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Journalism education in Ireland

Nora French

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The start of journalism education in Ireland is generally dated from the 1960s with the setting up of the journalism course in the College of Commerce, Rathmines. However, there were some earlier initiatives in the first decade of the 20th century. A series of lectures was organised by the Institute of Journalists in Trinity College Dublin in 1908-9 (Hunter, 1982; Institute of Journalists, 1909) and journalism is said to have become a degree subject in Queens College/University College Cork around the same time (Stephenson and Mory, 1990; Murphy, 1995). These efforts appear to have rapidly faded. They coincide with similar initiatives in Britain which were also unsuccessful, in contrast to the United States, where journalism education was developed in several locations such as the universities of Missouri, Wisconsin and Columbia University, New York, which to this day, remain strong providers in the field.

The reason for this activity in the early 20th century in the US and Britain is linked to unease amongst both journalists and public at the standards of journalism at that time. The commercialisation of journalism and the rise of the yellow press raised concern for the quality of news and for the working conditions of journalists. Attempts were made on both sides of the Atlantic to professionalise the industry. In the US, where the normal route to professionalisation of any group of workers was through higher education (McChesney, 2003), university level education in journalism was successfully established in the 1900s (Weaver, 2003; Johansen et al., 2001). In Britain, where the normal route to professionalisation was through the establishment of a professional body (Siegrist, 1994), the Institute of Journalists (IOJ) was set up by Royal Charter in 1890, but this was quite soon superseded by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), which as a trade union, proved itself a successful means of protecting journalists' interests. Nevertheless, there were attempts in Britain to establish programmes in journalism education. These included the setting up of a private school of journalism in London in 1887-88 (David Anderson's London School of Journalism, 200 The Strand), and various initiatives by the Institute of Journalists at London, Birmingham and Leeds between 1887 and 1909. They also included a 1908 conference in London on journalism education to which American speakers were invited, indicating an awareness of the development of education in the US. The most long-lasting initiative was the setting up of the Diploma for Journalism at the University of London which ran from 1919 until 1939. A small-scale operation, it closed at the start of World War 2 and never reopened (Hunter, 1982; Stephenson and Mory, 1990; Esser, 2003).

As Ireland at the time was politically part of the United Kingdom, both the lecture series in Trinity and the attempted development of journalism in UCC can be seen as part of the phenomenon occurring in Britain. Foley (2004) has argued that Irish journalism in the 19th century was distinctive from that in Britain in being more political and less a commercial enterprise than in the rest of the UK and the US. He also argues that Irish journalists were both more idealistic and more middle class than in Britain. Yet then as now, journalism in Ireland was closely linked to that of Britain, as evidenced by the organisation of Irish journalists by the NUJ. Likewise journalism education has always mirrored that in Britain, as distinct from that in the US or in other European countries (see Fröhlich and Holtz-Bacha, 2003). The resemblance is reinforced by the relative similarity of the higher education systems in Britain and Ireland.

The 1960s were a time of expansion in higher education in Ireland in general but especially in the areas of vocational and technological education (Coolahan, 1981; White, 2001). The OECD reports *Training of Technicians in Ireland*, (1964) and



Investment in Education (1965), and the start of economic development in the country as a whole supported this expansion. However, the move to set up provision to educate journalists preceded the two OECD reports and was instigated by the industry rather than any educational body, perhaps energised in the early 1960s by the establishment of an Irish television service and by the opening up of press coverage of Northern Ireland (Horgan, 2001). This initiative can be closely related once again to what was happening in journalism education in Britain.

The 1949 report by the Royal Commission of the Press in the UK found the training for journalists to be inadequate. As a result of this report, all bodies representing the press – unions, editors, management and proprietors – came together to form what by 1955 had become the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ). The NCTJ became the cornerstone of journalism training in Britain. It firstly set up day release courses which by 1965, had changed to block release. Alongside these a one-year full-time course in journalism was developed which was run in various colleges accredited by the NCTJ (Stephenson and Mory, 1990; Esser, 2003).

