

Journalism education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Dr Margaret Hughes

Senior Lecturer, University of the West of Scotland

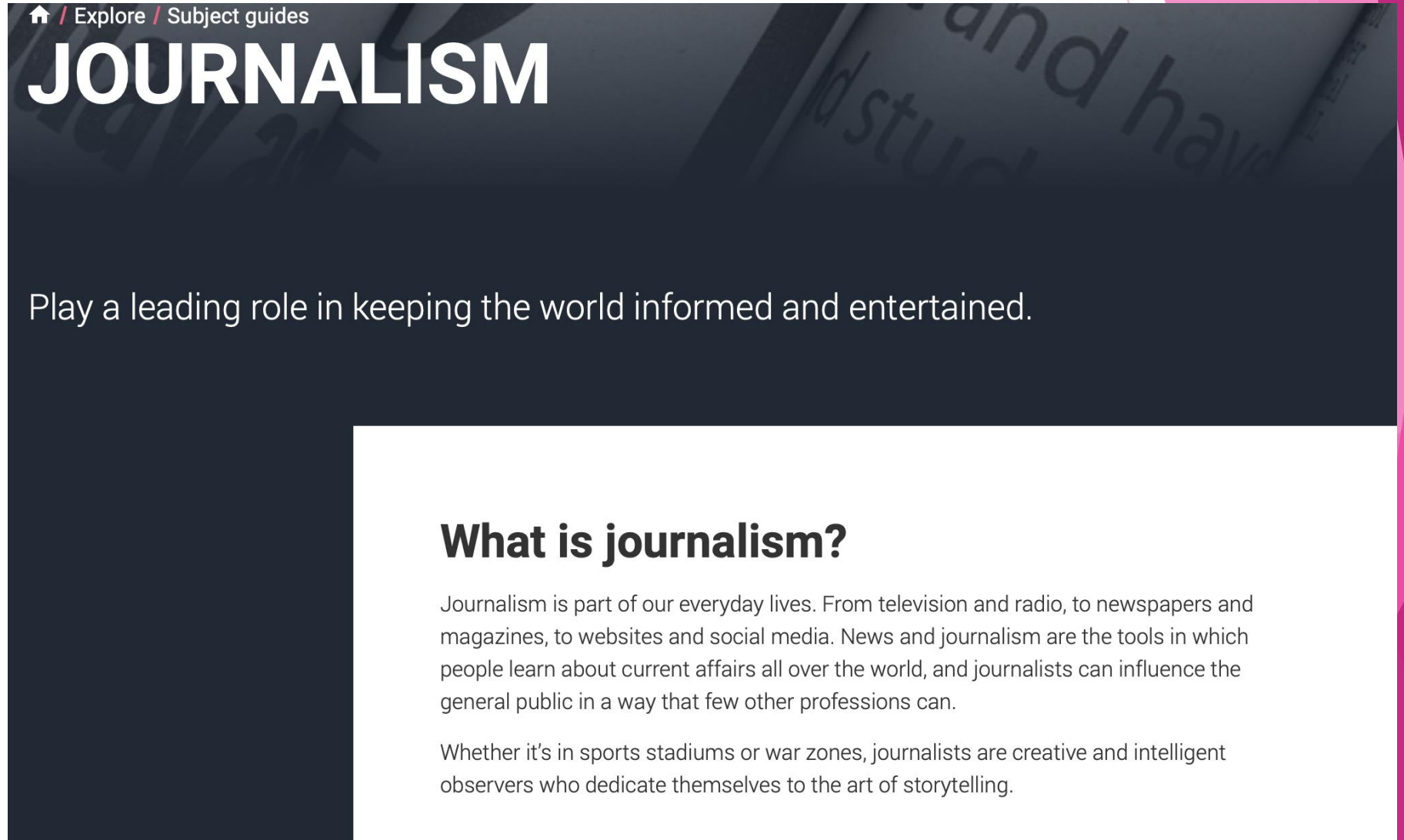
Association for Journalism Education Annual Conference, June 23, 2022

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

- ▶ Journalism is taught by 105 providers with a choice of 618 courses available to those seeking to study it at university ([ucas.com](https://www.ucas.com)).
- ▶ According to HESA (2021) around 11,500 students were studying journalism of around 47,000 in the wider media field.
- ▶ As we know, the offering is varied - named programmes (at UG & PG) include:
Journalism; broadcast journalism; magazine journalism; multimedia journalism; sports journalism; journalism studies; media & journalism; journalism & pr; journalism & creative writing.

