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Desired Attributes for Young Journalists

Research Paper:

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Abstract

This article approaches the question of ‘which core attributes should young journalists offer’ from the industry point of view. The answers by senior staff of leading newspapers are used to deduct a list of qualities cadets or young journalists are expected to offer. This study uses interviews at *El Pais* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Singapore’s *Straits Times* and Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*. Spain’s *El Pais* and Switzerland’s *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* are counted among the ten best papers in the world, but their histories are vastly different, as is their approach to the selection of cadets and beginning journalists. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* only takes graduates, but not those with a journalism degree, whereas *El Pais* has its own post-graduate journalism school from among whose graduates it selects the best to join its staff. The *Straits Times* and *South China Morning Post* have neither a preference for nor a rejection of journalism graduates. While the answers regarding the qualities of beginning journalists show a surprising unanimity, they also point to the fact that some attributes, possibly, can be encouraged but not taught.

Introduction: benchmarking

When looking at journalism and journalism education globally, as John Merrill and Arnold de Beer have done in the recent edition (2004) of *Global Journalism*, we are confronted with a picture of great diversity or – as others would call it – with a great multiplicity of cultures. *Global Journalism* is, as the previous ones, characterized by Merrill's pragmatic stance (Merrill, 1989: 289-90), which takes into account the current state of play. What can be observed around the globe is not very encouraging. In a climate created by concerns of national security, even countries that pride themselves on a free and independent press do not fare well in stakes of press freedom. When *Reporters Without Borders* published their first ranking of countries according to their press freedom, "the US rank[ed] below Costa Rica and Italy score[d] lower than Benin" (RSF, 2003). But – as Merrill points out – what might be counted as repression by some could be seen by others as "stability, religion and social order", and could be valued higher than a free press (2004: 6).

These tensions can be observed equally on a macro level in the wrangle over the world's information and communication order (Carlsson, 2003: 31-67), which saw its most recent chapter unfold at the WSIS in Geneva in December 2003 (www.itu.int/ws/geneva/). The same multiplicity of approaches to journalism was already acknowledged in the early 1990s by Nordenstreng and Traber in their *Promotion of Educational Material for Communication Studies* (Nordenstreng & Traber, 1992:79), a point made by Morgan a decade later (Morgan in Deuze, 2004: 128).

Given this diversity, how then do we benchmark journalism and journalism education? Journalism research is traditionally positioned between the normative and the empirical. Much research is based on assessing the performance of the media against an ideal of professional practice. Quality newspapers are among the media which get closest to a professionally adequate performance, though their performance may differ depending on their country's political and media system. Since this article attempts to establish desired graduate attributes which ensure quality, the research was carried out at newspapers known for their quality journalistic practice. Their answers may not extend to the wider field of the world's newspapers.

My approach to measuring quality is undoubtedly influenced by a Western bias of measuring the press in using the criteria employed by Siebert, Schramm and Peterson – that is a bias towards a libertarian and/ or socially responsible press. These ideals inform Merrill's own ranking, which he has carried out over several decades (2004: 32/33), as they do the German branch of International Media Help which, in July 1999 surveyed 1000 individuals – entrepreneurs, politicians, professors, journalists and advertising professionals – as to what they perceived as the ten world's best newspaper (IPI Report, No. 1, 2000). The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) and *El Pais* appear in all lists.

Interviews with senior staff and young journalists at the NZZ and *El Pais* were the most recent in a larger research project on the induction of young journalists into the newsroom. The same questions had been asked earlier at two prominent Asian newspapers, the Singapore *Straits Times* and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* (SCMP). The replies to these qualitative interviews permit conclusions as to which attributes quality newspapers look for in the graduates they employ. The research question posed in this article is therefore, what attributes are sought by these

major but geographically and politically divergent newspapers and how do they differ?

Research method

The question of core attributes is approached from the industry's point of view. Industry choices are accepted as benchmarks rather than establishing attributes free from industry influence. In doing so, this study implicitly acknowledges the importance of the organizational sphere in shaping professional behaviour, a premise strongly supported by newsroom studies (Tuchmann, 1979; Gans, 1980; Sigal, 1973; Schlesinger, 1987; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987; Berkowitz, 1997; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver, 1998; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Reese, 2000).