In Ireland, the NUJ instigated the setting up of journalism education in 1963 by writing to the then Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, on the need to provide training for young journalists. Lemass gave his support, a Committee for the Training of Journalists was established and arrangements were put in place to commence a part-time release programme in Rathmines that same year (see Aja, 2000). This course consisting of a half day weekly session over two years (Fox, 1967), was repeated for the next four years and, in 1968, was replaced by a one year full-time course. The course was accredited by the London-based NCTJ and was similar to that offered in British colleges at the time, with some adaptations to the Irish context. The Rathmines course was important as the only preparation for entry to journalism in the country. Admission to it was competitive and it was widely recognised as equivalent to a degree for employment within the print and broadcast press.

The development of journalism education

Since those first beginnings, there has been a gradual expansion in provision in the number of courses available, their level and duration (Horgan, 2001). Currently, the main higher education centres for professional journalism education in the Republic of Ireland are: Dublin City University (DCU), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), formerly University College Galway, and two private colleges, Griffith College Dublin and Dublin Business School. DCU runs a three year honours degree and a one-year masters' programme: DIT runs a four-year honours degree and a one-year masters' programme: NUIG has a one-year masters' programme. Griffith College's range of programmes comprise a three-year undergraduate honours degree, a three-year ordinary degree and a one-year graduate diploma. DBS since 2004 has a three-year honours degree.

The College of Commerce Rathmines was one of the six third level colleges under the local education authority, the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, (CDVEC) which were brought together informally in 1978 to form the DIT. DIT was set up by statute in 1992 (Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992). The programmes at DIT represent continuity with the original programme from the 1960s. This programme was developed and run in close relationship with the industry, both the union, the NUJ, and employers, NNI (National Newspapers of Ireland) and PNI (Provincial Newspapers of Ireland). The union had great influence over the course, insisting on restrictions in the number and age of students (maximum 21 years) admitted to the course, and through the NCTJ, determining the duration of the course and much of its content. The one-year certificate course was extended to two years in the late 1970s. Its curriculum reflected the NCTJ skills based approach, with the different elements of practical



journalism being complemented by courses in law, politics and public administration, and economics.¹ The Rathmines course went beyond the requirements of the NCTJ in these areas and also included Irish and French. Until the mid 1980s, one of the external examiners was from the NCTJ and a representative from the NUJ and the PNI sat on the interview board for student admissions. From the late 1970s, there were increasing tensions because of the restrictions insisted on the course by NCTJ and supported by the union and the college's desire to up-grade the course (Conway, 2006). In a paper from the Dublin branch of the NUJ, the union's feeling of ownership over the course is apparent in its expressed annoyance at its exclusion from decisions by the college, particularly over the extension of the course to two years. It, on the other hand, wanted the input to be reduced from 20 students per year to twelve and had its own proposals to make also about the course content and admissions procedures (NUJ, 1981).

In 1978, Rathmines, by then part of DIT, set up a three/four year course in communications that was originally intended to include journalism. However, the course developed into a film and broadcasting degree without any element of journalism. Apart from opposition from the industry, the eventual exclusion of journalism also reflected the views of the professional media lecturers on this course who, coming from RTÉ were accustomed to journalists being categorised as different and distinct from other media professionals.

In 1982, the newly founded National Institute for Higher Education Dublin (NIHE) developed a post-graduate diploma in journalism. It was able to take advantage of the blockage that was occurring in the development of the Rathmines course, and it reflected the development of similar post-graduate courses in Britain at that time, for example, at the University of Wales in Cardiff and City University, London (Stephenson and Mory, 1990: 19-21). The course was established without the agreement of the NUJ and without accreditation from the NCTJ. After initial opposition, the NUJ soon gave recognition to this course, despite the fact that it was contrary to its policy regarding the appropriate level of education and age of entrants to the profession.

