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Covid-19 and Journalism Education

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic had a particular impact on journalism schools. Journalism education had to adapt in real time, while newsrooms had to adapt because of the lockdown. In a matter of weeks, sometimes days, not only did academic teaching have to be adapted, but also practical work in the field. And it was not only the permanent teachers who had to adapt their teaching methods, but also the part-time faculty, i.e., the numerous professionals who intervene in the courses.

This section of the conference focuses on how journalism education has adapted and continues to adapt. Topics include student recruitment, adaptation of teaching and assessment methods, links with the industry, including internships and professional integration. Finally, it will be interesting to look at the future of these systems, which are often set up in an emergency. When the situation returns to normal, will the training of journalists have been permanently modified?

This summary report is produced to offer a review of the – still evolving – field, and it will hopefully spark debate amongst participants in this WJEC stream.

Introduction
Journalists usually report on crisis. The pandemic placed journalists, like everyone else in the crisis. It presented a unique challenge to journalism and its normative values – most notably the shibboleth of objectivity -- and to journalism educators, striving to teach professional values through the move to an online environment. This document aims to present a summary of the work done to date (March 2022) to report and reflect on the ways in which journalism education has responded and continues to adapt, over 2 years later. It engages with the key

themes of the strand to consider a range of challenges and responses within J-Schools. These themes are:

- Teaching and assessment methods
- Relationship with industry
- Wellbeing and duty of care
- Future directions

These themes all need to be appraised within a challenging and shifting context, as even prior to the pandemic, journalism was seen by many observers as a practice that is fractured, mistrusted and weakened in its ability to hold power to account.

Context

Journalists and journalism educators already faced significant challenges:

> Journalism is accused of elitism and often branded as too far removed from the reality of people's lives (McGill, 2016; Snow, 2017). The post-truth context has engendered a crisis of trust, where 'truth was fake, fake was true' (Rusbridger, 2018) and journalism is portrayed as core to the problem, rather than the solution. Despite a brief reprieve where journalists reporting on the frontline of the global pandemic were granted key worker status in the UK, and trust levels improved worldwide, deep fissures remain. Citizen journalism and societal shifts have engendered a move away from 'top down' reporting, towards greater interactivity with audiences, but inclusivity remains an issue with news organisations and industry councils intensifying protocols in a bid to create more diverse newsrooms, (Fowler-Watt, 2022)

The pandemic raised more 'red flags' for journalism, according to a survey conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University (Posetti et al., 2020). It collated responses from 1,400 English speaking journalists in 125 countries. 70% rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the Covid-19 crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work. 30% said that their news organisations had not provided them with a single piece of protective equipment during the first wave of the pandemic. 81% were working in a context where dis/misinformation was a key issue. The 'info-demic', defined by the World Health Organisation as "an overabundance of information, both online and offline", created a toxic environment:

> It includes deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response and advance alternative agendas of groups or individuals. Mis- and disinformation can be harmful to people's physical and mental health (WHO, 23 September 2020).

Many journalists felt the weight of responsibility to disseminate accurate and reliable information during the pandemic, often whilst struggling to assess risk and make decisions for their own households (see Jukes et al, 2021). This presents a difficult landscape within which

to teach the journalists of tomorrow. The pandemic exacerbated some of the challenges facing journalism, whilst also providing opportunity for innovation and change.

Teaching and assessment methods

Rapid response was required at the outset of the pandemic. The move to teaching online, generally over Zoom, presented challenges for a discipline that flourishes in face-to-face, newsroom environments and usually with a shoulder-to-shoulder apprenticeship model style of pedagogy. Social distancing and mask-wearing militated against this model. Teaching online thus required tutors of practical skills to respond with creativity, whilst ensuring equity in terms of students' access to technology (Ndzinisa and Diamini, 2021, a reliable broadband connection and the requisite capabilities with remote, rather than hands-on, technical support. Considerations of access, equity and inclusivity were sharpened by the move online. Hierarchies can also become flattened in the virtual space, but access to that space needs to be universally available; the pandemic highlighted socio-economic inequity within and across national boundaries (see, for example, World Economic Forum report, 2020).