As Nerone and Barnhurst put it, "Communication scholars understand the press as an institution that originates its most significant activity in the space of the newsroom" (Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003: 435). They further describe the newsroom as a "space that combines professional autonomy with inter-subjective surveillance" (p. 435).

This point has been the subject of much debate, dating from Breed who saw journalists as constrained by the newsroom. He argued that professional behaviour is acquired during the on-the-job-socialisation, with reporters reaching personal goals and avoiding punishment according to the policies they have learned (Breed, 1955/1997: 107-122). A less deterministic view is taken by Ericson, Baranek and Chan, who emphasise the journalists' relative autonomy – be it in their relations within the newsroom or to their news sources (Ericson et al, 1987: 347/8; Ericson et al, 1989: 2).

The latter approach of believing in the journalists' relative autonomy has informed this study and the formulation of the questionnaire for young journalists and senior staff.

The staff is asked six questions, with the first and the last concentrating on what young journalists, in the staff's view, need most for the job, and what they need to be taught most when entering the newsroom. It is these two queries which carried the greatest weight for this study. Other matters raised are about ethical decision-making, whether this is learned on the job and whether the teaching is weighted towards being a journalist at that particular paper. The further questions inquire whether the paper's views on politicians and community leaders are communicated to the young journalists and whether practical matters, such as telephone manners, are taught.

Six senior staff were interviewed at the *NZZ*, four at *El Pais*, five at the *Straits Times* and four at the *SCMP*. Although the sample is not wide, the recurrent mention of certain attributes made it possible to compile a list that can easily stand the test of a wider survey. Divergences only appear further down the list of desired attributes where differences in the papers' political environment show their impact.

The ten questions for the young journalists match those asked of the senior staff, but go into greater detail about the experience of entering the newsroom. Of importance for this study is a point not explicitly covered by a question but always recorded, and that is the educational path chosen by these young people to get where they are. This gives as much an idea of the selection taken by the papers as do the answers

by senior staff on how they wish their young journalists to be. While outlining their university studies and previously held internships, it also becomes clear how much experience the young reporters had gathered and how many languages they spoke.

The first questions for young journalists aim at finding out what they need to learn most when entering the newsroom. The answers establish the young journalists' knowledge prior to joining their current newspaper, and what they see as their most important learning component since then.

The subsequent questions pursue how the process of integration into the newsroom is handled by the newspaper. Since reporters, in order to perform their work, must learn to organize themselves to the point where their activities become habitualised (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987: 125), the queries are focused on finding out how much the paper's established news routines – from ways of writing to suggestions of news sources and the reading up of previous articles – determine a young reporter's approach to a task. The answers provide an insight into the extent to which young reporters are moulded by the existing ways of working. Two questions are directed at ethical decisions, inquiring whether the young reporters had already brought their own notions of a journalist's ethics to the job, or whether these were shaped in the newsroom.

Given the necessity for the young journalists to provide copy that fits into the overall style of the paper, the last question asks how the young journalists apportion their individual freedom within the organization. The underlying assumption is, as mentioned, that a journalist can create an autonomous space in which to practise his craft; at the same time this research attempts to find out whether this is indeed the perception of young journalists.

The idea of looking at the desired graduate attributes is taken from Australian universities which nowadays have to have them embedded in their courses. If “communicating effectively, thinking critically, reasoning logically, being culturally sensitive” (ECU, 2003) are the criteria a university wants to give its students, what then are the attributes seen as desirable for the cadets and young journalists at the *NZZ*, *El Pais*, the *Straits Times* and the *South China Morning Post*?