The reason why NIHE developed a journalism programme and became heavily involved in media education more generally has, of course, to do with the original development of this institution in the seventies. The government at the time wished to develop higher level technological education in the country and proposed to set up two new institutions in Dublin and Limerick. In Dublin, the plan was that the higher level work of the DIT colleges should be moved to the new institution; courses and staff were to be transferred from one institution to the other. However, the plan failed, mainly because local government (through the CDVEC) and central government did not agree on who should control the new body. The government went ahead to set up a completely new institution, the NIHE. Although courses were not transferred, it went on to develop its own programmes in several of the areas already found in DIT, including journalism and the wider media/communications field (White, 2001:149-153; Duff et al., 2000: 28-33). NIHE was given university status in 1989 and changed its name to Dublin City University (DCU).

DCU up-graded its course to masters level in 1990. At that stage, the courses in DIT and DCU were, it could be said, in line with what the government had intended with the higher level professional course being delivered in the new institution and DIT continuing the lower level work. However, this situation was to change in the next few years.

DIT developed its post graduate diploma in journalism in 1994 and converted the diploma course to a masters degree in 1997. In the 1990s also, both colleges established four-year honours undergraduate degrees in journalism, in 1992 in the case of DCU and in 1994 in DIT. This again was following the trend in Britain and elsewhere in Europe where it was argued, for example at meetings of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), that the one-year masters courses were not a sufficient response to the need for graduate journalists. The constraints of a one-year

¹ See Stephenson and Mory (1990: 192 foll.) for further details of the NCTJ syllabus.



course greatly limited what could be covered in the curriculum. A more thorough education in all aspects of journalism could be offered in the longer undergraduate programmes. Also, the aspirations of those graduating with masters degrees did not match many of the job opportunities available in the industry, for example, for work with the local and regional press and for work as generalists rather than as specialists in the field which these post-graduates would have studied for their primary degrees.

The two degree programmes were relatively similar, both being situated in larger media communications schools, and both drawing on general theoretical work in media communications alongside the different elements of journalism practice. Languages were also included in both programmes. They have diverged more recently. Since 2002, DIT's programme has been titled 'BA Journalism with a Language', with less emphasis on communications theory and more on languages. DCU, in contrast, dropped languages in 2004, refocused more on law and politics and cut the length of the programme from four to three years.

The course in NUIG was established as a Post-Graduate Diploma in Applied Communications in 1988 (O'Sullivan, 2003). Despite its title, it was a one-year course in professional journalism. Its distinctiveness lay in being offered through both Irish and English, thus supporting the Irish language media many of which are based close by in Galway or the Connemara Gaeltacht. In 2002, NUIG extended its English language course to an MA in Journalism. The Irish language course remains a diploma under the old title *Árd Dioplóma í gCumarsáid Fheimeach*, and has developed into a more general course in media practices. Galway has been the only centre for professional journalism education outside Dublin.

Griffith College was established in 1974. It was one of a number of private colleges set up for commercial purposes which, especially between 1980 and 2000, took advantage of the shortage of third-level places in the public education system (White, 2000: 242). It concentrates mainly on business and law apart from journalism. In the mid 1990s, it took over the journalism course originally established by Newman College in the 1980s. Newman College, run by the Catholic organisation Opus Dei, closed a relatively short time after the journalism course was started because of financial difficulties. Griffith College has expanded the original two-year certificate programme and by 2004 was offering a three-year degree in journalism, a three-year diploma and a one-year graduate diploma. Its courses are validated by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) DCU, DIT and NUIG have the right to validate their own courses.

The journalism degree offered in DBS is a very recent development. DBS is mainly a business school with some humanities programmes. Its degree programme, validated by HETAC, started in 2004.

Elsewhere there are courses that include elements of journalism, in higher education in the universities and institutes of technology, and in further education colleges.

The BA in Media Studies introduced in the National University of Ireland at Maynooth in September 2002 suggested journalism as a career option for graduates. However, although the course content included some practical courses in media production, journalism per se did not figure in the curriculum and the reference to journalism has been dropped. The University of Limerick has a BA degree in English and New Media the content of which is purely academic yet journalism is again listed as a possible career opportunity for graduates. Mary Immaculate College, affiliated to the University of Limerick, offers Media Communications as a subject on its BA degree. This degree is intended as a liberal arts programme – the prospectus even quotes Aristotle's definition of the aim of liberal education as the education and studies 'that exist for their own sake'. However, the media communications section somewhat contradicts this as the programme includes 'a theoretical and practical approach to journalism, both print and electronic media' (www.mic.ul.ie, 10.5.06). Some of these



centres may go on to develop professional journalism courses. Currently, they do not offer them, nor do they have journalist lecturers on their staff or recognition from the NUJ.

