

# The Norwegian journalism education landscape<sup>1</sup>

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Journalism is one of the most popular study programmes in Norway. There are several pathways into the Norwegian news industry for young people seeking a career in journalism, but it is increasingly common for aspiring journalists to start off with a journalism education. In this article the landscape of Norwegian journalism education is presented, including a closer look at the content of the studies, the connection to the industry and the students of journalism themselves. The description of the students is based on a dataset from a series of questionnaires administered between 2000 and 2004 to three complete cohorts of Norwegian journalism students at Oslo University College and Volda

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University College, the largest and oldest J-schools in Norway. Norwegian journalism education can be described as working quite well as measured by both the students' success in the job market and their expressed satisfaction with their studies. The fact that the application rate for several years has been among the very highest compared with other university programmes also validates this point.

**Keywords:** Norway, journalism education, relation between industry and j-schools.

## Introduction

Journalism is one of the most popular study programmes in Norway. There are several pathways into the Norwegian news industry for young people seeking a career in journalism, but it is increasingly common for aspiring journalists to start off with a journalism education. The trade union for journalists in Norway (NJ) organizes more than 90% of all working journalists. In 1992, only 19% of NJ members had journalism education, whereas by 1999 the number had increased to 30% (NJ/NR 1999:9) and 48% in 2002 (Sørensen 2005). Even if there are still many journalists who come to the profession through other kinds of education and news room experience, the study of journalism has become an increasingly important pathway to the profession, especially to the national and larger regional media. The journalism schools (J-schools) evidently play a more and more significant role in the shaping of the Norwegian journalists of tomorrow.

In this chapter we will present the landscape of Norwegian journalism education, including a closer look at the content of the studies, the connection to the industry and the students of journalism themselves. The description of the students is based on a dataset from a series of questionnaires administered between 2000 and 2004 to three complete cohorts of Norwegian journalism students at Oslo University College and Volda University College, the largest and oldest J-schools in Norway<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter is to some degree based on the article 'Journalists in the Making' where we discuss some major findings from these longitudinal surveys (in *Journalism Practice*, 2007, 1:3). The surveys were answered at the start and end of studies and three years after study completion. The surveys were conducted in cooperation with The Centre for the Studies of Professions at Oslo University College.

## The past and present of Norwegian journalism education

Prior to the formal start of the first J-school in Oslo several shorter courses for journalists had been offered, organized by the industry itself from 1951 under the name of the Journalist Academy (*Journalistakademiet*). The first J-school, with duration of one year, was established in 1965. If relatively synchronous with the development in other Nordic countries, this is still quite late compared to many other western countries. Australia, for example, established their first journalism school in 1921. Both the journalism trade union and engaged editors and journalists played a central role in starting up and running the first state run school. The establishment of the first journalism school in Oslo was seen as an important step in the professionalization of journalists (Ottosen 1996).

The second J-school was established in the rural small town Volda in 1971 after a lot of discussion about both the content and the placement of the school (Alme et al. 1997). From this year on the state-run schools offered a two-year programme. It has been argued that the political focus on regional development in deciding the placement of this school weakened the possibility for the academic development of journalism and set the research at risk of being fragmented and little coordinated in a small country like Norway (Bjørnsen et. al 2007, Ottosen 1997).

In 1987, the coastal towns of Bodø and Stavanger followed suit. In 2000 a separate journalism education was established for the indigenous Sami people at the Sami College in Kautokeino, recruiting Finnish and Swedish students as well. Finally, the University in Bergen established its own journalism programme in 2005, representing a more 'pure academic' flavour to the variety of journalism programmes.

Several private journalism programmes offering a bachelor-degree in journalism have also been established. The Christian institution Gimlekollen in Kristiansand established its own J-school, Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, in 1981 and was approved as a credit point-giving private university college in 1996. This J-school is extraordinary in the way that it is run within a Christian framework. In 2000 an internationally oriented journalism programme started up at Bjørknes International College in Oslo. This was a joint venture be-

tween Bjørknes and The University of Queensland in Australia, where the students attended the first year in Norway and then completed the bachelor-degree with two following years of study in Australia<sup>3</sup>. In 2002 a journalism bachelor programme was founded at the Norwegian School of Management in Oslo. The profile of this study programme is an evident specialization; approximately half of the curriculum consists of economic and management topics<sup>4</sup>.