What will students do once they get to university according to UCAS:

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?



🏠 / Explore / Subject guides

JOURNALISM

Play a leading role in keeping the world informed and entertained.

What is journalism?

Journalism is part of our everyday lives. From television and radio, to newspapers and magazines, to websites and social media. News and journalism are the tools in which people learn about current affairs all over the world, and journalists can influence the general public in a way that few other professions can.

Whether it's in sports stadiums or war zones, journalists are creative and intelligent observers who dedicate themselves to the art of storytelling.

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

But does this define what journalism education is in the 21st century? Or, indeed what it needs to be?

Guidelines/blueprints/objectives proliferate.

UNESCO (2007) identified three approaches to academic journalism:

- **Technical** - directed towards professional competencies;
- **Social/institutional** - assuming various aspects of journalistic practice. Emphasizing moral and democratic values;
- **Inter-disciplinary** - connecting journalism to other areas

How would we identify with these today?

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Solkin (2022: 451) identifies a different range of approaches:

Table 1. Models of journalism education.

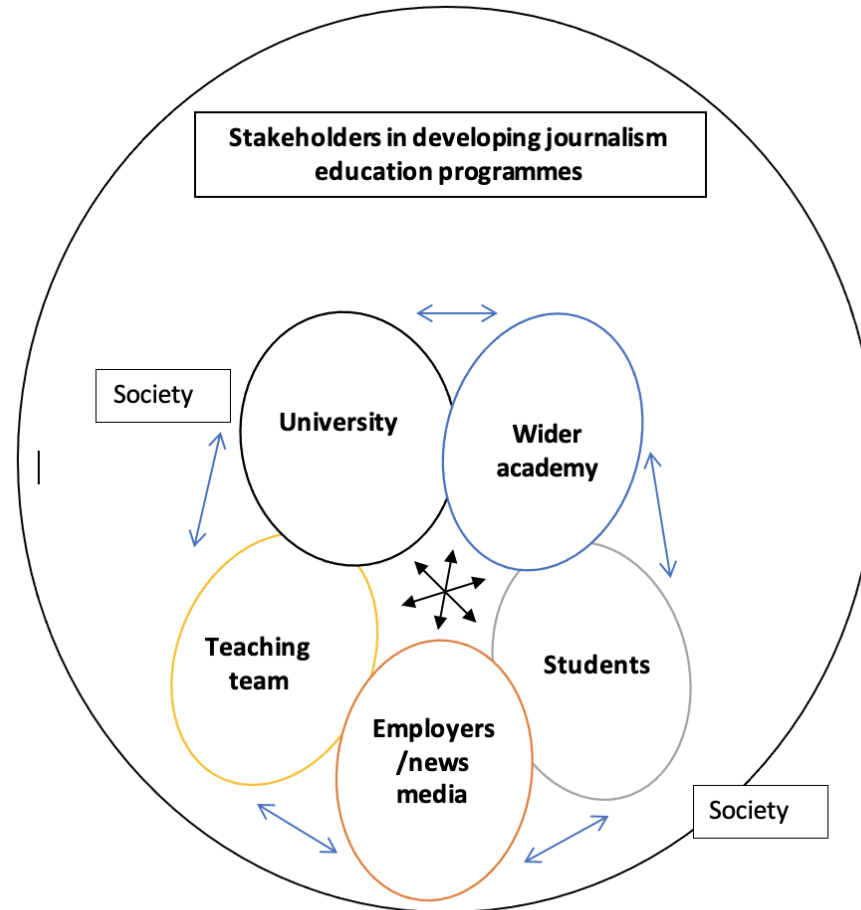
	Underlying assumptions	Role of journalism education	Change and diversity	Research focus
The standard model	A single unitary model of journalism as professional practice underpinned by a stable democratic free market system	To prepare practitioners to operate as objective observers whose primary mission is to support and hold to account democratic institutions	Is explained through national or regional journalistic cultures but also as a historic development towards the standard model	Refining and justifying existing approaches and structures
Derivatives or variants of the standard model J.Ed+	A pluralistic approach which recognises that Journalism is under threat and needs to develop especially in response to change in technology and the marketplace	To prepare practitioners to operate in changing circumstances and to adapt themselves to market demands	Is explained through changes in technologies (the web) or institutions financial models (advertising revenue)	Adding to or improving existing structures and processes for delivery
Radical models – challenges to the standard model	A more explicit rejection of the standard model of journalism education though the recognition that journalism education operates in many different ways depending upon context and can serve many different communities and their needs	To enable journalists to understand their relationship to the communities they serve	Diversity is endemic. Changes in technology and employment practices operate differently in different contexts	Developing new processes and understanding of learning

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Vukic (2019) talks about the need for journalism educators to look at sustainable models that enable us to successfully exist within challenged academic, professional, economic, social and cultural frames.