Different view of journalism schooling impacts on the attributes lists

Not only do the histories of the newspapers vary greatly, they also have a different view of journalism schooling and the role it should play in the education of the cadets or young journalists they chose. These differences in approach have to be outlined to fully appreciate the list of graduate attributes, drawn from the papers' senior staff's answers.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

The *NZZ* was founded in 1780. For censorship reasons it could only report foreign news, reprinting from other European papers and receiving “private correspondence” (Luchsinger, 1980: 11). For 41 years the *Zürcher Zeitung* kept to foreign news only

before, in 1821, also including local news. To this day, the *NZZ* has foreign – or world – news as the front section of its paper. What is more, their foreign news does not make use of the local angle (Josephi, 2002). The paper is small-size “Classicist Modern” broadsheet, whose every trait “stands in opposition to the vernacular form of news” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001: 266). In its in-house rules the *NZZ* declares its allegiance to the ideal of Swiss liberalism and to the endeavour of high journalistic quality (*NZZ*, Redaktionsstatut, 1998:1). In 2004, the daily print run was around 155,000 copies (*NZZ* Verlag, 2004).

The offices of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* are in its own building in central Zürich next to the Opera House. It was first used in the late 19th century and grew over 50 years (Wolfensberger, 1980: 191-193). Despite refurbishing, journalists mostly work in their individual offices. Their chance of debating issues is the regular, daily section news meeting. The internal newspaper structure is, as it were, akin to a federation. Each section has a very high degree of internal autonomy – to the extent that each section has its own way to hire and deal with cadets. While there is a central system in place to sort incoming applications – about 200 a year – section heads, too, are sent applications directly, making up well over a further 200 applications (Stamm, 10.7.2002). The four areas that take cadets are world news (*Ausland*), national (*Inland*), local (*Zürich und Kanton Zürich*) and business (*Wirtschaft*). The world news section, in 2002, took two applicants at a time for three to six months – i.e. four to six a year. The national section took one for four months – i.e. three a year – and the Zürich section took one applicant at a time for three months – i.e. four a year. The business section, at the time, did not have the resources to look after cadets but they had recently employed several young journalists.

While it is already highly competitive to be chosen as a cadet, it is even more competitive to be employed by the *NZZ*, as a cadetship only in rare cases means future employment at the paper. The *NZZ* has the explicit policy *not* to take journalism graduates, a point of view reiterated by the editor-in-chief (Bütler, 10.7.2002). This means that the teaching of writing and editing agency news is incorporated, to some extent, into the cadetship.

El Pais

El Pais, by contrast to the *NZZ*, is a young paper. Its first edition was published on 4 May 1976, less than six months after General Franco’s death. In its first edition *El Pais*’ first editor-in-chief wrote that at last the dream had come true of an independent paper “capable of resisting the pressures of power” (*capaz de rechazar las presiones del poder*) (Ceberio quoted in Ceberio, 2001:12). After 40 years of dictatorship and in a country still finding its bearings as a democratic society, this was no small undertaking. *El Pais*, in many respects, took Anglo-American journalism as its model, though admiration for a paper like *Le Monde* is equally evident (Ceberio, 2001:12). Its articles favour direct quote and a separation of news and comment.

El Pais built its offices on the north-western outskirts of Madrid with open plan newsrooms. However, unlike English or American papers, *El Pais* is forthcoming about its political – social-democratic – leanings. Its support for the European Union is mentioned in the very first point of its principles (*El Pais*, Principios 1.1, Stylebook: 17). *El Pais* has “the look of a modern broadsheet in tabloid format” with

its understated design reflecting “the commitment to debate in the public sphere” (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001: 278). In the first half of 2002 *El Pais*, Spain’s highest circulation paper, had a daily print run of around 445,000 copies (Information provided by *El Pais*, 18.7.2002).

However, there is a small irony in *El Pais*’ story. In General Franco’s time journalism was controlled through journalism schools. Journalists could not be employed unless they had passed through this government controlled training. After Franco’s death many of these journalism schools ceased to exist, and most of the now senior staff at *El Pais* did not attend them. *El Pais*’ senior staff frequently is of the generation of ’68. But as this generation gets older – but is not yet at retiring age – they will fill the higher echelons of the paper still for some years to come, making it difficult for the process of generational change to take place smoothly.

