

Local Reporter? Don't Forget Your Passport! Britain's new commitments to broadcast journalism education

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Broadcast journalism training in the UK stands on the brink of significant changes, the importance of which is only just beginning to be understood within the industry and the country's journalism schools. The next few years will see moves that some call revolutionary:

- Both public and private broadcasters will greatly increase in-career training for journalists, moving from a patchwork of primarily voluntary arrangements to compulsory ones that become prerequisites for promotion.
- There will be more direct collaboration between universities and employers in providing a variety of updating courses for working journalists.
- All broadcast journalists will be subject to virtual "skills passports" – with one or more centrally-organized data bases making their education and training records available to prospective employers.
- Broadcasters will be forced to extend in-career training to freelancers as well as staff.
- Universities offering broadcast journalism courses will be under increased pressure from employers to place greater emphasis on underlying issues such as law, journalistic ethics and cultural awareness, as necessary additions to practical newsgathering and storytelling skills. They find themselves constrained in this by a system that promotes one-year post-graduate programs, and some recent industry pressure.

A number of forces have combined to bring all this about. Chief among them are:

- Reform within the BBC following the Gilligan/Kelly/Hutton affair.

- Growing public dissatisfaction with much of British journalism and an increase in critical evaluations from within the profession.
- An ultimatum to the commercial industry from a newly-reinforced broadcast regulator.
- Broad government initiatives to bridge the country's skills gap perceived to result from a higher education system traditionally adverse to professional programs.

Over several decades, print journalism in Britain has fallen a long way from a pedestal that few now seem able to recall. The opening years of the twenty-first century find it battered, bruised and sometimes bewildered. The vast, popular tabloid press – which always had a tendency towards trivia and creative reporting – has sunk to a shameless routine of practices that owe little to any quest for truth. With few exceptions, the rest of the national newspapers target and pander to their own political constituencies. The Press Complaints Commission, the industry's half-hearted attempt at self-regulation, is widely viewed as self-serving and a national disgrace.

If the media are pillars of democracy, it seemed for a while that, in Britain, the relative upstart that is broadcast journalism was shouldering much of the weight. Both the BBC's charter and the country's commercial broadcasting licences demand fairness and balance in news reporting. British broadcast journalists enjoyed widespread international respect, even if they often endured criticism at home.

Jan Haworth, a journalism instructor and broadcast course director at London's City University, points out that print journalists, and especially those working for the national Sundays, are often allowed to run speculative stories with an impunity not available to their broadcast colleagues. "You can fly a kite, see what happens, get some kind of rebuttal. The lawyers will swing it. A big organization like the *Sunday Telegraph* has

always got the money to fend it off anyway.” Broadcast journalists, on the other hand, are subject to codes of fairness and rulings on accuracy and impartiality enforced by the industry’s statutory regulator, the Office of Communications, abbreviated to Ofcom.

“Anyone who wants to work as a broadcast journalist must know what the codes are, and the codes are universal,” says Dr. Richard Tait, Director of the School of Journalism at Cardiff University. “The code on fairness, the Ofcom code on fairness, applies to the BBC. The Ofcom rulings on impartiality and accuracy are very similar to the BBC’s.”

There have, of course, been plenty of occasions on which broadcast journalists have been accused of breaking the impartiality rules. But none could compare in consequences to the saga that unfolded in 2003 involving Andrew Gilligan, Alistair Campbell, David Kelly and Lord Hutton. The BBC’s impartiality and truthfulness were under unprecedented attack. At issue was whether Tony Blair’s office had deliberately misled the electorate over an intelligence dossier it used to justify declaring war on Iraq. Lord Hutton’s inquiry exonerated the government entirely and castigated the BBC’s reporting and policies. The judge’s findings defied the evidence presented, misinterpreted UK media law and beggared public belief. But the BBC lost both its Chairman and Greg Dyke, the most internally popular Director-General in its history.

It was a massive blow to the BBC’s confidence, and it came at a time when British faith in public institutions was at a particularly low ebb. John Lloyd, a former head of Channel 4 News, already perceived a link between this and the media’s own shortcomings. He believed the British media had become a danger to the very democracy they supposedly upheld.

“The media are at the height of their powers,” he wrote. “Nothing – not capital, not labour, not the military, not Christian belief and certainly not

politics – commands the same prestige, moral advantage and command over mass attention that the media do. Their themes dominate public and private lives. Their definitions of what is right or wrong, true or false, impose themselves on politics and on the public domain. Their narratives construct the world we don't immediately experience – which, for nearly all of us, is most of the world. Most notably, they pit themselves against political power and demand the right to judge, denounce, and even prompt, the replacement of political power.”

In an essay¹ based on his book ‘What the media do to our politics’, published by

Constable Robinson in June 2004, he went on:

“The struggle between politicians and the media is at the core of the news media’s practice. This is because the struggle, which has been usually represented as a healthy clash of independent institutions in a democratic policy, has for some time – in the UK– assumed the character of a zero-sum-game struggle for power.”