It prompts us to think about our stakeholders and what their expectations are & how we can continue to respond to them.

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?



Developing degrees in journalism education necessitates the contribution of a range of stakeholders in the process of designing, validating, implementing and moderating programmes. This chart illustrates how these stakeholders influence and inform the process.

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Solkin (2022) posits that the discussions we have around journalism education have for decades been almost binary in approach:

- Theory - v- practice;
- Profession -v- trade;
- Knowledge -v- skills.

Gou (2010:29) in discussing journalism education states that it: ‘largely revolves around who is defining professionalism, for what purpose and by what criteria...leading to conceptual ambiguities for the academia, contradictory interpretations amongst educators and comprehension confusion amongst students.’

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Looking at some of the key things many journalism programmes, such as news days etc, using that 'teaching hospital' approach that is so common - one is compelled to consider if we are getting it right?

Does this approach not privilege the practical and professional skillset over the development and necessity of academic knowledge? It certainly can exclude members of teaching teams who have not worked in industry but still have much to offer in terms of journalism education.

Does it not privilege the confident, assertive technically able student over the quieter ones?

More alarmingly does it serve to uphold power positions in terms of gender, race, culture and physical ability?

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Do newsdays merely replicate the structural inequalities that we know already exist in many news organisations?

Are they what Gen Z wants? Needs? Aspires to?

Young & Giltrow (2015:47-48) consider the currency of the newsday:

‘this situated, authentic experience may be good for replicating current journalistic practice, but is it good for generating innovation and an understanding of what students will be able to do on graduation as vectors by which new knowledge - rather than replicated practice - enters the profession?’

Furthermore, it prompts the question are we too closely aligned to a field of work that is so unrepresentative of our society? And, is this a good or bad thing?

It makes you stop & think!

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

The experiential aspect of the newsday is for many journalism programmes the backbone of what they do - but does it achieve the desired outcomes?

Maharidge (2016) talks about the challenges to journalism educators of getting the balance right between 'traditional' journalism skills and technical skills - back to that binary conversation perhaps?

But the more important questions this poses are: 'what are traditional journalism skills? Are they still relevant? Do our programmes promote them adequately?'

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Entrepreneurialism as an embedded skill is becoming prevalent across many journalism education.

On the one hand it is a laudable & realistic response to prevailing precarity in full-time journalism jobs, especially for new graduates.

On the other hand it is not a panacea, it is imbued with challenges - the least of which being the confusion and/or conflation with freelancing.

Entrepreneurialism often means doing something new, something different, something that the market does not have. As Deuze (2017: 322) states:

‘any class or curriculum or entrepreneurial intervention should come with a mode of instruction and pedagogical materials that would inspire critical engagement in a way of being in the world beyond just a way of setting up shop.’

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Ferrucci (2018) identified in a study of what digital journalists perceived was missing from journalism education - it was focused around:

- **Technological innovation**
 - how can we keep ahead of the constantly moving curve in HEIs?
 - do we neglect good basic journalism skills at the expense of technical skills?
 - does technological proficiency make you a better journalist?
 - does being a good journalist mean you need to have mastery of technology?

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

- Critical thinking

Ferrucci's (ibid) interviewees all cited the ability to think critically as being vital to being a journalist and that journalism schools need to do a better job of preparing graduates to handle complex stories and to understand the context of stories.

One editor of 20 years experience stated:

'We've lost the basics, I believe. We've hired people who cannot think. They don't seem to understand why something is important. This has to be the colleges' fault, I think.' (416)

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

- **Accountability**

In essence this aspect of Ferrucci's (ibid) research was about responsibility, thoroughness, preparedness for interviews and confidence to ask difficult questions and the ability to meet deadlines.

The respondents felt that by and large graduates lacked these - but that many of them could produce good, well cut video content.

Respondents stated that journalism programmes need to spend less time on technology because we are teaching tech natives who already well schooled in use of technology - and that these are proficiencies that they can quickly acquire.

