



Journalism education for the 21st century Roundtable Report

Topic:

Reporting the climate crisis: reflections on COP26 & the challenges ahead

Host institution:

Association for Journalism Education (UK)

Date:

November 26, 2021

1.00pm-4.30pm

Guests:

Panel 1: Journalists, activists and environment organisations share their views & experience on how climate is reported & reflect on COP26

CHAIR: Dr Margaret Hughes, AJE UK, University of the West of Scotland

Speakers:

MATT MCGRATH BBC News

Matt McGrath is an environment correspondent at BBC News and has covered climate change since 2007, reporting from ten COPs along the way. He's originally from Tipperary in Ireland and has also worked at BBC Radio Five Live and the BBC World Service. Matt has been a science journalism fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a science communicator in residence at York University in Toronto, and was the inaugural winner of the BBVA Foundation Biophilia award for environmental communication.

HANNAH MCNEISH – freelance journalist

Hannah McNeish is a freelance journalist in Print, TV and radio producer and presenter who has been reporting in Africa since 2010. She focuses mainly on conflict and human rights climate change, women, global health, science and investigations.

LEO HICKMAN – Carbon Brief

[Leo Hickman](#) ([@LeoHickman](#)) is our director and editor.

Leo previously worked for 16 years as a journalist, editor and author at the Guardian newspaper. Before joining Carbon Brief, he was WWF-UK's chief advisor on climate change. In 2013, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Exeter in recognition of his journalism. His books include *A Life Stripped Bare*, *The Final Call* and *Will Jellyfish Rule the World?*



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NATHAN FARRELL - Sustrans

Nathan is Sustrans Research and Monitoring Unit Deputy Director, Sustrans is a United Kingdom walking and cycling charity, and the custodian of the National Cycle Network. Its flagship project is the National Cycle Network, which has created 12,763 miles of signed cycle routes throughout the UK including 5,273 mi of traffic-free paths. Previously Nathan worked at Bournemouth University.

JON FULLER – Extinction Rebellion

Jon Fuller has been active in the environmental movement for over 40 years and, along with thousands of others, was so disillusioned by the failure of the main Eco-NGOs to secure dynamic action and so desperate for radical change that he joined Extinction Rebellion (XR) shortly after it formed. Jon has been arrested twice on XR protests, the first time being beside the pink boat, which was parked within sight of BBC HQ in London. Jon specialises in XR's first demand - that government and the media Tell The Truth about the gravity of the threats we face. Jon regularly speaks at XR protests about the role of the media in both suppressing the most frightening news and sapping the willingness of the public to demand the steps needed to avoid catastrophe.

MEGAN DARBY – Climate Home News

Megan Darby is the editor of Climate Home News, an award-winning news site specialising in the international politics of the climate crisis. Her mission is to make space for original reporting that informs and inspires action, while holding power to account.

JOELMA VIANA - Amazon University Center (Unama)/Amazon News Network

Joelma Viana dos Santos is a Brazilian journalist based in the Amazon region, specialised in Scientific Journalism, and with an MA in Education. She is a lecturer at the Amazon University Center (Unama) in Santarém. She has a broad industry experience and has been working for 20 years in the Amazon Forest Area, especially in radio – the most popular communication platform for native populations. She is the manager of the Amazon News Network and the vice-president of the Catholic Radio Network. She is also a volunteer at the Ecclesial Pan-Amazon Network (Rede Eclesial Pan Amazônica – REPAM).

PANEL 2: Journalism educators and journalists share their views on how journalism education can respond to issues around reporting climate crises

CHAIR: Dr David Baines, Newcastle University

ANNA TURNS – freelance journalist/Plymouth Marjon University

Anna has worked in TV, radio and print journalism for 20 years. As an experienced environmental journalist focusing on solutions, progress and innovation, she writes regularly for national publications such as Guardian, Telegraph, Evening Standard, Coast, Positive



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News and Wicked Leeks. She also teaches journalism students at Plymouth Marjon University. www.environmentaljournalist.co.uk

PROFESSOR CHRIS PATERSON – University of Leeds

Chris Paterson is Professor of Global Communication at the University of Leeds. He has authored books about journalists' safety and international news and created modules in journalism ethics, development communication, and climate communication. He leads an African climate communications research project, and is affiliated with the Priestley Centre for Climate.

