

Leveson Inquiry: culture, practice and ethics of the press

Witness statement: George Brock, Professor and Head of Journalism, City University London

This statement is in response to the notice under section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act addressed to me and dated 3rd November 2011. I have numbered the sections of this statement to match the list of items which the statement should cover. They are:

- A – Introductory
 - B - Overview of courses
 - C - Details of ethics training
 - D - Research
 - E – Feedback
- Appendix: undergraduate ethics exam paper

A.1 I am Professor and Head of Journalism at City University London. I joined the university in 2009. Before that I had worked since 1981 at the Times in posts which included Comment Editor, Foreign Editor, Brussels bureau chief, Managing Editor and Saturday Editor. Prior to that I had been a reporter at the Yorkshire Evening Press in York and subsequently for five years at The Observer as a reporter. I am an ex-president and current board member of the World Editors Forum. I am on the board of the International Press Institute and chair its British committee. I write a blog on journalism (www.georgebrock.net) and write in *The Times*, the *British Journalism Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

A.2 City University has around 23,000 students and describes itself as “the university for business and the professions”. It is strongly committed to academic excellence.

A.3 The Department of Journalism is recognised in both Britain and the world as a leading centre for practice-based teaching. Our alumni are in leading positions in news media both at home and abroad (for details see www.city.ac.uk/journalism). We are frequently consulted by universities and journalism training organisations from all over the world about our curriculum and teaching methods.

A.4.a The Department of Journalism is part of the university’s School of Arts and Social Sciences and I report to the Dean of that School. I am responsible for postgraduate, undergraduate and international exchange students. Those responsibilities include academic study, the curriculum and pastoral supervision. The School’s Board of Studies has oversight of the content of academic courses.

A.4.b There are 592 students in the department this year: 244 undergraduates, 337 postgraduates and 11 research students. (Exact numbers fluctuate a little from term to term as international exchange students join for a term or shorter periods.)

A.4.c Reporting to me are the Deputy Head of Department and the academic directors of the MA (postgraduate) courses and BA (undergraduate) courses. Postgraduate courses, with student numbers varying between 50+ and 15, each have a director who is responsible for the students on that course, curriculum design and managing the teaching staff for that course. All members of the staff can come to a staff meeting at least twice a term; in practice I see course directors much more frequently and the three most senior academic staff (see A.4.c above) still more often. Adaptation and re-design of the curriculum is a major topic of these discussions since journalism is changing so rapidly.

A.4.d We have close links with academic staff who specialize in media in the Sociology Department and with the newly-formed Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism, a trilateral initiative undertaken by the university's Law School, the criminology specialists from Sociology and Journalism.

A.4.e Both our postgraduate and undergraduate course are practice-based, offering a mixture of classroom theory, history and discussion with intensive exercises designed to create practical reporting skills. I say in the current postgraduate prospectus that "we equip our Masters students to be thinking journalists who can succeed and lead in the news media of the future". As sections B and C of this statement indicate in detail, ethics form an important part of this curriculum. Our experience has been that students value our emphasis on practice-based teaching as being the best preparation for work in journalism. Almost every member of the teaching staff, full-time or part-time, has been or is a practising journalist.

B.1 The Department offers 11 postgraduate MA courses and a three-year Journalism BA, with joint degrees possible with economics, sociology or psychology (although in practice fewer than a dozen students in a year normally take these combined options). Further details can be found at the course tabs on the front page at www.city.ac.uk/journalism.

B.2 It is fair to say that the postgraduate courses, on which the department was founded, are the basis of the City's reputation for journalism teaching. The MA course are: Broadcast Journalism, Television Journalism, Financial Journalism, Interactive Journalism, International Journalism, Investigative Journalism, Magazine Journalism, Newspaper Journalism, Political Journalism, Science Journalism and the Erasmus Mundus Masters in Journalism, Media and Globalisation (a two-year multinational course run with the universities of Amsterdam and Aarhus).

B.3 Our general approach to the teaching of ethics assumes that the subject is relevant to many different aspects of our teaching and should make many different appearances in our curriculum. We do not organise a single module

called “ethics”. The description in section C below is broadly divided into two: (a) the ethics elements in the courses which are taken by all (or virtually all) postgraduates and undergraduates and (b) the ethics strands in individual MA courses.