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Journalism as a necessity of a free, democratic society with a social responsibility to do good, to make a difference is a notion we can all support.

But do stakeholders agree?

Looking for good news is sobering.

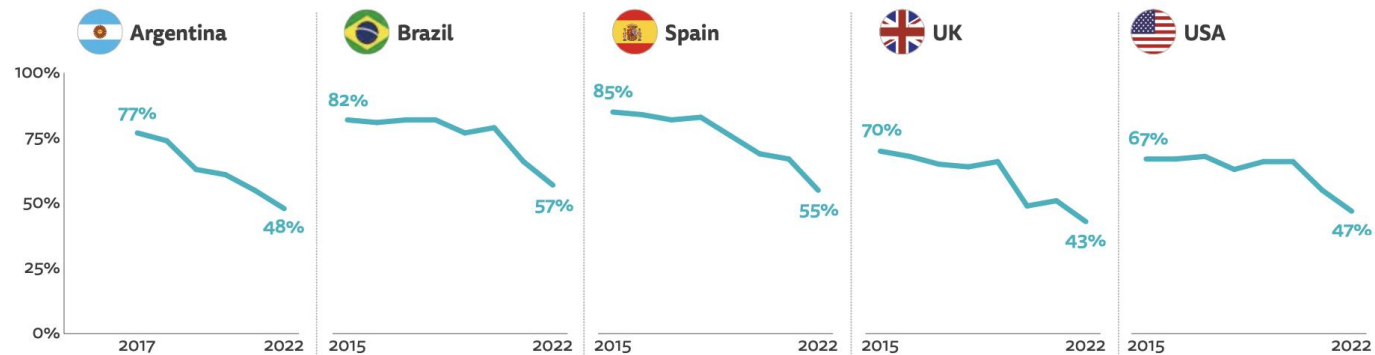
The 2022 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism did not provide much cheer for journalism - or journalism educators.

(<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>)

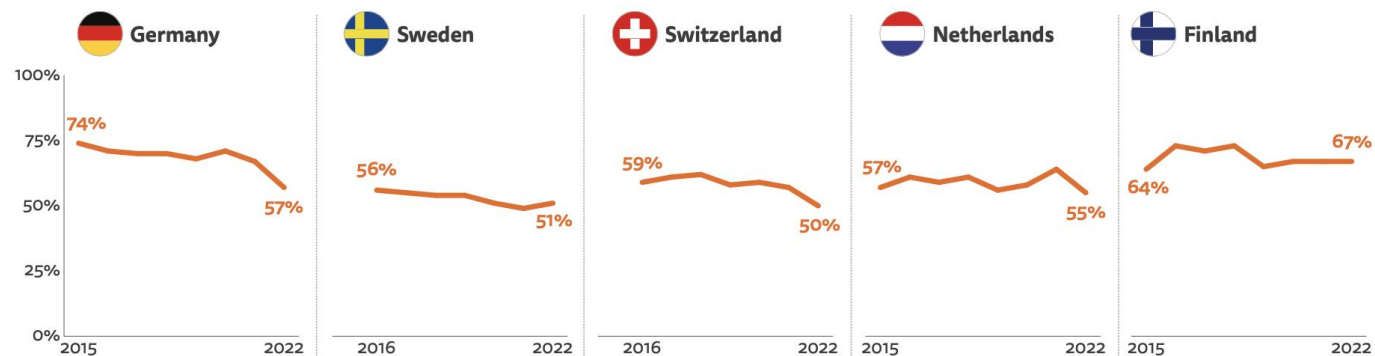
Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

PROPORTION WHO ARE VERY OR EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN NEWS (2015-22)

