

# *A socially-responsible educational response to routine-biased technological change in journalism*

*Fostering employability among journalists in the United Kingdom*

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**Abstract**—Journalism in the UK straddles the divide between high- and middle-skilled employment. Since the 1970s those determined to be middle-skilled have been vulnerable to increasing difficulty in finding employment, deepening insecurity of employment and limited opportunities for advancement as work has been routinized and off-shored. This is especially so for young people. Moreover, journalism is also a short-term career. However, at the same time, journalism has significantly upskilled through graduation, and currently the most favoured route into journalism is through a postgraduate taught (PGT) qualification, such as a Master's degree. This study examines the career experiences of 889 alumni of a PGT newspaper journalism course and maps them to employment trends. It is argued that the socially responsible approach is to prepare alumni for life during and after journalism through the development of their employability, rather than focusing on their immediate employment prospects.

**Keywords**-education; employment; employability; graduation; journalism; labour market

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s employment in the United Kingdom has been hollowed out resulting in occupational polarisation. This has meant a decline in the numbers of middle-skilled jobs and increases in both low- and high-skilled employment. However, since the mid-1990s the increase in high-skilled employment has been significantly greater than that in low-skilled employment, resulting in overall upskilling. This has been associated with graduation - more graduates doing graduate jobs - as the number graduated from university has risen until by 2013 they numbered 12m.<sup>1</sup> This has meant that middle-skilled workers have had either to upskill or face relatively fewer opportunities in low-skilled work. While levels of employment insecurity have not worsened, insecurity has deepened for the already insecure. Greater employment stability has also made it more difficult to get a job, and once in employment to move to a better job. The young (18-29 year

[1] See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/graduates-in-the-labour-market/2013/rpt---graduates-in-the-uk-labour-market-2013.html>.

olds) have been most affected by these latter trends. The most vulnerable workers, therefore, have been those in middle-skilled occupations (or young people qualified for this type of work) which can be routinized, especially but not exclusively through the application of technologies, and off-shored. Crudely, employment opportunities in the UK for those with mid-level skills have been disappearing.<sup>2</sup> This has coincided with the specificities of a secular decline in the traditional modern mass media with associated losses of jobs.<sup>3</sup>

Journalism in the UK has traditionally straddled the divide between middle- and high-skilled employment.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it has exhibited many of the characteristics of occupational polarisation, starting with the early introduction of 'new technologies' in the 1970s and continuing on to engagement with social media in the 2000s. While, initially, the direct negative impact of these developments was felt chiefly by middle-skilled non-journalist media technicians (print workers, tape editors, sound recordists, etc.), they have increasingly impacted on journalists through the reassignment of tasks and the abolition of roles.<sup>5</sup> The regional and local press

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- [2] L. Gardiner and A. Corlett, "Looking through the hourglass: hollowing out of the UK jobs market pre- and post-crisis," Resolution Foundation, 2015, at <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/looking-through-the-hourglass-hollowing-out-of-the-uk-jobs-market-pre-and-post-crisis/>: accessed 28 July 2015; P. Gregg and L. Gardiner, "A steady job? The UK's record on labour market security and stability since the millennium," London: Resolution Foundation, 2015.
- [3] European Federation of Journalists and Euro-MEI, Mapping Changes in Employment in the Journalism & Media Industry: Changes in Employment in the Journalism & Media Industries in the UK and France, Brussels: International Federation of Journalists, 2012.
- [4] M. Bromley, "The end of journalism? Changes in workplace practices in the press and broadcasting in the 1990s," in A Journalism Reader, M. Bromley and T O'Malley Eds. London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 330-350.
- [5] Bromley, 1997, p. 341.

has been disproportionately affected by this trend: it was estimated that a quarter of all journalism jobs were lost from this sector in the five years after 2009 as 242 titles closed.<sup>6</sup> Even editors' roles have been abolished; sub-editing work has been transferred to production hubs (a kind of internal offshoring); photographers have been done away with; foreign bureaux closed, desks of executives dismantled.<sup>7</sup> Tunstall viewed journalism in this press as composed chiefly of routine white collar work.<sup>8</sup> Yet at the same time journalism has been incrementally graduatised, following the introduction of postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes in the 1970s and undergraduate courses in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> By 2014 more than 60

universities were offering such courses.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, after 1992 and the expansion of higher education in the UK, more than twenty new PGT journalism programmes were introduced, and the number of students enrolled in these rose from fewer than 400 in 1996-1997 to more than 3,000, according to the Higher Education Statistical Agency.<sup>11</sup> It was estimated that in 2012 between 22% and 34% of journalists held a PGT qualification, 53% of which were in journalism. This had become the favoured contemporary route into the occupation.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, and in line with the experiences of a number of other Western countries, UK journalists were ageing: between 2001/2002 and 2012 the proportion aged 40 and over rose from 32% to 50-60%.<sup>13</sup> This increased stability has also made it more difficult for entrants to land a job and, allied to declining employment mobility, if they were successful, to move to a better job.<sup>14</sup> A survey conducted in 2012 suggested a generationally bifurcated occupation.<sup>15</sup>