B.4 My own approach to the subject is set out in an article in the *British Journalism Review* (vol 21, No 4, 2010):
<http://bjr.sagepub.com/content/21/4/19.short>

B.5 Events organized by the Journalism Department are frequently on themes which will broaden students’ knowledge of ethical issues. In the last year, we have mounted a public panel discussion on phone-hacking, organized a seminar on the reform of defamation law and one on new ideas in media regulation across the world (attended by several Leveson Inquiry assessors) and hosted lectures on law and regulation by Baroness Buscombe (outgoing chairman of the PCC) and Alan Rusbridger (Editor-in-Chief of *The Guardian*). In the week this statement is submitted, the Attorney-General is due to lecture on contempt of court. The following week we will host an expert debate on the role of the public interest in media regulation.

C.1 This section of the statement provides an outline of the various kinds of ethics teaching which occur on our courses. I have included one example of course materials in detail in the appendix to this statement but can supply more if fuller and further examples are required.

C.2 On the postgraduate courses, ethical issues are introduced and explored principally on two modules which are taken by the very large majority of students: “Journalism and Society” and “Journalism Practice”.

C.2.a Journalism and Society is a “core” module and consists to 20 hours of lectures by Professor Roy Greenslade in the first (autumn) term. The series covers the historical and political context of journalism and treats, among others things, the differences between theories about journalism and actual practice. Ethical issues feature strongly: Professor Greenslade devoted a two-hour session this term to the phone-hacking scandal. His own description of his course and its effect is as follows:

“All the areas raised by Leveson are the central subjects of my course - news-getting techniques (including hacking, subterfuge, covert filming and recording), self-regulation and the editors' code, intrusions into privacy, the nature of 'the public interest', the phenomenon of celebrity journalism and the relationship between proprietors and editorial content.

“I am convinced that during my eight years of teaching the J&S course no student has left without being abundantly aware of the importance of ethics to the craft of journalism. This is reinforced by the contributions of my two regular guest speakers - one from the PCC, Alison Hastings, and the other from the BBC, its director of editorial policy and standards, David Jordan.”

C.2.b In the second term (also 20 hours), Professor Greenslade often shares the lectern with a visiting speaker and the subject is quite frequently an ethical

issue. The exact list of topics will be varied according to current issues and ethical issues will feature prominently in some and less in others. If the topics include, for example, war reporting, new media versus old, celebrity journalism and the commodification of journalism – ethical issues arise in some form in all those subjects. With written assignments, reading and lectures, the two terms of “Journalism and Society” represent 100 hours of learning.

C.2.c The other core module to include ethical issues early in the MA course is Journalism Practice. Some key concepts are introduced to students in induction week, including the importance of them identifying themselves as (student) journalists; accuracy; attribution and quoting; sourcing; avoiding plagiarism; privacy; interviewing; on and off the record; copy approval. Students are also introduced to the PCC Editors' Code of Practice and the NUJ Code of Conduct, and key areas are highlighted (e.g. children, intrusion, harassment, privacy). They are expected to apply and to respect these from the start of their work on the course, including their first assignments in induction week.

These and other points are repeated and developed through the course, including discussions of their assignments before they undertake these, in feedback afterwards, and in individual tutorials where appropriate. Key legal concepts, and compliance with the law, are introduced in weeks 1-3, including contempt of court, defamation and copyright. These are covered in much greater detail in the Media Law module. Issues around data privacy are considered in work involving the use of the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations, and Data Protection Act.

C.2.d A few MA students on specialist courses do not take all or some of the two core course described above. In all cases we ensure that ethics and related issues are not left untaught. The next paragraph gives examples of these “opt-outs”.

C.2.e

- MA International Journalism: in term 2, a series of workshops replace the Journalism and Society lectures so that students can do and discuss “scenario” exercises with international dilemmas and examples.
- Journalism Practice for broadcast students includes 3 lectures by Professor Stewart Purvis (an ex-partner at Ofcom) on broadcasting regulation and compliance. In addition, most broadcasting teaching makes frequent references to watching and observing guidelines, both external and internal.
- The MA in Financial Journalism includes teaching on insider trading law and a series of workshops led by the course director on ethical dilemmas with a strong emphasis on the varieties of practice in different countries.
- The course director for Political Journalism describes his students as involved “in an almost constant discussion of ethics”. Presentations and classes cover subjects such as the nature of trust, “spin, objectivity and subjectivity and phone-hacking. Recent speakers on this course who have focussed on ethical debates include former MP Chris Mullin, former Downing Street spokesman Lance Price and campaigner and (Visiting

Professor) Heather Brooke.