Among the institutes of technology, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology has since 1998, run a degree programme BA Gnó agus Cumarsáid (Business and Communications) which includes a module in Irish language journalism. Cork Institute of Technology has been running a part-time certificate in printing for some time that includes some training in journalism skills. Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology has developed a course in radio broadcasting that attracts a National Certificate in Humanities (Radio Broadcasting) from HETAC.

It is worth noting that, notwithstanding their interest in the 1900s, the traditional universities have not become involved in journalism education with the exception of the minor engagement of NUIG and possibly Maynooth. The University of Limerick is a new university, and similar to DCU in having an explicit orientation towards applied, technological education. NUIG has a particular national role with regard to the Irish language and an orientation to the needs of the west of the country which explains its courses. Maynooth, the smallest of the universities, has most need to attract students and media courses tend to be very popular, which may have influenced the decision to move into this area. Its department of sociology was well positioned to contribute to the area and the non-profit-making media production company, Kairos Communications, on its campus also provided resources on which it could draw. The three largest and arguably most eminent universities, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and University College Cork, have remained aloof despite the fact that, under pressure from government and other sources such as the OECD and the EU to assist in the economic development of the country, the overall tendency has been for their programmes to become more vocationally oriented (White, 2001: 257). They have concentrated on areas of vocational education that are economically relevant such as information technology, business and biotechnology. Areas that are socially relevant have not gained their attention to the same extent. This is another similarity with the UK where, despite the many universities offering journalism programmes, only two are long established universities, the University of Wales at Cardiff and the University of Sheffield.

At the further education level, (i.e. post-secondary education below third level) a certificate in print journalism is awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). There are a relatively small number of candidates for this award, coming mainly from Dublin and Cork. One college of further education in Dublin, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, has gained recognition from the NUJ, mainly through the argument that because of its location, this college gives an opportunity to the more disadvantaged students to become journalists.² FETAC's certificates in related areas such as radio production and media production include optional modules in, respectively, research skills for journalists and print journalism.

² The argument has been disputed as the majority of students have not come from the immediate vicinity of the college.

The Involvement of the NUJ

From the start, the national and provincial papers and the NUJ were involved in the Rathmines course but the latter was always the more vocal and influential. Yet the position of the NUJ is now greatly changed from what it was in the first two decades from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. Then, it had a great measure of control. Its perception of its role at that time can be clearly seen in the 1981 report from the NUJ Dublin branch which gives a detailed critique of the course and makes proposals in order

to control the input and output of the course in a way that reflects the realistic job opportunities, protects the interest of members in the industry and safeguards professional standards (NUJ, 1981).



The NUJ was stronger in Ireland than in Britain during this time, essentially operating a closed shop for entry to the profession (Stephenson and Mory, 1990: 222). It then started to lose its grip on educational developments. As already noted, the DCU course from 1982 was contrary to its policy regarding the level of education and the age of entrants to the profession. It gave recognition to this course however, once it was successfully up and running. The course in Galway was given recognition without any controversy because the issue of post-graduate qualifications had already been decided with regard to DCU and there was strong support from the regional press for the course. Newman College also had its advocates in the NUJ because of its links with the Roman Catholic Church and it was given recognition. This recognition transferred to Griffith College when the course transferred and has been expanded by Griffith College to its current three courses. The connections with Newman College and now Griffith College were not universally accepted, because of the religious ethos in Newman and because of the private, commercial ethos in Griffith College. The practical advantages of NUJ recognition for these courses is that all students are entitled to temporary union cards and 'stages' are more easily made available within the industry.