Cooperation between public and private actors should also be mentioned; e.g. a cooperation between Oslo University College and a private college (NKS) and a joint venture between Bodø University College and Folkeuniversitetet ('The people's college'). The division between public and private is thus to some extent blurred, also as the government encourages public institutions to offer journalism courses with a course fee.

The main institution for further education offering short courses for practising journalists is the Norwegian Institute of Journalism; 'a knowledge and resource centre for media practitioners' (The Norwegian Institute of Journalism 2008) The centre was established in 1975 by the principal media associations: The Norwegian Union of Journalists, The Association of Norwegian Editors and The Norwegian Newspaper Publisher's Association.

All the public J-schools in the Norwegian system had by around 2005 established a three year bachelor programme in line with the so called Bologna process.

A major (extended, two years duration; 'hovedfag') in journalism was established in 2000 as a joint venture between Oslo University College and Oslo University (Department of Media and Communication). As part of the agreement both institutions established one professor position each. The first professor in journalism in Norway was appointed in 1999 at Oslo University College. As a part of the Bologna process the major ('hovedfag') was renamed master in journalism as from 2003. The master programme is a two year programme with 60 ECTS points obtained through four courses and 60 ECTS points in writing the master thesis. The master programme qualifies as further higher education for

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<sup>3</sup> In 2007 this vocational journalism programme was converted into a part of the media studies programme (60 credit points) at Bjørknes College, still qualifying for pursuing journalism bachelor studies abroad.

<sup>4</sup> This programme was not offered in 2009 because of reduction in the number of applicants.

journalists, a scientific career as media researcher and as teachers in the journalism educations.

In cooperation with University of Helsinki, University of Tampere in Finland and University in Örebro in Sweden, Oslo University College offers a programme in Global Journalism as a two year programme for journalists wanting to further their journalistic knowledge and skills focusing on international news reporting. The programme has a global focus and brings together professional journalists from Africa, Asia, North and South America, and North and Eastern Europe. The student's varying experience from different countries, cultures and media provide the basis for a discussion on differences in work practice and ethics, and shared problems and challenges for the journalistic profession.

Political regulations in the organization of Norwegian journalism education have been few except for the geographical placement of the teaching institutions. Regarding the content of the J-schools there is a high degree of autonomy and the government has had scarce impact compared with other vocational educations, as teachers and social workers (having quite detailed instructions about content through so called 'frame plans'). This may reflect that the strong idea of the free and independent press in Norway is valid in the education of journalists as well. There exist few regulations and a large degree of freedom from governmental control. This also strengthens the understanding of journalism as a semi-profession (Ottosen 2004).

## **Curricula between practice and theory**

All the study programmes leading to a bachelor degree have a duration of three years of study, each year consisting of 60 ECTS points (total of 180 points). It has also, until 2009, been possible to complete only two years of study and achieve the degree 'University College graduate of journalism' ('høgskolekandidat').

The content of the education of journalists in Norway can largely be said to be characterized by being practically oriented with much weight on journalism as a craft. Theoretical and factual topics are taught mainly integrated with a journalistic perspective and seldom in academic depth.

In general the journalism training favours a so-called all round model. The young journalists mainly become generalists, not specialists. Nevertheless, the different journalism educations obviously also are diverse both regarding types of topics and subjects taught, teaching methods and medium specialization. One example of this is that the second largest journalism education in Volda offers more specialization in broadcast, while the largest J-school in Oslo has its main strength in newspaper journalism.

The required readings in the different schools' study curricula are to a large degree similar. The same basic book of journalism is mainly used throughout. There is also a common emphasis on training of ethical awareness. When it comes to other topics, and the weighing between them, the variety is larger. For instance there is more focus on scientific methods in Bergen, international affairs in Oslo and civic journalism in Volda.

Most of the J-schools put a lot of weight on the production side of the education with the aim to resemble the real life of the newsrooms. At the same time there has been a drive towards more research-based and academic content in the curriculum, especially in the last decade, from 'craft' to 'academic discipline'. To some extent, one might say that this doubleness represents a kind of 'schizophrenia' in the Norwegian journalism education of today. There is a challenge to balance the demands of the industry with the driving forces in the academic world.