This situation, he wrote, “diminishes, rather than aerates or increases, freedom: and it increases the anomie and distrust within civil society. This is an argument intensely disliked by the media, for it strikes at the heart both of their idealistic self-belief and their everyday practices. But it should be made, and should be made from within the media themselves: indeed, it is almost the only place from which it can be made.” Lloyd is currently working with Oxford University to launch an institute to conduct research, scrutinize the media and hold poor journalism to public account. There is as yet no British equivalent to the Pew Foundation or the Project for Excellence in Journalism in the United States. But there is general concern about the scale, influence and lack of accountability of the British media, says Richard Sambrook, who was BBC’s Director of News & Current Affairs at the time of the Gilligan affair. He now directs the BBC’s world services and is the point-man for the BBC’s efforts to make adjustments to its journalism in the wake of the Hutton inquiry.

Lloyd's Journalism Institute and another along similar lines at the London School of Economics are not the only attempts to do something about the concerns. Sambrook says: "There are a number of non-university or non-aligned groups of people who are all thinking in similar terms as well about how can they launch something or some organization or some project which tries to bring some sense of accountability into what's going on."

In Sambrook's eyes, all this mainly concerns the country's print media. But Lloyd makes no such distinction. Siding squarely with Lord Hutton in his view of Gilligan's story, he argues: "Journalism in Britain – in Britain above all other democratic states – has been beguiled by a series of assumptions and attitudes, which created the 'accident waiting to happen' which was Andrew Gilligan's 06.07, May 29 2003 broadcast. The accident was waiting to happen because the media had become predators, destructive of their environment. Their environment is the institutions, practices and traditions of the democratic state: their rights and privileges derive from these; their power would be nothing without them."

Lloyd says Gilligan "falsely alleged government mendacity in the creation of a dossier arguing for war on Iraq". It's a judgment that's widely disputed. Gilligan certainly over-egged some details in a promotional two-way outlining his story and failed to ask for official comment before the broadcast. But his central point – that the dossier was "sexed-up" to try to persuade the British public of the need for war – was clearly correct. Nonetheless, the Gilligan affair and the BBC's reaction to it have led to reform. Even though broadcast journalism was generally believed to be less problematic than British print journalism, it is the broadcast side that is moving first to clean up its act.

All this takes place against a background of change. Britain's population has become massively multi-cultural, yet 96% of all the country's journalists are white and middle class, according to Jim Latham of the Broadcast Journalism Training Council. Broadcast does do better than print in this area, he says, but it's plain that neither is keeping pace with the diversity of the readership and audience.

While progress in that respect has been slow, however, successive British governments have made strident efforts to close the country's chronic skills gap – blamed by many on a higher education system that emphasized classics and pure research over professional or technical training. Gone are the days when only 2% of the population could expect to find a university place. New and converted (from technical colleges) universities now litter the landscape and the government pursues aggressive policies to ensure that industries nationwide take the business of practical training seriously.

As part of this effort, a new regulatory body – established under the 2003 Communications Act and known as Ofcom – has been given overall responsibility to see that the entire broadcasting industry commits itself to training on an unprecedented scale. Training schemes are now routinely written in as conditions of broadcasters' licences. Ofcom clearly means business. Aware of the broadcasters' natural fear of government intervention, Ofcom has devised what it calls a system of co-regulation. In reality, it's a way of holding a gun to the industry's head. Ofcom has simply given the broadcasters five years to prove that they are implementing training at every level – or Ofcom will step in and do it for them, directly regulating training programs for everyone from boom operators to political correspondents. It's a threat the regulator has legislative power to

enforce. At the Broadcast Journalism Training Council, Secretary Jim Latham clearly admires Ofcom's blunt style. "They're spelling out the future," he says. "Do you want to run your own business or do you want us to run it for you?" Self-regulation in newspapers, he says, has been "an absolute disaster", citing the one-sided arrogance of the Press Complaints Commission. But, he says, no one wants outsiders poking noses into the industry. He sees Ofcom's ultimatum as "a revolution...a real challenge." "I know what my answer would be," he goes on, "and I know what most people's answer would be. I'd rather control my own destiny than have some other bugger do it. Particularly a regulator."

At City University's journalism department, course director Jan Haworth also applauds Ofcom's approach - for the most part.

"It's very easy," she says, "for unscrupulous employers - in the BBC or in the commercial sector - to simply take the products of universities and get what they need from them on a short-term contract, and then dump them back into unemployment or under-employment, and hire a fresh lot. And so I think it's entirely reasonable that commercial broadcasters should be forced to be a little more responsible and not to hire and fire people at will in this kind of show-biz, Hollywood sort of fashion. Because, let's face it, in Hollywood you get paid big money for being hired on that kind of casualized basis. In commercial, independent television production - small companies, short contracts, no job security - if at least you're getting a bit of training thrown in, then at least you're coming away with something that can take you on to the next short contract or whatever."

But she is less enthusiastic about Ofcom's parallel requirement that broadcasters should also contribute somehow to media literacy among the audience.