In 2012 the media recorded the largest relative national decline among equivalent occupations in graduate vacancies (-50%): not surprisingly, job applications from graduates fell, too (by 12%), and graduate salaries, although rising, were among the lowest.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, there was evidence that the expectation that entrants into the labour market would be better qualified led to a decline in workplace upskilling and a greater reliance on pre-employment preparation at a time when PGT fees were uncapped and universities were charging 'market prices'.<sup>17</sup> Nationally, graduates were more likely to be in middle-skilled employment in 2014 than they were twenty

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- [6] F. Nel, *Laid Off: What Do UK Journalists Do Next?* Journalism Leaders Programme, School of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Central Lancashire, 2010; D. Ponsford, "PG research reveals 242 local press closures in 7 years," *Press Gazette*, 30 April 2015, at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/node/49215>: accessed 7 May 2015.
- [7] I. Burrell, "The dizzying decline of Britain's local newspapers: do you want the bad news, or the good news?" *The Independent*, 31 August 2015, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/the-dizzying-decline-of-britains-local-newspapers-do-you-want-the-bad-news-or-the-good-news-9702684.html>: accessed 5 January 2015; S. Dyson, "Life after editing," *InPublishing*, 15 July 2015, at [http://www.inpublishing.co.uk/kb/articles/life\\_after\\_editing\\_1519.aspx](http://www.inpublishing.co.uk/kb/articles/life_after_editing_1519.aspx): accessed 23 July 2015; R. Haria, "Boris Johnson and other MPs back London journalists in strike for 'living wage' and office to work in," *Press Gazette*, 25 June 2015, at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/boris-johnson-and-other-mps-back-london-journalists-strike-living-wage-and-office-work>: accessed 29 June 2015; D. Ponsford, "Photographers face sack at Newsquest's Wiltshire titles – reporters told to take pictures on their phones," *Press Gazette*, 3 June 2015, at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/photographers-face-sack-newsquests-wiltshire-newspapers-reporters-take-pictures-their-phones>: accessed 29 June 2015; W. Turvill, "Picture editors out, 'user generated content editor' in at Southern Daily Echo," *Press Gazette*, 20 February 2015, at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/senior-picture-desk-editors-newsquest-hampshire-risk-redundancy-company-creates-new-position-user>: accessed 29 June 2015.
- [8] J. Tunstall, *The Media in Britain*, London: Constable, 1983.
- [9] M. Bromley, "The United Kingdom journalism education landscape," in *European Journalism Education*, G. Terzis, Ed. Bristol: Intellect, 2009, pp. 49-66; P. Cole, "Instinct, savvy and rat-like cunning: training local journalists," in *Local Journalism and Local Media: Making the Local News*, B. Franklin, Ed. London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 65-79; T. Gopsill and G.

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Neale, *Journalists: 100 Years of the NUJ*, London: Profile, 2007.

- [10] See <https://www.journalism.co.uk/study-qualifications-degree-diploma-certificate-postgraduate/s31/>.
- [11] Sutton Trust, *The Educational Backgrounds of Leading Journalists*, London: Sutton Trust, 2006.
- [12] M. Spilsbury, *Journalists at Work: Their Views on Training, Recruitment and Conditions*, Newport, Essex: National Council for the Training of Journalists, 2013.
- [13] K. Sanders and M. Hanna, "British journalists, in *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat, Eds. New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 220-233; Spilsbury, 2013, p. 29.
- [14] Gregg and Gardiner, 2015, pp. 7-9.
- [15] Spilsbury, 2013.
- [16] *The Graduate Market in 2013*, London: High Fliers Research, 2013.
- [17] A. Felstead, D. Gallie, F. Green and H. Inanc, *Skills at Work in Britain: First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012*, London: Institute of Education, 2013; D. Matthews, "International and postgraduate student fees survey, 2013," *Times Higher Education*, 8 August 2013 at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/international-and-postgraduate-student-fees-survey-2013/2006262.article?page=0%2C0>: accessed 20 June 2015.

years previously. The number of young people (aged 18-29) in insecure employment also rose by a fifth over the same period.<sup>18</sup> Young people aspiring to become journalists were at risk of finding it difficult to land a job, being overqualified for the employment opportunities on offer, being vulnerable to employment insecurity, and confronting restricted career progression.

