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Are Journalists Today's Coal Miners?

The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms – A Study on Journalists in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

Alexandra Borchardt, Julia Lück, Sabine Kieslich, Tanjev Schultz, Felix M. Simon

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Executive Summary

Focus and Goals of the Research

As the news industry undergoes rapid change, newsrooms are confronted with continuously evolving challenges of the digital era. The role of media in society is changing; the legitimacy of traditional news organisations is being questioned. Journalists have lost their status as news’s exclusive gatekeepers while the economic base of many newspapers is eroding. Journalists must reach out to audiences that are becoming more and more diverse while newsrooms must be made attractive to a young and diverse talent pool who will have to be convinced that the news business still has a bright future. In the wake of Brexit, the 2016 US presidential election, the migration crisis, #MeToo and a range of other events, the news industry seems to have finally woken up to the lack of diversity within their ranks and how this lack affects their position in society and their ability to represent societies fairly and accurately.

In this context, how the news industry sees these challenges and changes, what it plans to do about them and what can be learned from their considerations merits further attention. Consequently, our study of leading news executives and heads of journalism schools in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom addresses the following questions:

- How do newsroom leaders see the talent challenge in comparison to other challenges that newsrooms are confronted with in times of rapid (digital) change?
 - a. Is there still enough talent to choose from?
 - b. Are today’s applicants motivated by other considerations than the generation before them?
- Is diversity being discussed at the management level and in the newsroom, and if so, what kind of diversity are newsrooms and journalism schools most concerned with?
- Does diversity influence the journalism “produced” as well as the working routines and climate within newsrooms?
- What active steps, if any, do newsrooms and journalism schools take to increase diversity and promote diverse talent?
- What possible solutions exist for increasing diversity in media organisations?

Method

- The report is based on semi-structured interviews with 18 editors-in-chief and senior editorial managers of leading news media in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom as well as 10 heads and key figures of the most important journalism schools in the respective countries. We selected these three countries because they represent roughly comparable media systems. At the same time, they differ considerably in their social makeup. Traditionally, the social class divide in the United Kingdom is particularly visible. Sweden is regarded as fairly egalitarian; Germany falls in between. All three countries have significant communities of migrants and ethnic minorities.

- In addition, the research team conducted an online survey among journalism students (N=195) at German university programmes and journalism schools as well as four focus groups with journalism students at three journalism schools and one trainee programme in Germany.

Key findings

- The talent question is regularly mentioned among the top three challenges facing newsrooms today, mostly ranked second, sometimes ranked third, but rarely not mentioned at all. The number one challenge for news executives is managing digital change and adjusting business models accordingly.
- Journalism is still a dream job for a considerable number of young people. They appear to be particularly idealistic. Today’s job applicants do it for the purpose, not just “for the fun of it”. But many are worried about insecure jobs and poor salaries.
- In the eyes of managing editors and journalism teachers, the new generation of journalists is very motivated, more flexible and more technologically savvy than previous generations. At the same time, young journalists seem to be less loyal to one company and more interested in individual freedom.
- The new generation of applicants is more demanding in terms of work-life balance and development opportunities. This is a challenge for 24-hour newsrooms with a work environment that doesn’t permit too much flexibility.
- Big media brands in big cities don’t have a journalism talent shortage. Instead, they have a harder time attracting tech talent in a very competitive environment.
- The talent shortage hits home with regional and local newspapers outside of big cities. This seems to be more prevalent in Germany than Britain and most pronounced in Sweden. In Sweden, journalism schools have had to close down due to a lack of applicants, and it is much easier to get in these days. As a consequence, the quality of applicants could go down.
- When asked about traits, skills and competencies that news executives and school heads expect from applicants, they mainly mentioned character traits (curiosity, tenacity, etc.), with only a few mentioning specific skills.
- Diversity is an important challenge and discussed almost everywhere, but with different emphases:
 - Diversity of political views in newsrooms is mentioned as a concern by many media outlets. This is a reflection of the trust debate.
 - An emerging challenge is the lack of journalists with a rural background due to the floundering of local journalism. This hurts the talent pipeline overall since graduating from a local/regional to a national paper used to be a traditional career path. Newsrooms being populated by urbanites who don’t understand life in the country is mentioned as a diversity challenge in all three countries.
 - The absence of the working-class perspective is mentioned as a problem in the UK, where journalism is very much Oxford/Cambridge territory, but also in Germany and Sweden, where university education is free. It seems to be hard to reach young people from non-middle-class backgrounds because they lack role models, funding, opportunities and the right social and cultural capital.

- According to our interviews, all news organisations are looking for young journalists with a migrant/ethnic minority perspective. However, this seems to be a challenge in Sweden and Germany in particular because applicants' language skills are frequently considered underdeveloped. It is not that much of a challenge in England (better English skills).
- It doesn't seem to be a problem to find and hire talented women, as more women are flocking to the profession, particularly as it gets less attractive for men. But with women, the gender pay gap is mentioned frequently as the biggest challenge.
- In broadcasting, the pressure is felt more urgently than in text-driven organisations because, on air, a lack of diversity is most visible/audible. This might be one reason why public broadcasters are often seen to be at the forefront of diversity efforts.
- There are several perceived hurdles to hiring diversity candidates.
 - Language, or rather the mastery of it, is mentioned as the number one impediment to hiring ethnic minorities as well as applicants from lower socio-economic strata.
 - In quite a few cultures, journalism is not considered to be an honourable profession by the families of applicants. When a family sacrifices a lot to move to a foreign country, they often prefer their children to engage in something that is seen prestigious and stable, for example becoming a doctor or lawyer.
 - It is not enough to hire diverse candidates; it is important to retain them and develop support structures. This means taking into account social difficulties that might arise from someone breaking class boundaries, making ends meet while attending journalism school or struggling with the language.
- The German students who participated in group discussions didn't see any convincing efforts on the part of media organisations or journalism programmes to increase and manage diversity. They perceived most of it as lip service or tokenism. This differs from the perception of the industry, where many said that, while they were not doing enough to foster diversity, they – in their view – were already doing a lot.
- Compared to the urgency and intensity with which the diversity challenge seems to be discussed in the industry, surprisingly few organisations have specific programmes in place to tackle the problem. Among the measures taken and pointed out to us are:
 - Reaching out to communities rather than waiting for candidates to show up at the doorstep
 - Supporting diversity candidates with their struggles (financial or skills-based, e.g. language classes)
 - Schemes to support minority candidates (particularly in the United Kingdom)
 - Commitment from the top, constantly communicating the need for diversity, raising awareness
 - Changing career profiles (e.g. German Press Agency (dpa) with different trainee schemes for different talents)
 - Addressing injustices like the gender wage gap and discrimination
 - Reviving career tracks for non-academic/unusual candidates (e.g. messenger to desk scheme at *The Sun*)
- Implications of our findings for the industry:

- The talent and diversity challenge is much more pronounced at local/regional newsrooms, so the big brands could learn from (some) smaller players about innovative approaches to address the issue.
- Active recruitment schemes and different recruiting procedures will be a must for newsrooms. The “fishing from the top of the pile” approach needs to be retired. It is also not enough to “widen the pool of applicants” if structural forms of discrimination persist.
- Innovative approaches to role and job sharing will be needed to accommodate greater demands for work flexibility.
- The profession is getting more feminised. But an eye needs to be kept on the gender imbalance at all leadership levels.
- Diverse newsrooms are key to gaining the trust of different audiences. They not only make for more diverse content and better access to sources and communities, but also support the development of storytelling formats that address audiences in their “language”. Newsrooms should strive to quantify this effect to buttress their argument for diversity.
- Diversity is not a “nice to have”. Without a real and genuine commitment to greater diversity in order to better represent the societies they operate in and give underrepresented communities a voice, diversity efforts are doomed to fail. Likewise, without addressing underlying issues of discrimination, sexism and racism in newsrooms, diversity efforts are likely to stall.

Introduction

The (Mostly) Mundane Challenges to Journalism

Journalism used to be a dream job for many. Generations of young, adventurous graduates felt inspired by Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein and the like, admired their local radio talk show host or couldn’t think of anything more fulfilling than reviewing movies or books for a living. While everyone suspected they wouldn’t get rich with it, the prospect of a life full of exciting experiences, interesting contacts and a sense of purpose attracted droves of applicants to journalism schools and newsrooms. These, in turn, didn’t have to do much more than to pick the best of the best – who very often resembled the very people responsible for the selection at the time when they had first entered the profession: (predominantly) young men, with a hunger to explore, if not change, the world.

But times have changed. Most journalists still don’t get rich, but with many local and regional newspapers downsizing or closing and even supposedly next-generation digital news outlets switching into layoff mode, the prospects of a stable future in the news industry are dwindling. With most newsrooms now operating close to 24/7, demands on the time and flexibility of their staff are rising as much as the requirements for skills in today’s always-on multimedia environment.

At the same time, the trust debate is in full swing. Even in stable democracies, the reputation of journalists and journalism is tanking. And it doesn’t stop there. In many regions of the world, the profession has become decidedly more dangerous. Investigative reporters are particularly at risk, even in the EU. Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta and Ján Kuciak in Slovakia were murdered, presumably because their research touched sensitive interests. In 2018, a record number of journalists worldwide were killed on the job. As a recent UN report found, perpetrators very often get away with these murders ([UNESCO, 2018](#)). Reporters and commentators, particularly female ones, suffer online harassment and abuse. In many countries, reporters risk jail time for asking critical questions or following up with the “wrong” stories. Journalism is under fire around the world ([Posetti, Simon, and Shabbir, 2019](#)).

In most democratic countries, though, the challenges to the profession are much more mundane. Younger job seekers are no longer that smitten with the old-style celebrity of reporters. Much of the tech talent that is desperately needed in newsrooms says “thanks, but no thanks” to job offers. They often prefer to join Google, Facebook and other big technology companies where salaries are higher, career prospects better, and the promise of an improved work-life balance awaits them. Furthermore, the younger generation is a lot less loyal to the news than their predecessors. In the annual “Trends and Predictions” survey of international media leaders conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, three-quarters of respondents said in December 2018 that attracting and retaining talent was one of their major challenges ([Newman, 2019](#)).

Concern about talent and diversity in the newsroom



Q9 Rate your level of concern about the following issues (showing code for concerned and very concerned)

Digital leaders survey, N=196



Finally, while journalism is still a dream job for many, it seems that it has become increasingly difficult to enter the industry. Moreover, one often needs resources to back up that dream. Journalism has become a profession many applicants no longer seem able to afford without a solid alternative financial background. Unpaid internships are still a common track for entering the interesting jobs. And even if internships are paid, they are often located in expensive cities that are difficult to afford on an internship salary alone. At the same time, despite #MeToo and growing awareness of issues such as racism, implicit and sometimes explicit structural discrimination remains present throughout the industry.

The Diversity Challenge

However, it would be wrong to claim that media executives haven’t noticed the changing signs of the times. Some of them are still a little bit flustered that their news outlets failed to predict the election of Trump or the Brexit vote. Others are distraught at having fallen out with readers over the migration crisis or at readers who call them out as members of “the elite”. These editors see their female employees denouncing the gender wage gap, and it suddenly dawns on them that looking at all these white faces in the morning meeting doesn’t necessarily reflect the societies they are operating in. Some have finally realised that more diversity is needed if they want to regain the trust of their audiences – or gain it in the first place.

It’s about time. Huge swaths of the media have never been attractive to broad segments of society. Female readership is significantly below 50 percent for many quality news outlets; at financial publications like the *Financial Times* or *The Economist*, it stands at around 20 percent, as senior editors of these organisations suggested in conversations. In countries such as the UK, which have significant black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) populations, many newsrooms are still predominantly white, with little to no coverage of the topics and issues relevant to these communities. Rural and urban divides persist. And media consumption continues to be divided along class lines, with some news media being decidedly more appealing to well-educated and well-off

audiences. Only public broadcasters have, to some extent, stretched to reach everybody as part of their mission. More diversity and a better representation of the underlying population is not only a question of justness and fairness, it’s also a question of power, as the media still largely decide who gets to be heard in society and thus who gets to shape political and social issues. Ultimately, diversity is increasingly a business question, too. In an age when readers, not advertisers, have to pay the lion’s share of news media revenues, expanding the pool of audiences has become a critical concern.

For the media to become more diverse and representative, ideas and real action are needed. But editors don’t quite seem to know how to approach the challenge since journalism for the longest time has been a profession in which employers have called the shots.

The Study’s Assumptions: Picking a Diverse Crowd from a Diminishing Pool

All this suggests that picking more diverse candidates from a diminishing pool of applicants is the task at hand. Or is it? This study examines the talent and diversity situation and how it lines up with the needs of modern newsrooms in three countries: Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden. In all three markets, media organisations are in the process of restructuring their operations for the digital age, moving towards business models that make readers pay for the journalism they consume online ([Newman, 2019](#); [Simon and Graves, 2019](#)). This requires a particularly skilled labour force since audiences will only put their money in quality products. News outlets that don’t provide more value than information that is available for free won’t justify subscriptions.

Additionally, repetitive and non-demanding tasks that used to be completed by journalists will likely be increasingly delegated to artificial intelligence applications. This so-called “computational journalism” (Thurman, 2019) has already been implemented by some outlets. They let software write earnings reports, sports results and simple summaries, with a view to expanding into other genres over time. This means that in the next decade, employees who want to make it in the newsroom need to be even more qualified and skilled, a requirement that will likely apply to most industries.

Our research was guided by two assumptions:

- *First, the journalism profession has become less attractive* for all the reasons mentioned above. If this holds true and the pool of applicants shrinks, the average quality of journalists will most likely go down. This is happening at a time when increasing external pressures demand a particularly skilled and committed workforce.
- *Second, making newsrooms more diverse has become an important goal.* On the one hand, this is a response to the diminishing trust of audiences. The reasoning behind it is that a more diverse newsroom will not only have a better understanding of society in all its facets but will also be able to provide better, more representative coverage. Additionally – and more importantly – there is an ethical element: fostering diversity is “the right thing to do”.

Both assumptions are interrelated. When economic conditions for a profession worsen and perspectives get dim, candidates who crave for job security and adequate incomes will increasingly

opt out.¹ It is also true that becoming a journalist has always been challenging from a financial perspective. It is still the norm that candidates have to prove their talent and dedication in internships, many of which are unpaid. Additionally, the decline of employment opportunities in small towns means that jobs in the news are concentrated in metropolitan areas where the cost of living is high. While journalism has always been somewhat of an elite profession, there is a risk that these trends will skew the pool of applicants even further towards those from well-to-do social backgrounds – a development that’s highly problematic when more diversity is asked for, especially given the fact that socio-economic status and other forms of diversity are often linked.

Sample, Scope and Research Design

Selection of Countries

To study the talent and diversity challenge in modern newsrooms, we compared the situation in leading newsrooms and journalism schools in Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden. We selected these three countries because they represent roughly comparable media systems despite their differences (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).² Another key factor was that the three markets are more or less at the same stage of digital disruption. The expectations and requirements for young journalists are similar as are, to some degree, the career prospects.

Where these countries differ is in their social makeup. In the United Kingdom, the social class divide is particularly visible. A majority of the politicians and business leaders who shape public life attended the prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Graduates of these schools also dominate the leading media organisations. A mix of ethnic backgrounds is very visible in Britain as a legacy of the colonial past. Nevertheless, leadership levels don’t reflect this even though there is no language barrier.

Sweden, by contrast, is transitioning from a very homogenous society to a more diverse society due to an influx of refugees of mostly Arab heritage. Business activity in both countries is concentrated in the capitals, London and Stockholm. Things are different in Germany, a federal political system with strong regional centres. The country has a poor record of employing different ethnic groups in managerial positions (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017), as does Sweden. One would expect the language barrier not to be as much part of the problem in Germany because many of the potential applicants are second- or third-generation immigrants. Language issues seem to be much more of a challenge in Sweden with its more recent history of immigration. Interestingly, Germany has a significant lack of female leadership. This is a lesser challenge in the UK and a comparatively small challenge in Sweden.

¹ It has been argued that this trend could support an influx of women in journalism although there exists – to our knowledge – only anecdotal evidence for this assumption. Experience shows that when men leave professions for better opportunities elsewhere, the female share of the workforce rises. However, it remains to be seen if this will really lead to more females in leadership positions or if they will remain stuck in non-managerial positions. Further research is required to understand the implications of this trend in the news industry.

² The UK is a representative of Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) liberal model for a media system with strong market orientation. Germany and Sweden both use the democratic-corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) with stronger state regulations.

Research Method and Design

We identified a comparable sample of important news organisations in each of the countries although our study does not claim that they are representative. We selected national quality (print) news media, regional media, public broadcasters and private broadcasters. We further identified at least two well-known journalism schools/university programmes in each country. Potential interview partners were contacted by email or in person. All but two British media outlets agreed to participate. The outlets and schools interviewed in this study (see appendix) allow a reasonable degree of equivalency.

To study the talent and diversity challenge in modern newsrooms, we opted for a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to uncover the richness of experience and thoughts that quantitative studies usually cannot provide. We managed to conduct 30 interviews in total – 11 in Germany, 9 in the UK and 10 in Sweden – with editors-in-chief, managing editors and heads and lecturers of journalism schools. In Germany, we additionally conducted 4 group discussions with journalism students at three journalism schools. Finally, we conducted an online survey among journalism students at universities and journalism schools in Germany (N=195). A full list can be found in the appendix.

The interviews lasted between about 30 minutes and one hour and were conducted in English (UK and Sweden) and German. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded for pre-defined themes in MaxQDA. All individual codings were checked by another coder and conflicts resolved by comparing and discussing results. All quotes in this report were authorised by participants. Where we received consent to do so, we did not anonymise interviewees, except for the students, which were all anonymised. Apart from minor edits for the sake of clarity and readability, the quotes appear in their original form.

To supplement the resulting snapshot of the state of diversity within journalism, we additionally conducted focus group interviews with journalism students and trainees as well as a survey among students of different journalism programmes in Germany. Our interview guideline was constructed similarly to the ones we used for chief editors and heads of journalism schools but were slightly adjusted to fit their perspectives. Our survey questionnaire concentrated on students' motives for becoming journalists as well as the fears they may have when thinking about their future within the profession. We wanted to know what type of media they would like to work for in the future and where they saw themselves in 5 years. Furthermore, we included a series of questions to determine their social backgrounds and asked about their education and their parents' education as well as their nationality and their parents' nationality. We also asked for their religious affiliation and political classification on a left to right scale. We managed to gather 195 complete data sets with students from 8 different institutions (see appendix for details), consisting of five university programmes (bachelor's and master's), two journalism schools and one trainee programme. Two thirds of our respondents were female. People were on average 24 years old (while most people (20 percent) were 23 years old, the youngest person was 18, the oldest 46).