"If I'm making a television program, it's not my job to train people in how to watch it and analyze it. That's the way I look at it. That's a job for a sociologist. So I think it's a bit wrong-headed of the government to bring in media literacy requirements and muddy the waters here. There are people in government who don't understand the difference between journalism, or media production, and media studies."

While, technically, Ofcom's writ applies only to the commercial side of the industry (the BBC having a Royal Charter rather than a broadcast licence), it makes little real difference. It's politically impossible for the BBC not to subscribe voluntarily to whatever conditions the regulator imposes on its commercial competitors – and it has already said it will.

As it is, natural tension between the government and the public broadcaster has been dangerously high. It reached a new peak with Britain's involvement in the second Gulf War. There has probably never been a government at Westminster that did not want to strangle the BBC in its time, but Alistair Campbell, Prime Minister Tony Blair's spin doctor, launched a campaign against the broadcaster without precedent in its public savagery. Campbell sought to take advantage of a broad level of dissatisfaction with journalism in general in the community, and of serious attempts at self re-evaluation within the news media. The consequent clash, involving the suicide of a defence ministry whistle-blower, a widely discredited judicial inquiry, and the downfall of the BBC's top brass, produced a review of BBC journalism by a former chief editor, Ron Neil. And that led to a program for what some call reforms and other describe as "knee-jerk changes" in BBC journalism.²

Cardiff's Richard Tait is a former editor-in-chief of Independent Television News (ITN). Now with a seat on the BBC's Board of Governors as well, he casts an experienced eye over the shifting contours of the British journalism landscape.

"There's an ideological row going on about is the media pro- or anti-Blair, is it bent? There are fissures between the tabloids and the broadsheets in the newspaper business. John Lloyd's set out his stall. And there's a completely alternative view, which is, you know, a very powerful government requires an aggressive media as a check on it.

“That’s not the role of the BBC,” he hastens to add. “The BBC’s got no job being a check or a balance on anything. The BBC’s just there to report what goes on. But in the newspapers, some of them are making a perfectly arguable case that the reason why they bash the government is the government’s had huge majorities and the opposition’s not been very effective, and they should hold the government to account. The government says, you’re just biased against us and you’re producing disgracefully dishonest journalism. Which is basically Lloyd’s point. And then the middle position – people like (Guardian editor Alan) Rusbridger and me, I suppose – would be to say, look, whosoever fault it is, this is really bad news for democracy. Because the public is just walking away from this row, whosoever view is right. Look at the turnout figures in elections, the indices of political engagement.”

Many journalistic observers now agree the BBC was mugged in the Gilligan affair by Tony Blair’s government, over the details of a story that was, nonetheless, essentially correct. But that no longer really matters. The changes it brought on will affect all of British broadcast journalism, not just the journalism of the BBC. The public corporation is by far the largest employer of journalists in the UK – 7,000 of them. Its standards and requirements have enormous influence, both by example and because the corporation, with a 10% annual turnover rate, is the major training ground for journalists who subsequently work in the private broadcasting sector.

City’s Jan Haworth is dismissive of Gilligan’s performance on the dossier story. “Any of our first year journalism undergraduates would know better from the little bit they’ve already learned at this university than to do what Andrew Gilligan did – basically an off-the-cuff two-way, unscripted, unchecked, not cleared.” And that’s what many in Britain still think. But Gilligan’s report *wasn’t* entirely unchecked or uncleared. It was a routinely unscripted early-morning two-way, essentially a promo for a scripted report that had already been carefully examined and approved in the usual way within the *Today* program unit and was scheduled to run in a prime morning slot when the audience picked

up after seven o'clock. Greg Dyke, whose resignation as BBC Director-General was brought about by the subsequent Hutton Inquiry, fumes that Lord Hutton's conclusions of BBC guilt and government innocence blatantly contradicted the facts placed before him. "The myth is that Gilligan and the BBC made a series of very serious mistakes," he wrote in his memoir *Inside Story*, in which he closely detailed the editorial process Gilligan and his editors followed. "This is simply not the case. Gilligan did make errors, a couple of which were serious; but it was Lord Hutton, not the BBC, who got it fundamentally wrong.

"Over the months, the BBC could have countered this myth. Instead, led by the acting Chairman, the BBC ran for cover. From the moment Lord Ryder made his apology, with a worried acting Director-General by his side, no one from within the BBC has been allowed to argue the opposite case. This has done great damage to the BBC's integrity and to the reputation of its journalism both in Britain and, more importantly, around the world."³

Jim Latham takes a practical line. "A fairly general view, I think, was that too much was made of it. OK, it was badly handled. But actually, the more we've learned about it, the more it seems, actually, that Gilligan may well have been right. But it's gone, it's past now. We're saddled with the results of that."