Although reliable data were difficult to come by, there was a general consensus that a career in journalism was short and often neither continuous nor permanent.<sup>19</sup> The UK Labour Force Survey estimated that a half of journalists were aged under 40 years.<sup>20</sup> As the veteran journalist Michael Parkinson, who began an apprenticeship in the 1950s, observed, ‘the continuity, the job for life I was given, isn’t there [now]’.<sup>21</sup> The underlying employment reality was not lost on students: one PGT alumna noted, ‘When I started out I was convinced that this would be my career forever. ... But things change. ... It’s not a contest to see who can stick it out the longest’.<sup>22</sup> The editors of a global survey of journalists concluded that, ‘In many countries, young people become journalists to gain some experience before leaving for more lucrative and stable jobs in other fields’.<sup>23</sup> Davidson and Meyers characterised journalism as ‘a stepping-stone occupation and one that fits the lifestyle and financial needs of young workers’: their exploration of journalists’ life histories suggested that ‘journalists view the possibility of occupational exit as probable, some plan it in advance and many take advantage of the capital accumulated as journalists to nourish themselves moving forward’.<sup>24</sup> In

places, such as Denmark, Flemish Belgium, Israel, Spain and Sweden, journalists’ careers typically lasted between ten and 20 years.<sup>25</sup> In New Zealand 43% of journalists surveyed had been in the occupation between two and five years.<sup>26</sup> In a study of Swedish journalists, where 65% reported leaving journalism voluntarily, two-thirds had worked in journalism for fewer than ten years.<sup>27</sup> Not all journalists – even those made redundant – were as inexperienced, however: an Australian sample had an average of 25.7 years in the occupation.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, there appeared to be a division in terms of length of experience between younger and older journalists not accounted for solely by age differential: for example, in Israel, which it was claimed was likely to be typical of Western contexts, younger journalists reported an average of two years nine months in journalism; older journalists almost seven and a half years.<sup>29</sup> Nel found that the largest single number of UK journalists who lost their jobs around the financial crisis of 2006-2010 had between two and five years of employment: 54.5% had no more than 15 years of experience.<sup>30</sup>

While there was not (yet) a strong proven case that UK journalists had short careers in journalism – and younger journalists, the shortest – it was apparent that many of the

[18] Gregg and Gardiner, 2015, p. 5.

[19] G. Hudson and S. Rowlands, *The Broadcast Journalism Handbook*, London: Pearson Education, 2007; P. Lee-Wright, A. Phillips and T. Witschge, *Changing Journalism*, London: Routledge, 2012; P. Linford, “Review of 2014: editors’ exodus marks year of change,” *HoldTheFrontPage*, 28 December 2014, at <http://holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2014/news/review-of-2014-editors-exodus-marks-year-of-change>: accessed 21 June 2015; S. Niblock, *Journalism: A Beginner’s Guide*, London: Oneworld, 2014.

[20] Spilsbury, 2013, pp. 29 & 39.

[21] Cited L. Oliver “‘You’re either a journalist or not a journalist’: Parky on journalism, jobs and training,” *journalism.co.uk*, 28 April 2009 at <https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-features/-you-re-either-a-journalist-or-not-a-journalist--parky-on-journalism-jobs-and-training/s5/a534189/>: accessed 21 June 2015.

[22] See, <http://wannabehacks.co.uk/2014/04/28/five-things-to-consider-before-committing-to-journalism/>: accessed 21 June 2015.

[23] D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat, “Journalists in the 21st century: conclusions,” in *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat, Eds. New York: Routledge, 2012, pp.529-551.

[24] R. Davidson and O. Meyers, “‘Should I stay or should I go?’ Exit, voice and loyalty among journalists,”

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		10.1080.1461670X.2014.988996, 2014.