Research Questions

Our study tried to address several questions:

- *How do newsroom leaders see the talent challenge in comparison to other challenges that newsrooms are confronted with in times of rapid (digital) change?*

In this context, we further tried to understand if *a) there was still enough talent to choose from, and b) whether today’s journalism applicants were motivated by other considerations than the generation before them.*

As for diversity in the media, we tried to address four key questions:

1. *Is diversity being discussed at the management level and in the newsroom, and if so, what kind of diversity are newsrooms and journalism schools most concerned with?*
2. *How has diversity influenced the journalism “produced” as well as the working routines and climate within newsrooms?*
3. *Which active steps, if any, did newsrooms and journalism schools take to increase diversity and promote diverse talent?*
4. *What possible solutions exist to increase diversity in media organisations?*

In our focus groups with journalism students, as described in more detail above, we were interested in finding out their motives for becoming journalists as well as the fears they might have when thinking about their future within the profession. We were also interested in their views on the diversity debate.

It is important to stress that this study presents a top-down view of the issue of diversity in the news industry. In line with our aims and research questions, we tried to understand how news executives and heads of journalism schools think about (the lack of) diversity in their organisations, how it could be addressed and what steps they have taken to address the problem of a lack of diversity in the media. Yet it is crucial to underline that these perspectives might differ significantly from the impressions and views of those ultimately affected by such measures: (prospective) journalists with diverse backgrounds. It is highly likely that their assessment of what needs to be done to promote diversity, or how good existing approaches are, differs greatly from that of executives and school heads. Studying these views was beyond the scope of our research. Accordingly, we can only insist that these perspectives in particular require greater attention in future research on this topic.

The State of Newsrooms Now

Brief Anatomy of a Challenged Industry

The talent challenge has hit newsrooms at a time when many of them are struggling for their very survival. The old business model that heavily relied on brand and classified advertising in print newspapers is not entirely dead for many, but even modest success obtained through sheer perseverance can be a mixed blessing. How can you advise your newsroom to dive into digital when ad and subscription sales from print still bring in the bulk of the money, many editors wonder?

Hopes burst a while ago that digital advertising will somehow replace print advertising as a reliable source of income. Google and Facebook absorbed most of that revenue. That’s why almost everyone is pivoting into selling digital subscriptions now. This works for some, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, where willingness to pay for digital news products is exceptionally high, as the Reuters Institute’s annual Digital News Report shows ([Newman et al., 2018, 2019](#)). And it works for big players like the *New York Times*, arguably one of the world’s most successful media companies in terms of the digital transition. But even there, revenues from print subscriptions still outshine all other income sources.

The situation is slightly better for public service news media, as long as the public goes along with it. The flat-fee citizen-support model of old-style broadcasters has been challenged in many countries, and more is yet to come. After all, the Netflix generation will not be the only individuals less inclined to pay for a service they don’t consume. As so much information and entertainment is competing for audience attention, it will get harder to convince people that news is actually more than just another nice-to-have service for citizens in a democracy.

It is not exaggerated to describe this business environment as hostile – and as one that talent doesn’t necessarily flourish in. With all the aforementioned challenges to master, human resources development is not necessarily the first thing on editors’ minds. Catching up with technology and selling products is, and if they don’t sell any longer, then the focus is on developing products that do. Talent often comes in as no more than an afterthought in this context even though everyone knows it shouldn’t. After all, who is going to do great journalism, develop great products and ramp up technologies if you cannot attract and retain talent?

The challenges of the business environment are broadly similar in the three countries we examined. The loss of revenue from advertising, particularly the classifieds, and the dependence on digital platform companies as new powerhouses have shaped all three markets. But there are quite a few differences, particularly concerning context and strategy.

Swedish publishers do significantly better than those from other countries in selling digital subscriptions. This is a business strategy everywhere, so people who want to consume quality Swedish-language news don’t have many free alternatives, consequently they pay for it. This has injected considerable optimism into the industry. Swedish daily *Göteborgs Posten*, for example, added 12 journalists to a newsroom of 100 this year. “The reason why we can hire new staff is

because, for the first time since the ‘70s, we now have more subscribers than we had the same time last year. And it’s the first time in about 40 years”, editor-in-chief Christopher Ahlqvist said. National daily *Dagens Nyheter* makes a point about competing for top talent.

In Germany, willingness to pay is fairly low, but publishers are moving towards subscriptions nonetheless. As many people still subscribe to print newspapers, the challenge is to make them rechannel their media expenses and, more importantly, convince young audiences that good journalism is worth paying for. Although the Digital News Report finds that the “Spotify and Netflix generation” is more prone to pay for digital products than audiences in their 40s and 50s, media budgets are limited, and younger users often prioritise streaming services (Newman et al., 2018, 2019). It will likely be challenging to sell younger audiences subscriptions in the price range that quality media need to flourish.

The toughest market in this respect is the UK. Not only is the BBC a strong public service provider for free quality news, but the UK has also never had a strong subscription culture in the print era. People walked to their local newsagent to buy a paper or picked up a free copy at the railway station. These days, *The Times*, *The Financial Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* have implemented pay models and subscription strategies, as have several magazines. *The Guardian*, long guided by a “news has to be free” philosophy, managed to just break even with a membership model and reliance on donations.

Our interviews reflected these ongoing struggles of a battered industry. When asked for the three most important challenges to their organisation, managing the transition to digital was the number one response for most of the editors-in-chief and senior leaders we interviewed. While securing stable revenue streams is one important component of this transition, another one relates to processes and culture in the newsroom: In an industry where the editorial and business sides used to be strictly separated, the new challenge is getting journalists, marketing and tech staff to work together on products customers are willing to pay for.

There was no discernible difference among the three countries even though challenges varied slightly with the size, business model and legacy of the organisations. For example, attracting younger audiences seems to be a much bigger difficulty for big public broadcasters that were founded on producing linear TV and radio. Print-driven organisations have adjusted to the requirements of platform-driven distributed content much faster.

Of course, the talent question is connected to all of this. Many of our interviewees mentioned it as the second biggest challenge they were facing these days. For the big brands, the difficulty is not necessarily finding entrants to the job market. In metropolitan areas, the pool of young people who want to become reporters still seems to be sufficiently large. But it is much harder to get people to engage in increasingly complex management roles, not only on the editorial team but particularly on the commercial side of the operation.

Additionally, there seems to be a mismatch between education, expectations and requirements. While most entry-level journalists are trained as reporters who can stand on their own, modern digital newsrooms need them in roles that are a far cry from writing the feature story of several thousand words they practiced at school. Serving multiple platforms, developing data-driven

projects and coordinating collaborations require very different talents, social and management skills – and these are not always taught to a sufficient degree in journalism schools.

The increasing dependence on platforms like Google, Facebook or Apple for the distribution of content has injected another set of challenges into newsrooms. While journalists have always been trained to deal with rapidly shifting news situations, they have long relied on disaster-proof routines to deal with them. But now these stable structures are shaking as ever-new formats for publication and storytelling emerge. It used to be enough to have a report first, then a feature and maybe a commentary. Now newsrooms also have to produce video, a podcast, infographics, divers social media for different channels and whatever else pops up as the latest fad. This can be fun but also draining. It’s more than an anecdotal observation that an increasing number of mid-career or even senior journalists yearn for sabbaticals and career breaks amid this rapid pace of change. Brain drain is a serious issue in the industry.

Are Journalists Today’s Coal Miners?

A Profession Between Decline and New Opportunities

Apart from a few star reporters or celebrity anchors on television, journalism has never shown much potential for making a fortune. But it used to guarantee a secure, if not comfortable, middle-class existence once someone had landed a permanent position in a news organisation. This is no longer always the case. Employment in the profession has dropped, particularly in old-style print-driven organisations at the local and regional level. And while the prospect of publishing via online platforms without the costs of paper, printing and distribution inspired many new ventures, the enthusiasm of the initial years is gone as well. News of layoffs at established digital-born players like *BuzzFeed News* and *Huffington Post* in 2018 discouraged many who were hoping for opportunities in a new type of media.

It is difficult to assess the development of the profession in numbers because everyone can self-identify as a journalist. According to the European Statistics Authority (Eurostat), the number of journalists has actually increased by ten percentage points between 2012 and 2017 ([Eurostat, 2018](#)). But these figures don’t indicate whether these are full-time journalists who can make a decent living off their job. Additionally, statistics often include different types of job descriptions, and so are not necessarily comparable. While the Eurostat statistics include linguists and authors, studies like the British “*Journalists at Work*”, published in October 2018 by the National Council for the Training of Journalists, also include journalists employed in PR and communications in the total ([Spilsbury, 2018](#)).

While prestigious organisations in big cities still receive plenty of applications for journalism careers, regional papers outside metropolitan areas struggle. Ian Carter, editorial director of the Kent Media Group in southeast England, said, “The number of applications we receive has definitely narrowed, and the people that are coming forward tend to be people that have got a lot of technical skills but not necessarily the interpersonal skills to be able to talk to people and go and find stories.” Carter is not surprised about the retreat of talent: “If somebody wants to be a journalist, you expect them to do the background research into the industry. And if they do their research they are going to think very carefully about the future of the industry, which is inevitably going to be challenging.”

There is a similar split in Germany. Large organisations like *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and public broadcasters like ZDF have plenty of applications to choose from, but not necessarily the ones they would like to have more of: candidates with a diverse background (see Chapter 2). The situation is quite different for the regional press outside of cities like Berlin or Hamburg. “For small local bureaus, we sometimes don’t find anyone at all,” said Hendrik Brandt, editor-in-chief of *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*. The average quality of applications has gone down, as editors of regional media in all three countries observed.

Obviously, there are always some stars, but they are often snatched away quickly by the competition or leave for national outlets. This is particularly the case with diversity candidates everyone is eager to employ, such as those with a family history of immigration. And there is another challenge, according to Brandt: “Second- or third-generation migrants are often great journalists, highly driven, very motivated, but not necessarily of the down-to-earth quality that we are looking for. In most cases, they don’t want to work in the region. They’d much rather cover national or foreign policy.”

Pay is not that much of an issue in Germany once someone lands a contract because the industry is still widely unionised. Then again, journalist salaries compete with salaries in adjacent industries in a prosperous economy with full employment. As the German trade magazine *journalist* summarised in 2018, “The number of full-time journalists is declining, salaries are growing slower than average for the German economy, unemployment is higher than average and precarious job conditions are no exception.” One third of journalists make less than 1800 Euro monthly and have sideline jobs ([journalist, 2018](#)).

In Sweden, economic insecurity cannot be the main issue driving job seekers away from the profession. The social safety net is strong in Scandinavian countries and unemployment much less threatening than elsewhere. Nevertheless, in our research, Sweden showed the greatest decline in interest in journalism as a career. Waning job opportunities in regional newspapers have played a significant role. And with fewer applicants, the quality of the talent pool inevitably declines. The impact is less pronounced at the entry level but more so when it comes to positions that involve responsibility. *Göteborgs Posten*’s Christopher Ahlqvist: “To find reporters is not the problem. To find editors and higher up who have an understanding of the new media climate and how things work, that is.” Ahlqvist thinks applicants need to be aware of the risks: “If I want to have a secure job and be able to work until I retire, I wouldn’t choose journalism. There are a lot of changes right now. Competences that were attractive a few years ago are not as attractive nowadays, and things change really quickly now.”

Two general themes pop up again and again when one starts to look into the industry’s quest to attract talent. First, the industry narrative is almost consistently negative. There is regular news about downsizing: jobs are cut, brands disappear, news organisations are merged. What is lacking are success stories with attractive protagonists that can serve as role models to young, driven applicants.

Sven Gösmann, editor-in-chief of German Press Agency dpa, said, “Journalism is connected with expressions like death of newspapers, ‘fake news press’, paid content [...] There is nothing less sexy than that. [...] And then it competes for these creative spirits who are drawn to startups. [...] There

are no success stories like the Samwer brothers, Steve Jobs, Sundar Pichai at Google. The new boss of Twitter Germany is a 32-year-old woman. Our industry doesn’t produce enough stories like this.”

All this is discouraging for aspiring journalists, particularly for young people with the tech skills that are desperately needed in newsrooms. “They could choose Google, Spotify. Why would they choose public service? We don’t pay as much. And the work might not be as creative,” said Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News at Swedish TV.

Second, it is hard for the media to fulfil the requirements of a young generation that demands a better work-life balance and more time for friends and family. Modern newsrooms require 24-hour staffing, shiftwork and a willingness to be there when news happens. “It’s still a lot of work at inconvenient hours,” said Jochen Arntz, editor-in-chief of *Berliner Zeitung*. And sometimes it’s work that is hard to get to. “Many young people don’t even have a driver’s license any longer,” one editor said. What might be an environmentally friendly lifestyle choice for urbanites doesn’t go down well when reporting in rural areas.

There is a third aspect that concerns potential candidates from disadvantaged social backgrounds or with a history of migration. Often, their families feel that journalism as a profession is not secure, honourable or prestigious enough for them to engage in. Families that migrated to Europe from poor or war-torn countries in particular risked a lot to enable their children to have a better and preferably prosperous future. Some children are even expected to provide for extended families back home. This means that potential applicants from these backgrounds have to fight on two fronts: For one, they are facing a very competitive industry where the cards are, to some extent, stacked against them. At the same time, they have to overcome doubts and concerns at home, as our research revealed.

All this doesn’t mean that journalists are indeed today’s coal miners, as some interviewees suggested. The digital world makes it relatively easy to set up new ventures, and there exist a growing number of outlets that focus on serious, sometimes investigative journalism, such as Correctiv.org, Netzpolitik.org or Pioneer Media in Germany; Tortoise and the Bureau Local in the UK; De Correspondent in the Netherlands; or Republik in Switzerland. Time will tell if these companies can grow significantly to have a real impact on the job market for journalists. But it is a good guess that more will be done with fewer people in the near future.

First, the necessity for comprehensive coverage will likely become less pronounced. News organisations will increasingly specialise in long or investigative formats, news briefings and certain topics, very often surrounded by events. In an age of information overabundance, there is less need for around-the-clock newsrooms that compete with others to provide the same standard-fare news. Second, artificial intelligence will likely change news production dramatically although it remains to be seen in which ways. Simple, straightforward news or data analysis will be supplied by AI applications; the higher quality of automated translation already has quite a few newsrooms rethinking their allocation of human resources. This might free up journalists for more fulfilling assignments or completely new formats, but it might also make roles redundant.

When journalism evolves more into a profession that fosters debates and learning on all kinds of platforms and formats, different skill sets will be needed than those that were most in demand in past decades. According to our research, many young journalists are quite adept at using different technologies for new ways of storytelling even though some still enjoy crafting the old-style long-form essay or report. But there are other skills needed to help the industry survive: talent in managing people, conducting conversations, speaking in public, handling and interpreting data and the like. In short, journalism could and should evolve into a profession where people with very different talents will find room to develop – if there are working business models, that is.

Elite or Not Elite?

“Pale, male and posh: the media is still in a class of its own” – this was a headline in *The Guardian* for a story on the social background of journalists, and one could use it as a shortcut to describe much of the profession, at least in the UK ([Martinson, 2018](#)). The biggest report on the social background of journalists in the United Kingdom, published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and City University of London in 2016, stated that 94 percent of British journalists were white and 86 percent had a university degree ([Thurman et al., 2016](#)). Only 11 percent of journalists had working-class backgrounds, a 2016 report about social mobility by Alan Milburn revealed ([Social Mobility Commission, 2016](#)). The situation in Germany and particularly in Sweden is less dramatic. Neither country has an Oxbridge-type education system, so access to the profession is much more open. However, it is still safe to say that journalism everywhere has evolved into a largely college-educated, middle-class profession.

Numbers don’t always tell the whole story about someone’s social background because it’s something that is hard to define. Is someone elite who went to Oxford or Cambridge on a bursary but comes from a working-class family? What about a manager raised by a single mother who was a teacher but earned so little her daughter received free school meals? And what about someone from a wealthy family that didn’t have any books at home? In our sample, only the BBC makes an effort to assess the social background of incoming staff with a questionnaire. Most organisations don’t want to go down that road because of privacy and data protection concerns.

Looking at gender, the situation is even more difficult to assess in another way. Statistics on gender are available for practically all newsrooms, and at first glance the ratio between the genders is balanced, even tipping towards the female side in some cases. International comparative studies like the “Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media” confirm this finding ([Byerly, 2011](#)). Quite a few times in our interviews we heard: “Actually, we are now looking for talented men because we have too many women.” This trend starts at journalism schools. But the picture is different for leadership levels and prestigious positions such as columnists or political or business reporters. A byline and visual analysis of the first sections of news media in eleven European countries revealed that, across all countries, men wrote 41 percent of the stories compared to 23 percent written by women ([EJO, 2018](#)). “News coverage in Europe is overwhelmingly dominated by male journalists and commentators, who spend much of their time writing about other men,” the authors concluded. Germany scored particularly low in the comparison; Sweden was not included.

Newsroom diversity has long been discussed and researched primarily in the US context. There is, for example, an ongoing and detail-rich report entitled “The Status of Women in US Media” (Women’s Media Center, 2019). The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) regularly reports on the percentage of minority journalists in representative surveys (Geißler, Enders, & Reuter, 2009). In the European context, representative surveys about numbers and working conditions of journalists with different backgrounds are less common. In Germany, for example, it is culturally unacceptable to ask for “race” or minority status. The latest estimates for Germany suggest that about 2 to 5 percent of journalists are themselves immigrants or come from immigrant families (Geißler & Pöttker, 2009; Horn, 2012; Pöttker, Kiesewetter, & Lofink, 2017). Geißler et al. (2009) estimate that 84% of all German newsrooms do not have any such staff members. Numbers for Sweden suggest that 5 percent of the journalists were not born in Sweden (and 2 percent non-Western born) (Hovden, Bjørnsen, Ottosen, Willig, & Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2009; Hultén, 2009). Representative data from the UK reports that about 6 percent of journalists are people of colour (Thurman, Cornia, & Kunert, 2016).