MARK NEUZIL - University of St. Thomas-Minnesota

Mark Neuzil, Ph.D, is professor and chair of the Department of Emerging Media at the University of St. Thomas-Minnesota. He is the author, co-author or editor of eight books, mostly on environmental themes, as well as a frequent writer and speaker on environmental issues.

AMANDA GEARING – journalist & academic

Amanda Gearing is an Australian investigative journalist, author, broadcaster and academic. Her work has led to law reform and to various inquiries in Australia and Britain. She has won many awards for her print and broadcast journalism including a Walkley Award in 2012

DR. NGO SHEAU SHI, Senior Lecturer in Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Ngo Sheau Shi is a senior lecturer in the School of Communication at Universiti Sains Malaysia. She graduated with BA (Hons) Communication in 1999 and MA in Film Studies in 2003 from Universiti Sains Malaysia. She co-edited a UNESCO handbook on 'Getting the Message Across: Reporting on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: A Handbook for Journalists'.

Summary of discussion:

Panel 1: Journalists, activists and environment organisations share their views & experience on how climate is reported & reflect on COP26

There was an agreement around the urgency of the issue and the need for it be widely reported beyond the headiness of COP26 and the international headlines that event had grabbed.

The speakers, the majority of whom had attended COP26 in Glasgow, agreed that there needed to be greater literacy around the issues, there needed to be greater clarity from governments, political & environmental organisations and pressure groups and NGOs. Journalists talked of the deluge of information they received, the often complex nature of it and the need for them to have the knowledge and experience to cut through this to make journalistic content that spoke to audiences in ways that they could understand and relate to.



Several of the speakers, most notably our speaker from the Amazon News Network reminded us of the need for greater understanding of the context and culture around the reporting of the issue and narratives that frame the issue from politicians and powerful elites.

There was an acknowledgement that in many respects this was a conversation between journalism professionals and journalism educators that was long overdue and is one that we should return to far more regularly.

Panel 2: Journalism educators and journalists share their views on how journalism education can respond to issues around reporting climate crises

Speakers shared their experience of teaching and addressing issues around climate crisis/environmental news within their own institutions and looked at challenges and opportunities.

What was clear is that there is no one way to approach the issue, indeed, it was generally agreed that we need to understand that this is a complex issue and it one which, in some respects, no different to how we approach telling any stories – perhaps the main challenge being students, and journalism educators, knowing the vocabulary around reporting crisis, the complex socio-economic and political issues around it in some parts of the world.

We gained an international perspective as colleagues joined us from around the globe and we learned of the differing challenges from different cultures whose experiences of the climate crisis are quite different.

The consensus was that we need to be aware of the growing need to address the issue as part of our learning and teaching, that we need to equip our students to learn more about the issues and that we should strive for inter-disciplinary approaches that call on the deep knowledge and expertise that can exist within our universities outside of journalism departments to enhance our approach to teaching the issue.

Discussion outcomes/recommendations:

The key recommendation from both panels was that this needs to be an ongoing conversation within journalism education.

It was clear from hearing from those colleagues who were embedding, or even just acknowledging, reporting the climate crisis into their curricula, that more needs to be done. Suggestions from journalism educators were wide ranging and included:

- Teaching science/scientific aspects of reporting the climate/environment crisis as a



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key component on all journalism programmes;

- Explore opportunities for inter-disciplinarity within our universities to bring colleagues from non-journalism, scientific departments onto our programmes to provide knowledge and understanding of the range of issues that need to be considered; create specific modules that explore the issues;
- Teaching climate literacy – ensuring that our students can understand the issue and how it is framed in the news media so as to make the sometimes complex science relatable, understandable and meaningful to audiences;
- Create a toolbox for journalists, journalism educators and journalism students for reporting on climate/environmental issues;
- Teach our students to understand complex political and social issues that also lie at the heart of reporting on climate change/environment;
- Think about the scale of the issue – look at it locally, at how it is impacting on our own communities as well as on a global scale;
- Think about how the stories are presented – what is the best format to tell these stories.

Promotion and visibility of the event:

Event was promoted via AJE social media and online.

Event was also shared via individual AJE member institutions.

Further comments:

The event was very well attended for both sessions – it was great to see journalism students attend - and while it was clear that there is much to be alarmed about in the context of us all meeting the demands of the global climate crisis, there was a willingness, enthusiasm and optimism that there is much opportunity to address the challenges of embedding reporting the climate/environmental crises within journalism curricula and to create learning and teaching content across journalism education that will enable our students to meet the demands for