In 1989, the union set up a committee to review the situation regarding training because of the expansion in courses and because Rathmines was no longer the cornerstone (Stephenson and Mory, 1990: 223). Employers were represented on the committee; DCU and DIT preferred not to participate as members of the committee but agreed to co-operate in any way they could. The report in its draft form (NUJ, 1989) made far-reaching proposals for a comprehensive approach to journalism education. These included the setting up of an institute for journalists similar to those of other professions and the development of a multi-level approach to education, with certificate, diploma degree, post-graduate conversion courses and masters courses for experienced journalists. It speaks of the need for the study of journalism as an academic discipline, the lack of which has led to

the failure to engage in the type of rigorous study and examination of the role and nature of journalism, the role of the media in national life and the development of ethical standards and procedures in journalism (NUJ, 1989: 17).

This lack, it was felt, also

contributed to the relative paucity of serious media study and comparative and critical analysis of journalism output and media standards in general (NUJ, 1989: 17).

The chair of this committee was Christina Murphy, then also education editor of *The Irish Times*. The report was a reflection of her strong interest and views on journalism education. As a member of the management at her newspaper, she was in fact the NNI representative on the committee. Her subsequent ill-health was one of the main reasons why the report and the work of the committee never went any further. The other was that the Irish section of the NUJ gained a lot more independence from the London headquarters in the 1990s, was set up with its own executive council, and turned its attention to issues of more immediate day to day relevance to its members. Education had been one of the few areas within its remit before then.

In recent years, the only concern of the union regarding education has been to do with the recognition of courses. Its earlier view of its controlling role in journalism education in order to control entry to the profession has long gone. According to Michael Foley (2005), a member of the NUJ executive and of the 1989 committee on education, the former education committee has fallen into disuse and more recently the union executive has been making the decisions on course recognition. There is disquiet about how the decisions are made, as there is no firm policy or set criteria. As mentioned, some members were concerned at the recognition given to Griffith College and even more so to Coláiste Dhúlaigh. Requests have come in from other colleges in recent years



but a stop has been put to processing them in order to allow time for discussion and reflection.

The NUJ's position in the industry is not as strong as it was either. It does not organise journalists in some of the more recent press organisations such as the commercial television channel TV3, some local radio stations and the *Ireland on Sunday* newspaper. In education, DCU's and DIT's course development in the 1990s took place independently of the NUJ. Both colleges include input from the industry for the development and review of their journalism courses as they do for all professional courses. This input, however, does not come through the NUJ but through industry experts identified and chosen by the colleges themselves. The situation is thus different from professional education in other fields in the country where professional bodies have formal links with courses and accredit them, for example, in accountancy, engineering, and the medical sciences.

It is also different from the UK where industry accreditation and recognition of courses is more firmly established. There are three British accreditation bodies for journalism education, for the print industry (NCTJ: National Council for the Training of Journalists), for the magazine industry (PTC: the Periodicals Training Council) and the broadcast industry (BJTC: the Broadcast Journalism Training Council). (The on-line industry is not accredited). The NUJ gives recognition to courses with accreditation. However, there is dissatisfaction within higher education in the UK about the accreditation process (Taylor, 2002), over the lack of understanding of higher education systems and processes on some panels, the lack of academic representation on the panels, the old style separation into three separate bodies for different media which does not match the growing media convergence and cross media careers of most journalists. The Association for Journalism Education, (AJE) has been discussing alternative proposals for accreditation but so far, there are no firm proposals or decisions.

It might be noted that the BJTC in particular has made approaches to extend its activities to Ireland in recent years. They have met with some interest from the private sector colleges and broadcasters. However, there is currently no interest from those who might be regarded as the main players, DCU, DIT and RTE. Formal accreditation from the media has not been an issue of great concern to DCU or DIT. This no doubt reflects DIT's previous experience with the NCTJ, the current situation in the UK and the generally satisfactory relations between colleges and industry in this country.