What the Literature Says

Within the scholarly debate, diversity in journalism is mainly discussed under three aspects: (1) moral implications, (2) democratic representation and (3) economic value (Adams & Cleary, 2006; Awad Cherit, 2008). Morally and on an individual level, everyone should have equal opportunities to obtain jobs and positions within society, which is why people with different backgrounds should have access to the profession of journalism regardless of their sex, gender, socio-economic status, race or other markers. What follows from this individual-centred argument is a social perspective: People need representation in the democratic system and its institutions (such as the press) in order to be heard and have their interests revealed for the political decision-making process. Journalists from different backgrounds often have better insights into specific communities and parts of society, thus increasing their chances of being adequately represented. There is also an economic case to be made for diversity. From this point of view, the media needs to provide coverage that is relevant to different groups of people if they want to reach broad audiences (Brinkmann, 2013).

It is often assumed that diversity on the production side – in newsrooms and in leadership – leads to diversity of content (Schwenk, 2006), but evidence for this is scarce. Edström (2017), for example, recognises that female representation in Swedish news coverage is still low even though women are well-represented in Swedish newsrooms (52% of reporters). She concludes that female representation among staff alone does not solve the problem of underrepresentation in content. Regarding racial diversity, Pritchard and Stonbely’s (2016) study of a newsroom in Milwaukee showed that minority reporters primarily wrote about issues that concerned their community while white colleagues covered hard news in politics and business. The authors conclude, “Practices that channel journalists of colour into covering minority issues while white journalists cover the centres of power in modern American society reinforce white privilege and marginalise journalists who were intended to be the beneficiaries of diversity initiative.” (Pritchard & Stonbely, 2016, p. 232)

Hence, having a diverse staff does not automatically result in more diverse content or better representation of society as a whole if working routines and habits within the newsroom remain the same. Awad Cherit (2008) writes that more diversity can even lead to an increased homogenisation

of content. Breed (1955) explains this with a theory of social control in the newsroom. New journalists are often automatically and implicitly socialised into the existing rules and routines of a newsroom. Johnson and Flamiano (2007) concluded that it takes a critical mass within a newsroom for minority issues and perspectives to be heard. In this context, Nishikawa et al. (2009) further examined whether journalistic norms such as objectivity, accuracy, balance and fairness hinder minority journalists from adding to the diversity of viewpoints covered. They interviewed African-American and Latin-American journalists who worked at mainstream US newspapers. Their results support the claim that journalistic norms significantly influence the work of minority journalists.

Röben (2010) reflects on the specific situation of female journalists from immigrant communities in Germany, which is overlooked in most studies of diversity in newsrooms. She argues that this group faces even higher barriers in the white and male-dominated environment of mainstream German journalism where mostly white men define what skills and qualifications count as relevant, important and necessary.

In this vein, Graf (2017) also underlines the potential of journalistic habits and routines to hinder diversity. She assumes that time pressures, an intense working pace and the standardisation of journalistic practice impede diversity in the newsrooms. In her study of larger German news organisations, she concludes that only larger media companies support diversity while smaller companies often declined her interview requests, citing the absence of diversity programmes or efforts. Graf also found that diversity was merely a secondary consideration in recruitment, with “skills” being the decisive criterion for HR managers. The focus was particularly on language skills, making the barrier to entry especially high for diversity candidates.

These results underscore what Brinkmann (2013) found in his study of local newspapers in Germany. Although his interview partners understood the economic need to reach audiences in immigrant communities, they did not necessarily implement any measures to increase diversity within the workforce. Interview partners did not say that a job applicant’s immigrant background was an obstacle per se but – again – language skills were quoted as more important. Interestingly, the interviewees often failed to give compelling answers to the question about the benefits journalists from diverse ethnic backgrounds could bring to local journalism. Most of them did not even have any first-hand experience of having journalists with diverse ethnic backgrounds within their newsrooms.

When talking about diversity, “active diversity management” is often brought up as a solution. Yet many newsrooms underestimate the time, money and energy it takes to implement this (Graf, 2017; Turner, 2014). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that, in interviews with minority journalists in the US, Turner (2014) found that diversity had taken a backseat due to the industry’s economic downturn. This factor is exacerbated when no immediate economic benefits can be found, thus making it harder in the eyes of news executives to spend resources addressing this problem. Adams and Cleary (2006) showed for the US that more minority staffing did not automatically lead to additional subscriptions within the respective minority community nor to increased trust, thus giving managers a potential excuse to shy away from concentrating their efforts on becoming more diverse.

More recently, the diversity debate has evolved beyond the categories of gender, social background, race or minority status towards concepts of intersectionality: Social differences cannot be regarded in isolation from one another. Instead, interdependence has to be taken into account against the backdrop of complex power relationships (Walgenbach, 2014). Categories of social differences need to be viewed together because there is simultaneousness as well as co-constitution (Lutz, Viva, & Supik, 2010). The beginning of this discussion can be found in the conflict between black and white feminists. People of colour would rightly argue that they face quite different problems than white (middle-class) women in Western societies (“racist genderism” and “gendered racism” are important terms in this context, see Essed, 1991).

Who Wants to be a Journalist?

Motivation – A Profession for the Convinced

Despite uncertain prospects and increasingly harsh working conditions, journalism still attracts many young people. The editors-in-chief, managing editors and heads of journalism programmes we interviewed in Germany, the UK and Sweden were largely in agreement as to why young people still decide to pursue a career in the profession. They said the motivations were the same as 20, 30 or even 50 years ago: a conviction that journalism plays an important role for society but also the joy felt in expressing oneself through storytelling.

Belief in the public role of the media is strong among prospective journalists in all three countries. Jonas Eriksson, CEO and editor-in-chief of the Swedish news agency TT, said, “I don’t think that has changed. You want to be a part of something bigger; you want to report the big stories. You have a true belief that the media is sort of the third power. It’s extremely important to monitor what politicians do, what sports clubs do. It’s the same reason to go into journalism today.” Peter Frey (ZDF, Germany) said, “I believe there are still many young men and many women who are interested in the world, who want to tell stories and who - and this perhaps makes the difference - are technologically more alert than they used to be.”

Henriette Löwisch, head of the German School of Journalism in Munich, had noticed a change in motivations among prospective journalists. Before the turn of the millennium, it was primarily people from the educated middle classes who applied. Then, up until around 2015, those who wanted to “do something in the media” and had a rather vague idea of their profession dominated. This pushed up the number of applicants. Subsequently, with the media crisis in full swing, the number of applicants who mainly wanted to have fun declined, she said. Recent applicants were much more serious, they “want to make a difference”.

Many of our interview partners said that the new generation was particularly motivated. There were more idealists in journalism today than in the past. But some worried that idealism sometimes turned into activism. This collided with the journalistic ideals of impartiality and objectivity. Olle Zachrisson, Head of News of Swedish Radio, said, “We see more people who go into journalism now because they want to change the world. They want to have a positive impact, or they want to change opinions. [...] We say that maybe it’s a good motivation but a lot of these preconceived opinions that you have, you have to put them aside now because now you’re an impartial news journalist.”

The majority of respondents positively noted that the younger generation was more technologically savvy than the previous generation. There is agreement that new entrants already have a wide range of amateur technical skills. They are, for example, able to shoot and edit films with a smartphone, make original sounds or have already mastered storytelling on various platforms.

Well-known media brands in major cities of the respective countries, prominent companies and institutions such as Springer, *The Sun*, ZDF, *Dagens Nyheter*, BBC or SVT have not yet reported a

shortage of applicants. However, the declared goal of many media houses is to employ only the most talented. The prospect of bottleneck situations arising in the future is a frequently voiced fear. Hendrik Brandt, editor-in-chief of *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* (HAZ), which belongs to Madsack Group that owns many regional news media outlets in Germany, said, “We are still winning enough young people, but we may no longer be winning the best ones.” According to him, it was already close to impossible to fill some positions in regional offices before the publisher established its “Madsack Media Campus”. There is also the concern that the industry’s negative reputation and worsening career prospects could lead to fewer young people being interested in the journalistic profession in the future.

Journalism schools and programmes are already complaining of a significant drop in the number of applicants. Henriette Löwisch (German Journalism School, Munich) pointed to apprehensions that journalism schools would no longer be able to meet the demand in the job market. The lower-birth cohorts produced fewer applicants while waves of retirement at Germany’s public broadcasters are expected in the years to come. The need for the media to adjust to the disruptive digital landscape also increases the demand for junior staff. Löwisch: “A number of media houses, both public broadcasters and regional publishers, have now decided that they want to try it one more time. They are not giving up. They are trying even harder now, and that means digitalisation, that means online, that means social media, that means audience engagement. And for that they have to hire well-trained young people.”

Schools and universities affected by the decline in the number of applicants are often pressured financially and worry about the quality of their training. In Sweden in particular, interest in journalism has declined to such an extent that some institutions have already had to close. Jonas Eriksson (TT) said, “Some of them have shut down. There are not as many places either. [...] Back then, you needed the highest grades possible to get in. Today, it’s fairly easy to get in. So of course that affects the quality of the people that finish these courses.”

Peter Jonriksson, head of journalism training at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall, registered a significant decline in the number of applicants: “We have a maximum of 50 students for each year. But recently we have been experiencing a decline in interest, so this year’s students, they are now 28.” This means that less financial resources are available: “Funding is tightly connected to the number of students we can recruit, because we get our funds according to how many students we have. When the number of students goes down our funding decreases as well. And this of course might force us to change things that we know work really well [...] If this continues we will have to let staff go. And then we will have to rebuild the whole programme in a new way that does not require so much attention from teachers.”

As Malin Picha Edwardsson, head of the journalism programmes at Södertörn University, points out, it is apparently no longer perceived as cool for young job seekers to become journalists: “We discuss this all the time and have different theories about what it could be, but I think what we can all agree on is when we were young, it was more of a cool profession to be a journalist. And I think that it’s not that cool anymore. People might want to become YouTubers nowadays. You know, TV stars or pop stars or whatever. But becoming a journalist is not part of that really, really cool career.”

Requirements – “To Have the Best”

The requirements that today’s young journalists have to meet can be roughly divided into three categories: personal qualities, traditional craftsmanship and new technical skills. When asked about personal qualities, the interviewees in Germany, the UK and Sweden agreed that curiosity was a central prerequisite for successful journalism. Anyone who wants to pursue this profession must have a sincere desire to get to the bottom of things and bring a good deal of perseverance and tenacity with them, they pointed out. Furthermore, emotional intelligence and communication skills rank among the most desired characteristics. In addition to curiosity, Suzanne Franks of London City University mentioned courage and enterprise as important characteristics. Prospective journalists should not shy away from picking up the phone or venturing out to talk to people. All respondents agreed that good general knowledge and an interest in current events were also basic requirements. Many editors-in-chief also attach importance to applicants having a degree, preferably not in the humanities and social sciences but in hard sciences as very few journalists can boast this kind of education. At least in Germany this wish was expressed frequently.

Executives from the TV sector often mentioned “innovativeness” and “creativity” as important requirements for career starters. Television, in particular, faces the challenge of attracting younger audiences via new digital channels. This requires talent that is capable of developing innovative formats and content. Marc Thomas Spahl, director of the Axel Springer Academy in Germany, said, “I believe that competition for the best content will increase in coming years and spread to other platforms. To get the best content, I first need people who are creative.”

The interviewees also mentioned mobility and a certain “down-to-earthness” as requirements. For example, prospective journalists should be prepared “to change their place of work and residence at a certain pace” (Peter Frey, ZDF). At the same time, however, a down-to-earth viewpoint is also called for, which means the willingness to deal with people and topics beyond the big-city educational elite, to “not only move in the globalised educated world but also to have the interest and ability to go to the Hunsrück, the Westerwald, the Harz and Eastern Saxony [authors’ note: predominantly rural areas in Germany] and talk to people there about their life situation and catch up with them.” (Peter Frey, editor-in-chief, ZDF).

Down-to-earthness is decreasing everywhere, as many of the respondents confirm. Today, young people primarily seek employment with national newspapers and radio stations based in large cities, which currently offer the safest career prospects. This makes it more difficult in all three countries to find journalists who are willing to work in editorial offices outside urban centres. This is as true for the suburbs as it is for the rural areas, with the result that these areas and their communities are also included less and less in the reporting. The decline of local media in Germany, the UK and Sweden also means that fewer and fewer journalists hail from places outside of metropolitan areas. The classic career path from a local to a national medium – the path many of our interviewees themselves once took – doesn’t exist in the same way it used to.

Sabina Rasiwala, Head of Talent at Swedish TV SVT, said, “A lot of them [local journalists] have been fired. [...] But what we see now is it’s actually pretty hard to find good journalists who want to live very far from big cities.” Ian Carter, editorial director of the Kent Media Group has had similar

experiences: “Some of our titles are only a couple of hours from London, but it can be a challenge to recruit in those areas. We are often recruiting from quite a small pool.” Ed Fraser, Managing Editor of Channel 4 News reflected on his own career in this context: “I went straight into journalism at the age of 20, and I worked my way up from local commercial radio through to television. I think you can still do that but probably the route I took is harder to achieve now maybe because there is less local radio news output than there was before other than the BBC.”

Next to character traits, traditional craftsmanship is equally important to many news executives. The basic requirements for every journalist still include research skills and the confident and skilful use of language. Good research skills have always been part of the journalistic trade and are gaining in importance for the very survival of the media. Peter Wolodarski, editor-in-chief of Swedish *Dagens Nyheter*: “Being a great researcher is also very important because we see now that investigative journalism is really driving our subscriptions.” Good linguistic skills are a prerequisite for a successful application, which is emphasised quite often, especially by the heads of journalism programmes. In order to be accepted at a school or university, applicants usually have to go through an admission procedure. This usually includes writing texts in the form of reports and feature stories. In general, confident use of language is very important in journalism and is still considered a core competence.

Andreas Wolfers, Head of Henri-Nannen-Schule in Hamburg, said, “In my opinion, text is the journalistic form in which one can best test the most diverse skills. And the most important one is complexity reduction. Can someone get to the heart of a complex topic in such a way that it fits on half a page? And for that I have to be able to effectively manage language, nuances and intermediate terms.” Writing skills are obviously essential for outlets that start out in print. Peter Wolodarski of *Dagens Nyheter*, said, “I love the kind of journalist who can write. That is always very, very important. And you don’t have to write in the same fashion. So there is not one style; there can be different styles. But I admire and always look for the people who write.” Writing skills are becoming more important – even for broadcasters since their digital products involve a lot more text than the old radio- or TV-only days required.

Lastly, new technical skills are perceived to be a “must-have” for younger-generation journalists. Almost all media companies and institutions now require their applicants to master various media (print, audio, video) and handle digital and social platforms. Accordingly, prospective journalists have a broad spectrum of technical skills that they do not always acquire through training but often already bring with them. Leonhard Ottinger, Managing Director of RTL Journalism School, said, “The experience applicants bring to the table in handling pictures and digital tools has risen significantly.” But technical competencies and communication skills do not always coincide. Ian Carter points to a growing gap: “The number of applications we receive has definitely narrowed and the people that are coming forward tend to be people that have got a lot of technical skills but not necessarily the human skills to be able to talk to people and go and find stories. So that’s changed”.

“The two most important things I look for in a reporter are the ability to have one-to-one conversations with people from all walks of life. And that is something that has really changed over the past few years because people come in to us with lots of technical skills. But because they live their lives on social media, they are absolutely terrified of picking up the telephone and talking to somebody or talking to someone face-to face. They are so used to doing everything via instant messaging or Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or whatever. And, actually, the number of people that can hold a conversation with somebody – it becomes a real challenge for us. They come around literally scared. “What do you mean, I have to call somebody up?” “Well, yeah, you wanna talk to them, you cannot just rely on tweeting them!” And that’s a real challenge for them so we really, really home in on that.”

Ian Carter, Editorial Director, Kent Media Group

The use of technology also leads to an increasing need for specialist knowledge. Demand for data scientists or coders is growing. Editorial teams are hard-pressed to find tech talent as people with both technical and journalistic skills are rare and very much sought-after. In this race, traditional media compete with technology companies like Google, Facebook, or Spotify, to name just a few, which often pay much higher salaries.

This raises the bar for journalism schools as well. On the one hand, they have to teach the traditional journalistic craft (writing, forms of presentation, research); on the other, they need to constantly adapt their curricula to new requirements. It is not always easy to decide which trends are sustainable. Malin Picha Edwardsson, Head of Södertörn Journalism School, said, “The challenge is to make sure we are not falling behind. [...] We want to teach them research in the digital tools, knowing the ethics, how to work with the internet and so on. The latest technology within TV productions, radio productions, podcasts, you name it. All these different ways to do it. Working with social media. It seems to be so much more nowadays that needs to fit into a programme than when we went to school a long time ago.”

The Pool of Applicants

Most interviewees said that finding qualified candidates for reporter jobs was not that much of a challenge. However, it has become more difficult to fill management positions. As a possible reason, some respondents mentioned the desire for a better work-life balance, especially among younger people. The willingness to put work ahead of one’s private life and work towards later rewards is decreasing. Andreas Wolfers, Head of Henri-Nannen-Schule, said, “I can already see that this can lead to them shying away from leadership responsibility, project responsibility. Carrying out larger projects within a certain period of time requires a lot of energy and the ability to suffer. I don’t know whether you can go so far as to say that it changes journalism, that we will find it harder to find good editors-in-chief, good department heads in the future.”

In addition to the difficulty of filling executive positions, many editors-in-chief say that traditional media companies are finding it harder to retain talent, arguing that this is due to the media industry’s declining reputation, increased editorial pressure and unsatisfactory career prospects. Journalists who also possess the coveted technical and cross-media skills are particularly mobile in

their careers. It is often not difficult for them to find more attractive and better paid jobs at media start-ups, corporations such as Google or in PR and corporate communications and publishing.

The career expectations of young people have also changed fundamentally. They are no longer as keen as previous generations to pursue their careers with a single company, but are more likely to change employers or move from a permanent to a freelance position.³ Jo Morrell, managing editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, said, “I think there is a greater expectation that you won’t be in one job with one company for your entire career, and there is the ongoing personal tension between the attractiveness of being freelance versus the attractiveness of being in a staff job. Talented people have so much opportunity, and understandably want to be involved in so many more things than just having one straight career path.” This can, however, also be interpreted as a consequence of the media crisis. Because there are fewer and fewer permanent jobs, many journalists are forced to move from job to job or to work as freelancers.

A Profession for White Elite Children?

Most of the respondents stated that they were far from satisfied with the social and cultural mix of their newsrooms and programmes. Journalism is still a profession for white children from privileged upbringings, with applicants of colour or from migrant or working-class families often being the exception. Henriette Löwisch said, “To be honest, I believe that journalism has always tended to attract the children of so-called ‘highly educated families’, and that is still the case. One of the reasons for this might be that journalism is so text-focused with reading and writing. That’s why I honestly don’t believe that much has changed as far as the social background of journalists is concerned.”