- All students on the Erasmus Mundus course take a first-year module at Aarhus University on ethics. At the start of their time at City, those students have an introductory session on ethics and it is a significant component in three compulsory modules.

C.2.f To illustrate that ethics teaching reaches all postgraduate students, I have attached to this submission a chart of the course modules and credits.

C.3.a Undergraduate students take a five class series on media law and ethics in their first year. In their third year students take a mandatory module of 7.5 hours of lecture-seminars on law and ethics and this module is assessed with separate law and ethics exams. A sample exam is attached as an appendix at the end of this submission.

C.3.b The aim of the lectures is to encourage awareness and debate on major ethical issues facing journalists and to expose students to the guidelines governing and shaping journalistic ethical behaviour and practice. Those include the Press Complaints Commission Editor's Code, the Ofcom broadcasting code and the BBC Code of Ethics and Editorial Guidelines. Students also look closely at the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct, the International Federation of Journalists Code of Ethics, Al-Jazeera's Code of Ethics and the NUJ's 'Working Practices' outlines.

C.3.c The lectures also cover: balance and impartiality, truth and objectivity, privacy and intrusion, clandestine listening devices and cameras, journalists' sources and protecting their identities, conflicts of interest, reporting stories involving children and young people (and vulnerable adults), reporting on major disasters or conflicts, covering stories involving racism and the representation of ethnic minority groups, travellers or minority groups, "off the record" (what the phrase actually means), payment to witnesses in criminal cases and cheque book journalism.

C.3.d The undergraduate journalism ethics lectures this academic year (2011-2012) have covered the following specific material: (a) the background to the phone hacking scandal and investigation, (b) current issues of taste, decency, harm and offence, highlighting Ofcom's approach to 'sexualised' content on pop videos and popular TV series and (c) journalists' sources – focusing on the attempt to get Guardian reporters to identify the source of their phone hacking revelations.

C.3.e The outcomes expected from this teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are that students should be equipped to:

- Understand and be able to apply the laws and ethical issues relating to the media and understand the ethical issues relating to the media.
- Research topics relating to historical and ethical journalistic issues, analyse data, draw conclusions and present them in essays and orally.
- Show an awareness of the roles and responsibilities of a journalist in society; become aware of the importance of accuracy and fairness and the

right to personal privacy; show respect for the views of others, both in the media and the outside world.

D.1 The department's principal contribution to research on journalism ethics and standards comes in the work of our Research Director, Professor Howard Tumber. The following is a list of relevant publications from the past decade:

Ethics of reporting conflict

Tumber H. (2010) Journalists and War Crimes, in Stuart Allan (ed) *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, Ch 48, 533-541 Routledge.

Tumber H. (2009) Covering War and Peace, in K. Wahl-Jorgensen and T. Hanitzsch (eds.) *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 2009 .

Tumber H. (2008) Journalists, War Crimes and International Justice, *Media War and Conflict Vol 1 No. 3 Dec.*

Tumber H. and F. Webster **(2006) Journalists under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practices**, Sage Publications.

Tumber H. (2005) Journalism and the war in Iraq, in S. Allan (ed.) *Journalism: critical issues*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 370-380.

Tumber H. (2004) Prisoners of News Values? : Journalists, professionalism, and identification in times of war, in S. Allan and B. Zelizer, *Reporting War: journalism in wartime*, London: Routledge 190-205.

Tumber H. and J. Palmer **(2004) Media at War: the Iraq Crisis**, Sage Publications.

Scandal

Tumber H. and S. Waisbord, **(2004)** Political Scandals and Media Across Democracies: Introduction:, Volume 2, in **Tumber H.** and S. Waisbord, (eds.) *Political Scandals And Media Across Democracies, American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 47 No. 9 May 1143-1152, Sage Publications.

Tumber H. (2004) Scandal and Media in the United Kingdom; From Major to Blair, in **Tumber H.** and S. Waisbord, (eds.) *Political Scandals and Media across Democracies, American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 47 No. 8 April Sage Publications 1122- 1137.