Journalism educators worldwide devised innovative approaches: from publication of detailed documents providing information of free virtual technical tools (e.g., Concordia University, Montreal) to allowing students to conduct interviews over the phone or via video conference call. New formats for storytelling evolved: for example, inspired by the rise in lockdown-style video diaries (Estefania, 2020; Toniolo, 2020) educators in the UK adapted industry-accredited television journalism teaching for their first-year undergraduates to a mobile journalism " survivor video" alternative (Fowler-Watt et al, 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, the pandemic has accelerated experimentation with online tools for teaching journalists (Reuters Institute report, 2021). In other areas, the flipped classroom model of pedagogy already employed in some J-Schools (e.g., Indian Institute of Journalism and New Media, Bangalore) gave institutions a head-start in the move online.

When hybridity was introduced and some teaching took place back on campus, or students could report in the community again, seminar groups had to shrink in size to accommodate social distancing, perhaps half the student number would be online, the other half in the newsroom – this led students and teachers alike to develop their communication skills, experimenting with channels like Slack and Teams to build digital communities – often mimicking newsroom workflows in the process. Original modes of storytelling such as mobile videos also became baked into journalism pedagogic practice - and experimentation with different social media platforms such as Tik Tok, developed apace. Covid-19 is redrawing the boundaries of the journalistic field. It has broken down objectivity and amplified subjectivity, as human stories, often with auto/biographical elements, are employed to engage audiences and make information relatable – for journalism students, family often provided the most accessible interview material for their storytelling.

Modes of assessment also had to be changed quickly and equitably: presentations were recorded or conducted live online, group newsdays were flipped into portfolios, peer assessment was developed and innovative modes such as photo diaries, self-reflections, vlogs

and blogs integrated into assessment schedules. In the UK, the leading industry council, the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)[1] devised online strategies for all of its professional diploma exams. Journalists are known for their flexibility and adaptability; troubleshooting and finding workarounds became part of the daily routine for journalism educators and journalists alike (for example Leonard, 2020).

Relationship with industry

Work placement, internships and industry experience are integral to practice-orientated journalism programmes worldwide. The pandemic closed down opportunities for students to engage in practical experience, with some news organisations moving mentoring and internships online, others seizing the chance to review their structures and workflows, at worst downsizing and reducing workforce numbers. In the 'post-pandemic' context news organisations are recovering from temporary lay-offs and furlough, with many making the decision not to return to full-time office working (see, Poynter Institute monitoring in US; Mayhew and Turvill, 2020). This has knock-on effects for journalism students and underlines the sense of precarity experienced by journalists in the pandemic (see Posetti et al, 2020). Journalism educators supporting students have needed to be innovative and flexible over work placement, whilst conforming to industry and accreditation body requirements (notably in the US and UK).

Most J-Schools benefit from part-time and/or freelance staff who work in industry, but come into the academy to share their skills and expertise; in the heart of the pandemic, it has been of great benefit to map this expertise onto changing delivery patterns, as newsrooms experienced the same challenges. These are some of the key areas where this has been evident:

- mobile journalism
- human interest stories that are often 'auto/biographical'
- interviewing with social distancing measures in place
- ethics – compassionate and humane reporting of crisis
- risk assessment
- fact-checking and verification of social media and UGC, news sources
- specialist journalism, notably data journalism and science/health journalism
- critical reflection
- trauma training and self-care

The relationship between J-Schools and industry has arguably become closer in the pandemic, it will be interesting to consider how these benefits can be captured 'post-pandemic' to drive and lead change, if the pandemic is seen to be a 'critical moment for journalism' (Quandt et al, 2021; Jukes et al, 2021; Perreault et al, 2021)

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[1] National Council for the Training of Journalists is the main industry accreditation body in the UK: https://www.nctj.com