Those results include the recommendations of Ron Neil's panel, of which Richard Tait was a member. Tait says of the Hutton Report now: "It was a car crash. And the reaction of the rest of the British media to it was, I thought, extremely sensible, which was to say: 'There but for the grace of God go we.' Very few people sort of danced on the grave of the BBC when it took that terrible beating in the Hutton Report, and said: 'There, I told you so, I thought they weren't a very good organization.' People don't think that. They think the BBC is a good news organization. For example, Alan

Rusbridger of The Guardian produced a very thoughtful memo to all his staff saying what can we learn from this? And in other newsrooms the same process went on. And: look at our systems, and could it happen to us, and do we need to tighten up on single-sourcing, do we need to think about use of language, right to reply, some of the issues that came up in the Neil Report?”

The most far-reaching conclusion of that report stated: “At the heart of the BBC’s journalism is a well trained journalistic workforce. In a fast-changing world, life-long training at every level is vital. Competence based training should be the key to competence based promotion. We recommend that the BBC establishes an industry-wide, residential college of journalism under the leadership of an academic principal.”

For the rest, the report essentially reinforced good journalistic practice. It

- emphasized the need for accuracy, fairness and precision in BBC journalism
- declared that training should include reliable note-taking and that stories making serious allegations should not normally be broken in live two-ways
- reinforced the principle that responses should be sought from people or organizations against whom serious allegations are being made
- recommended that complaints be handled at arms length from BBC management.

At City University’s journalism school, Jan Haworth was unimpressed.

“I think that whole moral panic that was caused by the Neil Report was completely wrong-headed,” she says, “and also, I’m very angry from a political point of view because I think it let our government off the hook. It seemed to be quite shallow and hastily concocted and badly written, as a knee-jerk response to the Andrew Gilligan affair. I think this one shabby example of poor journalism has created all these ripples across the BBC which is actually, you know, in the most part a very fine institution when it comes to broadcast journalism.”

Within the BBC, however, the debate is closed and Dyke claims no further discussion is permitted. The corporation is in implementation mode and Richard Tait has no trouble justifying the approach. “The BBC, remember, is rather different than anywhere else,” he says as he prepares for a Board of Governors meeting. “It employs so many people, it has to create really robust systems to capture the range of journalism that it does and the range of people and the number of people who are churning through it every year.

“It has to be impartial, it has to be accurate, it has to set the highest standards in every possible area. It’s impossible to do that if you don’t have a very coherent system of management and control and training to ensure that all the new entrants know what’s required; to ensure that everybody who’s in the organization knows when the requirements change; to ensure that training is seen as a central part – a must-have, rather than a nice-to-have; and that there has to be an absolutely clear system for inculcating the BBC’s core values to all the journalists who work for it. Because, unlike a national newspaper or a magazine, where opinionated people can operate and flourish and good luck to them, in the BBC your own private views about anything are things that you should leave at the front door before you come into the newsroom.”

Continuing on, he reiterated

“And in a world where there’s less and less impartial journalism and journalists at the BBC absorb more and more partisan, opinionated journalism, it’s more and more important that you ensure that they understand that their sort of journalism is different. And that their views are irrelevant. All that matters is accuracy and impartiality and upholding the best standards, the highest standards of journalistic behaviour. And we found that there was general buy-in to that idea in the BBC, but there was a very wide range of understanding of what it meant. At the top of the BBC, the management understood it altogether; experienced people understood it all completely; when you got down to people who’d just arrived and had worked for another operation, they’d come out of newspapers, they’d come out of satellite television – no disrespect to where they’d been, but they’d been operating on different principles. And you had to make clear to them that they’d now joined a different sort of organization, operated on different lines.”

Jim Latham, of the Broadcast Journalism Training Council, is characteristically blunt and enthusiastic about one outcome of the Neil report – its emphasis on updating journalists’ skills and knowledge in mid-career. “Updating?” he says. “Jesus, you know, if you qualified on UK media law ten years ago, you are dangerous now. What it

boils down to is that the BBC in particular, but also the other employers now, are much more aware of the need for training, for updating, being very careful about what people know and don't know, and trying to fill the gaps.”

To do that, the BBC is doubling its training budget over the next three years - to £10 million a year. Richard Sambrook says: “There is a significant shift of emphasis. Looking at our training historically, I think there has been too much emphasis on craft skills and production skills and not enough emphasis on editorial policy and journalistic ethics and so on. With the extra investment we're going to take a shift in that direction. It's a recognition that the environment in which our journalists have to work is extremely complicated and getting more complicated and they need some help and support in making the kind of judgments there are expected to make, often in a 24-hour news environment with very little time to think about it. So there's a significant shift in emphasis away from simply broadcasting skills towards ethics and policy and decision-making.”

Neil's College of Journalism will be key to implementing these changes, but the concept has evolved. Instead of the ivy-clad building some imagined with residential courses, it's been launched as a virtual college, with knowledge imparted through interactive online learning modules, and short workshops or seminars held close to the workplace. Even before the college was officially launched in June 2005, 10,000 BBC employees had already completed an online editorial policy course and 8,000 had attended workshops on the Neil Report's implications.