One reason for the lack of diversity is that journalism is often a profession that one has to be able to afford. Rents and living costs are high in the capital cities in particular, especially for new entrants. Wolfgang Krach, editor-in-chief of national newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, said, “We have no problem finding excellently qualified employees. I think what has changed is that only the particularly motivated ones now want to become journalists. Firstly, because career prospects are worse than they were twenty or ten years ago. Secondly, it is the case that our salaries are by no means particularly good, especially not here in Munich, because the cost of living is extremely high. Even though we really do pay collectively agreed wages, it is in many cases extremely difficult to get by on them, especially for young journalists.”

This statement obviously holds true for London in the UK as well, but, for many, financial bottlenecks already begin at university. As Richard Sambrook, Director of the Centre for Journalism at Cardiff University, explains, many media companies have outsourced their journalism training to universities for cost reasons. This, in turn, means that if one wants to become a journalist, one has to be able to afford tuition and living expenses in university cities. Sambrook: “I think the risk is that journalism will become a middle-class profession full of people who have got parents who can afford to put them through university and all the rest of it. Now that’s always been a bit of an issue, but I think at the moment it is worse with student fees, high levels of student debt, a whole range of other social issues.”

³ Another factor in this might be an increase in temporary contracts.

The situation is entirely different in Sweden. None of our interviewees said that a lack of financial resources was an obstacle to career development. As universities do not charge tuition and internships are paid, everybody can theoretically afford to study journalism and become a journalist regardless of their social background. Malin Picha Edwardsson of Södertörn said, “Everybody can start. If you just have good enough grades or you can get in on a practical test. [...] We have paid internships. So they go off for one semester and get a salary. So that’s an important thing.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, Södertörn University is located in one of the disadvantaged suburbs outside of Stockholm, part of the Swedish effort to democratise university education.

The Need for Role Models – And More Contact with Quality Journalism

Journalism runs in the family. This statement doesn’t have to be taken literally, but it holds some truth nonetheless. You can’t be what you can’t see, the saying goes, and students who have never met a journalist in their lives other than on screen often won’t be attracted to the profession. As Katie Lloyd, Development Director at BBC News, said, “When you go into communities where people, nobody in their family, nobody they know, nobody’s friend’s parent is in journalism or media so why would they ever consider that as a career?”

Our interviews with journalism students and journalism trainees have shown that it is precisely those people who are afraid of not “fitting in” who are afraid of applying for traineeships or courses. One student described that she felt very insecure about her natural sciences background during the admission process for a master’s degree in journalism because nobody else had studied anything similar. The application process erects further hurdles, such as when applicants from a foreign culture fail to complete the formalities or feel insecure about what is perceived as appropriate behaviour in an admissions interview.

Bernhard Goodwin, coordinator of the master's degree programme in journalism at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, remembered one case: “She [a candidate] made a formal mistake in her resume, not doing it the way she should have – a classic disadvantage for someone who has no one to go over it with her. Those who have journalists as parents won’t have that happen to them because someone reads through it again and says: No, you have to do it differently. Another [an applicant] played it a bit too cool [during the interview] and then was totally put into the hip hop corner.” Both applicants failed in the first round but were admitted at a later date after the course director had advised and supported them. Both are now successful journalists.

It is often assumed that the desire to become a journalist grows from early contacts with certain media at home. Some of the interviewees wondered how children from families in which no newspapers are read could develop an interest in the news business. What role models for journalism do they have? Sven Gösmann, editor-in-chief of German Press Agency dpa, said, “We have problems explaining to young people what journalism is. If you take a look at the journalism films of recent years: Spotlight, The Post... it’s all about newspapers in the 1970s or 20 years ago. There are no role models for contemporary journalism. There is no Instagram editor as the heroine of a Netflix series.”

The Reputation Problem: “Not an Honourable Profession”

In the eyes of some of the editors we interviewed, another barrier that keeps children from migrant families away from journalism is a lack of appreciation for the profession. This has generally decreased in many societies. On the one hand, the “fake news” debate and increasingly hostile political climate towards the press in many countries have led, among other factors, to a decline in confidence in journalism. On the other hand, economic insecurity, high workloads in editorial offices and online harassment are increasingly triggering doubts about the future of the profession among young people – at least, that is what editors-in-chief fear. Journalism today almost has the reputation of being the “coal miner of the 21st century”, as Sven Gösmann (dpa) put it.

Peter Jonriksson, Head of the Journalism School of Mid Sweden University, said: “The news industry itself is communicating that everything is tough now. The industry itself is saying that they have to let so and so many people go. And also the Union – the journalist union is talking a lot about how many journalists are being let go right now.”

The majority of our respondents assumed that journalism does not offer attractive career prospects, especially for people with a family history of migration or a minority background. In general, news executives and school heads seem to be convinced that the profession does not have a great reputation among immigrants. They believe that parents, in particular, wish for a more respectable and secure profession for their children and advise them against it. However, those who chose journalism in the face of family resistance tend to be particularly passionate. Suzanne Franks, Head of the Journalism Programme at London City University, said, “I think it’s also sometimes a family thing. Parents from certain kinds of, for example, poorer immigrant backgrounds don’t regard this as a respectable and reliable way to make a living. We have occasionally had students who did it despite opposition from their parents who wanted them to be accountants or engineers. Sometimes they had done a year of something else and hated it and then persuaded their parents.”

So in many respects one could speak of journalism as a closed circle. Children from affluent families are more likely to be able to afford joining a profession that requires much idealism but offers a lower income and less security than other professions. Socially less privileged people are left out. The bourgeois-intellectual milieu is also most likely to teach the social and cultural skills that editors-in-chief value, such as linguistic eloquence, a general “canonical” education, the ability to project intellectuality and self-confidence. The decline of local media in many places also means that journalism is increasingly concentrated in the cities, where only people with a corresponding financial background can afford the high rents and living costs. It is therefore not easy for migrants or socially less privileged people to enter the inner circle of journalism. Those who make it against all obstacles are often particularly capable and highly motivated.

The Students’ Perspective: Learn and Discover

The students’ motivations, desires and interests for the most part matched the requirements of journalism schools and newsrooms. Most of the focus group participants and survey respondents (we only led groups in Germany and conducted surveys in Sweden and Germany) had quite realistic expectations about their professional future. A general curiosity, the desire to learn about the world, to be creative and to uncover and point out what is wrong in society were mentioned frequently. An

interest in current affairs and politics was quoted, along with the desire to contribute to democracy by holding power to account. Only a few saw themselves as activists in the sense that they wanted to improve the world.

FIGURE 1 Students' primary motives to become journalists



People were asked to name the reasons why they wanted to become journalists and could answer freely. Answers were coded into categories that were used to create the word cloud.

We also asked what they thought journalists needed for the job. The word cloud in Figure 2 shows that they quite strongly agree on very basic competences such as critical thinking (“kritisches Denken”), general knowledge (“Allgemeinbildung”, “Allgemeinwissen”), honesty (“Ehrlichkeit”), accuracy (“Sorgfalt” und “Genauigkeit”) but also empathy (“Empathie”), courage (“Mut”) and resilience (“Belastbarkeit”, “Ausdauer”). The language competency required by the editors was often mentioned, and its importance was widely accepted by students.

FIGURE 2 What competencies journalists need to have



People were asked which are the three most important competencies journalists need to have these days. Answers were not coded into further categories for this word cloud.

As assumed, the journalism students expressed high idealism but low expectations about financial gains. Several students said they did not expect to end up unemployed – job prospects seem to be

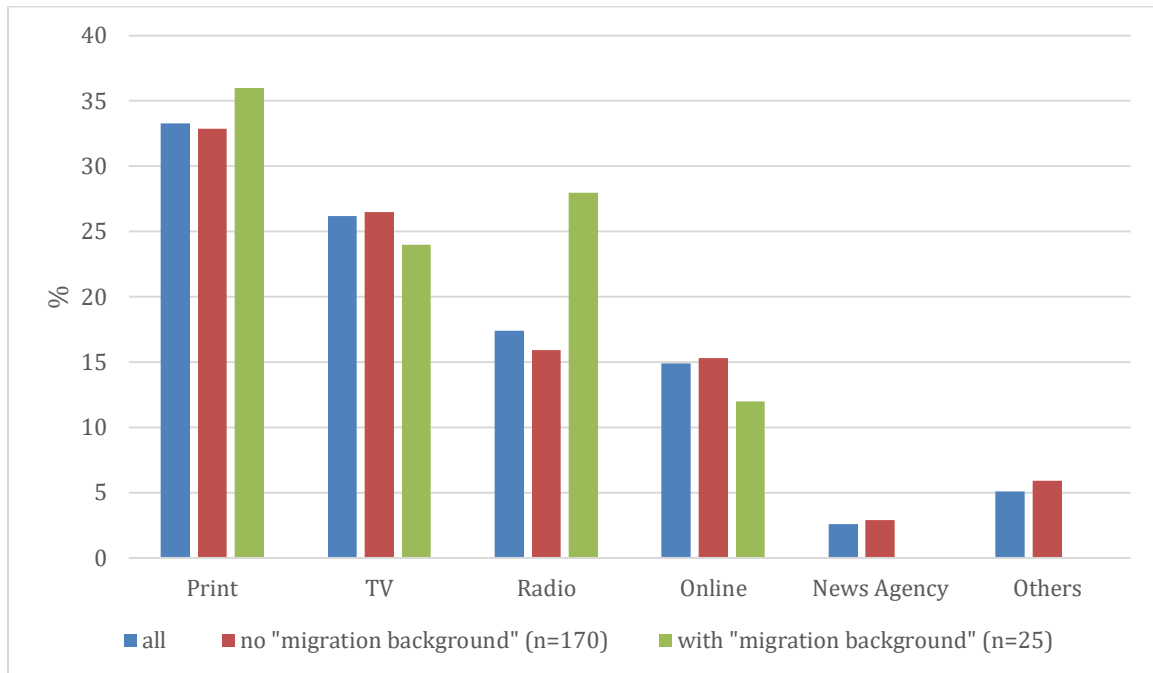
decent after having landed a spot at a prestigious programme. They were, however, worried about salaries and unstable job constellations. These aspects were also expressed as the top fears in the survey. Some of them had had experience with low-paid freelance work. They regarded the dismal financial prospects as a threat to journalistic independence since some might be more receptive to offers by third parties, as one student explained:

“I would like to return to the concept that someone else has already mentioned: independence. It is important that we journalists report independently. I believe that this goes along with the question of whether you can still afford journalism today, and I see it as a problem. I’ve been watching a documentary over the last few days about popular election campaigns for presidencies in the US. Of course, election campaigns are always a bit dirty, and you try to dig up something about the other, which has often been an opportunity for journalists who learned something about the other side that could possibly be decisive for the election campaign. They can obviously sell this information dearly to the other party. [...] That may be tempting because you can make a lot of money in one fell swoop. On the other hand, that is no longer independent reporting, which raises the question of whether we are able to stay independent if we work for the salaries we work for.”

A general fear of traditional media’s loss of relevance could be detected in both the survey and the group discussions. It was perceived by the respondents and participants as a threat to their personal prospects and to the democratic function of quality journalism.

Many criticised the overall working conditions in journalism and were worried about the compatibility of their work, private and family lives. Several people emphasised in the surveys that they feared the decline of print journalism. Apparently, the young generation is still attuned to the old genres: One third of them aims to work in print media, followed by TV, radio and online. A couple of respondents chose the category “other” and explicitly mentioned that they wanted to work as cross-media journalists (Figure 3). A higher percentage of students from immigrant families wanted to engage in radio journalism while the share of people who wanted to do print was slightly higher.⁴ Interestingly, they seemed to be less attracted to being on TV, as TV stations are keen to show “different faces” – is this a coincidence or do they want to avoid being “token migrants”?

⁴ It is, of course, difficult to compare both groups since we only have 25 people from immigrant families who answered this question compared to 170 not from immigrant families. However, we decided to present the comparison nonetheless to give readers an indication.

FIGURE 3 Preferred media for future work

Question "Which media do you want to work for in the future", relative values (N=195)

Two thirds of our respondents were female. This coincided with the perception of our interviewees from newsrooms and journalism programmes. As expected, the students were very homogenous in education and background. 192 of 195 respondents had "Abitur" (the German university entrance qualification); the others had "Fachhochschulreife" (entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences). There were 26 students (13 percent) in our sample who had at least one parent born outside of Germany and thus would be counted as coming from an immigrant family. This is more than the average in today's German newsrooms although it should be noted that an "immigrant family" could mean that one parent is from Austria, for example.

The political affiliation of the students confirmed the view that journalists are more likely to be politically left-leaning. We asked about their political attitudes on a scale from 1 (very left) to 7 (very right). The average outcome was 2.81. Seven people indicated that they see themselves as very left-wing (1) while only one person answered with a 6 and ten people with 5. All others who answered this question (n=192) indicated that they were centrist or skewed to the left. It should be mentioned again that our survey is not representative and, at best, can only serve as an indication of more general trends.

Quo Vadis Journalism?

“Something that worries me is that journalism is being commercialized in a way that it doesn't honor the journalistic core values. I mean students who look at this type of like clickbait thing - if people in general think that this is journalism why would anyone want to be in this business? So I think that the news industry and journalism business have to prove themselves worthy of the attention from young people and right now they are not doing a real great job of this. [...] You have like two different development trends. You have one which is the commercialized side of it which is the big bulk of journalism that is presented very fast and very shallow with clickbait and editors looking at user data for reach rather than actual impact in society. That's the bad side of it. Then you have the good side of it. Investigative reporting is getting better all the time, and digital storytelling is constantly developing. I mean when you look at cross border journalism. Like the things like ICJ - if you know them?”

Peter Jonriksson, Programme Manager, Mid Sweden University Sundsvall

“Technology has become such a sprawling issue. What do I publish, how do I publish it, and for what platform? What app do I need to do that? What does the Facebook algorithm do with my news and newsfeed? How do I react as a publisher and broadcaster to big data and artificial intelligence and all these issues as well as robot journalism and so on and so forth? So there are hundreds of issues. What do we as journalists have to react to? Which of these issues do we have to teach journalism students and which ones can we gloss over? And how extensively should we cover them? There is a danger that we will constantly have to be thinking about what lecturers, technologies and platforms we work on, and how we work on them. So we talk a lot about technology, about forms of mediation and presentation, and perhaps we lose sight of the fact that we must always keep the discussion alive: What does it mean to be a journalist? What is our actual mission? How do we approach complex topics? What is our attitude? How do we handle opinion if it is allowed, if it is wanted? What do readers expect from us in terms of content quality and orientation? Because of the many technological challenges, as I said, you might run a bit of a risk of not paying enough attention to these issues.”

Leonhard Ottinger, Managing Director, RTL-Journalistenschule

“So my opinion has been for a long time that you will not be successful in this business if you're not successful in journalism. And no matter if you're a local newspaper or a national brand. You need to be successful with your journalism. And then you need all these new things and a great website and a great app and great digital presentation, great sort of news kind of storytelling. Not only focused on print. All of that is really important. But the basis of the business is still journalism. And if you lose sight of that, then you will probably fail with the other things as well.”

Peter Wolodarski, Editor-in-Chief, Dagens Nyheter

The Quest for Diversity

Why Different Perspectives Matter

Diversity, or the lack thereof, hasn’t been much of an issue in newsrooms until very recently. This is what our interviews revealed. Olle Zachrisson, Head of News and Current Affairs at Sveriges Radio, is outspoken about the state of diversity in the media organisations in his country: “It is generally very poor. There has been so much focus on digital transformation in recent years, the question of diversity has had to stand aside.” When talent had been recruited, then it was all about digital talent. Before joining the broadcaster, Zachrisson had worked in print media for many years. The situation in public service media was a bit better, but not good enough, he said. Zachrisson: “Maybe newsrooms are paying more attention to diversity now that the newspapers are bouncing back up again because of digital subscriptions.”

And diversity is complex. It can be defined in terms of social background, ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation, but also as different life experiences, upbringings and ways of looking at the world. In short, what counts as diverse is, to some extent, always in the eye of the beholder. Consequently, how newsrooms see diversity can differ, as can the reasons why they consider it important to be diverse. “What we have a hard time doing is making sure that we are bringing diversity of thought into the organisation”, one managing editor said. Very often, diversity from a newsroom’s perspective is about better access to those sources, cultural environments and communities the regular white academic journalist would not be able to get to at the same speed. “When we hire someone, we look at their networks. Do they have networks that add value?” Anne Lagercrantz said.

Yet diversity, as many of our interviewees see it, is not solely about improving stories but also about representation. “We have to reflect Sweden as a whole. Sweden has changed quite a bit, but we haven’t at the same pace,” as Anne Lagercrantz put it. Richard Sambrook, head of the journalism programme at Cardiff University feels the same way: “If you go into a classroom and see 29 white middle-class faces and one Asian face, you think, well, this does not reflect the society they’re reporting on. It can’t be right. And the same happens when you’re going to a professional newsroom. Quite often, that is what you see. It feels wrong. Journalism of all activities needs to reflect the society it’s reporting on, and it needs to be in touch with society.”

There is always confirmation bias at play when interviewees know the research topic. Nevertheless, the willingness to respond at length as well as the thoughtfulness the participants showed during our interviews demonstrated one common theme: Virtually everyone regards diversity as an important challenge and something they have to improve on. This applied to the diversity of staff at their organisation and to the diversity of media content. And it was seen as a rather broad concept. As Joanna Webster, Managing Editor Strategy and Operations EMEA at the news agency Reuters, said, “We have to embrace diversity of thought, of style, of experience, of culture, race, colour, gender, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, veteran status – you name it.”

When talking about diversity, our interviewees spoke about gender and ethnic origin as well as social class, regional background or political preferences. Sometimes they introduced additional aspects such as sexual orientation, age or disability. Such dimensions can also be derived from national laws against discrimination. Most interviewees seemed to have a rather broad understanding of diversity that corresponds to their notion of an increasingly complex society in which diversity and multiculturalism are not only a matter of a few ethnically or religiously defined groups and group identities, but also a matter of individual identities, lifestyles and beliefs and of all kinds of combinations and overlaps of these different identities and affiliations.

The moral concepts of equal opportunity and recognition were not discussed explicitly in the interviews. Diversity was primarily discussed as a matter of democratic representation. The assumption was that as societies got more diverse, newsrooms and the content they produced had to reflect this diversity; if not, they wouldn’t fulfil their democratic function, wouldn’t be trusted and would lose audience share. This view was widely shared in media organisations in Germany, Sweden and the UK. By hiring journalists from diverse backgrounds, newsrooms aimed to become less elitist and less encapsulated in their own bubble. Many feared that journalism was increasingly becoming a homogeneous profession with little to no connection to the general population. This also has an economic downside: If audiences don’t feel represented, they might not be willing to pay for journalism by subscribing to a publication or endorsing public broadcasters’ license fees.