Wellbeing and duty of care

Student wellbeing in Higher Education was a serious matter of concern before the pandemic (Hubble and Bolton, 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Crawford, 2018), but global crisis witnessed heightened student anxiety and concerns for educators. Journalists are often depicted as resilient, but, the pandemic was a unique event, which, as we have already established, journalists were living *in* and reporting *on*. This presented unique challenges to journalism educators, too with relation to safeguarding and ensuring student wellbeing. As Bissell (2020) notes: "There is a sense that belonging to the same dreadful story has fostered a need to belong together. Nonetheless, the virtual sphere can also accentuate a sense of human distance and estrangement". Journalism is a fundamentally human activity; 'post pandemic,' educators have noted a loss of confidence, a disinclination for group-working, with poor student attendance and engagement noted as HE sector-wide problems. Some observers have adopted a psycho-social approach, seeking to understand student wellbeing issues in the pandemic (for example, in the UK : Burns et al, 2020; in Europe and Russia: Plakhotnik et al, 2020; in Canada: Schwartz et al, 2021) . We are only just beginning to assess the effects of the pandemic on young people's mental health (for example, Deeker, 2022), but within J-Schools, a renewed focus on the need for trauma training is evident, with institutions drawing from the excellent work of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, for example and evident in the newly-formed gathering of journalists and journalism educators in the international Journalism Education and Trauma Research group, JETREG)[2]. This highlights another area where the synergies between the academy and industry can be observed and utilised to focus on building resilience in journalists. There is vigorous debate about the importance of placing care and compassion front and centre in pedagogic contexts (Auerbach et al, 2020). This can be more challenging in environments where precarity is endemic – for example, Southern Africa, Latin America, the MENA region.

Conclusions and future directions

> *"At the end of the day, education is about forming personas. It is about integral, responsible citizens who, for sure, are employable, but more importantly are committed to their community and with a broad perspective on what happens in the world"* – Francisco Marmalejo, 2020.

Society needs resilient journalism to function effectively: robust, effective, and accurate communication and media are fundamental to trust in institutions, to informing publics, to encouraging ethical and empathic behaviours and to the mitigation of risk. there is a grave risk that the 'info-demic' of misinformation about coronavirus combined with the precarity of journalism and journalists (emotional and socio-economic) presents a significant threat to the resilience of the post-pandemic world. Journalism education can be at the forefront in helping to address these challenges if we, as educators, can integrate the lessons learned during the pandemic into the design and delivery of pedagogy going forwards. The call and response will vary according to the media ecology within which journalism

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[2] Journalism Education and Trauma Research Group (JETREG) was founded in 2020 to promote trauma literacy in journalism education: https://jetreg.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk

education is located – for example, in some contexts, such as in South Africa (see, Open Society Foundation report) , Latin America (see UNESCO report, 2022), Lebanon (Melki et al, 2021), Covid-19 may have accelerated factors that already exist; fragility has been present for a long time, both within journalism and society.

However, there is evidence – discernible when educators have taken the opportunity to discuss best practice – for example at conference and symposia hosted by AEJMC, AJE, WJEC, MES[3] - and in institutional initiatives (see: Carleton School of Journalism and Communication, 2020) – of a shared ambition in the academy and industry to look ahead to more resilient, trustworthy, inclusive and trauma-informed journalism practice and pedagogy. Whilst the immediate global context remains challenging, with emerging evidence of genocide in Ukraine, looming economic crisis and persistently high rates of Covid-19 infection worldwide, there is strong potential for journalism education to make a positive contribution to the 'post pandemic' media landscape. This review indicates that to do so may require a long-term commitment to flexible, innovative approaches to teaching and learning strategies, a critical mindset that actively interrogates journalism's normative values and professional boundaries, a focus on a pedagogy of compassion . The call to action? To draw on the lessons of reporting *on* and living *in* the pandemic to lead change and build resilience in journalism practice and pedagogy.

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[3] AEJMC = association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication; AJE = Association of Journalism education; WJEC = World Journalism Education Congress; MES = Media Education Summit

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