The BBC is widely expected to form alliances with journalism schools in the design and delivery of some of the college's programs. Richard Sambrook says:

“There will be expertise and skills in terms of training and developing modules and so on, which lie outside the BBC. So we’re very open to doing these in partnership with other universities and other institutions and also partnership in the sense of other news organizations or media organizations who may want to buy into what we develop. So we see it very much as a very kind of outward facing facility.”

At the same time, Sambrook admits the corporation is applying indirect pressure to get British journalism schools to shift their own courses more to the BBC’s way of thinking, placing less emphasis on the craft skills - which this interviewer called journalistic carpentry. A lot of students, according to Sambrook, want those skills “because they think that’s what’s going to get them into a newsroom and get them earning money. And I think, historically, that’s probably been true. But what we’re saying now is that ‘carpentry’ needs to include a bit more around ethics and policy and so on as well. As an employer, we want to see an increased emphasis on issues of law, editorial policy and journalistic ethics. “We’re talking to the BJTC about an equal shift in emphasis in the kind of accreditation they give to courses and the kind of discussions they have with colleges about what they should be providing.”

It may be an uphill battle. Jan Haworth bristles at the suggestion that her university’s courses might need adjustment. “There are certain core values that all journalists need,” she says, “and it’s the job of universities to provide them.

And then the organizations will imbue their company’s message as they see fit. Down the years (the BBC have) not done anything that would criticize or seek to influence the way we set about our journalism education, and they’d get pretty short shrift if they did because we’re a university. You know, we don’t exist here to turn out the sort of people the BBC wants. Why they need a college is because they need to be able to put the BBC-ness into our graduates, who are actually perfectly well-formed when they come out.”

The BJTC's Jim Latham thinks journalism schools do blend theory and practice well. But he says there are elements they could add to the programs – things to do with trust and cultural awareness, giving graduates greater depth.

“It’s about the whole person, the whole journalist. I think the BBC and other employers are realizing at the moment that what they want is the full person. “I think, in any case, the boundaries between these areas of practice and theory are blurring anyway.” He finds that media law, ethics, industry regulation, editorial policy and government at all levels, are “more and more consistently” being taught as practice subjects rather than theoretical ones. “It’s being applied, it’s being reinforced at every level of teaching that goes on, and it’s fine.”

Cardiff's Richard Tait – who doubles as a BBC governor – argues that compliance with media law and various codes of fairness and privacy, accuracy, impartiality are taught “pretty formally” in British universities, but he finds it easier to see the BBC's point. In the debate over whether journalism education is really about skills or about knowledge, he says,

“the British tradition up to now has been really to focus on skills.” British university courses in journalism generally “offer essentially a vocational post-graduate course which is pretty skills-heavy. And there's reason for that: because these young people come to us not having many skills. They may have worked on a local paper, worked on a local radio station, but they don't have the skills that will persuade an employer to take them on for the first proper, serious, salaried job. And therefore the focus of the universities has been to do that for quite a long time.”

Of their own volition, he says, universities are “seeing whether one can add, enhance, improve journalism education by adding a bit more context, a bit more knowledge of the rather complex world into which people are going.” But it isn't easy. “How do we enhance our courses without taking newsroom time, practical time, out of the syllabus?” he asks. “When we know that newsroom time, practical time, the core skills that we're imparting, are a key weapon to enable our students to get onto the ladder?” It's also

difficult to squeeze much more into the existing curriculum. And the British post-graduate educational system, Tait points out, “is not set up to encourage two-year post graduate courses, which are very expensive and the students have to borrow money to do it.”

Jim Latham doesn't care what label the courses are given. He just wants a rounded approach. “Practice, theory, call it what you like. But cram as much as we can into people and start them off with the ability to be discriminatory, to be self-analytical, to have an awareness of the impact they're having on the people they're talking to in chasing their stories. And – above all – knowledge. Research. If you go to a story and don't get your facts right in the first bloody place, you're in trouble and so is your employer.”

If the BBC is looking for a qualitative change in journalism education, it mirrors somewhat the change it's seeking in its own training programs – and others in the industry. It's an industry that's grown accustomed to linking training with financial gain. With the digital revolution, says Richard Tait, “you've had huge technological change, slashed production costs, jobs disappear, roles disappear, employers get very excited by the money they're saving, so there's a huge emphasis on skills training, working the machines, making the machines work to their full capacity. “I don't think there's been as much emphasis in the last five years, maybe even before that, in journalism education, in actually training people to be journalists. To be fair, to be thoughtful, to be analytical, to be well-informed.”

The BBC's massive new emphasis on in-house training sets out to change that, with little regard to the cost. As Tait says, “The BBC's got no bottom line. The BBC is

there to produce excellence. If it doesn't produce excellence, there's no point in having it. So the BBC will spend what is required to make sure its staff are of the highest possible caliber." BBC's internal training will no longer be voluntary. Management aims now to make it, quite literally, the passport to promotion.

"We're really saying, if you want to progress to this next level in your career, you need to have done these courses," Sambrook says. "And you have, like, a training passport with these stamps in it. If you want to be a program editor, you need to have these three stamps in your training passport even to be considered. So that's going to produce a demand from the bottom up."