Sven Gösmann, editor-in-chief of the German Press Agency dpa, articulated this clearly: “Journalism has evolved from a profession that helped you climb the social ladder to one for children of the academic elite. [...] All the German newsrooms I know are very homogeneous. The only woman who wears a headscarf in the dpa offices is the cleaner. I once said I’d prefer to have more Marzahn [a mostly working-class district in Berlin] and less Mitte [an upper-middle-class district of Berlin] in my staff. What I meant was, I wish we had more people who don’t view spending 3000 euros for one week of skiing as an ordinary thing but rather discuss this within their families, maybe save for it. [...] This kind of experience is missing. That means we are removed from a number of societal debates.”

Likewise, Ian Carter (Kent Media Group) argued, “I do think it is a challenge that you get fewer and fewer working-class journalists or indeed people that represent their own communities, be that ethnicity or any other kind of criteria. So I do think it is becoming far more of a middle-class profession, which is something I've always tried to fight against.”

Other interviewees expressed similar thoughts. Many expressed the hope that staff diversity would help mirror what is happening in their communities and prevent newsrooms from missing out on important developments, problems, perspectives and opinions in society. Diversity would also provide better access to specific groups, be they ethnic communities, the working poor or groups with special interests and hobbies.

Many emphasised the importance of providing role models. It was often argued that names in bylines or TV personalities from diverse backgrounds could contribute to the image of the media organisation. Our participants also reasoned that it could have an impact on the audience’s views about the particular brand and its coverage of issues. They also hoped that it would affect young people’s career considerations.

As Joanna Webster (Reuters) put it, “I don't think it's just an issue of fairness. I think it impacts our ability to create world-class journalism. It impacts our access to stories; it impacts our ability to reflect the world in creative ways. And also, I think it impacts our ability to attract and retain talent. If individuals come into a newsroom and don't see diverse groups of people, it would be an unattractive place for people to work.” Wolfgang Krach, editor-in-chief of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, commented on this in the context of having too few ethnic minority applicants: “Maybe people with a family history of immigration apply predominantly where they see others from immigrant backgrounds. And we don't have many in our newsroom. So maybe that's why they don't feel encouraged to apply.”

Heads of journalism schools were also aware of this issue. They see it as a challenge for the composition of their faculty. Suzanne Franks, head of the journalism school at City University of London, said, “Getting a sufficiently diverse cohort of teachers to teach journalism – that's a problem. I'm very aware of that in terms of recruiting staff. We are trying to maximise diversity where possible and recruit from the widest possible pool.”

Ian Carter, editorial director of the Kent Media Groups, referred to a “vicious circle” when not only is the newsroom too homogeneous, but the less educated and well-off audiences remain silent while the privileged make themselves heard. “I used to edit newspapers in Croydon and in South London, which are obviously massively diverse areas. We did have to make conscious efforts to ensure that the balance was right. [...] So I think it's slightly chicken and egg. If people that come to us with their stories tend to be from that more traditional, less diverse background, they are the ones getting covered because they are the ones who might phone up and say ‘We have an event at our school. Please do come and cover it.’”

There are a number of events and developments that interviewees mentioned when they were asked about turning points and eye-openers regarding diversity in newsrooms. According to them, the unforeseen outcome of the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election victory, or, more recently, the yellow vest movement in France, triggered discussions about newsrooms losing touch with parts of the population. Our interviewees said that for a number of important events and social developments, familiarity with diversity issues would be helpful or even necessary in order to fully capture the whole picture.

Several examples illustrate this point. In the UK, the Grenfell Tower disaster – a devastating fire in a council high rise towering over the affluent North Kensington borough in London – showed that the public often has too little knowledge about what is going on in certain communities and the challenges – and in the Grenfell case, the discrimination – they face. “Grenfell speaks to us all about our own lack of diversity and capacity to reach into the swaths of western society with whom we have no connection,” Channel 4 News TV presenter Jon Snow wrote in a powerful piece for *The Guardian* (Snow, 2017) following the catastrophe. Polly Curtis, former editor-in-chief of Huffington Post UK, mentioned the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, which was accompanied by (occasionally racist) discussions about her origins: “It was an incredible moment for diversity in Britain. And I had no one in the newsroom who could confidently write about that because of a lack of diversity in my team. We were already working to change that, but that moment accelerated our efforts.”

Some interviewees reported positive experiences not linked to concrete topics. Joanna Webster (Reuters) remembered how she once built a very diverse team from scratch: "I felt like we were acting like a start-up in a large organisation," she said and highlighted an "ability to change quickly". In this example, diversity is related to creativity and vibrancy. Others have pointed to their experience of a lack of diversity in news organisations, such as Ian Carter (Kent Media), who himself comes from a working-class background: "I spent a couple of years working at the BBC, and it was notable that all my colleagues there were from very similar backgrounds. Quite a lot of Oxbridge education. Very few people coming through the state course system."

When it comes to ideologies and political views, it is unclear how far media organisations and editors-in-chief would go to achieve more diversity. In public service broadcasting, political balance is important. In contrast, private media organisations typically follow editorial lines and target audiences that have certain political leanings. Consequently, their staff tends to be more or less politically homogeneous, too, and does not necessarily tolerate "excessive" diversity when it comes to commentary or representation of dissenting opinions and perspectives.

Moreover, calls for more political and social diversity are quickly confronted with a paradox: Some groups and opinion leaders on the conservative or right-wing side of the ideological spectrum are opposed to concepts of diversity. What happens when journalists fighting diversity efforts enter a newsroom – and make such views clear in their pieces? Interestingly, this paradox and the potential conflicts in newsrooms with regard to political orientation were rarely addressed by the interviewees. Could this expressed desire for political diversity be just lip service? Paul Clarkson, managing editor of the tabloid *The Sun*, pointed this out as a challenge for his newsrooms.

Are Journalists on the Left?

„There was one big study and it turns out that in Sweden in that time journalists are overrepresented as socialists and green. And then of course the alternative media has made a great fuzz about this. But what they don't talk about is a second study that studied if journalists' personal political conviction also make an impact on their actual news work, and they found no evidence that this was a problem. And in fact, journalists tend to separate personal views from their professional work. But there is a discussion, there is criticism that says all journalists, they live in downtown Stockholm and they never see this part of the country for instance. They don't go outside the office anymore. They only sit and look at Twitter [...] They think journalists are something else than what they are, but that is also a very populist view. I am working class. That's where I come from and I know a lot of other journalists with the same type of background. [...] I think some people don't trust that journalists are doing their best to cover the issues that they feel are important. And then there is the other side of the coin. What do they want us to cover? Well, the same people who say this - they would like us to write about why the immigrants are going to turn Sweden into shit. And as long as we don't call immigrants the biggest problem that we have [...] they don't believe us.“

Peter Jonriksson, Programme Manager, Mid Sweden University Sundsvall

Desperately Seeking a Minority Background

Many interviewees explicitly articulated the idea that newsrooms would benefit from recruiting young journalists with a migrant or ethnic minority background. This is perceived as a big challenge in Germany, even in a city like Berlin where many immigrants and their children and grandchildren live. This is partly due to conflicting priorities. On the one hand, editors-in-chief, especially those of text-oriented media, want their staff to have very good German skills – something, they say, applicants with these backgrounds sometimes lack. On the other, they seek candidates with intercultural competence and additional language skills that enable them to reach out to specific groups and minorities. According to our interviewees, this is a balancing act, especially in Sweden and Germany.

Jochen Arntz (*Berliner Zeitung*) talked about problems caused by a lack of diversity: “We face that issue every day. We would like to know: What do people talk about in certain coffeehouses in Kreuzberg (location of the headquarters)? What do they talk about in mosques? What do local Turkish families talk about when Erdogan comes here? [...] And then we realise that we need help.” Peter Frey, editor-in-chief of German public broadcaster ZDF, said, “We don’t have enough people of Turkish or Arab origin who speak the language and are at home in these cultures. And who can understand and translate all the curiosities, characteristics and conflicts of these communities.”

Language, or the mastery of it, is mentioned as the number one impediment for hiring ethnic minorities, but it also frequently brought up in the context of applicants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Underdeveloped language skills are seen as a major obstacle in Sweden and Germany. Writing skills are particularly important. As Henriette Löwisch (DJS, Munich) said, “How do you get out of this vicious circle that children from highly educated family backgrounds are often more skilled in using language? What do I do if someone can’t spell, can’t construct a proper sentence?” This was not mentioned as that much of a challenge in the UK, where racism and classism are more of a problem than a lack of English skills.

Peter Jonriksson, head of the journalism school in Sundsvall, provided a somewhat different perspective on the language challenge: “I think the biggest problem is that if you are a journalist coming from Jordan or Pakistan, your biggest problem is not your poor language. Your biggest problem is that you don’t understand the media system, you don’t understand the press traditions and you don’t understand transparency laws. You come from a country where the free press is unknown. Journalists there are either spokespersons for the government or they are activists. And the traditional Western journalist is neither of these two things. We try to find the objective stance. [...] You have to teach people how to write good Swedish. But that can always be fixed. [...] Editors do this every day. But to function as a reporter, you have to know how to do it. And you have to know the ethics and you have to know the stance you need to be a journalist in Sweden.”

Women on the Move – But Not Necessarily on the Way Up

It is no problem these days to find and hire highly qualified women. More women are flocking to the profession, particularly as it gets less attractive for men. In some journalism schools, women are already in the majority and sometimes the strongest candidates. Hendrik Brandt, editor-in-chief of *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* (HAZ), said, “To be honest, currently I’d like to see more men

apply. We are tilting hugely toward the female side.” Henriette Löwisch of the German Journalism School confirmed the numerical observation: “Some explain this by saying that men go into professions where you earn more and that you can't earn enough in journalism. I don't know if that's really true. It is indeed the case that we have more women than men. And also more and more female applicants than male applicants.”

Strikingly, gender balance isn't even mentioned any longer by many interviewees when asked about diversity although figures show that many news organisations are still predominantly male, especially in management. However, the gender pay gap was mentioned frequently as a big challenge. While many thought that change would be only a matter of time for women, they assumed that growing attention to diversity in a broader sense could cause new conflicts and result in sticky problems. For example, male candidates from working-class families will most certainly compete with middle-class female candidates, or male job seekers of colour with white female applicants. Such (possible) conflicts were rarely addressed by the interviewees, and it is an open question how the news industry will handle them.

Where is the Working Class?

The absence of the working-class perspective was mentioned in all three countries and seems to be especially pressing in the UK, where journalism is very much Oxford/Cambridge territory. Paul Clarkson, managing editor of *The Sun*, argued, “I think there are people we haven't reached yet, or we haven't reached in great enough numbers.[...]This should even include the white working class. People who are probably the most underprivileged people in some communities. That they feel they have an opportunity to make it here, and we're trying new ways to reach those kinds of people, too.” Obviously, a tabloid like *The Sun* is particularly dependent on these voices. As some interviewees pointed out, candidates who come from poorer families cannot afford expensive cities like London or Munich, the homes of big media organisations. They depend on financial support, often from their family, early in their career.

Some interviewees highlighted that talent is not necessarily correlated with a university education, but it is harder to find good candidates without degrees. “We're missing that passionate individual that maybe doesn't want to go to university or doesn't have the means to. And I don't know how to find them,” said Joanna Webster (Reuters). *The Sun* and others have put up an apprenticeship scheme that is supposed to help those who cannot not afford tuition fees. The training and a living wage are paid for by the media company. Most media organisations in Germany already have such apprenticeship programmes (“Volontariat”). But the people admitted to these programmes in Germany have usually already earned a university degree (which was less common in the 1950s to 1980s but is almost standard now). German universities do not charge tuition, but recruiting persons from working-class families is a big challenge in Germany, too.

Usually, editors don't keep quantitative data on social backgrounds because it is tricky and a matter of privacy. Katie Lloyd, BBC Development Director, reflected on this: “Assumptions are made of people's social class by the way they sound or look rather than actually what their background is. And often when you then ask, you'll find somebody very senior who happens to have gone to a state comprehensive. [...] So I think we have to be quite careful with these big assumptions that are made.

[...] That being said, we know journalism is not attracting, recruiting or retaining enough people from socially diverse backgrounds and we have a lot to do to ensure there is more diversity of background and perspective in the newsroom.”

The interviewees rarely touched upon the dynamics of socialisation in the profession: As soon as social climbers reach a certain status, they may be overly eager to shed their roots. And they might not want to be seen as “experts” for certain social milieus. In this context, it would be interesting to see how journalists with diverse backgrounds, for example ethnic minority backgrounds, view themselves and their experiences in newsrooms – a perspective we could not provide within the scope of this research. Are they passionate about covering topics that are related to their background, or do they rather feel typecast into it? Ed Fraser, Managing Editor at Channel 4 News, made this point: “We had a journalist who worked for us who specialised in extremism. Now, it was an area of interest to him and he had contacts nobody else could access. [...] But we quite quickly became aware that we didn’t want to typecast him as the journalist who just did extremism.” Andreas Wolfers, head of Germany’s Henri-Nannen-Schule, remembered a discussion with one of his students who had parents from Turkey. She told him she did not want to be a “Türkentussi” (“Turkish chick”), covering topics related to Turks all the time. Wolfers said he nevertheless recommended that the student used her special expertise as a ticket to get in: “I told her using that expertise now doesn’t mean you will have this label for the rest of your life.”

Meet the Urban Class or “Where Have all the Villagers Gone?”

Regardless of social and ethnic background, another emerging challenge is the dearth of journalists with a rural background due to the floundering of local journalism. Jo Morrell (*The Telegraph*) said, “regional diversity is potentially one of the biggest challenges for this generation, I worry we’ve gone backwards on mobility”. There are several aspects to this issue: First, the talent pipeline is broken. Young journalists used to start at local papers and work their way up to national brands. This no longer works smoothly due to declining training opportunities and low income. Second, young people with moderate salaries have a hard time affording housing and living expenses in costly metropolitan areas like London and Munich if they are not backed by family resources. This results in the class problem.

The third and most important aspect is groupthink: Journalists’ coverage is far too focused on these cities and misses out on the mindset and perspectives of people who live in smaller towns and villages. Newsrooms populated by university graduates and urbanites who do not understand life elsewhere is mentioned as a diversity challenge in all three countries. Sven Gösmann (dpa) pointed out that many journalists were “Provinzflüchtler” (refugees from provincial backwaters) who had been raised in smaller towns but couldn’t wait to get away from there and now look down on those who stayed put.

Joanna Webster, managing editor of Reuters, discussed reasons and impact: “I think one of the biggest problems is the demise of the regional press. That’s where a lot of young talented journalists would start out often. [...] There they got a really good foundation in journalism, an understanding how to find and chase a story and cultivate a source. And with many of those papers going out of business, where do these people go? [...] This lack of local knowledge was reflected in the Brexit

coverage ahead of the Brexit vote. It was so London-centric that it did not capture what was actually going on regionally. And I think a lot of organisations realised that, but obviously too late.”

The election of Donald Trump in the US and the Brexit vote that surprised many journalists in urban newsrooms made the lack of a rural perspective blatantly clear. Many news outlets took action in response. Ed Fraser (Channel 4) said, “After Brexit, and like most of the media we didn’t identify that Brexit was actually going to happen, we proactively decided to get more journalists outside of the London bubble, outside of the metropolitan elite. We opened bureaus in Glasgow, and we opened a bureau in Cardiff, and we are going to move staff to Leeds. We’ve proactively tried to get much more out of London and get those viewpoints [...] reflected in the programme, and we’ve worked quite hard at that.”

Peter Frey (ZDF) referred to the refugee situation in Germany as a turning point: “The discussion about refugees led to a debate about the legitimacy of public service broadcasting, and we understood that we have to reach out to our audiences better. [...]. Reporting alone isn’t enough; we need to be there.” Michael Wulf, editor-in-chief of German private TV station RTL, claimed that audiences had less tolerance for being patronised than they used to: “Journalists have a tendency to believe they know what other people want. And maybe there were times when that would have worked. It doesn’t work any longer. Today’s journalists live in big cities and are relatively well paid. And they think that everybody is roughly in the same situation. But that isn’t the case.”

From Awareness to Action

Most interviewees think that the attempts to achieve more diversity are still in their infancy. Polly Curtis (formerly HuffPost UK) said, “It’s a slow process, but awareness is definitely there. I don’t know a newsroom that isn’t trying to do something about this.” Most interviewees were self-critical but not convinced that their competitors were much better at it. In Germany, some mentioned the national weekly newspaper “DIE ZEIT” as a frontrunner of newsroom diversity that devoted considerable resources to hiring diverse talent. In the United Kingdom, the BBC and *The Guardian* were brought up by some of our interviewees as organisations who seemed to have done a lot to foster and increase diversity.

The pressure is felt more urgently in broadcasting than in text-driven organisations because a lack of diversity is most visible/audible on air. This might be one reason why public broadcasters are often mentioned as being at the forefront of diversity efforts. Plus, larger organisations usually have more resources and a lot of turnover so they are able to systematically improve their level of staff diversity. Other organisations struggle with sparse resources and small turnover. Even some public broadcasters find it difficult to change as quickly as they would like to. Ed Fraser, managing editor of Channel 4 News, the news programme of the UK’s other public broadcaster, Channel 4, said, “We’ve got quite a good ratio of ethnic diversity within our news organisation. We work hard at that. I think our biggest challenge is we have a certain number of posts, and people who come to Channel 4 News tend to stay at Channel 4 News for a long time. It’s a good place to work; they get exposed to quite a lot of different kinds of journalism here. So they can stick around. We don’t have a big turnover which means those valuable staff positions are very rare. You may have one job to give out,

and you’ve got potentially ten talented journalists you would like to give it to. And that’s the challenge for us.”

BBC News monitors diversity intensely. Their Development Director Katie Lloyd:

“We’re quite transparent about our numbers and we also have very specific targets for 2020. Our targets are 50% of women in the workforce and in leadership roles, 15% BAME in leadership and the workforce, 8% disability in leadership and the workforce, and 8% LGBT. Women in leadership was a big focus for us when I first joined because also we had such a big pipeline of women in the organisation and yet, like in many other organisations, there was drop-off at the very top. In our senior management roles it was 26% when I joined four years ago. Now we have 45%. We are on track to meet our targets but there is still more work to do at leadership level in terms of BAME and disability. But it’s not just about numbers, and I don’t like to just approach it by numbers, it is also about culture.”