A decade after journalism schools had been seen as discredited the idea had again regained sufficient currency for *El Pais* to open its doors in 1987 for the first intake of students for a master’s degree in journalism (www.elpais.es/corporativos/elpais/escuela/). From this school, *El Pais* recruits 80% to 90% of its new journalists (Villena, 18.7.2002). The yearly intake for the master’s degree is 40 students, one or two of whom find employment with *El Pais* newspaper each year, though others are taken on by other *El Pais* controlled media outlets. Of the six young journalists interviewed, five had come through the master’s degree. This meant that the craft aspects, such as writing, had been thoroughly covered and were no longer an issue when the young journalists joined the newsroom (Harbour, 18.7.2002).

Straits Times

The Republic of Singapore was founded in 1965 after a merger with Malaysia, which had been attempted two years earlier, had failed. The media’s role was cast in terms of aiding nation building, and the ruling People’s Action Party’s stance has been described as that “the press should be independent, but subordinate to an elected government” (George, 2000, 70). Laws were passed to ensure the government’s control over the media (Hwa, 1998, 165).

The application of the Newspaper and Printing Press Act in particular has led to a press monopoly in Singapore which, in 1971, had four English language newspapers, four Chinese dailies and one Malay paper owned by different companies and families (Turnbull, 1995, 287). These papers were not all discontinued but, with ownership changes, became entrusted to Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), a company founded in 1984 (Turnbull, 1995, 349). Since its inception SPH has supported the national interest. This has been written into SPH’s editorial policy, which also sees its papers’ role as engendering discussion by “questioning and commenting competently and constructively on national policies” and “by providing a forum for the exchange of views and reader responses” (SPH, 1995).

The *Straits Times*’ contribution to public discussion consists mostly of considered comments by its columnists. As George writes, “It is in the pages of *The Straits Times*, more than anywhere else, that Singaporeans read alternative views and participate in public debate. Long time readers detect a steadily more serious attempt to reflect various shades of public opinion” (George, 2000, 70).

To the outsider, Singapore is a baffling conundrum of openness and restrictions. The *Straits Times*, of all papers researched so far, was the only one to provide me a magnetic card to have access to the premises for the week's duration of her visit. In December 2000 the premises in Kim Seng Road were decidedly old fashioned by Singaporean standards. The *Straits Times* has since moved to the News Centre at Tao Payoh North Road. Then some sections of the paper, such as the *Life!* and sport sections, were on different floors from the main newsroom. Only the section editors had their own rooms. The non-hierarchical and collegial atmosphere was emphasised by the fact that well known journalists and columnists, such as Asad Latif, Chua Lee Hoong and Sumiko Tan, occupied workstations no different from other journalists. The young reporters spoke openly about their experience, volunteering remarks such as that they self-censor.

Circulation figures in August 2004 were put close to 390,000 (SPH, 2004).

The *Straits Times* does not offer cadetships. They also take in 'mid career' reporters, meaning that these journalists have pursued another career for a decade or so. However, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) – like other Singaporean companies – offers scholarships. An outstanding academic record, evidence of co-curricular activities and the passing of five rounds of a selection process are prerequisites to obtain a scholarship, which entitles holders to pursue a degree in Singapore or overseas with nearly all expenses met by SPH. In turn the graduates were bonded to SPH for four years, if they studied in Singapore, or six to eight years, if they studied abroad. Yet most of those joining the *Straits Times* would have done internships at the paper, usually during their university breaks. There was neither a preference for nor a rejection of journalism graduates.

South China Morning Post

The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) was founded in 1903 and is the oldest surviving newspaper in Hong Kong (Hutcheon, 1983:2; SCMP, 2003). Its initial clientele were major shipping lines and shipping crews. The commercial, or business, orientation of the *Post* has lasted to this day. Though the *Post* has no mission statement as such, various attempts to define its editorial policy have been made over the years. Robin Hutcheon, its long-time editor, wrote in 1983, "while a newspaper's primary role is to publish news and views, in a commercially oriented society it also serves as a daily shop window of the various retail, financial, industrial, transportation and service industries that cater to the community." (Hutcheon, 1983: 2).