Sambrook retorts that

"It's simply a factor of scale and turnover that that tends to be the case. And I think it's quite difficult to see a way round that. I mean it's certainly not that the BBC's setting out to say that we want to be the providers of journalism training for the nation, but it's inevitable that we would take on something like that role because of the scale of what we do."

In fact, about 10% of BBC journalists move on to jobs outside the corporation every year. That potentially provides a steady flow of seven hundred BBC-trained recruits to the commercial radio and television stations. But now, with regulators also making training demands, the private sector may well seek to join forces with the BBC on a more formal basis.

Richard Tait, who has worked both sides of the public/commercial divide, says: "You've got quite a lot of people – I think ITV is one of them – who might well say maybe we should simply divert our budget into sending people for training at the BBC. Maybe we should partner with the BBC. Maybe we should all save overheads, you know... I don't know whether that would happen but it's not impossible."

The commercial broadcasters may not commit as many resources to training, but Jan Haworth says their need for a highly-skilled workforce is just as great, if not greater. “Commercial broadcasters want people who can do the job,” she says. “And they’re usually looking for a higher standard of graduate, because they haven’t got the mechanisms in place yet – although they will have to under Ofcom regulations – to bring people up to standard.” Most do offer training, she says, but “it’s a less forgiving environment, so if you’re not willing to learn, you’ll lose your job, or you don’t get any more shifts, or whatever. So the commercial imperative drives their training. And they get the best people by weeding out the ones who can’t learn or won’t learn.”

And, indeed, many journalistic decisions are now made by much more junior people and with much less thinking time than ever before. “Because of cost cutting and the de-layering of journalism,” Tait says, “what used to be decisions for the editor or the news editor or the commissioning editor or some intermediary and really coming quite low down the chain. “24-hour news channels, on-line news, people working under tremendous pressure with light supervision, often quite young people - so that goes back to the journalism schools and says they’ve really got to come in knowing what they are doing and we’ll tell them what that means in our context. “There has to be a focus on ethics, standards, the framework in which we operate, the law, what it is to be an honest journalist as well as a technically proficient one.”

There’s no disagreement on that point from Jan Haworth. She says commercial broadcasters have to take a highly practical approach to picking even the junior staff.

“Could you leave them in charge of the news desk while the news reader pops out to the post office, knowing that they’re not going to make some kind of legal blunder? So the legal and ethical competence of a student

intern or graduate is every bit as important in the commercial sector, because they're usually more exposed. Because they haven't got layers of people to whom you can refer up, they've got much more flat hierarchies, they typically don't have a lawyer on call, except in dire emergencies, and they're often not really insured for libel, defamation. So your students have to know what they are doing."

So the "skills passport" is an idea whose time appears to have come right across the British broadcasting landscape. For one thing, it's an easy way for the industry to demonstrate that it is meeting Ofcom's five-year training ultimatum for both employees and freelancers. An organization called Skillset is currently drawing up a database for the broadcast industry under the broader umbrella of the government's Framework of Achievement. Where journalists are concerned, the Broadcast Journalism Training Council is set to look after implementation. And a Skills Passport – whether physical or virtual - is very much on the BJTC's mind. It's seen as an effective way to help prove the industry is taking the injunction to train freelancers as well as staff seriously.

Skillset is funded by the broadcast industry. In fact it already offers – and pays for – some courses to freelancers that may become models for expansion. "If you can prove you are a genuine freelancer and you need a new skill like video editing or whatever, they'll pay for you to go and do a course in it," Haworth notes. She expects any journalistic opposition to the idea of employers having access to such information to erode quite quickly as the benefits of the system become clear. "I think it will happen anyway," she says, "because employers lay off older people and younger people come in for whom the notion of a passport is not anathema. They've grown up with it and so they just get on and do it."

The BBC, too, is wrestling with the issue of freelance training. Richard Sambrook has no doubt that it's necessary. "For us to say that we'll have two classes of

people, we'll have people on staff who are properly trained and all the rest of it, and then we'll have a freelance community that, you know, won't even be talking the same language as the rest of the people they're working alongside, clearly doesn't make any sense."

But while freelance training may be incorporated into the BBC's Journalism College, university journalism schools point out there still may be gaps in the mid-career training scenario. At Cardiff, Richard Tait says: "I was approached recently by somebody who wanted to do a part-time journalism course. (He was a) graduate, already work in broadcasting, wanted to improve his professional skills. Where could he do a part-time course in broadcast journalism to add some skills to what he already had? And the answer is, there really isn't anywhere.

"I think the universities may have to think in the next five years whether they are actually offering the sort of courses that the profession requires. Maybe there should be more shorter courses, more refresher courses, and particularly teaching people knowledge and ethics. Those things are absolutely perfectly limited or restricted in their scope to make them ideal for short courses. You wouldn't want to spend 9 months discussing journalistic ethics, but you might want to go for a month and do a course with case studies and examples and discussions and write about it and read about it; and afterwards you'd come out a very good journalist."

