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Coincidentally, the event came a fortnight after the global newspaper industry’s annual meeting (WAN and WEF in Cape Town in June), and shortly before African editors were due to debate with presidents in Accra, Ghana, in July.

Being sandwiched between these occasions neatly symbolises the significance of the WJEC. The point is: journalism education is a spring. It bubbles into much that is in the newspapers. It underpins much of the intellectual firepower the African editors would have mustered (had the presidents arrived in time for the debate).

Like many conferences, the WJEC included a share of duds who simply make you depressed about the future of media. But overwhelmingly it showcased a worldwide cadre of cosmopolitan individuals committed to providing the best journalism education possible.

One was Rebeca MacKinnon, founder of Global Voices and a former CNN correspondent now teaching in Hong Kong. She gets her students to blog in order to learn about RSS and social media. Another was Yevgenia Munro, a journalism teacher from Russia who works in New Zealand. She’s collated what her fellow educators around the world see as crucial for assessing the quality of a news story. It’s evolving into a tool for students to score their own work.

On the agenda were six key subjects:

1. Counting and comparing programmes around the world. Early results came through from a global census on journalism education. Organiser Charles Self announced a list of 1,859 journalism schools at tertiary level around the world, adding that there may be double that number. An online survey, completed by 193 schools, puts new technology and funding as the top challenges for journalism teachers. Also released were figures from a Unesco survey, done partly by Rhodes University’s J-school, which listed almost 200 schools in Africa. Only 15% of these have any Internet presence, and less than 1% offer online educational resources or display their students’ work.

2. Group brainstorms on topics like adapting journalism education to a digital age. Among the conclusions:
   - Every journalism teacher needs to become more competent about digital media – and make more use of ICT in teaching.
   - Because it’s all new, the old hierarchy of “know-it-all” teacher and “empty-head” student doesn’t wash. Instead, the challenge calls for joint experimentation and mutual learning.

3. Assessing the quality of J-schools. Among the systems outlined at WJEC:
   - The US has voluntary peer review based on 10 standards – like what the curriculum covers, how student feedback is gauged, etc.;
   - French-speaking countries look at what’s covered by a programme, the means of implementation and the relevance to media;
   - European Union countries use a standard called the Tartu Declaration which sets out the skills that a journalism student should graduate with.

Work towards an African system was presented. This emerged out of a Unesco project (again involving Rhodes) that drew 30 African J-schools into a dialogue. The system pinpoints three broad criteria for what should count towards being a potential centre of excellence in African journalism education:
   - internal: the curriculum and capacity of the journalism school;
   - external: professional and public service, society links and stature;
   - future-focus: plans and momentum.

What’s distinctive here is how a journalism school impacts not only on students and the media, but also on society at large.

4. Disseminating research about best practice. Among the papers presented were:
   - support for media rights as a criterion for evaluating journalism education;
   - using a blog to encourage journalism students to engage in critical reflection;
   - from podcasts to attitude shifts: the value of the oral history interview in introductory journalism classes;
   - go far: students out of their comfort zones (offering student experiences in foreign
The basic debate.

● The basic debate.

● After the Digital Revolution: journalism education in Kyrgyzstan;

● Scholarly turn of journalism education: redesigning curricula at university level in Bangladesh;

● Making every comment count: effective formative feedback to journalism students.

5. The basic debate.

Given the diversity of journalism everywhere, a lot of debate went into what can and should apply to journalism education anywhere.

A common denominator was devised by almost 30 journalism education organisations in the form of a Declaration of Principles of Journalism Education. According to this document, journalism education should prepare graduates to work as highly informed, strongly committed practitioners who have a distinctive body of knowledge and specialized skills. Above all, to be a responsible journalist one must have an informed ethical commitment to the public. This commitment must include an understanding of and deep appreciation for the role that journalism plays in the formation, enhancement and perpetuation of an informed society.

We are pleased to work together to strengthen journalism education and increase its value to students, employers and the public. In doing this we are guided by the following principles:

1. At the heart of journalism education is a balance of conceptual, philosophical and skills-based content. While it is interdisciplinary, journalism education is an academic field in its own right with a distinctive body of knowledge and theory.

2. Journalism is a field appropriate for university study from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Journalism programmes offer a full range of academic degrees including bachelor’s, masters and Doctor of Philosophy degrees as well as certificate, specialised and mid-career training.

3. Journalism educators should be a blend of academics and practitioners. It is important that educators have experience working as journalists.

4. Journalism curriculum includes a variety of skills courses and the study of journalism ethics, history, media structures/institutions at national and international level, critical analysis of media content and journalism as a profession. It includes coursework on the social, political and cultural role of media in society and sometimes includes coursework dealing with media management and economics. In some countries, journalism education includes allied fields like public relations, advertising, and broadcast production.

5. Journalism educators have an important outreach mission to promote media literacy among the public generally and within their academic institutions specifically.

6. Journalism programme graduates should be prepared to work as highly informed, strongly committed practitioners who have high ethical principles and are able to fulfill public interest obligations that are central to their work.

7. Most undergraduate and many masters programmes in journalism have a strong vocational orientation. In these programmes experiential learning, provided by classroom laboratories and on-the-job internships, is a key component.

8. Journalism educators should maintain strong links to media industries. They should critically reflect on industry practices and offer advice to industry based on this reflection.

9. Journalism is a technologically intensive field. Practitioners and students with first-hand experience of the way that journalism is practised in other nations;

10. Journalism is a global endeavour: journalism students and educators should learn that despite political and cultural differences, they share important values and professional goals with peers in other nations. Where practical, journalism education provides students with first-hand experience of the way that journalism is practised in other nations.

11. Journalism educators have an obligation to collaborate with colleagues worldwide to provide assistance and support so that journalism education can gain strength as an academic discipline and play a more effective role in helping journalism to reach its full potential.

Endnotes

4. http://www.s.i.ku.edu/ajc/journalismreport.doc
5. www.theophraste.org

Declaration of Principles of Journalism Education

World Journalism Education Congress
Singapore, June 2007

The undersigned representatives of professional journalism education associations share a concern and common understanding about the nature, role, importance, and future of journalism education worldwide. We are unanimous that journalism education provides the foundation as theory, research, and training for the effective and responsible practice of journalism. Journalism education is defined in different ways. At the core is the study of all types of journalism.

Journalism should serve the public in many important ways, but it can only do so if its practitioners have mastered an increasingly complex body of knowledge and specialized skills. Above all, to be a responsible journalist one must have an informed ethical commitment to the public. This commitment must include a deep appreciation for the role that journalism plays in the formation, enhancement and perpetuation of an informed society.

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