Though the expatriate community is of lesser importance since the handover, the *Post* has retained its position as one of the major English language papers in Asia. Even before the handover on 1 July 1997 the percentage of English speakers in Hong Kong was put at only 3.1%, compared to the *Post's* 16.6% share of the newspaper market (McIntyre 1998:39/40). 98% of Hong Kong's almost 7 million people are ethnically Chinese, but the need for a "respected source of English language news about Hong Kong, China and the rest of Asia" has remained (scmp.com: Annual Report 2000).

About the people at the *Post* Hutcheon wrote, "The editorial staff is a reflection of its international commitment, for its reporters and sub-editors are not just local people

but are drawn from almost every part of the English speaking world.” He went on to say that “today graduates from local universities and post secondary colleges form the *backbone* of the reporting staff.” (Hutcheon, 1983: 156, my emphasis). In November 2000, the top echelon, like the editorial section heads, was still mostly Caucasian.

The *Post* was owned from 1987 to 1993 by Rupert Murdoch who, after acquiring Star TV, sold the *Post* and Robert Kuok, a Malaysian-Chinese businessman, became the controlling shareholder. This ownership change has been interpreted as the *Post* having been “acquired in whole or in part by China-affiliated capital” (Stone 1998:160). “While the *Post* did not seem to undergo an immediate or radical change in its editorial line following the change in ownership”, it has been suggested that there is a measurable decline in the number of political stories about China (Stone 1998:161).

To an outsider, the voices of vigilance over press freedom seem louder in Hong Kong than most other places – also among the young journalists and the press itself. With the Hong Kong press having been strongly partisan, especially in the lead up to the handover, the young journalists seemed very aware of the political affiliations of their paper and, by extension, attuned to the nature and danger of self-censorship.

The *South China Morning Post* has its offices in the very modern Dorset House in Quarry Bay on Hong Kong Island. In the British tradition, it is an open newsroom with only senior staff having their own offices.

In 2000, the *Post* offered a cadetship program, instituted in the time of the News Corp ownership, which was “quite famous in the industry” (Leung 2000). An advertisement in the middle of the year generated a response of well over 200 applications, which were narrowed down to twenty, with these applicants being invited for interviews and tests. Those coming from journalism school had an advantage in the selection process, but the company also considered graduates from other fields. Applicants were tested for their writing skills, their news sense and their sincerity about the job, with four to six cadets being chosen each year (Leung 2000). Though journalism courses enjoy great popularity in Hong Kong, journalism is not considered a highly desirable career (Parry 2000). Data shows that 55% of journalists in Hong Kong have worked no longer than two years at their present organization (Chan, Lee & Lee, 1996: 28).

In their first year the cadets learn T-line shorthand, spend two mornings a week with the cadet counsellor and do a rotation of five or six desks: news, political, business, features, and – if they speak Mandarin – the China desk, and the on-line division. The time spent on each desk varies between eight to ten weeks. In consultation with the cadets and the section editors, it is then decided where they should spend all of their second year. After this, as a rule, the cadets are taken on by the *Post*.

Graduate attributes

For this study the responses by senior staff to the questions of what cadets and/ or young journalists lack most when first coming to the newsroom and what they need to be taught most of all were used to compile the lists of graduate attributes.

At the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* I talked to the deputy editor-in-chief, who is also the section head for world news. His answers were particularly valuable in shaping the *NZZ*'s list of graduate attributes. In the national and local section I spoke to the senior staff entrusted with the task of looking after cadets and to senior staff in the business, sport and arts sections.