Richard Tait is an unusual man. He heads one of the Britain's leading journalism schools. He's a doctor of philosophy, from Oxford. He has been editor in chief of the private-sector Independent Television News. He's on the Board of Governors of the publicly funded BBC. But nothing in that background tempts him to dilute his journalistic courses with the milk of media studies. On the contrary, he sees the proliferation of media studies as adding to the problem rather than the solution.

“Currently,” he says, “some of the courses that are being offered (at British universities) are pointless because they are theoretical, academic, media-studies courses which are of no more value, in my view, to a budding journalist than doing economics or German, and possibly less, because at least if you know economics and German you can persuade the editor you’ve got some immediately transferable skills.

“But the expansion of those courses is actually creating quite a problem in the British universities for the old-style journalism courses. Because there are so many courses that it’s getting slightly more difficult than it used to for the students to find their way through the noise, to find the ones that are vocational. You still have tensions between, if you like, people coming from an academic side and a journalistic side in the whole area of journalism training, and shouldn’t journalism training be more of an academic discipline and shouldn’t they study media studies, do media studies, and journalism studies, and actually study discourse analysis and some of these tools to try and see what’s really happening in journalism, and sometimes it goes on to say, what’s really wrong with journalism. That’s not a good place for a university to be if it’s trying to encourage people to come to it with a view to having a vocational course, because the university appears to be hostile to the media industry. It can be critical, of course, it should be critical; but if it’s actually actively hostile, it’s not likely to be a constructive relationship. You can’t get to a situation where you’re teaching people about a profession and then tell them that they can’t work for large chunks of it.”

Journalists, he says, must be able to distinguish between being asked to do something they disagree with and being asked to do something wrong – like making up a story, or suppressing an inconvenient fact. “You can be honest, you can be straight and you can be true to your beliefs in what the journalists’ code of conduct says a journalist should be. And that doesn’t make you either a wimp or a weak journalist or an incompetent journalist or an unemployable journalist. It just makes you a journalist with values, and I think that’s right actually.”

What's needed at bottom, he says, is simply more factually correct reporting – in both broadcasting and print. “It's an issue for television because Hutton showed that the audience really wanted the BBC to be straight and impartial. And therefore it's absolutely obliged to do so. It's an issue for the newspapers because actually, in the long term, if you are running a business which is based on people buying something which gives them information they don't really believe, it must in the long term – I know, I've talked to some of the editors, they're not happy with that. They're not quite sure what to do about it. And it may be that journalist education has a role in that, in preparing the students with a better sort of professional grounding, including ethics and standards.”

ENDNOTES

¹ John Lloyd, *The Untouchables*, (London: Policy Network, 2004).

<http://www.policynetwork.net/php/article.php?sid=4&aid=264>

Policy Network describes itself as an international think-tank launched in December 2000 with the support of Tony Blair, Gerhard Schröder, Giuliano Amato and Göran Persson following the Progressive Governance Summits in New York, Florence and Berlin.

¹ For a chronology and the BBC's official view of the whole affair, see the extract from the BBC's Annual Report for 2003 in Appendix 1.

¹ Greg Dyke, *Inside Story*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2005) 287

Appendix 1:

Extract from: BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2003/2004

Chronology

On 29 May 2003 Andrew Gilligan, Defence Correspondent for *Today*, broadcast a number of reports about the dossier published by the Government in September 2002 entitled *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*. At 6.07am he did a live 'two-way' (a report in the form of an interview with a presenter) which raised serious questions about the dossier, in particular its claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction ready for use in 45 minutes. Andrew Gilligan said “one of the senior officials in charge of drawing up that dossier” had told him “the government probably knew that the 45-minute figure was wrong even before it decided to put it in”. Andrew Gilligan also reported his unnamed source as saying that “Downing Street ... ordered it [the original draft of the dossier] to be sexed up, to be made more exciting and ordered more facts to be discovered”; and that the published dossier upset the Intelligence Services because “it didn't reflect the considered view they were putting forward”.

That weekend, the *Mail on Sunday* published an article by Andrew Gilligan naming Alastair Campbell, the Government's then Director of Communications, as the person identified by the source as responsible for including the 45-minute claim in the dossier.

The Government strongly denied these stories. The BBC stood by its decision to broadcast the *Today* item. There was a private exchange of correspondence between the Government and the BBC. In late June, Alastair Campbell called for an apology from the BBC during a televised hearing of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, and released one of his letters of complaint to the press. The BBC in its reply again stood by its decision to broadcast the report.

At the end of June, Andrew Gilligan's source, Dr David Kelly, a Ministry of Defence (MoD) scientist, told his manager that he had spoken to Andrew Gilligan and might be a source for the *Today* report. While the MoD was investigating this (and before Dr Kelly's identity became public) the BBC Chairman, Gavyn Davies, called a special meeting of Governors on 6 July. A statement afterwards said the Board was "satisfied that it was in the public interest to broadcast Mr Andrew Gilligan's story". The Governors criticised two aspects of *Today's* handling of the story: they said the production team "should have kept a clearer account of its dealings with the MoD"; and "could also have asked the No 10 Press Office for a response prior to broadcasting the story". The Governors also said they intended to look again at the rules for BBC reporters and presenters writing for newspapers.