[25] Davidson and Meyers, 2014, p. 6; P. Farias, F.J.P. Rojano and S. Roses, “Journalists in Spain”, in *The Global Journalist*, 2012, pp. 295-305; K. Raeymaekers, S. Paulussen and J. De Keyser, “A survey of professional journalists in Flanders (Belgium),” in *The Global Journalist*, 2012, pp. 220-233; M. Skovsgaard, P. Albæk, P. Bro and C. De Vreese, “Media professionals or organizational marionettes? Professional values and constraints of Danish journalists”, in *The Global Journalist*, 2012, pp.155-170; J. Strömbäck, L. Nord and A. Shehata, “Swedish journalists: between professionalization and commercialization,” in *The Global Journalist*, 2012, pp. 306-319; T. Witschge and G. Nygren, “Journalism: a profession under pressure?” *Journal of Media Business Studies* 6, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 37-59.

[26] G. Lealand and J. Hollings, “Journalists in New Zealand” in *The Global Journalist*, 2012, pp. 126-137.

[27] G. Nygren, “Passing through journalism? Journalism as a temporary job and professional institutions in decline,” in *Journalism Education, Training and Employment*, B. Franklin and D. Mensing, Eds. New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 207-221.

[28] P. O’Donnell, L. Zion and M. Sherwood, “Where do journalists go after newsroom job cuts?” *Journalism Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1017400, 2015.

[29] R. Davidson and O. Meyers, “Towards a typology of journalism careers: conceptualizing Israeli journalists’ occupational trajectories,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* DOI 10.1111.cccr.12103, 2015.

[30] Nel, 2010, p. 15.

students graduating from PGT journalism courses could expect to leave the occupation (voluntarily or otherwise) long before retirement. Given the abolition of compulsory retirement and the delay in allowing access to State pension provision, their working lives may extend to a second career which actually lasts longer than that as a journalist. Even among a sample of highly-experienced Australian journalists who lost their journalism jobs, only 28% returned to full-time journalism; in the UK the figure was 18%; in the US 6%.<sup>31</sup> By choice, or as a function of contextual circumstances, a university journalism course, it would seem, should be a preparation for lifelong portfolio employment as much as, if not more than, for an immediate, and perhaps only, job in journalism.

Using the published data on the career experiences of 889 alumni of the newspaper journalism PGT programme at City University London from the period 1983-2012, this study explored the balance within and between journalism and non-journalism employment among this cohort over 30 years. Like many such programmes, this one claimed to prepare students for ‘a first job in newspaper journalism’.<sup>32</sup> Even so, never more than two-thirds of alumni opted for such jobs on graduation and for twenty years the number was just over a half. There was an even larger fall-off in the numbers of alumni taking first jobs in the regional and local press – from just over a half to an eighth. Furthermore, even among the most recent graduates, only just over a third stayed in newspaper journalism: among the cohort which graduated between twenty and 30 years ago, the figure was a fifth.

## II. EMPLOYABILITY

University programmes in the UK are charged with delivering recognised ‘graduate characteristics’ as part of the maintenance of academic standards.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, students and faculty did not always look beyond immediate employment as an objective.<sup>34</sup> The web site of City

University’s Journalism Department in 2015 declared, ‘Our success is measured in our graduates’ success’, and went on to claim, ‘Last year 96 per cent of our MA graduates found employment within six months’.<sup>35</sup> Students balanced pragmatic and idealistic views of their career prospects.<sup>36</sup> This both reflected and stimulated debate about the nature and purpose of journalism as a field of study at university level, much of it pivoted around the relationship with the employment of graduates.<sup>37</sup> This debate was underpinned by a lack of consensus on what journalism education ought to be<sup>38</sup> – the identification and application of abstracted knowledge as a means to attain ‘conventional professional respectability’ founded in a critical, evaluative and reflexive practice,<sup>39</sup> or the acquisition of a rhetoric of expertise as a marker of belonging through the operationalisation of existing practices.<sup>40</sup> Representing the expectations of, on the one hand, the academy and, on the other hand, the mass media industries, they required divergent masteries, and were measured differently.<sup>41</sup> For media institutions, the primary requirement was the attainment of ‘entry-level skills’ – hence the location of journalism education in the US, Australia and elsewhere primarily at undergraduate level.<sup>42</sup> The provision of university journalism programmes in the UK initially (and for two decades, exclusively) at PGT level but as diplomas, not Master’s degrees, was predicated on them being conversion courses specifically designed for initial employment and offering an intensive version of an undergraduate programme.<sup>43</sup>

Employability, on the other hand, was defined as more than just getting a job but *inter alia* as have the potential to be successful in an occupation and in employment, and to make a

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improved their employability,” Journalism Education, vol. 2, issue 2, 2013, pp. 53-61.