The current situation

At present, DCU and DIT are recognised as the primary centres for journalism education. They both run highly sought after courses at undergraduate and masters level, courses that are aimed at the teaching of professional practice as well as more theoretical approaches to journalism. Both also are involved in research and have students taking research degrees up to doctorate level. DCU has an annual intake of approximately 40 undergraduate students and 25 post-graduate students each year; the corresponding figures for DIT are 30 at undergraduate level and 20 at post-graduate level. The points required for entry to the undergraduate degree in DCU was 455 minimum in 2005, in DIT, 440. It should be noted that these figures are in sharp contrast to those for the two private colleges which stood at 260 for Griffith College and 230 for Dublin Business School (DBS) in the same year.

Whereas DIT has a longer tradition, DCU has currently somewhat of a lead in journalism education as can be seen from the higher student numbers and the higher points required for entry to the undergraduate course. It also has been involved in journalism research over a longer period. In DCU, journalism is part of the School of Communications with a chair of journalism, the only one in the country. Journalism in DIT comes under the School of Media with one of the two departments in the school, the Department of Communications and Journalism, focussing on journalism and related areas.



NUIG has the status of a traditional university in Irish terms, compared with DCU and DIT, but the small scale of its activity means that it is a minor player in journalism education.

In line with private higher education in the country in general, Griffith College and DBS fall a long way behind DCU and DIT in terms of the level required for entry to their courses and in terms of research. Griffith College has been successful in running its journalism programmes in its own way. In the future, it will be interesting to see whether these two colleges will develop beyond their present teaching roles or whether they will fade away as the demographic and economic situation in the country becomes less favourable to them. Their focus has already changed to attracting foreign rather than Irish or other EU students.

Journalists and journalism education

In any discussion of journalism education, it is important to note that only a minority of Irish journalists have taken such courses. There is no standard educational requirement for entry to journalism, with the result that journalists exhibit a wide spectrum of educational levels and qualifications. Corcoran and Kelly Browne (1998: 9) in their profiling of Irish journalists found that 61 per cent of their sample had primary or advanced college degrees, 19 per cent had completed the Leaving Certificate only and 1.8 per cent had left school at 16 or less. A mere 25 per cent had studied journalism at college and a further 20 per cent had completed a formal journalism apprenticeship. Corcoran and Kelly Browne's survey was confined to journalists in the national print and broadcasting press where educational levels are likely to be higher than in the regional and local press. Their findings supported Declan Kiberd's view (1997:34) when he spoke of 'the haphazard nature of recruitment to the profession of journalism'. This phrase accompanied his more contentious assertion that one of the major problems of the media is 'the absence of top class training for journalists'. The overall confusion on the issue can be further highlighted by a quote from Collins, a former editor of the *Irish News* in an interview with Ivor Kenny (1994: 33) where he stated that 'journalism is essentially a non-academic trade. I like to think of it as a trade, not a profession'.

Such findings and quotations are indicative of the confusion surrounding journalism education in general, not only in Ireland but in most European countries and in North America too (Fröhlich et al, 2003). Delano and Hennington's (1995) survey of the British press found that only a minority of respondents (22 per cent) thought a degree necessary for entry to journalism, and as in Corcoran and Kelly Browne's survey in Ireland, British journalists were found to have the same wide range of educational levels and qualifications. Journalists argue strongly amongst themselves as to whether they are professionals or merely 'hacks'.

It is difficult to establish the basis for journalism education, when there is no clear agreement on the role of the journalist and the sort of education required for working in journalism. And indeed, journalism education has been slow to develop in higher education, compared with similar semi or quasi professional occupations such as teaching or social work (see Bines and Watson, 1992; Hoyle and John, 1995).

Newman (1995) can be said to have foreseen these difficulties. In *The Idea of a University*, written in 1852, he drew attention to what he saw as the antithesis between what is required for journalism or 'periodical literature' and what is required for intellectual training. He contrasted the former with 'its incessant demands for views at a moment's notice on all matters of the day' with the 'science, method, order, principle and system' required for critical scholarship. Journalism, though quite firmly established at this stage in Irish higher education, is still negotiating its way towards critical scholarship of its practice, and is still debating how journalism programmes should be structured and shaped in order to educate those who wish to become journalists.



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