The internship period is a vital part of the programme and lasts for two months. Many students consider the internship period to be the most important part of their studies, and experience also shows that it is often a gateway to the first job after completed studies.

Journalism education in Norway places heavy emphasis on preparing students to adopt a critical watchdog function as a part of the role of the journalist. In the curriculum and course literature, this watchdog function is underlined to such an extent that it is likely to affect students' attitudes, drilling into them the view that journalists should make a difference in society even though they may have other personal priorities. A strict demarcation is marked vis-a-vis media and communication studies in general and PR and information topics in particular.

When students are asked what ‘they’ believe are the important qualities for a journalist and a journalistic education, we can observe some patterns. At the beginning of their studies the students emphasize personal traits and professional knowledge. During their studies, they appear to substitute their initially more charismatic and professional ideals of the good journalist with a more practical, skills-based ideal. Also, press ethics appear increasingly important to them. When asked three years after graduation about how they retrospectively evaluate their education, 65% of the students express satisfaction. This is an increase of 15% from when they ended their studies (Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen 2007).

### **The students: middle class, ethnic homogenous and female**

In Norway, the recruiting bias of the journalism profession – especially the predominance of middle- and upper-class socioeconomic backgrounds and left of centre political leanings – has been well-known for decades (Høyer 1982), and still persists today (Hovden 2008). Such bias in the social recruitment of journalists has, not surprisingly, been perceived as problematic, especially in the eyes of other elites. It is potentially compromising because it threatens journalists’ public legitimacy, not only as ‘objective’ reporters of events – by the possibility of others linking social bias to a real or perceived ‘journalistic bias’ (‘of course the leftist press will try to discredit conservative political parties’) – but also through journalists’ frequent claim of representing and defending ‘the common people’ against social elites (Pettersson 1994).

We can summarize some of the social characteristics of journalism students from Volda and Oslo who started their studies in the years 1999–2001. So far as the ‘basic demographics’ are concerned, students of journalism in Norway are predominantly female, relatively young and ethnic Norwegians. While journalism education in Norway was male-dominated until the early 1980s, the proportion of women has been steadily rising. In the 1970s, only one in three Norwegian journalism students was female. In the 1980s, male and female students were roughly equal in numbers, but in the last fifteen years female students have been clearly in the majority. In

2001, they outnumbered male students by two to one<sup>5</sup>. This seems to be in line with international trends (cf. Splichal and Sparks 1994: 110)<sup>6</sup>.

The mean age for new journalism students in 2000–2001 was 23–24 years, which is about average for students at universities and colleges. The students of journalism, however, appear particularly homogenous regarding age, as more than two-thirds were between 21 and 24 years (Bjørnsen 2003b: 31).

Journalism students are still an ethnically homogenous group: less than 3% says ‘both’ their parents were born abroad (quite low, compared both to the 6% national average for Norwegian students and to the proportion with a non-western minority background in the population as a whole – 19% in Oslo and 6% nationally (SSB 2006)). This skewed representation is perceived as a challenge, in parts of the education system, in some newsrooms and in the journalists’ union (Bjørnsen 2003a).

Geographically, students appear to be fairly representative of the Norwegian population, both regionally (by county) and in term of city-peripheries, with a slight over-representation from the capital and the regions closest to the schools.

Regarding students’ ‘previous experience’, findings illustrate the problems of a clear division between ‘students’ and ‘professionals’: more than half of the Norwegian students of journalism have undertaken paid journalistic work before starting their studies (predominantly in local and regional newspapers), and almost a third had worked for at least a year as a journalist<sup>7</sup>. These numbers are decreasing after the new system of intake to the J-schools was implemented. Now a special quota of 50% of the students’ are being recruited almost directly from high school. This intake rule implies that half of the students are only 21 years old or younger when they start their studies.

<sup>5</sup> The estimates are based on data from 1971–2003 for students at Volda University College (Alme, Vestad et al. 1997), and data from 1993–2003 for Oslo University College (Bjørnsen 2003b:30). It should, however, be noted that these changes are not confined to journalism studies, but follow quite closely the changing male-female ratio in the Norwegian student population in general over the last 35 years (SSB 2000: table 192).