Pressure groups like the German “Neue Deutsche Medienmacher” keep the issue on the agenda. Still, many interviewees see little progress being made. Sven Gösmann (dpa) said, “We have talked about diversity for many years, but we don’t live it.” This is a concern that was also raised by some journalism students and participants of a journalism trainee programme at a public broadcaster in Germany. According to them, it is one thing to have a few hosts and presenters whose ethnic background is visible. It is something else entirely to look at the rest of the newsroom and determine whether diversity is a natural part of coverage, journalistic routines and the news agenda.

But Do They Act? Students’ Experiences

Sven Gösmann seems to have a point. While we lack data for Sweden and the United Kingdom, our focus group discussions in Germany revealed that journalism students don’t see German newsrooms as diverse. They find journalists not to be representative of society and criticise their lack of sensitivity and access to certain topics. One student emphasised this by pointing to her own East German origins: “Throughout my young career I haven’t met anybody from East Germany who is my age. I was the only one at my journalism school, now I’m the only one again. I realise that these topics are always treated from a West German perspective. I wouldn’t have a pure East German perspective myself because I was born after 1990. But I believe this issue crops up in many other areas, such as [the representation of] working-class families or people from immigrant families.”

When the groups reflected on reasons for the lack of diversity within journalism, two main aspects were identified. Most importantly, students saw the journalistic habitus as a deterrent for potential candidates. One student called it “journalistische Wissensarroganz”, a term that refers to quite traditional knowledge that journalists ought to have, but that comes with a lack of understanding and respect for different kinds of knowledge that people with different backgrounds might bring to the table. The student added that he was raised by an Arab father who couldn’t teach him Goethe or German proverbs. This problem of the “journalistic habitus” was mentioned a couple of times. “There are so many invisible hurdles. Including for people from less affluent households and non-university-educated households. It is not just a question of money; it’s also a question of habitus, other resources, networks.”

In one group discussion, participants reflected upon the general education system in Germany and the challenge for students from non-university-educated households to enter higher levels of education in the first place – which is often still a prerequisite for a career in journalism. Well-educated aspiring journalists may even harbour prejudices about potential colleagues from social milieus other than their own: “Someone who is from Marzahn [a largely low-income district of Berlin] might not be that popular. That’s a reflection of our own stereotypes”, one student remarked.

The other main obstacle our discussants mentioned was the path into the profession. Many participants explained that they had started out early with unpaid internships. They perceived the field as highly competitive. To get a foot in the door, an “education before education” was an unspoken requirement, they felt. They also observed a habitus problem with well-known journalism schools: Several students reported that they were almost deterred from handing in their applications since they were not sure if they would fit in.

The students and early-career journalists in our focus groups did not observe any serious efforts, whether among their institutions or among media businesses, to reach out to people with diverse backgrounds. One student said, “I believe neither the journalism schools nor the publishers or broadcasters actively pitch for people from different social backgrounds who, let me put it this way, did not have that much support when they were young.”

Students complained that commitments to diversity were mostly lip service. Many participants of the group discussions felt that diversity ended as soon as the candidate was hired. Afterwards, there was no room for real diversity. Working routines and pressure opened no opportunities to venture out into different directions than the ones indicated by editorial standards. All aspects of diversity were swallowed by the system. “Even if there was diversity, daily routines would cancel it out because everything is about structures, routines and happens in tightly defined frameworks. There is no room for it. [...] Diversity is swallowed by the system because someone works their shift how the shift has to be worked no matter what your cultural background may be,” as one student explained.

Discussions in newsrooms reflected the lowest common denominator, participants said, because content is supposed to target mainstream audiences. Differences were either washed away or outsourced. The pressure to adapt was tremendous. “It will be harder for you if you come from an immigrant background. Because you have known since childhood that it is important to blend in.” Another student suspected that young people with an immigrant family history who wanted to express themselves preferred to do so on social media instead of traditional media. “I have the impression they would much rather use Twitter a lot or YouTube and other platforms and do projects.”

Participants also criticised broadcasters for tokenism. Yes, there were more diverse faces on TV, they said, and this might be important when it came to having role models and increased visibility. However, several students didn’t think there was an impact behind the camera. One student said, “Diversity is shown on air, demonstrated to the outside world. Look, we have Turkish presenters! Look, we have Arabic presenters! Sorry, I think that’s fake.” The power remained elsewhere, they observed. “We have a female presenter who doesn’t look entirely German, and then – sorry, this

sounds bad – a managing editor who is older than 60, well-established, always male. That’s how it has been in every newsroom I have visited.”

Students were also wary of positive discrimination. If someone felt they were chosen because of their background, they might feel second-class, many students suspected. Nevertheless, they looked at real diversity as an opportunity and normatively desirable. One student said, “This is the only way to escape the old routines, create new formats, new approaches, new ideas, brainstorm and initiate new processes. [...] In these times of dwindling audiences and circulation numbers you have to try out many new things. Everyone brings a different background to the table.”

Diversity is still complex, in particular when applied to intersectionality. Two journalists – both from middle-class families, but one of them from an immigrant family – might be more alike than a non-immigrant and one from a working-class family, students suspected. Observations like these describe the challenges in implementing diversity.

Effects of Newsroom Diversity on Reporting

“There was a murder of a young black model in South London. And Linda Adey, a reporter, was asked to cover that story. As it turned out that, actually, she knows that community incredibly well, she was able to talk to his family and friends in a way somebody else might not have been able to. The way she told that story was different as she had in-depth knowledge and insights into the community and ensured their perspectives were really well represented. The feedback we got from the community was really positive. And it was a black community in London who don't always feel the BBC represents them, and Linda, a young black woman from London was able to bring that to the story.”

Katie Lloyd, Development Director, BBC News

“A younger reporter, Ashley John-Baptiste, who grew up in care did a story about young people in care and how few of them are getting into university. And again, I’m not saying it's always about bringing your personal perspective because it's not, but he was able to bring a certain depth and expertise to that because of his understanding for young people in care that not everybody would have been able to. It was a different way of telling the story and that cuts through with our audiences.”

Katie Lloyd, Development Director, BBC News

“When we mix the newsroom with people from different backgrounds more, then the journalism tends to become better. So we don't do it to be politically correct. We do it because we want better news. And we have so many examples of that. There was this Swedish guy who had been arrested in relation to the Brussels terror attack. [...] We had one woman from our Arabic service who said, ‘Well, you know my cousins used to play football with that guy.’ So she put herself on a plane, went down to Malmö, and in one day she had a fantastic interviews with that guy's brother, two interviews with women worried about radicalization in their community and one interview with a guy who was said he wanted to join IS in Syria. And that was in 24 hours because she had all the cultural codes and all the language skills needed.”

Olle Zachrisson, Head of News, Sveriges Radio

“We did a story about families cramming together in really small apartments. So a family with eight kids would live in a two-room flat. And it has traditionally been difficult to us to gain access to those environments because they would feel that we would look down on that. But then when we have a journalist who shared their experiences of emigration, asking the question is totally different.”

Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News, Swedish SVT

How Newsrooms Try to Attract and Promote Diverse Talent

Recruiting for Diversity – Have Recruitment Procedures Changed?

Recruitment in journalism used to be about working paper piles and phones. Applications arrived in the hundreds, sometimes thousands, and some editor or other tried to separate the wheat from the chaff. Those who came from a prestigious journalism school were at an advantage. When there were more significant job openings, editors scrutinised their phone books. Who might be available or poached from the competition to fill a role? Very often they came up with candidates that looked very similar to themselves. This was – and often still is – an industry reproducing itself.

Times have changed. Instead of fending off an abundant supply, recruitment has become an active endeavour for many, ranging from prestigious news organisations like Reuters in the UK to regional media companies like Madsack in Hannover, Germany. “Two years ago we started to advertise our trainee programme. We actively approach people – and it is a success,” Hendrik Brandt said. Image films are prevalent now to attract talent. There are also assessment centres to identify the best candidates.

At the same time, diversity has increasingly moved into focus across the news industry. While all our participants recognised it as one of the main issues and challenges facing their industry today, the question remains as to whether this awareness has translated into concrete measures. Have newsrooms changed their recruitment practices in order to increase diversity and, if so, how?

Germany

Editors-in-Chief

Our interviews with German editors-in-chief revealed an awareness of a lack of diversity in their organisations and the knowledge that something needed to change when it came to recruiting. However, most participants weren’t clear how to go about this process. Likewise, concrete steps were lacking although some stressed that budget constraints and job cuts in recent years severely limited their capacity to hire new, more diverse talent even if they wanted to. Yet, instead of introducing specific schemes or making drastic changes to recruitment practices, many remained passive. Most interviewees described how their organisation still mostly relied on traditional recruiting routines.

The changes that were introduced seemed to be cosmetic rather than substantial. Many expressed a need to widen the pool of applicants and look out for diverse candidates although little was said on how this could be achieved. To address the former concern, the option of advertising positions in new ways and venues was singled out as a possible and effective solution by interviewees such as Jochen Arntz, editor-in-chief of *Berliner Zeitung*: “The applicants we attract through social media are very different from those who usually apply. You can see that quite clearly.”

Our participants also described how they put less of an emphasis on degrees and internships in the recruitment process. These categories were useless for selection since practically all applicants had degrees and internships under their belt. The shift in emphasis appeared to be less due to a genuine concern that selecting along these lines could exclude certain applicants. Instead, participants stressed unusual CVs or volunteering histories as ways to identify more diverse talent – which can be problematic, given that such traits and activities are often associated with higher incomes and certain backgrounds with corresponding networks. Our interviewees were consistently averse to the idea of introducing quotas although they didn’t exactly specify why.

Journalism Schools

Germany’s journalism schools clearly say that they want more diverse candidates and need to do more, especially when it comes to applicants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and applicants with a minority background. While our interviews indicate that they have, in general, more measures in place to achieve this than the German news outlets we interviewed, the approaches are far from uniform and differ from school to school. Like their counterparts in the industry, our interview partners were consistently averse to the idea of introducing quotas which they saw as inhibiting their freedom to choose “the right candidates”.

As to changes to recruitment procedures, both the RTL Journalism School and the Axel Springer Academy said they had changed their entry criteria to encourage a more diverse set of people to apply. Leonhard Ottinger of RTL said that applicants did not need to have a degree while Marc Thomas Spahl, director of the Axel Springer Academy, said, “We do not have any entry criteria bar one: You have to be 18 years of age when you start with us, but you can already apply at age 17.” The Henri-Nannen-School, however, admitted that they “could not yet bring ourselves to lower our standard criteria in order to get more people from educationally disadvantaged families or from immigrant backgrounds”. Instead of changing its recruitment procedures, the Henri-Nannen-School, according to its director Andreas Wolfers, liaises with the journalism programme of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (politically associated with the Green Party in Germany), which supports prospective journalists from minority or immigrant backgrounds during their education through training and scholarships.

In an attempt to become less elitist, several German schools have tweaked their general knowledge aptitude test, re-focusing it on news knowledge and knowledge of current and recent events rather than “canonical” general knowledge, which is often skewed towards middle- and upper-class ideas of what counts as part of the canon. “We ask less about literary history or contemporary history and more about current affairs,” as Marc Thomas Spahl said of his school’s test.

Sweden

Editors-in-Chief

Sweden’s editors-in-chief revealed a strong awareness of the importance of diversity in their organisation although this was not uniformly reflected in changes to their recruiting practices. Two of our interviewees said they had not applied any specific tools to their recruiting to increase diversity, instead pointing to strong awareness and far-reaching equal opportunity plans as required

by Swedish law. “We look for the part that’s not represented, whether that is gender or whether that is race,” as TT’s Jonas Eriksson explained.

A different picture emerged for the public broadcasters. Olle Zachrisson of Sveriges Radio explained that he knew they had several measures in place to ensure diversity during the recruitment process, one of them being diversity trainings for hiring managers. Sabina Rasiwala of SVT said the broadcaster was actively screening for diverse candidates in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background as well as a number of other categories. Head of News Anne Lagercrantz pointed to the News Division’s policy that positions can only be advertised if managers have explained in-depth how they will seek diversity. Managers also have to justify how a chosen candidate adds to the diversity of the respective team. Diversity is defined by language skills, different perspectives and networks that add value.

Journalism Schools

Sweden’s journalism schools clearly expressed their desire to reach more diverse candidates; however, active diversity management in undergraduate programmes proved difficult due to the application system. “We cannot pick out students. That’s not possible. We cannot say, ‘We have a quota for this, we have a quota for that’ – that’s not how it works. Because you come in only on your grades,” as Malin Picha Edwardsson, head of the journalism programme at Södertörn University, explained. However, the fact that students do not have to pay tuition and can get financial aid for their studies was, she said, key in widening access and not excluding students based on their financial background. Monica Löfgren Nilson of the University of Gothenburg also pointed out that master’s programmes are giving universities more freedom to pick diverse candidates as they do not solely depend on grades although she did not specify if additional tools had been introduced.

Due to the limitations of the application process, Swedish universities are focusing on reaching more diverse candidates before the application stages. The University of Gothenburg has collaborated with statisticians and other universities to come up with an action plan that tries to address how the university can better reach out to students from diverse backgrounds and encourage them to apply. The university’s journalism programme also tries to engage with schools and participates in events to get as many young people as possible interested in a career in journalism, particularly those from rural or suburban areas.

United Kingdom

Editors-in-Chief

With the UK being a strong multi-cultural society in which old class hierarchies persist and strongly shape public life, the sense of awareness and urgency around diversity in newsrooms seemed more pronounced than in the other countries we studied. Consequently, the active steps taken to change recruiting practices to achieve diversity were by far the most advanced. It might be no coincidence that the editors-in-chief of two major British news organisations – *The Guardian* and *The Economist* – are women (interestingly both avoid talking about it).

Joanna Webster of Reuters described how managers in her organisation are constantly reminded of the importance of diversity, using data to reflect on their progress and their team’s diversity. They are also encouraged to push for diversity in various ways, such as keeping in touch with prospective candidates. In addition, Reuters’s routines have been overhauled. Webster: “We have diverse slates, diverse panels, anonymous testing [and are] making sure that our remuneration is equitable. [We are also] making sure that we look at a wide pool of candidates [and] that we actively go out and source candidates rather than waiting for them to come to us. Being aware of unconscious bias [and] being transparent with jobs is also important.”

Like Reuters, the BBC has also introduced diverse interview panels to increase diversity in hiring processes and remove bias, according to Development Director Katie Lloyd. The corporation has also set out a new policy requiring leadership roles above a certain level to have an ethnic minority candidate on the shortlist. The *Telegraph’s* Jo Morrell also emphasised the importance of reducing bias in the hiring process to ensure a fair assessment of all candidates. “Lots of personal details are taken off CVs before they are passed on to hiring managers, and we’ve been discussing exactly what length we need to go to on that. Because personal details are fairly irrelevant in a recruitment process when you’re just looking at expertise.”

As for finding suitable candidates, all interviewees stressed the importance of being more active and aggressive in reaching out. The BBC’s Katie Lloyd underlined the importance of going beyond the usual channels when advertising for positions. “We try and make sure we’re not just using traditional platforms, and we use social media and different groups to get awareness.” The BBC also adapted the language it uses in an effort to become more diverse. “We try to stay away from old-fashioned terminologies and language that might put certain people off.”

Polly Curtis, former editor-in-chief of HuffPost UK and for many years a journalist with *The Guardian*, described how she had actively looked for candidates outside the capital of London for senior positions she had to fill and “really proactively recruited black and minority ethnic journalists for the more junior roles we were hiring for as well.” The Kent Media Group’s Ian Carter explained that his local news organisation also had decided to become more proactive in the way they recruit. “We are talking to Kent County Council, we are talking to Kent and Pride, and lots of other different diverse groups representing diverse communities. And we are actively pushing jobs at them, ask them to promote for us.” For their apprenticeship scheme, the Kent Media Group regularly sends staff to schools around the county in an effort to recruit directly at the “source”.

A somewhat similar approach was taken by tabloid *The Sun*. As Managing Editor Paul Clarkson explained, the tabloid’s various paid apprenticeship, internship and trainee schemes are open to graduates and non-graduates alike and had recently reached out to schools in the Tower Hamlets, Newham and Southwark – all London boroughs with very diverse demographics. In addition, he said, *The Sun* was establishing an initiative with a leading Muslim charity where the newspaper would host a scholar studying at London’s City University: “Muslims find it harder to get into journalism than some other groups so we’re working with them. They will have won a place on the MA in City University London for a year [on a journalism course], and we will give them all their paid work [...] and then at the end if it all works well, we’ll give them a job.”

Journalism Schools

The heads of the two journalism schools we interviewed in the UK, Richard Sambrook and Suzanne Franks, both underlined their concern about having a diverse set of students. Both reported that they hadn’t recently changed their recruitment procedures to increase diversity but instead pointed to a range of measures already in place.

As in Sweden, the UK’s journalism schools cannot positively discriminate against applicants. Instead, they rely on intensified outreach activities, especially at schools and other universities, as well as special scholarships and schemes to attract diverse talent. “We can’t do positive discrimination, but, for example, every black or Asian student gets written to at least twice pointing out the scholarships we have got available for them,” explained Richard Sambrook. Suzanne Franks also underlined City University’s scholarships for students from minority backgrounds. “We just got a scholarship this year, and we’re going to have two of them next year. They are aimed at the British Muslim community, full scholarships with everything paid.” The partnership with the scholarship provider, she said, was also crucial in reaching candidates. “They obviously have got great networks for getting the message out. And then we also have a scholarship through the Scott Trust, and they’ve got different networks.”

Despite the general effectiveness of the scholarships and outreach activities, they were not panaceas, as Richard Sambrook admitted: “We often don’t get very many applications for them because people just don’t even consider it. They dismiss it: ‘Oh there’s no way I can get to do that.’ [...] We’re not finding the right root especially into black and Asian communities. And I don’t know why that is because we do quite a lot of outreach to schools and so on.”

Existing Initiatives and Innovative Ideas on How Diversity Could Be Increased

Apart from trying to understand how outlets’ recruiting processes had (or had not) been affected and potentially changed by concerns about a lack of diversity, we also tried to understand what other steps newsrooms and journalism schools had taken to foster diversity. In this context, we also asked about new, innovative ideas on what could be done to address the issue.