Graduate attributes at NZZ

Graduates will

- be able to make intelligent choices
- show responsibility
- have curiosity
- show initiative and creativity
- be able to reflect on their use of language (as to whether it presents a fair view)
- research and read up widely
- be able to observe and write with precision
- have wide general knowledge
- have a proven academic track record (preferably in law or history, or economics)
- have command of several languages
- know the community they are writing for
- fit into the organization

The young people who possess these attributes (NZZ)

At the *NZZ* one of the cadets and one of the young journalists held a PhD – both in law; one in European law, the other in law philosophy. One cadet, in line with the Zürich section's policy of taking in cadets at a younger age than the other sections, was at the beginning of his university studies, intending to major in history and economics. The young journalist in the economics section had graduated from Switzerland's most highly ranked business school at the University of St. Gallen and then worked for two years for an American consulting firm before joining the *NZZ*. The young journalist working in the sports section had graduated in history, had done a cadetship in the national section before joining the on-line department, and then transferring to sport.

The pattern of educational pathways concurred with the preferences given by senior staff – i.e. for history and law and/ or economics graduates. All cadets and young journalists, however, had already early on indicated their interest in journalism by either contributing in their student days to their local paper or doing a series of internships in the media, also frequently the electronic media. As elsewhere,

presenting a portfolio and a letter with a rationale why they should be considered for a cadetship are an integral part of the selection process (Stamm, 10.7.2002).

Graduate attributes at El Pais

At *El Pais* I talked to four senior staff, two from the international section, one from the life, science and education section and one from the arts section. Since all but one young journalist were graduates from *El Pais*' own master's program, the question was more a case of, 'when all craft has been taught, what else makes a graduate stand out?'

Graduates will

- have curiosity
- research and read up widely (and not become enamoured only with 'hot news')
- have news sense
- show initiative and creativity (have good ideas and proposals)
- vouch for the accuracy of their news
- be able to make transparent power structures for their readers
- will talk to their sources rather than rely on the Internet
- work with texts (edit) and give them good headlines
- make sure that the article delivers what the headline promises
- have wide general knowledge
- have command of several languages
- know the community

The young people who possess these attributes (El Pais)

At *El Pais* the picture was somewhat different from the *NZZ*. The term 'young journalist' was a little stretched as the oldest was from the first master's degree intake in 1987. The one who had not obtained the master's degree had studied economics and journalism at a university in Madrid before becoming a financial journalist at a now defunct paper, then went to *El Mundo*, from where he was invited to join *El Pais*. Economics was in fact the first degree of three of the six young journalists. However, the one now working in the economics section had studied law in Buenos Aires, then worked for the Italian news agency ENSA and subsequently for the BBC in London, while studying radical political thought at the London School of Economics. But realising that his English would never be fluent enough to work as a journalist in England, he applied for the master's degree at *El Pais*. The other two young journalists had already studied journalism as their first degree and had worked for news agencies – the Spanish news agency EFE, AFP, Europe Today (an international news agency with seat in Brussels, specializing on European Union news), and Radio Vaticano – before doing their master's degree. By that stage they were fluent in several languages.

Despite these varying biographies, two of the senior staff at *El Pais* were concerned that the master's degree turns out graduates who are "too uniform". They feared that too few young journalists have travelled the rough road of journalism and thus were

somewhat removed from the community they are writing for – hence the emphasis on curiosity and knowing the community they write for as graduate attributes.

Graduate attributes at the Straits Times

At the *Straits Times* I talked to five senior staff. These were prominent *Straits Times* columnists Sumiko Tan and Chua Mui Hoong, sports editor and columnist Yap Koon Hong, and senior staff in the money and foreign news sections. Predominantly the answers of the three columnists informed the list of graduate attributes.

Graduates will

- have curiosity
- have confidence
- have a news sense
- understand the paper they work for
- understand the responsibility that comes with writing for an authoritative paper
- write clearly and concisely
- be accurate, balanced and fair in their reporting
- abide by the code of conduct
- be good at information gathering
- have a considerate approach towards newsmakers though be persistent if need be

The young people who possess these attributes (Straits Times)

The *Straits Times* places great value on high academic achievement and only takes graduates with outstanding grades. A scholarship scheme is available to top secondary students who would complete their studies at the expense of Singapore Press Holdings and then work for a set number of years at the paper. Two of the young journalists fitted this category, with one having studied at the London School of Economics and the other having completed Honours in English Literature at Edinburgh University. One new journalist had switched to being a journalist after a decade long career in industrial law, another had studied management and Japanese studies at Leeds University. Two of the six young journalists had completed their tertiary education in Singapore. One held an Honours degree in English from the National University of Singapore and had previous industry experience. The other had studied Journalism at Nanyang Technical University, where she came to the attention of *Straits Times* staff teaching in the course and was encouraged to apply.