<sup>6</sup> David Weaver also documents the gender composition in journalism internationally. Ten years ago Finland (49%), New Zealand (45%) and Germany (41%) had the highest proportion of women in the journalism work force. At the bottom of the list was Korea (14%) and Algeria (24%). In England, Spain, Equador and Mexico around every fourth journalist was a women around ten years ago (Weaver 1998: 457).

<sup>7</sup> An interesting trend in this regard is that the number of journalism students who have some form of previous journalistic experience has been increasing, but the average length is declining (Bjørnsen 2003b: 40).



75 per cent have completed some kind of university education before starting their journalism education. Of these, the large majority has completed only shorter studies (less than two years), mostly in the humanities (media and communication, history and languages being popular subjects) or – somewhat fewer – in the social sciences (political science or sociology) or psychology. Subjects from the natural sciences, or vocational subjects, are very rare.

Politically, students of journalism are more likely to vote for a radical socialist party than professional journalists are (and again, much more so than the general population), but not more than university students in the social sciences and humanities (Hovden 2002). Only 13% said they were ‘very interested’ in politics, indicating that political activism is not important to most Norwegian journalism students’ choice of a journalistic career.

Even so, most journalism students appear to come from relatively privileged social backgrounds. If less a social elite than students of medicine and of the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH), their backgrounds appear markedly more privileged than those of other student groups at the university colleges (teaching, engineering, health/social studies). Compared to students in the social sciences and arts faculties, which are quite similar to journalism students in their social background, journalism students appear to have parents with somewhat more economic capital but less political capital.

18% of the students of journalism have a father or mother ‘with journalistic experience’<sup>8</sup>. Even if this survey question is rather vague, the number still appears large compared to the 1% of university students who have a father working with journalism or information. This suggests a tendency towards a direct social reproduction of the journalistic profession by the way of journalism studies.

## Cooperation with the industry

All the established J-schools have established a system with training and internship in newsrooms. Both the schools and the industry sup-

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<sup>8</sup> 2% have both parents in this category, 11% only their father and 5% only their mother.

port the idea that internship is an important contribution to the education. This is supported by the pedagogical notion in the schools that the importance of learning through practical work as a journalist is an important element in the education. It varies from school to school at what stage in the education the internship takes place. For example, at Oslo University College the internship is placed in the summer between the first and second year in the bachelor degree whilst in Volda the internship is placed in the last term in the third year in the curriculum.

Another important contact between the education field and the industry is that active journalists and editors regularly teach as guest lecturers at the campuses and also function as examiners during exams. The majority of the staff in the J-schools has a background as journalists themselves.

Many newsrooms also use students as extra staff while they study. Sometimes this can be a challenge for their education since the risk is always that when they get a chance to work as journalists their attention will be as much in the newsroom as the classroom. It could be discussed whether the relation between the industry and the J-school is asymmetrical. Since the J-schools are dependent on the industry to have agreements on internship there is always the danger that the industry decides the terms and wants to pick the candidates for internship themselves. Here is a potential conflict of interest since the J-schools try to implement the principle that all students have an equal right to internship whilst many newsrooms tend to look for the best students to get as much as possible out of the trainee period.

The possible asymmetry in the relation between the J-schools and the industry is also manifested in the challenge of balancing the aim to 'produce' journalists for the newsrooms and at the same time represent a critical correction to the news industry. This can also be seen as a version of the market vs. ideals dilemma in journalism (Ottosen 2004).

Another potential problem for the J-schools is in recruiting teachers from the industry. The teaching institutions can seldom compete with the industry on the wage level.

## **Networking among the J-schools**

There is an active network between the established J-schools both at a national Norwegian level and at a Nordic level. The most important

part of the networking is a biannual joint conference where the institutions meet and exchange experiences on teaching and curriculum issues. The institutions take turns in hosting the conference and the network is called 'Nordic journalism education'. Since the end of the cold war the Baltic countries to a certain degree have been included in the network (Hovden et al. 2009).

To some extent there is also student exchange where the Nordic J-schools open their courses for students from other countries. Through the Interlinks cooperation there is a programme for student exchange on master level between some Baltic and Nordic institutions. On the same level there is also a development in the direction of joint degrees. As an example University in Örebro, Sweden, Tampere and Helsinki in Finland and Oslo University College have a joint Global Master in Journalism mainly recruiting students from developing countries.

There are also several examples of joint research with the staff between Nordic institutions.

