitioners recruited by universities were known to be 'reluctant participants' in the process, including Australian 'journalist-academics' who often assumed 'the transfer from newsroom to the academy involved no fundamental re-orientation', although there was some evidence that growing numbers of women journalism educators may provide 'a renewed impetus to the project of academizing the field' (Bromley 2012, pp. 569-570; see also Wake, 2015; North 2010).

Thirty-five years later, in mid-2015, and in anticipation of the third scheduled ERA audit of research standards, JERAA published a journalism research Australia national statement for the first time in the association's history ("Journalism Research", 2015). The record shows the association led by president Matthew Ricketson has pro-actively responded

to ‘the research climate dictated by government policy’ (Bromley, 2013, p. 11) by clarifying its research paradigm or stance. The statement said, ‘journalism as an academic research discipline contributes to the body of scholarly knowledge about the contexts, tools, creation, distribution, consumption, impacts and social relations of journalism via journalism studies and journalism practice’ (“Journalism Research”, 2015).

The statement’s aim was to define and describe the journalism research discipline in Australia and, by extension, to signal JERAA’s leadership of the disciplinary field. It also recognises some of the unconventional particularities of Australian journalism research: competing paradigms (e.g. journalism studies, practice-led or practice-based research), eclectic interdisciplinary impulses, and a disposition to serve ‘the public good’ (“Journalism Research”, 2015). The statement, spearheaded by JERAA’s Vice-President (Research), Johan Lidberg, built on the research advocacy of high-profile journalism educator Wendy Bacon (2006), and other distinguished JERAA members such as Mark Pearson and Roger Patching (2010), Mia Lindgren (2011) and Gail Phillips (2013), and integrated the perspectives of the JERAA executive, a panel of experts, and JERAA members (Lidberg, 2015). The statement was part of a move towards a new public profile, following the association’s name change in the previous year. A further step has seen the association champion free expression by making forthright public statements on, for example, the imprisoned Al Jazeera journalists, Peter Grete, Mohammed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed.

We find JERAA’s research statement to be a significant development because it offers a clear articulation of the association’s research position and, thus, following Mayer (1979), enables better debate about the nature and significance of Australian journalism research. Conversely, it is important to note the statement belies ongoing disagreement between journalism educators on central points, specifically whether journalism practice should count as research (see, for example, Lester 2015, Pearson et al. 2015, Gunaratne 2015), and therefore may require review given the changing research landscape.

Of course, the real test of the statement, and the research paradigm it outlines, will be a turnaround in the research performance of journalism educators and an end to scathing adverse assessments of their research productivity, international profile and impact (see, for example, McNair, 2013; Bromley & Neal, 2011; Turner, 2011; Henningham, 1999). As Meadows (2014) argued, ‘if it’s rigorous, quality research – with clear societal benefits – then it will prevail regardless of ERA or ego’ (p. 119).

This report card therefore finds JERRA has exceeded its objective of fostering research through its annual conferences, publications and collaborative partnerships with



industry to reposition itself at the forefront of disciplinary development. However, we suggest, the association's new focus on disciplinary leadership would be strengthened by renewal of its traditional mission statement, and rejuvenation of its public profile to direct greater attention to its research activities.

## **Conclusion**

In December 1975, the AATEJ's founding members looked forward to a future when journalism education would be a respectable academic pursuit, and a recognised partner to industry in raising the standards of Australian journalism. They believed in collective efforts to improve the standards of university-level teaching in journalism as the most productive path towards better journalism for all Australians, and they set about the task of creating that pathway. Looking back, 40 years later, their sense of purpose and optimism are striking, especially given how few they were and how ambitious their plan of action. It is important at this point to acknowledge that JERAA is able to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday this year thanks to the vision and hard work of these pioneering journalism educators.

At the same time, organisational factors sharply constrain the association's activities and public profile, as do the broader contextual developments in the journalism profession, the union, news industry and university system that we have alluded to but not analysed in any depth in this article. The association became an incorporated non-profit organisation in 2008 ("Minutes of the AGM," 2008), yet it still has no substantive administrative infrastructure, and relies on its executive of 10 unpaid, elected office-holders, to oversee its extensive work-slate of conference, awards, research, publication, networking, and media activities. There is evidence that a small group of enthusiasts can do much to incrementally build consensus for change in journalism, but unanswered questions remain about how much more progressive it could be with better resources. Nonetheless, this preliminary historical account of the JERAA at 40 concludes the association is free of mid-life crisis and in good shape, with a stable membership of 120 journalism academics (Sykes, 2015) who continue to meet annually to discuss their teaching and research. Thankfully, it has achieved greater gender balance and is no longer seen as an old boy's club (Meadows, 2014).

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## Appendix

<p><b>Association presidents</b></p> <p>1976 Ken Gompertz  1977 – 1978 John Maittlen-Harris  1979 Don Woolford/  Howard Gaskin  1980 John Avieson  1981 Unknown  1982 Unknown  1983 David Potts  1984 David Potts  1985 Bruce Grundy  1986 - 1987 Lawrence Apps  1988 Roger Patching  1989 - 1991 John Wallace  1992 Chris Lawe Davies  1993 - 1994 Mark Pearson  1995 -1996 Ian Richards  1997- 1998 Roger Patching  1999 - 2000 Lynette Sheridan Burns  2001- 2002 Kerry Green  2003 -2004 Suellen Tapsall  2005 - 2007 Stephen Tanner  2008 Suellen Tapsall  2009 - 2012 Anne Dunn  2013 – present Matthew Ricketson</p>	<p><b>Editors, <i>Australian Journalism Review</i></b></p> <p>1978 Don Woolford  1979 Douglas Golding  1980 Don Woolford  1981 No publication  1982 - 1990 John Henningham  1991 – 1994 Len Granato  1995 Lawrence Apps  1996 Martin Hirst, Lani Guerke, Roger Patching  1997 Charles Stuart  1998 -2000 Warwick Blood  2001 -2002 Mark Pearson  2003 - present Ian Richards</p> <p><b>Association Life Members</b></p> <p>Len Granato  Roger Patching  Mark Pearson  David Potts  Ian Richards  Suellen Tapsall  Sally White</p>
<p><b>1975 Executive</b></p> <p>President Ken Gompertz  Vice president Graham Deakin  Secretary/treasurer David Potts  Newsletter editor Don Woolford</p>	<p><b>2015 Executive</b></p> <p>President Matthew Ricketson  Secretaries Kayt Davies, Colleen Murrell  Treasurer Jolyon Sykes  AJR editor Ian Richards  Media Officer Alexandra Wake  Vice president (awards) Kathryn Bowd  Vice president (research) Johan Lidberg  Vice president (networks) Angela Romano  Vice president (conference) Margaret Van Heekeren</p>

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### Disclaimer:

Following Anne Dunn's passing in 2012, Penny O'Donnell was invited to join the JoMeC Network's Steering Committee to produce scholarly publications informing a wider audience of the projects goals, methods and outcomes and had a minor involvement in the project from that time. Margaret Van Heekeren is a convenor of the 2015 JERAA annual conference to be held at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, and as such was a member of the JERAA executive in 2015.