[35] <http://www.city.ac.uk/arts-social-sciences/journalism>.

[36] F. Hanusch et al, “Journalism students’ motivations and expectations of their work in comparative perspective,” Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, vol. 70, no. 2, 2015, pp. 141-160.

[37] Bromley, 2009, pp. 62-63.

[38] B. Josephi, “Journalism education,” in The Handbook of Journalism Studies, K. Wahl-Jorgensen and T. Hanitzsch, Eds. New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 42-56.

[39] M. Aldridge and J. Evetts, “Rethinking the concept of professionalism: the case of journalism,” British Journal of Sociology, vol. 54, issue 4, 2003, 547-564.

[40] M. Schudson and C. Anderson, “Objectivity, professionalism, and truth seeking in journalism,” in The Handbook of Journalism Studies, 2009, pp. 88-101.

[41] M. Bromley, H. Tumber and B. Zelizer, “Journalism education,” Journalism, vol. 2, no. 3, 2001, pp. 251-254.

[42] S.D. Reece and J. Cohen, “Educating for journalism: the professionalism of scholarship,” Journalism Studies, vol. 1, issue 2, 2000, pp. 213-227.

[43] <http://www.graduates.co.uk/conversion-courses/>.

[31] R. Hodierna, “Is there life after newspapers?” American Journalism Review, Feb/Mar 2009, at <http://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=4679>: accessed 29 June 2015; Nel, 2010, p. 31; O’Donnell, Zion and Sherwood, 2015, p. 8; E. Richards and M. Steen, “Life after journalism,” American Journalism Review, Feb/Mar 2007, at <http://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=4269>: accessed 29 June 2015.

[32] See <http://www.city.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/newspaper-journalism>.

[33] Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Masters Degree Characteristics, Gloucester: QAAHE, 2014.

[34] Bromley, 2009, pp. 60-61; S. Maxwell-Magnus, “Tales of the unexpected: skills and attributes successful graduates of a combined journalism course felt had

wider economic, social and cultural contribution.<sup>44</sup> Arrayed around the concept of ‘graduate characteristics’, it was conceived as embracing transferable skills, lifelong learning, and ‘person-centred qualities’ including motivation, self-insight, social skills, the capacity to grow, flexibility, social sensitivity, numeracy, communication, problem-solving, team-working, good judgement, positivity, integrity, creativity, innovation, metacognition and the capacity to manage ‘non-routine’ work.<sup>45</sup> It was driven by concerns with ‘longer-term quality and sustainability of graduate-level employment’ across an entire working life, and changes in the labour market, such as occupational polarisation and underemployment.<sup>46</sup> In journalism, this often meant prematurely exiting the traditional institutional media, which nevertheless exercised enormous influence over journalism education.<sup>47</sup> Employability lay ‘at the core of the dichotomy between industrial and academic approaches to journalism education’.<sup>48</sup> The Higher Education Review Group nominated

employability as a priority theme for three successive years (2013-2016).<sup>49</sup> The Confederation of British Industry declared that ‘Businesses want graduates who not only add value but who have the skills to help transform their organisation in the face of continuous and rapid economic and technological change’.<sup>50</sup> Summarising the argument in favour of employability as a key measure of student attainment, the Higher Education Funding Council for England noted, ‘In their lifetimes, graduates have varied careers; their HE experiences should prepare them with the capability to make a smooth transition to work, but equally give them the opportunity for intellectual and personal development, to be effective and adaptable within a rapidly changing economy and society’.<sup>51</sup>

### III. LIFE IN AND OUT OF JOURNALISM

Recent literature has suggested more nuanced ways of capturing journalists’ lived experiences of work in an era of occupational crisis. What has emerged in aggregate is a reflection of a hollowing-out of the occupation, with journalists reporting a degradation of work (feeling like ‘errand boys’); others striving to maintain their status, and some embracing innovation and entrepreneurship. Those who believe the work is being deskilled complain of speed-up, diminishing resources and falling standards: for them, journalism has become more like working in a factory. Others see opportunities for upskilling and new ways of doing journalism. Those in the middle-skilled cohort, usually working in bureaucratic settings, recognise their employment status vulnerability and are cynical towards their employers. Many appear resigned to simply exiting journalism altogether. Although professional efficacy among journalists has been historically high – almost 70% of UK journalists who had lost their jobs said they were pleased they had chosen journalism as a career – studies have reported disenchantment with the occupation. Common complaints have been a lack of agency, declining autonomy and burn-out. Journalists have spoken about their work being purely technical with ‘no intellectual depth’; having difficulty initiating ‘novel practices ... suggest[ing] unconventional stories’; a ‘feeling that you cannot improve and learn new things’; being a kind of ‘assembly-line worker’.<sup>52</sup> Even among very experienced

[44] M. Yorke, *Employability in Higher Education: What it is – What it is Not*, York: Higher Education Academy, 2006.