The Nordic Council has established a financial support system where they support research, student exchange, teacher exchange and joint meetings and seminars through a system called Nordplus.

Most J-schools in Norway are also members of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) and take part in annual meetings and conferences there.

## **Concluding remarks**

Summing up, Norwegian journalism education can be described as working quite well as measured by both the students' success in the job market and their expressed satisfaction with their studies (Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen 2007b). The fact that the application rate for several years has been among the very highest compared with other university programmes also indicates a viable journalism education.

From the high percentage of the recently educated journalists who are able to get relevant – and in many cases permanent – jobs, there is also reason to be slightly optimistic about the future for young, newly educated journalists. However, there is obviously a discrepancy between where the newly educated end up, and what their first preference in the job market was. Those who preferred jobs in newsrooms in highly pro-

filed newspapers and the larger broadcasting companies, sometimes have to settle for part-time jobs or less popular permanent jobs in local newspapers, professional magazines or online newspapers. But it is reasonable to believe that this might be the first step towards a career in their preferred jobs at a later stage.

It is fairly safe to say that the J-schools understand themselves to play an important role as a knowledge base and a critical corrective for the industry through publishing and participation in the public debate on issues related to journalism and through critical analyses of certain development trends in the industry such as commercialism and concentration of ownership, ethical issues etc. (Ottosen 2004).

The tendency is clearly that journalists are increasingly recruited to the industry through the J-schools (*Kunnskapsløftet*). This has the positive factor that it strengthens the professional identity and ethical level in the journalist community as a whole. A potential danger could be that the journalist profession as a whole becomes too conform and in the long run loses the individualists and nonconformists that have always provided the spice in the profession as a whole. It could also be argued that there is a potential danger that the education system as a whole educates generalists while a broader recruitment from other educations, professions and walks of life could secure a broader and more varied journalism community. Even though the J-schools appreciate that the level of education is rising, there is a general support of the idea that the journalist profession should be open and recruit staff with varied backgrounds.

There is a growing awareness that the journalism community and the J-schools should reflect the multicultural society. At the same time there is a long way to go before the recruitment of journalists with an ethnic minority background reaches a satisfactory level. This counts for both the J-schools and the newsrooms. Oslo University College has established an experiment with a quota system where five study places each year are earmarked for qualified minorities. This is a controversial system and is just a very small step on the road to a multicultural journalist community.

The trend is that the J-schools become more international to the extent that journalism students are now encouraged to take parts of their education abroad. To a certain extent the schools also receive exchange students, but mostly on a master level since most of the teaching is in

Norwegian at the bachelor level. The increased level of internationalization is obviously an effect of the Bologna process which in itself stimulates internationalization.

The Norwegian J-schools have become what they are through a historical process where the struggle for academic independence has developed hand in hand with a will to be relevant and attractive for the industry. The process of change from the 1960s, when the education level was low and the available education weak, has been quite significant. The present development of academization (Zelizer 2004) of journalism as a trade and J-schools as institutions have given the J-schools self-confidence and autonomy, even though the power of the industry and the commercialism of the media sector with increased concentration of ownership causes concern and challenges for the future.

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## Žurnalistikos studijos Norvegijoje

### Santrauka

Žurnalistika yra viena populiariausių studijų programų Norvegijoje. Nors egzistuoja ne vienas būdas įsitraukti į žiniasklaidos veiklą, tačiau dažniausiai norintys tapti žurnalistais renkasi žurnalistikos studijas. Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiamos žurnalistikos studijos Norvegijoje, jų turinys, sąlytis su žiniasklaidos industrija ir pačių žurnalistikos studentų požiūriai. Studentų tyrimą sudaro 2000 m. ir 2004 m. vykdytos apklausos seniausiose Norvegijos žurnalistikos mokyklose – Oslo universiteto koledže ir Volda universiteto koledže. Žurnalistikos studijos Norvegijoje gali būti apibūdintos kaip pakankamai sėkmingos, vertinant studentų įsidarbinimo galimybes ir jų pasitenkinimą

studijomis. Tai, kad stojančiųjų skaičius į žurnalistikos programas yra vienas didžiausių lyginant su kitomis universitetinėmis programomis taip pat patvirtina šį teiginį.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** Norvegija, žurnalistikos studijos, santykis tarp žurnalistikos mokyklų ir industrijos.