Tumber H. and S. Waisbord, **(2004)** Political Scandals and Media Across Democracies: Introduction, Volume 1, in **H. Tumber** and S. Waisbord, (eds.) *Political Scandals and Media across Democracies, American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 47 No. 8, April Sage Publications 1031-1039.

Professor Michael Bromley will return in 2012 to the Journalism Department after some years in Australia. Three recent publications of his might be worth listing:

'Subterfuge as public service: investigative journalism as idealized journalism' in Stuart Allan's *Journalism: Critical Issues* (Open U Press, 2005).

'MAS in the United Kingdom. Between complaint and compliance: groping for media accountability' in Claude-Jean Bertrand's *An Arsenal for Democracy: Media Accountability Systems* (Hampton Press, 2003).

E.1 The department has not gathered any systematic feedback from alumni on their experiences in relation to standards and ethics when they go on to work as journalists. Only two points seems worth making here.

E.2 Teaching about ethics and the related subject of law and regulation can make students aware of issues and knowledge that they may need. If the teaching is imaginative and thorough, it can deepen their understanding of what is involved. But it would be fanciful to say that journalism education is going fundamentally to alter an individual's moral outlook. If someone is aware of rules and their enforcement, teaching that framework may improve the odds that the rules will be kept. But if someone is determined to act outside the rules or if they find themselves in a situation where they are forced to act outside the rules, then the ability to answer an exam question on how to make ethical choices will be of limited use.

E.3 Anecdotally, our alumni tell us that they find ethics teaching useful, in particular in being very closely related to practical exercises. But they also observe that very little can prepare for making difficult moral choices when time is very short and competition with rivals a dominant imperative.

Appendix: a 90-minute unseen exam for third-year undergraduates:

ETHICS UNSEEN TEST 2010/2011

Answer five questions in total. You have one and a half hours. Please write clearly and make sure your name is on each of your papers.

Q1. A BBC television producer is offered some secretly filmed footage of turkeys being hit with sticks by a group of workers at a turkey farm in Norfolk. The footage was filmed with hidden cameras by members of an animal welfare group who want to draw attention to the cruelty.

Should the producer use this footage? What do the regulations say and how would he/she justify using it?

Q2. The Editor of 'Top Gear' is quoted as saying 'I can't be arsed with Ofcom'. However, he had to think again when the regulator ruled that the programme had breached regulations with its use of a mock advert depicting suicide.

What are the considerations for journalists in covering suicides? Discuss two instances of stories in which suicide was either attempted or committed.

Q3. How much does the case of Max Mosley tell us about privacy and the workings of the Human Rights Act? What did Mr Justice Eady take into account in his decision on the case? What did the newspaper which published the material about Mosley say to justify publication?

Q4. A recent edition of 'Panorama' on BBC television exposed the extent of racist abuses in Britain. More than one of the interviewees – who were exposed as having racist attitudes – used the word 'Paki'. Producers debated whether to leave the words in or to bleep them out. What would you have done and why? And what do the various guidelines and codes, including the NUJ Guidelines on Race Reporting, say about stories involving race and immigration?

Q5. The PCC received record numbers of complaints about Jan Moir's article in the Daily Mail on the death of Stephen Gately. But which parts of the Code could the article be accused of violating? And what would Ms Moir and the Daily Mail's defence be?

Q6. The prank calls made to Andrew Sachs by Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross on BBC radio prompted a public outcry and their suspension from their contracts. But which parts of the Ofcom or BBC Codes or guidelines did they offend against?

Q7. Is it ever ok to offer payment to a witness in a criminal trial? Discuss this with reference to the trial of Rosemary West, and the Gary Glitter trial.

Q8. You are offered information which you are aware has come from transcripts of a private mobile phone voice mail. You are not however, fully aware of how the information was obtained. The transcripts show a celebrity to be involved in having an affair with her personal trainer. What do the Ofcom and PCC codes have to say regarding this, and what else would you take into account about using the material or not?

Q9. The Gilligan-Kelly encounter led to the BBC re-writing its rules on gathering material and taking notes. Where exactly did Gilligan go wrong? And what do the new rules suggest reporters should be careful to do when interviewing an important source of information?

Q10. Is it ever ok for a journalist to reveal his/her sources? What might the consequences be? Refer to two actual cases in your answer.

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29.11.11