Germany

Editors-in-Chief

While German some editors-in-chief talked at length about a need to become more diverse in their content and the stories they cover, there seemed to be a disconnect between this urge and an understanding that this would require a structural shift in their own organisations. There seemed to be no significant innovative ideas to bring in people from diverse backgrounds and few partnerships with trusts or charities (perhaps due to a lack of them in Germany). While several EICs expressed a desire for better “diversity management”, only one editor-in-chief – the ZDF’s Peter Frey – mentioned a fruitful relationship with “Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen” (NdM), an NGO that aims to increase diversity in the media.

Journalism Schools

While the situation among editors-in-chief seemed dire, a different picture emerged for German journalism schools. The school and course leaders we spoke to either had concrete ideas or existing programmes to support diverse candidates.

Generally, increasing diversity was seen as a challenge that needed to be tackled through a multi-stakeholder approach. In this context, all participants considered partnerships with foundations and scholarship providers to be particularly important. This model had proven to be particularly effective and ought to be broadened, they said. Several of them highlighted the efforts of the journalism programme of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (politically associated with the Green Party), which supports journalists from minority or immigrant backgrounds through training and scholarships. Andreas Wolfers of the Henri-Nannen-Schule said of his school’s relationship with the foundation: “We ask them for recommendations, and we then talk to these people directly and say, ‘Please apply to our programme.’” Bernhard Goodwin of the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich reported of his efforts to establish a partnership with the Hans Böckler Foundation, the foundation of the German Federation of Trade Unions, which traditionally seeks to support students with working-class backgrounds. Henriette Löwisch, head of DJS, suggested involving sponsors from beyond the realm of the more traditional “go-to” places, such as Google.

Another solution proposed by several interviewees were mentorship programmes for potential applicants. Henriette Löwisch, head of DJS, suggested mentorships and training opportunities to help people who were not from typical “Bildungsbürger” or highly educated backgrounds develop the skills necessary to get a head start in journalism although she left open who should provide these opportunities and at which level. Finally, Andreas Wolfers suggested that journalism schools needed to become creative in their outreach activities if they wanted to increase diversity. “So what we're doing now is, we have a digital advertising campaign where we are targeting people on Facebook. I can, for instance, say that my advertisement should appear in the feeds of people from immigrant families or in groups with such members. [...] And I can use that to reach the groups where I would like more people to apply and say, ‘Hey, you can apply until March 28th.’”

Sweden

Editors-in-Chief

Swedish editors-in-chief showed great awareness of diversity in all its different forms, which manifested itself in existing and proposed solutions. Admittedly, Swedish law seems to play an important role in this regard. Larger companies are required to have and follow an equal opportunity plan, which is specifically aimed at gender equality but may also include other aspects of diversity. One active measure taken by SVT, Sweden’s national public television broadcaster, forces managers to explain how they will seek diversity before they can even advertise a position. As Head of News Anne Lagercrantz explained: “You won’t even get to advertise until you explain how you will seek diversity. And you have to explain what your group looks like today. And then when you have a suggestion [and say,] ‘Okay, this is my candidate’, you have to explain how this person’s skill adds to the diversity [of the group]. [...] So that’s quite a big change. And it’s mandatory for everyone.”

Another innovative approach to increase diversity over time was described by SVT’s Head of HR, Sabina Rasiwala. SVT actively tries to fill up its pool of short-time employees with diverse candidates, thus giving them a better chance when they apply for non-temporary positions: “We know that if they get access and learn our systems, they would be first on the list [...] for the next time.” According to Rasiwala, who worked for Microsoft before, the broadcaster’s diversity strategy in both employing and commissioning is strongly informed by the research of Stanford management professor Margaret A. Neill, putting it on a scientific footing rather than following a rule-of-thumb approach.

A final approach that is worth pointing out in this context is an integration initiative at Sveriges Radio. According to Olle Zachrison, the broadcaster merged the language service that reports in Kurdish, Arabic, Somali, Persian, and English with the national news department in 2016. The aim was twofold: to increase professionalism in the language service and use their skills in the general news operation. “We integrated reporters from those language groups, who report in their languages but report news about Sweden. So we integrated them here in the national newsroom. And that was a very good way of getting their competence. Both journalistic competence and language competence. [...] This kind of integration has been really good. [...] And the most talented people there are becoming important regular news reporters.”

Journalism Schools

While diversity was very much at the forefront of the Swedish journalism schools we talked to, no particularly innovative initiatives or schemes to increase diversity emerged from our interviews. As one interviewee put it, “We haven’t done any systematic work, if you understand what I mean.” However, all schools were committed to increase diversity and raise awareness about the issue. “We have been sort of forming our message to show that this is a place of diversity. Or at least that we want it to be a place of diversity”, as Peter Jonriksson, Head of the Journalism Department at Mittuniversitetet put it.

United Kingdom

Editors-in-Chief

As newsrooms realise that they are increasingly handicapped by a lack of diversity, many UK editors look to specific schemes, often supported by industry bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) or entities such as John Schofield Trust, which aims to support social mobility in UK newsrooms and offers a mentorship scheme for young journalists ([John Schofield Trust, 2019](#)).

The Sun’s Paul Clarkson, for instance, described cooperating with a foundation to support journalists from Muslim backgrounds. Speaking of the NCTJ, Joanna Webster, Reuters’s Managing Editor for Strategy and Operations, highlighted the council’s diversity fund, which her organisation contributes to. Reuters has also collaborated with the NCTJ to offer paid internships to diversity candidates from the council’s training courses.

Others reported having set up in-house schemes that aim to widen access. The Kent Media Group, for instance, has launched its own apprenticeship scheme to help people into journalism who cannot afford a university education – often a necessary requirement to get a footing in the UK’s media industry – and to increase diversity across their local newsrooms. As the group’s editorial director, Ian Carter, said, “We recognised that we don’t want to prevent anybody entering the industry if they cannot afford 30,000 pounds of university debt. So if someone joins us as an apprentice, we will fund their entire training course, we will give them a living wage while they are junior apprentices, and then they are straight on onto a proper journalist’s salary at the end of it.”

Another idea to address diversity is an industry-spanning “diversity working group”, mentioned by *The Sun*’s Paul Clarkson: an informal body made up of senior news executives from various organisations that are tasked with identifying solutions and promoting diversity. However, Clarkson conceded that the council was relatively new, which makes it difficult to assess its impact.

Reaching out to schools, councils and initiatives was another frequent talking point in our interviews. The BBC’s Katie Lloyd pointed to the broadcaster’s “BBC Young Reporter” project, which tries to engage with schools and youth groups around the country to get young people from all backgrounds interested in a careers in media and journalism ([BBC Young Reporter News, 2019](#)). Paul Clarkson highlighted that *The Sun* was targeting specific schools and “community networks with underprivileged people”. Joanna Webster mentioned the “Charlotte Project”, named after the late Charlotte Cooper, a leading Reuters editor ([Charlotte Project, 2019](#)). In cooperation with the Thomson Reuters Foundation and Reuters journalists, the charity reaches out to 16- to 18-year-olds, “particularly students from more challenged social economic backgrounds to both encourage them to consider a career in journalism and show them a path of how they could do so.”

Ian Carter pointed out his outlet’s relationships with local councils and initiatives representing diverse communities when it comes to recruiting staff. “We are actively pushing jobs at them, ask them to promote for us. I think that needs to be applied across the board every time we recruit now.” Finally, the Kent Media Group has also started a partnership with Facebook through the technology giant’s journalism scheme, a model that Carter said could hold tremendous potential for helping to increase diversity: “The way it’s working is that publishers will receive funding from Facebook to employ community reporters across the country. We are recruiting two of them in Kent. It’s a scheme that is running in conjunction with the publishers, Facebook and the National Council for the Training of Journalists. The whole idea is, they are called community reporters because we want people who are going to go to represent diverse communities, and that might be tapping into the big Sikh community in parts of North Kent. It might be LGBT coverage. It will be anything that is a community that we feel isn’t particularly represented in our newsroom at the moment.”

Journalism Schools

From our interviews with heads of British journalism schools, two main approaches to tackling diversity emerged. First, the universities try to reach out to schools – and in the case of postgraduate degrees, other universities – with the aim of spreading the word and reaching diverse candidates. Second, scholarships for particular groups are an important tool for increasing diversity. Suzanne Franks, head of the Journalism School at London’s City University, described two foundation-

supported full scholarships aimed at the British Muslim community and diversity scholarships supported by the Scott Trust and the National Union of Journalists. Likewise, Richard Sambrook, Director of the Centre for Journalism at Cardiff University, explained that his school only recently launched two more scholarships for black, Asian and multi-ethnic (BAME) students.

Approaching diversity not solely from a perspective focused on gender equality and the representation of minorities, Suzanne Franks further highlighted a scholarship that had been awarded in previous years aimed at students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds: “I do think the other important diversity category that shouldn’t be overlooked is poorer students [...] and particularly [those] whose parents don’t live in London. For example, since last year, we have had the Stephen Lawrence scholarships, which are funded by *The Daily Mail*. Students get a year’s work at the *Daily Mail* afterwards, but again, that’s aimed at both poorer students and students from ethnic diversity backgrounds.”

Support, Training, Mentoring – How Editors-in-Chief Describe Their Efforts

Diversity is not only about application processes and recruiting diverse staff. It is equally important to support (diverse) employees as they progress in their careers, particularly towards leadership positions. Diversity is only truly achieved when it is present at all levels of a news organisation. Consequently, we tried to understand what news organisations had done to support their staff and how they trained managers and senior personnel to be aware of and aim for diversity when recruiting.

Germany

The German editors-in-chief we talked to recognised the need for internal support, training and mentoring structures, especially when it came to supporting female journalists in their organisation. Several mentioned that they had special mentoring programmes in place where younger staff are paired with older mentors as well as designated “leadership programmes”, although some acknowledged that they should have implemented the latter programmes earlier. While these systems were generally meant to support all younger staff in their careers and build them up for leadership roles, our participants acknowledged the need to support women in particular, especially with regard to their sparse representation in leadership positions.

“We are working on getting more women into leadership positions,” said Michael Wulf, editor-in-chief of private German broadcaster RTL. “We have already made great progress [...] but our upper echelons are still almost exclusively male.” Wolfgang Krach, editor-in-chief of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, expressed a similar sentiment: “In my view, we need to increase the proportion of women in management positions here. We are not as bad as some people think we are, but we are still far from where we need to be.”

German Press Agency (dpa) says it has introduced new roles in its newsrooms that allow for more flexibility when it comes to combining different skillsets and commitments. More importantly, however, the press agency has set up a development programme for future leaders, a mentorship programme for new employees and a debating space where, amongst other things, topics such as diversity are discussed on a regular basis.

Apart from support programmes, a transformation of the work culture and an improvement in work-life balance were seen as crucial to achieving these aims. As Wolfgang Krach noted, “We must give women in particular more opportunities to reconcile these leadership positions with their private lives. And we have yet not done that systematically, I would say.”

Concrete practical steps could include, according to some of our participants, offering employees the chance to work remotely and allowing for more flexible work hours – a measure they say that supports employees with children in general but is particularly targeted at women.

German private broadcaster RTL has expanded this approach to leadership positions, which can be shared by several employees. As Michael Wulf, RTL’s editor-in-chief, said, “We also try to share management positions so that women who are working part-time can also be leaders. This is a major issue for us because we obviously have many young managers who have children and come back from parental leave and do not work full-time but start out with a 0.6 or 0.7 FTE schedule. It’s very important to accommodate them because if we don’t, we’ll lose an insane amount of know-how.”

Sweden

Our discussions with editors in Sweden only touched upon questions of support, training, and mentoring within news organisations. Our picture of the situation is, therefore, not as detailed as in the other two countries. One aspect brought up by participants were internal awareness trainings that focus on diversity, equality and gender equality in particular. Olle Zachrisson of Sveriges Radio stated that these are focused on “managers who are doing the hiring about how to recruit in a more diverse manner” while Christofer Ahlqvist, editor-in-chief of *Göteborgs Posten*, pointed out to us that such efforts were spread across their entire organisation, from management to editors to normal team members.

Another support and training initiative to increase diversity was described by Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News at SVT. Her organisation, she said, “grants extra money if you are recruiting someone who’s not totally ready.” She describes these efforts as particularly relevant for integrating and supporting journalists who have emigrated to Sweden. Lagercrantz: “There are journalists who have a journalistic background and could be from Syria or Greece, but they need to learn more about journalistic ethical issues in Sweden, or it could be language skills. So that type of training [helps], so they don’t need to feel the pressure to produce perfectly on day one.”

United Kingdom

The editors we interviewed in the UK also indicated that they understood the need to do more to support and promote diverse talent within their organisations. However, only a handful of our interviewees’ organisations had leadership and mentoring programmes or in-house training programmes in place. Those that did exist were generally more focused on improving all staff members’ skills to allow them to progress in their careers rather than improving diversity within the organisation.

Apart from constantly monitoring staff figures across newsrooms, our participants mentioned several approaches and concrete steps they had taken, especially those aimed at helping more women move into leadership positions. The BBC seemed most advanced in these efforts. The

broadcaster runs regular leadership programmes for different groups, one of them being the “Women in Leadership” programme, with about 85% of the women on the programme having moved into new jobs, according to Development Director Katie Lloyd. Lloyd also mentioned various “buddy” and mentorship schemes to support people in moving ahead. In some of the organisations we interviewed, similar initiatives were not yet properly institutionalised although our participants expressed a desire to do so in the future.

“We’ve been trying over the last year to really improve our pipeline of female leaders. So although we’ve done a few leadership bootcamps, we haven’t done them solely for women. But we’ve tried to identify women who we think have the potential to progress,” said Reuters’s Managing Editor for Strategy and Operations, Joanna Webster. Reuters also encourages job sharing in leadership positions – including for men. This initiative is expected to set an example for others to follow, particularly for the men.

The Telegraph has introduced “50/50” shortlists, selecting an equal number of male and female candidates across all career levels when it comes to hiring decisions, in an attempt to put men and women on equal footing. The newspaper has further introduced an equal parental leave policy that allows men to take the same amount of leave on the birth of their child. According to *The Telegraph*’s managing editor Jo Morrell, “equal parental leave is really important in terms of levelling the playing field. It does two jobs: women are less disadvantaged from having children, and men have a greater opportunity to take leave to spend more time with their child as well.”

“At The Sun we have also always had people who worked their way up from being a messenger. In fact, my deputy was a messenger 35 years ago and worked his way up to deputy managing editor. That route was always in the background, but we’ve tried to revive that a bit. We have so-called apprentice messengers who are people that can be anything from skilled labour up to graduates. What they do is, they come in four days a week and are doing the general messenger role, but one day a week they get to work at a desk [in the newsroom] and they get a chance to prove themselves. They have around three months as an apprentice messenger, and if they show enough initiative and potential, then they can become a full apprentice. Our apprentice schemes are one to two years. They will usually be given to a certain desk department and will have a £20,000 starting salary per year. Usually, they’ve got a full year, but sometimes we expand to two years if we want to have a longer look at them to find them a home and get them a lucky head start in the business.”

Paul Clarkson, Managing Editor, The Sun

Serious Attempts or Paying Lip Service to the Critics?

While it emerged from our interviews that news executives and journalism schools across the three countries are clearly thinking about changes to recruitment practices and measures to foster diversity as well as initiatives to support, educate and mentor staff in an effort to promote diverse talent, no clear, overarching strategy seems to exist across the industry. Furthermore, given that diversity seems to be such an important topic at the leadership level of most news organisations and

journalism schools we interviewed, there is sometimes surprisingly little creativity in finding ways to achieve it. The UK seemed to be most advanced both in its discussion of the issue and in steps taking to address it, though our study cannot claim to make assessments that are representative for the entire industry.

One notable aspect of our interviews with German and British editors was that, when it came to internal efforts in supporting, mentoring and training staff to make them fit for leadership roles, the discussion seemed to be centred on promoting women, with no particular emphasis on fostering other forms of diversity such as socio-economic or minority status. While we could not identify why this was the case, possible explanations could be that participants were unsure how to promote these groups or hesitant to single them out, thus engaging in a form of positive discrimination.

Finally, it needs to be said that we could not independently assess the success of the measurements described by our participants. It is possible that their responses stressing their efforts were shaped by their general awareness of diversity being a much discussed and conflicted topic within the news industry, thus potentially leading them to exaggerate their organisations’ efforts.

Conclusion – What Needs to Be Done?

No Leadership, No Results

There is one rule for any issue that involves cultural change in organisations: If top leadership doesn’t embrace and push it – in this case the importance of talent and diversity – little will happen. Our research revealed that there is considerable concern among media leaders about attracting the right mix of talent to gain access to different audiences and inspire their trust. But there is much less specific commitment to initiate changes that would lead to more diversity. Very often, diversity is treated as a “nice-to-have” issue rather than a “must-have” for newsrooms and journalism schools.

Our research revealed several explanations for this dichotomy. First, the digital transformation of the media and worries about the sustainability of news are among the most pressing issues for many news executives (Newman, 2019). Acquiring digital talent often trumps acquiring diverse talent. Producing output for different platforms in different formats is perceived to be more important than producing output with different perspectives. Learning from peers and organising conferences around how to go fully digital is more popular than learning how to attract and retain talent and diversify newsrooms. It is perceived as sexier to develop a strategy for artificial intelligence in newsrooms than to get down to the presumably “soft” and often less straightforward issues of behavioural change and human psychology.

Second, the industry is coming from a place where a lack of talent, and a lack of diversity in particular, was never perceived to be a problem. Human resource (HR) issues were a sideshow on the editorial side while HR sat with the commercial side. Only in recent years has management training and awareness of the need to become more diverse actually reached newsrooms. But management skills are vitally important in all talent questions. It is an encouraging sign that big news organisations like the BBC, Reuters and the *Financial Times* have created posts within their newsroom that are responsible for talent development. While the editor-in-chief will always be the chief talent officer on the editorial side, progressive strategies for talent development consume too much time and effort to squeeze them into the vast array of editorial tasks – hence the need for designated posts that address these issues.

Third, at some regional news organisations, diversity takes a back seat to the challenge of attracting any talent at all. Particularly where economies are healthy and alternatives to positions in journalism abundant, the struggle is about enticing job seekers to join the profession, especially in rural areas. Interestingly, this demand for a proactive search for talent could potentially lead to more innovative approaches. Sometimes change needs to be preceded by a crisis. Are journalists today’s coal miners? Will this profession vanish, or will it be able to keep and restore its appeal and significance? In increasingly diverse societies, the quest for diversity in the newsroom must be part of any strategy to secure the news industry’s future.