[45] D. Cole and M. Tibby, *Defining and Developing Your Approach to Employability: A Framework for Higher Education Institutions*, York: Higher Education Academy, 2013; A. Havnes and J-C. Smeby, “Professional development and the profession,” in *International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-Based Learning*, S. Billett et al, Eds. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014, pp. 915-954; R. Hogan, T. Chamorro-Premuzic and R. B. Kaiser, “Employability and career success: bridging the gap between theory and reality,” *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 6, 2013, pp. 3-16; G. Mason, G. Williams and S. Cranmer, “Employability skills initiatives in higher education: what effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes?” London: National Institute for Economic and Social Research, 2006; A. Tymon, “The student perspective on employability,” *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 38, no. 6, 2013, pp. 841-856; B. van der Heijden, “Prerequisites to guarantee life-long employability,” *Personnel Review*, vol. 31, no. ½, 2002, pp.44-61.

[46] Havnes and Smeby, 2014, p. 917; Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic and Kaiser, 2013, pp. 3-4; Tymon, 2013, p. 852.

[47] J. Curran, “Press reformism 1918-89: a study of failure,” in *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*, H. Tumber, Ed. London: Routledge, 2003, pp.35-55; C. Frost, *Journalism Ethics and Regulation*, 3rd edn. London: Routledge, 2013; C. Frost, “Educating for a better newsroom culture in a Leveson compliant future,” *Journalism Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, pp. 76-81.

[48] A. Hunter and F. Nel, “Equipping the entrepreneurial journalist: an exercise in creative enterprise.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, Spring 2011, pp. 10-24.

[49] <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/HER-Themes-Guidances-15-16.pdf>.

[50] CBI, “Boosting employability skills”, 2014, at <http://cbi.org.uk/business-issues/education-and-skills/in-focus/employability/>: accessed 23 June 2015.

[51] Higher Education Funding Council for England, “Employability statements,” Circular letter 12/2010, 2010, at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2010/cl122010/>: accessed 27 July 2015.

[52] Davidson and Meyers, 2014; Davidson and Meyers, 2015; B. Ekdale, M. Tully, S. Harmsen and J.B. Singer, “Newswork within a culture of job insecurity,”

Australian journalists, a number regarded leaving journalism as improving their working lives.

#### IV. METHOD

The data for the present study were sourced from the 2014 issue of the City University London Department of Journalism annual magazine *XCity*.<sup>53</sup> There were 899 alumni entries for the years 1982-1983 to 2011-2012. Discounting small numbers of duplications, errors and nul records, the career experiences of 889 alumni were collected. These were drawn from the diploma course (1982-2006), the optional diploma/Master's course (2007-2009) and the Master's course (2010-2012) in newspaper journalism. The diploma course 1977-1982 was discounted because, although accredited by the NCTJ and designed to graduate newspaper journalists, it was not a named newspaper journalism programme. The 2013 graduates were not included in the survey because research suggested that the first year following graduation was atypical.<sup>54</sup>

It was not possible to calculate accurately what percentage of the total population of PGT newspaper graduates for the period were represented. University enrolment data were available for only the last nine years. These suggested an under-reporting of the population of 4.1%. Correcting the dataset accordingly, the survey sample appeared to capture 95% of the relevant alumni. Problems with the data included not only where the numbers of graduates reporting career experiences were less than the official enrolment figures (five out of the nine latest years) but also where they exceeded the rolls (two incidences in the nine years). It seemed that only those alumni with employment to report appeared in the full

dataset. Certainly, no unemployment was recorded. As the data were based largely on self-reporting, prestige bias may have exacerbated this tendency. Consequently, it is likely that the data over-reported employment.

Each alumnus/a entry contained from one to several career experiences. As this was a study of career experiences (the participation of alumni over time in the labour market) each type of experience entered by a graduate was counted separately. Therefore, apart from data on unique experiences, the figures referred to work experiences not individual alumni. Among alumni who graduated in the most recent years, it was not always possible to determine in particular whether they worked in an online or offline environment as many listed only their employer (for example, Telegraph Media Group [TMG]) where editorial practices were converged. In such instances, the main business of the employer (in the case of TMG, newspaper publication) was entered. This may have also inflated the proportion of newspaper work experiences (and deflated the occurrence of online employment).