Graduate attributes at the South China Morning Post

The editorship at the *SCMP* twice underwent change since these research interviews were done. The list of attributes is based on the answers given by the then present and past cadet counsellors, the news editor and night editor. However, interestingly,

when I visited Hong Kong two years after these interviews were conducted, several of the cadets spoken to earlier were regularly writing front page news.

Graduates will

- have news sense
- have confidence
- make informed choices
- have a sense of balance
- be able to find the right story angle
- be able to ask the right questions
- have a sense of responsibility befitting a paper of record
- have a sense of the paper they are working for
- be persistent when dealing with difficult interview situations (e.g. on the China desk)
- have a passion for journalism

The young people who possess these attributes (South China Morning Post)

All young journalists talked to were either present or past cadets at the *SCMP*.

The most outstanding factor about the cadets at the *SCMP* was that they all lived and wrote in a bilingual and bi-cultural world. While all the cadets interviewed were ethnically Chinese, two of them had completed their A levels in England. Four held degrees from English universities – Sheffield, Coventry, Essex and the London School of Economics – the other two from Hong Kong universities. Two had degrees in economics and one a degree in international relations and politics. Of the other three, one had a post graduate degree in journalism and the other two undergraduate degrees in journalism – one from the Chinese University Hong Kong and the other from the Hong Kong Baptist University. These courses include internships. For the others, the *SCMP* was their first experience of working in the media.

Conclusion

There is remarkable unanimity in what these four papers of record look for. They want young journalists who have the urge and determination to find out news, and call this ‘curiosity’. The young journalists’ proven academic record is hoped to be a guarantee that they will make intelligent choices when it comes to news selection, interviewing and understanding stakeholder positions. At the *NZZ* and *El Pais* most of the young journalists have a post-graduate degree, and at the Asian papers they all are graduates. Interestingly, apart from the *NZZ* who takes its business reporters from the University of St. Gallen, the other three papers had one young journalist each who had studied at the London School of Economics.

Their years at university assure their ability and willingness to research, though this was less emphasized by the Asian papers. What those years may not do, however, is to connect these young people to ordinary citizen. They are undoubtedly an elite

and as such somewhat removed from the preoccupations of the man or woman in the street. This concern was especially expressed at the two European papers by wanting young journalists to know their community and the community they write for.

For three of the four papers it was important that the young journalists understand the paper they are working for. Largely this means that they recognize the responsibility writing for a widely read and prominent paper brings. It also means – particularly at the Asian papers – that they know and accept the areas in which the paper treads cautiously. The media freedom, in which these papers operate, differs widely. Freedom House's rating divides countries into 'free', 'partly free' and 'not free' (Karlekar, 2003: ix). Both Switzerland and Spain are rated 'free' with regard to freedom of the press, Singapore and China are both listed as 'not free' (Karlekar, 2003: 10/11). However, the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong is not mentioned separately, and probably would still be considered as 'free'.

This difference in freedom is most clearly borne out in the European papers' emphasis on initiative and creativity. These attributes, rated highly by *NZZ* and *El Pais*, were not mentioned at all by the Asian papers. However, given these variations in press freedom under which these papers operate, it is all the more astonishing that the main attributes sought are so congruous. This data is also in strong agreement with the qualities wanted by Australian newspaper publishers (Bice, 2004). Overall, a passion for news, confidence and, in many places, a certain fearlessness is seen as indispensable for the profession of journalist.

Yet these attributes can only partially be taught. Writing and critical thinking can be honed. But it would prove very difficult to convince a highly intelligent but diffident or shy student to have the urge and determination to pursue vital information. The graduates most in demand, clearly, are those who not only have the skills but are also temperamentally suited for the job.

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