On 9 July, Dr Kelly's identity was made public by the MoD. On 18 July, he was found dead near his home in Oxfordshire. The BBC made a statement expressing deep regret for the death of Dr Kelly and confirming that he had been Andrew Gilligan's source. The Government asked Lord Hutton to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death and he published his report in January 2004.

During the inquiry the BBC accepted it had made mistakes and Andrew Gilligan accepted that some of his reporting had been inaccurate. The BBC admissions were:
the 6.07 broadcast should have been scripted
the 6.07 broadcast contained inaccuracies.
It did not distinguish sufficiently between what Dr Kelly had said and Andrew Gilligan's interpretation of what he had said.

The BBC accepted that Dr Kelly did not say the Government had put in the 45 minutes claim when they probably knew it was wrong; nor did he say that Downing Street ordered more facts to be discovered

the BBC accepted that one of its replies to Alastair Campbell contained two factual errors

the BBC accepted that Andrew Gilligan's notes should have been examined earlier than they were

the BBC accepted that, although Alastair Campbell had not taken up an invitation to refer his complaint to independent investigation, the BBC itself should have referred his letter of 26 June to the BBC Programme Complaints Unit for independent investigation. In his conclusions, Lord Hutton exonerated the Government of almost all blame for their handling of the events investigated. On the central issues, Lord Hutton's view was: the wording of the dossier was consistent with the available intelligence; the allegation that the Government probably knew the 45-minute claim was wrong before it went into the dossier was unfounded; the allegation of 'sexing-up' was also unfounded.

Lord Hutton's main findings on the BBC were:

the editorial system which the BBC permitted was defective in that Andrew Gilligan was allowed to broadcast his report without editors having seen a script and considered whether it should be approved

BBC management was at fault for failing to investigate properly the Government's complaints in that Andrew Gilligan's notes should have been examined earlier, and that when they were, there was a failure to appreciate that they did not fully support the 6.07am broadcast allegations

the BBC's management system for considering complaints was defective in that an email critical of Andrew Gilligan's reporting from Kevin Marsh, Editor of *Today* to Stephen Mitchell, his line manager, was not passed further up the chain

the BBC Governors should have made more detailed investigations into the extent to which Andrew Gilligan's notes supported his report.

In the 24 hours following publication, Gavyn Davies resigned as Chairman and Greg Dyke, the Director-General, offered his resignation to the remaining Governors and it was agreed that he would leave the BBC. Lord Ryder agreed to become Acting Chairman while a permanent replacement was found, and the Governors appointed Mark Byford Acting Director-General.

In September 2003 the Governors had asked Greg Dyke to formulate proposals for reform of key areas including BBC complaints-handling, and the *BBC Producers' Guidelines* covering the breaking of controversial stories and the use of anonymous sources. Mark Byford took this work forward and commissioned Ronald Neil, a former senior BBC editorial executive, to lead a review on behalf of the Director-General.

Shortly after Lord Hutton published his report, Andrew Gilligan left the BBC of his own volition. An internal disciplinary process was conducted. No dismissals resulted. A statement at the end of the process in May 2004, made two points of clarification.

Firstly a core script had been properly prepared for the *Today* programme of 29 May 2003. This had been cleared in line with normal production practices in place at the time, but was then not followed by Andrew Gilligan. The BBC's evidence to the Hutton Inquiry could have been clearer in this respect.

Secondly it had not been necessary for the email sent by the Editor of *Today*, Kevin Marsh, to the Head of Radio News, Stephen Mitchell, to have been passed further up the chain. The impression given by the BBC's evidence to the Hutton Inquiry was that this email did not reflect the view of senior news management. In fact it did and those views had been the subject of recent discussion. Therefore the implied criticism of Stephen Mitchell and Kevin Marsh was unjustified.

Governors' commentary

At the heart of this narrative lies the death of Dr David Kelly. Lord Hutton's report made clear no one could have predicted he would take his life. The BBC has expressed its condolences to Dr Kelly's family, and we wish to do so again here. We have no doubt Dr Kelly's allegations merited a place in BBC output as information on a matter of clear public interest from a credible source. But BBC journalism values accuracy and impartiality. The reporting here was neither sufficiently accurate nor sufficiently impartial since the Government was not asked to respond before broadcast.

We, and management, have apologised for the mistakes the BBC admitted before and during the Hutton Inquiry. We have taken steps to improve some BBC processes:

BBC complaints-handling processes are being reformed to make them clearer, fairer and more responsive.

Management is implementing all the proposals from the Neil Review, including revised editorial guidelines and procedures, and improvements in the training of BBC journalists.

We have ensured that BBC staff, and regular freelance journalists whose main profile or income comes from the BBC, are no longer allowed to write newspaper or magazine columns on current affairs or other contentious issues.

We are confident the right lessons have been learned and appropriate measures are being implemented. The BBC, under its new leadership, can now look to the future.