Employment as a newspaper journalist was counted if the alumnus/a listed a national daily or Sunday or regional or local or recognised international title: these ranged from *The Wall Street Journal* to the *Wandsworth Borough News*. Periodical publications, such as *The Times Higher Education*, were not included; nor were entries which indicated that the graduate worked in a newspaper's online environment (MailOnline, ft.com). The roles included reporter, correspondent, critic, sub-editor, assistant editor, etc.; roles such as blogger were excluded. In any event, the data were used heuristically to inform debate around the nature, purpose and outcomes of vocationally-oriented newspaper journalism programmes in relation to the post-graduation careers of alumni rather than to demonstrate statistical significance.

#### V. DATA

Notwithstanding the university's assertion about preparing students for first jobs in newspapers, as noted, over three decades the proportion of alumni from this programme entering first jobs in newspapers actually decreased. Furthermore, those starting their careers on the regional or local press collapsed. Only between a fifth and a third were working in newspapers 20-30 years later, and of them as many as three quarters appeared to have worked outside newspapers at some time. Even where alumni had been graduated 10 or fewer years, a third were no longer working in newspapers. Few (between no more than one in six and one in three) stayed in newspaper journalism for their entire careers to date. As newspaper journalism became less popular as a first destination, over 30 years women moved from a slight minority (44%) to a small majority (51%) in that area, and were more likely to make that their only career (30% to 46%). That gender distribution was exaggerated in first destinations in the regional and local press: women comprised a minority (42.75%) among the cohort which graduated in 1983-1992 but 77.5% in the 2003-2012 cohort. However, women were less likely than men to stay in newspaper journalism. After 20-30

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Journalism Practice, vol. 9, no. 3, 2015, pp. 383-398; R. Hummel, S. Kirchhoff and D. Prander, "We used to be queens and now we are slaves," Journalism Practice, vol. 6, issue 5-6, 2012, pp. 722-731; V. Luoma-aho, M. Leppänen and T. Uskali, "Errand boy or entrepreneur? Journalists' expectations of their future roles in Finland," Central European Journal of Communication, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 188—203; O. Meyers and R. Davidson, "The journalistic structure of feeling: an exploration of career life histories of Israeli journalists," Journalism, vol. 15, no. 8, 2013, pp. 987-1005; Nel, 2010, p. 3; Nygren, 2013, p.215; O'Donnell, Zion and Sherwood, 2015, p.9; S. Reindary, "Newspaper journalism in crisis: burnout on the rise, eroding young journalists' career commitment," Journalism, vol. 12, no. 1, 2011, pp. 33-50

[53] [http://issuu.com/xcitymag/docs/xcity\\_for\\_issuu](http://issuu.com/xcitymag/docs/xcity_for_issuu).

[54] R. Bridgstock and S. Cunningham, "Graduate careers in journalism, media and communications within and outside the sector: early careers outcomes, trajectories and capabilities," in *Creative Work Beyond the Creative Industries: Innovation, Employment and Education*, G. Hearn, R. Bridgstock, B. Goldsmith and J. Rogers, Eds. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014, pp. 226-244.

years, only 30% of those still in newspapers were women; after 10-20 years that number was less than 42%. On the other hand, an increasing proportion of these women (16% to 42%) used a first job in this sector to upgrade to employment in the national press

What else did these alumni do? The longer the alumni had been graduated, the more varied careers they reported. The most common other jobs (listed by frequency of mention) included PR and associated work and freelancing. However, although the numbers of alumni taking up freelancing as a first job rose over time (from 4% to 7%) they remained low. Nevertheless, freelancing at some time during their careers was relatively commonplace: between a quarter and one in six or seven had done so. Similarly, between a fifth and one in seven had some PR or related work experience. Almost a quarter of the most recent graduates had no work experience in any traditional print media. That figure had risen from an average of around 16% in the earlier periods. Two in 15 (13.5%) reported work experience outside journalism, PR and any related occupation. Their jobs included academic/teacher; politician and civil servant; therapist; landlord; investment banker; lawyer; horse trainer; wine-maker, and literary agent, as well as novelist/writer/author.