Active Recruitment – And the Corresponding Culture

Most media organisations can no longer trust that all the best talent will flock toward them. Recruitment has become more proactive. In many parts of society, schoolchildren don’t know

anyone who is a journalist; they lack role models. They might not even know what journalism is all about. It is, perhaps, no wonder then that “young people from challenged social backgrounds don’t automatically apply”, as one editor expressed it. It is thus the responsibility of media organisations to reach out to these groups and explain their jobs – not only to their audiences but also to potential future journalists. Going into schools and universities to promote journalism should be a mandatory exercise. If done correctly, the effects could be mutually beneficial, allowing media organisations to better understand the younger audiences they so eagerly want to attract.

Regional media in particular are increasingly promoting their brands to job seekers. But producing a “cool” video to present oneself as a “sexy” place to work at doesn’t help if the place turns out to be not that enticing on closer inspection. This doesn’t mean that work in modern newsrooms has to be all about flexible working hours and free pizza deliveries. There will always be a lot to do at inconvenient times, and quite a few decisions have to be made top-down. But young, particularly diverse talent gets discouraged by stuffy editorial meetings and hierarchical debating patterns. Minorities need to be encouraged to speak up and listened to and should see an impact when they do. One step towards this is reverse mentoring, as practiced by BBC News, where all senior managers have an under-30-year-old mentor. Newsroom culture has to change significantly. It needs to become more inclusive. “Learning how to lead diversity is a challenge,” as Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News at Swedish public broadcaster SVT, put it.

Leading diversity also demands the integration of the editorial, tech and commercial sides. In traditional newsrooms, journalists staged the play; everyone else merely assisted. But without a collaborative culture, there won’t be good products. And there won’t be talent to produce these products. “There is much more friction between different professional categories than between journalists. Even if you have parents who come from another country, if you are a news journalist, you tend to be much more like another news journalist than like a computer scientist [with a family background similar to yours],” said Olle Zachrisson of Sveriges Radio.

While news organisations can do little to help change the underlying social inequalities that disadvantage diverse talent, they have to play their part in helping diverse applicants make their way into the news. To widen the pool of applicants, it is not enough to hope that this will happen automatically. Instead, it is important to professionalise recruitment procedures and gear them towards recruitment that actively seeks diversity. This is not only about the wording and placement of adverts, but about the composition of interview panels, the definition of roles and special access schemes.

A challenge, particularly for the big brands, is that they still see plenty of applicants but not necessarily the diverse talent that their organisation wants. It can be difficult to justify rejecting top talent for a less “paper-proof” candidate that might be a greater risk to take on. This becomes apparent when looking for talent from lower socio-economic backgrounds or applicants with unusual career paths. If 500 applicants compete for five jobs, a very compelling argument has to be made for hiring someone promising who doesn’t have a school degree but meets diversity criteria. Some may fare well running a separate apprenticeship programme explicitly open to candidates with different backgrounds. But it is hard work to prevent them from feeling stigmatised as token candidates. Again, leadership and newsroom culture matter.

A downside to the current practice of hiring is obvious: a mismatch between supply and demand. Highly qualified applicants with university degrees and experience abroad usually want to do the big stuff: reporting foreign policy or No. 10 Downing Street. “I have no trouble finding someone for Washington, [...] but when I need someone for Magdeburg or Schwerin, they raise their eyebrows,” said ZDF editor-in-chief Peter Frey. But if you want the kind of down-to-earth talent that is willing to immerse themselves in a region, it’s better to hire people who are passionate about this kind of reporting to begin with.

Metrics Matter

If it’s not measured, it doesn’t get done. This holds true for most issues in business and organisational life, and it holds true for diversity as well. Except it is a bit trickier in this case. While keeping track of gender equality is easily done at most organisations, ethnic or even social diversity is a lot more complicated. Can a third-generation immigrant still be called a minority? What about an Austrian in Germany or a Dutchman in Britain? Or is it all about race, as in the US? Social background is even harder to track, not only because it is multi-faceted but also because of the privacy concerns associated with gathering this information. Of all organisations we interviewed, only the BBC asks incoming employees to fill out a questionnaire on their social background. Class is still a big divider in Britain, and public service media are supposed to work particularly hard to overcome divisions.

When it comes to diversity of political views – a topic raised by German and Swedish newsrooms in particular – hard data is close to impossible to come by. Every data-gathering effort would end up in a slippery scoring system or a questionable quota for political party affiliations, as practiced at some public broadcasters. As far as rural versus urban background is concerned as a category for diversity: How do you know if someone who was born in a village really understands rural issues or rather belongs to the group who did all they could to get away from it?

This means that most diversity assessments are left to gut feeling. And that can be deceiving. Many companies who have one or two women on their boards feel that they are doing well on gender diversity. Organisations that have three black managers out of 30 might congratulate themselves on being progressive. But the positive effect of diversity – people speaking up and expressing different views – only shows up when minorities feel they are not alone.

Metrics are important and usually the first indicator of whether a task is taken seriously. And they are an early warning system if things deteriorate. But metrics are only the beginning. They have to be reassessed constantly, too: Do they solve the right problem? Do they address it properly? Do they set the right incentives? The most detailed metrics won’t help if they end up as pure box-ticking exercises. What they are definitely good for is raising awareness. The next step is to come up with policies to implement diversity.

Retention Matters, Too

For many, attracting talent is not as hard as nurturing and retaining it. Jo Morrell, managing editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, said, “It’s that gap in the middle where retaining talent is the toughest. We certainly reach and attract great talent, but how do we ensure the career path and keep them in the long term?”

There are two relevant issues that need to be addressed in this context: First, looking out for burnout in a systematic way and actively addressing it. And second, developing career prospects.

It is hard to open up development opportunities in an industry where headcounts are going down and there is little room to bring new people in due to budget constraints. At big brands such as the BBC, Channel 4 or *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, attractive posts are often taken – or taken over internally – by generations that are not planning to leave any time soon. One solution is to give young people project responsibility. The development of new formats and products opens up room for experiments and fresh ideas. It’s a fantastic opportunity for new, diverse talent.

For talent with a diverse background, it is important to provide them with opportunities beyond their particular area of experience. Just as female journalists shouldn’t be automatically selected for gender, family and women’s issues, the Syrian journalist shouldn’t be confined to writing about refugees, nor should the journalist who is a Muslim need to write only about Islamist extremism. Bringing in diverse talent is crucial and needed when particular issues crop up, but they should be given diverse paths to develop and not be confined to certain topics.

Burnout and anxiety in newsrooms are significant, still under-researched issues that come up in many conversations with senior media leaders when the doors are closed and confidentiality is assured. One can only speculate about the reasons. The relentless, 24-hour publishing pressure might be among them, along with the rapid pace of organisational change, the fragility of prospects, pressures to combine work and family life, discrimination in all its forms, or the disturbing effect of online harassment, particularly against female journalists. Other possibilities include the burden on middle managers when they have to manage resistance from above and below simultaneously while implementing change. And there are other psychological pressures that affect everyone such as the “happiness and success doctrine” promoted by social media and increasing competition with coworkers as performance becomes ever more transparent and seemingly measurable ([Simon, 2018](#)).

These pressures affect all generations. While younger journalists might lack a sense of direction, older ones feel threatened because experience no longer seems to be valued much in an environment of rapid change.

It is obvious that the industry is suffering from burnout and general fatigue, which is one of the issues news executives worry about most ([Newman, 2019](#)). Sabbaticals are in high demand; journalists exhausted from downsizing transition into industries with happier outlooks.

This was also strongly reflected in our interviews. It is getting particularly hard to get and retain good managers, observed Michael Wulf, editor-in-chief of German private broadcaster RTL. Peter Wolodarski, editor-in-chief of Swedish *Dagens Nyheter*, said: “What I worry a little bit about is that a lot of talented people are leaving the journalistic profession.” Wolodarski’s response at least is clear: Making employees feel safe is among his prime concerns. *Dagens Nyheter* got rid of most temporary workers and fixed-term contracts, cultivates good relations with unions, makes sure employees are paid well and helps older employees to upskill. Wolodarski: “I feel that, in this very toxic, insecure environment, it is especially important for us to provide security. [...] In theory it might sound great

with these flexible arrangements and freelance contracts. But in my opinion, it [...] creates a lot of frustration. It’s especially hard to work on difficult journalistic projects if people don’t feel secure.” Of course, being economically successful is the precondition for providing security, Wolodarski added. But if one wants to sell quality journalism, one needs the talent that produces it.

Building sustainable business models might be the biggest challenge for the industry these days. But diverse talent can gain the trust of different audiences. And without trust, there can be no business model at all.

Diversity Affects Content and Product

Increasing diversity is about doing the right thing, but it is also a means to an end: creating a better product. In journalism, this is not just about improving sales and profit; it’s about mission. If journalism is to shine a light on and explain all facets of society, it has to be pursued from different perspectives.

But does a diverse newsroom with diverse leadership really produce diverse journalism? It depends. There is lots of anecdotal evidence but little systematic research. The reason is that the overwhelming number of newsrooms are not yet really diverse, so it is hard to track changes. In our interviews, not a single executive could point to an organisation in their country that had really nailed the challenge. Admittedly, some small newsrooms might have risen to it better, but this is often not where the jobs are and the output is.

For now, there doesn’t seem to be a clear relationship between the makeup of newsrooms and the diversity of their product. The reason might be that minorities tend to adapt to spoken and unspoken expectations within a newsroom about what makes a great topic, great journalism and a great product. The reason is all too evident: Without this ability to understand norms and conform and adapt to them, they would have never made it that far in their careers. This is why, for example, women in leadership positions sometimes end up being “the better men” instead of bringing their own style and perspectives to the table. Some of them even look down on other women because it enhances their own status if they can distinguish themselves from the rest of the female crowd. This might be intuitive, but it eventually sets many of them up for failure because it can be pretty lonely at the top. As stated before, diversity has to reach a certain threshold to make minorities feel comfortable and give them real influence over a newsroom’s decisions.

However, we did find clear examples that diversity does make a difference. Over the course of our research, editors cited many examples of reporters with a particular background making a difference in a special field or with a special topic: a journalist who reported on people who live in very small flats with their entire family who had grown up in a similar environment herself; a reporter who was connected to a neighbourhood in which terrorists had subsequently grown up and who had information about them within a few hours after an attack; the murder of a black model that was covered by a journalist who had access to her crowd.

A particularly telling example not derived from our interviews was the 2018 undercover investigation by *Financial Times* reporter Madison Marriage, who exposed rampant misogyny and sexism at a

men-only fundraising dinner in London for the Presidents Club charity where hostesses were groped, sexually harassed and propositioned ([Marriage, 2018](#)). The article became the most-read story on the *FT*’s website in the paper’s history and led to the closure of the charity ([Marriage & Wood, 2019](#)). An all-male newsroom likely wouldn’t have commissioned the story in the first place ([Kiesel, 2019](#)) because it probably would not have been regarded as “FT material” – apart from the fact that the investigation was essentially exposing a group that is likely among the newspaper’s readership.

One of the most interesting initiatives to drive diversity of content has been the BBC’s 50:50 project ([BBC, 2019](#)). Spearheaded by presenter Ros Atkins and supported by the BBC’s Director General, Tony Hall, its aim was to even out the ratio of male and female contributors and experts in all participating programmes. The deadline was 30 April 2019. The results were astonishing: Within a year, 74 percent of all participating 500 teams met the goal. When the results were presented on 15 May 2019, BBC News Head of News Fran Unsworth said that its journalism had already improved by including more experts who were not previously known because they were not the obvious choice. Most of the readers appreciated it.

Many news organisations, among them *Dagens Nyheter* and the *Financial Times*, now use gender bots to track how many female or male experts and sources are quoted. Others, such as Bloomberg, keep databases of female experts to call or invite to conferences and even train them for better on-air performance. Obviously, this is no solution for all kinds of diversity, as discussed in the section on metrics. But if diversity is practiced successfully with regard to gender, it might not be too hard to extend these efforts to other features of inclusiveness.

To bring in more voices from rural areas, Swedish public broadcasting ran a constructive news project called “Ten million”, alluding to the ten million citizens Sweden now has. Instead of asking people questions like “What do you think about...”, reporters swarmed out with a more open-ended approach: “What bothers you in this community? What upsets you?” These topics were then discussed with other people and used in interviews with party leaders. Projects like this could help to detect moods and trends early while also improving representation.

Content is one thing; formats are another. Different parts of society consume news differently, as shown in the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report ([Newman et al., 2018](#)) or in a special report on news consumption by different social strata ([Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2018](#)). A variety of digital platforms provide a unique opportunity to reach audiences that had never before been drawn to quality news. There are new ways of consuming news, ranging from smart speakers, podcasts, virtual reality and games to Instagram stories. Packing serious news content into comedy shows is a format very much appreciated by younger generations. The more voices have their say in product development, the better different needs will be met.

Diversity Doesn’t Come for Free

Diversity is as much issue of fairness and equal representation as it is an issue of trust. Why should people trust the media or part from their hard-earned cash if they are not adequately represented both in the creation of the news and in the news itself? But diversity will not happen on its own.

Diverse talent will not automatically apply. On the contrary, diverse candidates might feel discouraged not only by a sense of not belonging but by dwindling opportunities in the industry.

It is important to stress that researchers are aware that this study presents a “top-down” view of the issue of diversity in the news industry. In line with our aims and research questions, we tried to understand what news executives and heads of journalism schools think about (the lack of) diversity in their organisations, how it could be addressed and what steps they have taken to address the lack of diversity in the media. Our aim was to withhold judgment as much as possible and reflect their thoughts in this respect as impartially as possible.

However, it is worth noting that these perspectives might differ significantly from the impressions and views of those ultimately affected by such measures: (prospective) journalists with diverse backgrounds of all kinds. It is highly likely that their assessment of what needs to be done to promote diversity in the news, or how good the existing approaches are, differs widely from that of executives and programme heads. Studying these views was beyond the scope of what we could do in our study. These perspectives in particular require greater attention in future research.

If the media want to enjoy the trust of a broad public, especially among diverse groups within a society, if they truly want to become diverse to better represent the people they ultimately serve, simply paying lip service to diversity is not enough, nor is thinking that with enough diversity initiatives one’s work is done. All the diversity initiatives in the world are useless if underlying structural forms of discrimination, sexism and racism are not confronted. As Sara Ahmed has argued in her 2012 book, “On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life” (Ahmed, 2012), diversity initiatives come with the very real risk of serving as a means of avoiding confrontation with these issues. Instead, they can offer “an optimistic narrative [with marketing value] of institutional improvement that often distracts from the need to address these deeper, and much more difficult structural issues.” ([AI Now Institute, 2018](#)).

Thus, achieving diversity demands a commitment to structural change in addition to investment, outreach and encouragement. This effort has to start in journalism schools and extend to newsrooms. More fellowships and access schemes might be needed. Recruitment practices have to change in order to eradicate the role of implicit biases in hiring as far as possible. Diverse candidates will most likely need more management attention in the beginning. This can include things as wide-ranging as additional language training or support with housing in expensive metropolitan areas.

Managing for diversity doesn’t come for free, either. Talent recruitment and retention needs to be put in focus if the industry wants to survive and thrive. Digital transformation might be the primary challenge. But it is not an end in itself. Diversity, or the lack thereof, will affect what this new world of digital journalism looks like. Judging by the old world, there is certainly room for improvement.

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Appendix

Table 1: Interviewees in this study

Country	Organisation	Interviewee	Function
Germany			
News outlets	DPA (German Press Agency)	Sven Gösmann	Editor-in-Chief
	ZDF (Public Broadcaster)	Peter Frey	Editor-in-Chief
	RTL (Private broadcaster)	Michael Wulf	Editor-in-Chief
	Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)	Wolfgang Krach	Editor-in-Chief
	Berliner Zeitung	Jochen Arntz	Editor-in-Chief
	Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung (HAZ)	Hendrik Brandt	Editor-in-Chief
Journalism schools	Deutsche Journalisten Schule (DJS)	Henriette Löwisch	Principal
	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU)	Bernhard Goodwin	Course Director
	LMU/DJS	Focus group with students	
	Henri-Nannen-Schule	Andreas Wolfers	Principal
	Henri-Nannen-Schule	Focus group with students	
	RTL Journalistenschule	Leonhard Ottinger	Managing Director
	RTL Journalistenschule	Focus group with students	
	Axel Springer Akademie	Marc Thomas Spahl	Principal
	ZDF Apprentice Scheme	Focus groups with students	

United Kingdom			
News outlets	Reuters	Joanna Webster	Managing Editor, Strategy and Operations, EMEA
	BBC News	Katie Lloyd	Development Director
	The Telegraph	Jo Morrell	Managing Editor
	The Sun	Paul Clarkson	Managing Editor
	Kent Media Group	Ian Carter	Editorial Director
	HuffPost UK	Polly Curtis	Former Editor-in-Chief
	Channel 4 News	Ed Fraser	Managing Editor
Journalism schools	London City University	Suzanne Franks	Professor of Journalism, Head of Department
	Cardiff University	Richard Sambrook	Professor of Journalism, Deputy of School and Director – Centre for Journalism
Sweden			
News outlets	TT	Jonas Eriksson	CEO, Editor-in-Chief
	SVT (Public broadcaster)	Anne Lagercrantz	Head of News
	SVT (Public broadcaster)	Sabina Rasiwala	HR and Director of Communication
	Dagens Nyheter	Peter Wolodarski	Editor-in-Chief
	Göteborgs-Posten	Christofer Ahlqvist	Editor-in-Chief
	Sveriges Radio	Olle Zachrisson	Head of News
Journalism schools	JMG Gothenburg (Department of Journalism, Media and Communication)	Ulrika Tengby Holm	Lecturer

	JMG Gothenburg (Department of Journalism, Media and Communication)	Monica Löfgren Nilsson	Head of Journalism Department
	Mid Sweden University (MKV – Institutionen för medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap)	Peter Jonriksson	Programme Manager
	Södertörn University Stockholm	Malin Picha Edwardsson	Head of Department

**Table 2: Overview Survey German journalism students
(Institutions, absolute and relative numbers of participants)**

Institution (Programme)	N	%
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (master’s in journalism)	37	18.97
University of Leipzig (master’s in journalism)	18	9.23
Technische Universität Dortmund (bachelor’s and master’s in journalism)	38	19.49
Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (bachelor’s and master’s in journalism)	36	18.46
Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich/ Deutsche Journalistenschule (DJS) (master’s in journalism)	27	13.85
Henri Nannen Schule, Hamburg	12	6.15
RTL Journalistenschule, Cologne	18	9.23
ZDF Trainee Programme, Mainz	9	4.61
Overall	195	100