Did these alumni substitute working in journalism in other media? The most common alternative experience was with the wire services/news agencies (Reuters, Press Association, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, etc.). The numbers reporting having worked in this area increased over time until almost a quarter of the most recently graduated alumni said they had had this kind of experience. A similar number in this cohort reported having had jobs in online/multimedia domains, although the increase over time was much steeper. Experience in online environments grew from zero among those who graduated in the earliest years (1983-1985) to more than a quarter of the most recent alumni (2008-2012). Those who graduated between 2003 and 2012 reported having jobs as social media editors, heads of online content, web producers, digital publishers, multimedia journalists, community publishers, search engine optimisation managers, data editors and bloggers in a range of media, including BBC Online, Yahoo! News, BuzzFeed, *Huffington Post*, Skysports.com, the MailOnline and ft.com, and working on a variety of platforms. Employment in other traditional print media (outside national and regional and local newspapers, and chiefly in magazines) remained constant over the 30 years. On the other hand, the number of alumni reporting having worked in broadcasting fell from more than 30% among the 1983-1992 cohort to only 8.8% among those who graduated between 2003 and 2012. Those for whom newspapers were their first employment destination were also 40% less likely to have worked outside journalism, the media and communications altogether.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The population of PGT alumni surveyed in this study was socially and economically advantaged – a key part of the

incremental century-long process of the graduatisation, professionalisation and social segregation of UK journalism.<sup>55</sup> These alumni leveraged their access to expensive and exclusive PGT professional education to enter higher-skilled work. Among those qualifying for work in journalism through a different, lower-level route, employment rates in journalism were considerably lower.<sup>56</sup> However, newspaper journalism attracted no more than a bare majority of these PGT graduates – and even those stayed a relatively short period of time working in the press. From the late 1980s (well before the 21st century crisis in journalism) they had all but abandoned middle-skilled employment in the regional and local press. Here there was a gender dimension with women overwhelmingly entering this most precarious of employments, suggesting a negative form of feminisation. Most alumni indicated having portfolio careers of one kind or another. A significant minority – perhaps a third – reported working at some time outside journalism (in PR and related work). Of these, more than four in ten had left all kinds of media-related employment. A further quarter said they had spent time in the indeterminate role of a freelance. Bureaucratic employment in other forms of journalism outside newspapers seemed not to be offering adequate alternatives; for example, the BBC, the largest employer of journalists in the UK, was itself shedding jobs.<sup>57</sup> The study did not capture either periods of unemployment of part-time working.

This PGT alumni cohort clearly had a privileged entrée to higher-skilled employment in journalism. However, holding a Master's degree in journalism correlated over time increasingly weakly with permanent employment in bureaucratic media settings, and especially in the press notwithstanding the focus of their course of study. Although

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[55] D. Ponsford, "Why journalism has become 'most exclusive middle-class profession'," *Press Gazette*, 20 July 2009, at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/editor/2009/07/20/why-journalism-has-become-most-exclusive-middle-class-profession>: accessed 8 January 2015; Spilsbury, 2013, pp. 28-29 & 31-32; The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, *Unleashing Aspiration*, 2009, at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>; T. Walters, "Journalism: occupation of the privileged?" *Huffington Post*, 19 August 2013, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-walters/journalism-occupation-of-the-privileged\\_b\\_3461781.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-walters/journalism-occupation-of-the-privileged_b_3461781.html): accessed 8 January 2015.

[56] M. Spilsbury, *Destinations of NCTJ Diploma in Journalism students*, Newport, Essex: National Council for the Training of Journalists, 2015.

[57] For an example, see "All change at the BBC as 2,900 jobs cut," *Daily Mail*, nd, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-329819/All-change-BBC-2-900-jobs-cut.html>: accessed 31 July 2015.

the hollowing-out of journalism left some disgruntled with the occupation, voluntary severance was probably less a factor than redundancy. Consequently, the issues they faced were those of changes within mainstream journalism – a qualitative shift from stability to precariousness, and demands for enhanced skills, calling on innovation, enterprise, critical thinking, the capacity to contribute to ‘the future trajectories of the industry in crisis’ as well as to undertake rigorous journalism.<sup>58</sup> In other words, a socially-responsible higher education would prepare journalism students for employability not the replication of existing, perhaps outmoded, practice

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[58] R. G. Picard, “Twilight or new dawn of journalism?” *Digital Journalism*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2014, 273-283; D. Robie, “Lies, media integrity and the new digital environment,” Pacific Media Centre, 17 March 2014, at <http://www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/artciles/lies-media-integrity-and-new-digital-environment>: accessed 29 June 2015.