Selected countries with largest falls



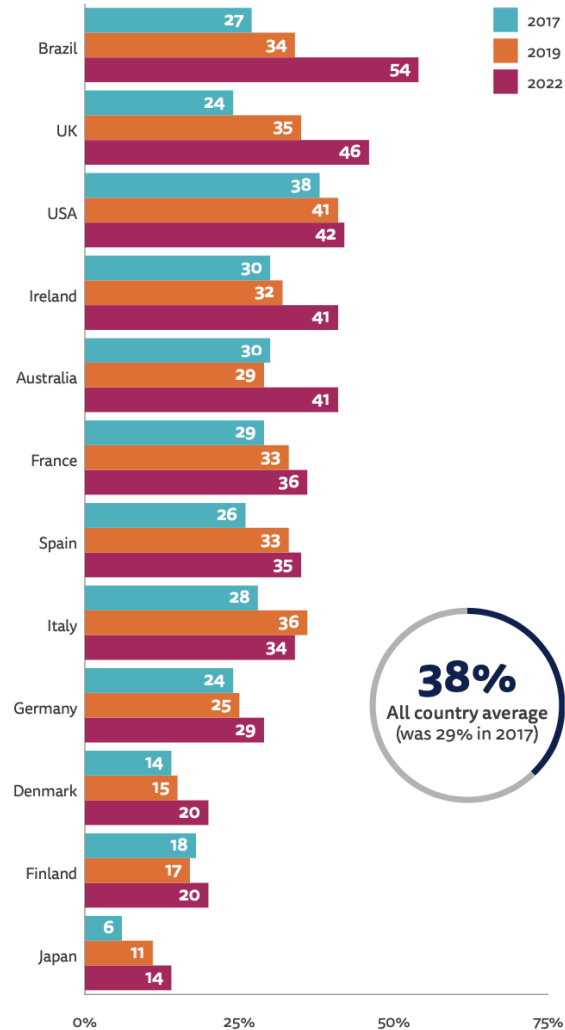
Selected countries with more stable levels



Q1c. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? Base: Total 2015-22 samples (n=2000).

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

PROPORTION WHO SOMETIMES OR OFTEN ACTIVELY AVOID THE NEWS (2017-22) – SELECTED MARKETS



Q1di_2017. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days? Base: Total 2017-22 samples (n=2000).

MOST COMMON REASONS FOR NEWS AVOIDANCE – ALL MARKETS



43%

say there is too much politics and COVID-19



36%

say news has negative effect on mood



29%

say they are worn out by amount of news



29%

say the news is untrustworthy or biased



17%

say it leads to arguments I'd rather avoid



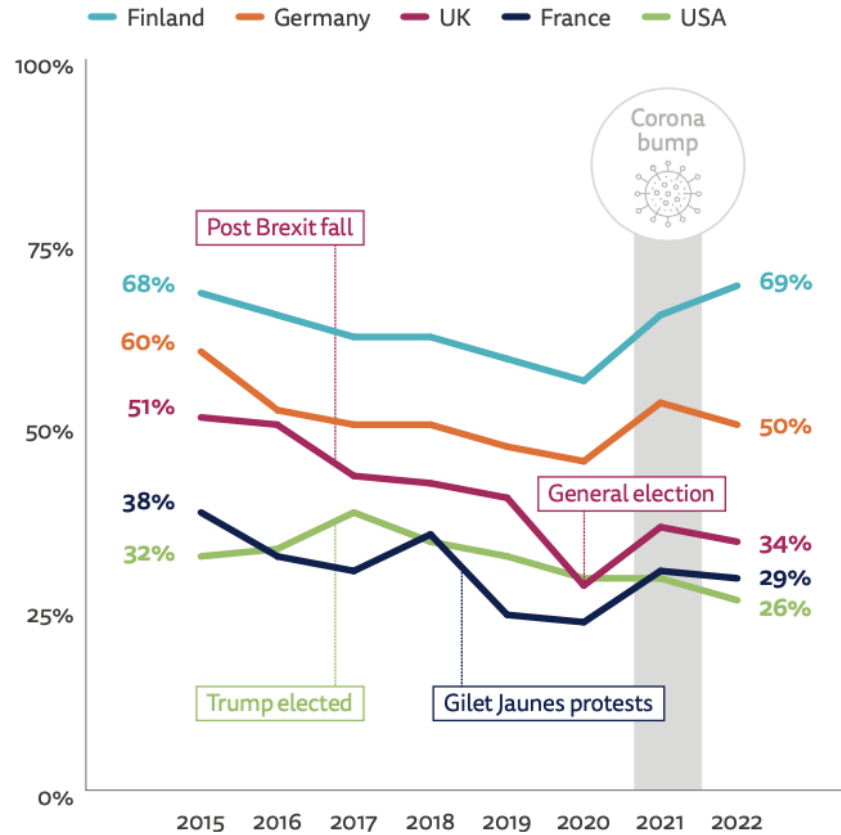
16%

say there is nothing I can do with the information

Q1di_2017ii. Why do you find yourself actively trying to avoid the news? Base: All who avoid the news often, sometimes, or occasionally. All markets = 64,120.

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

PROPORTION THAT TRUSTS MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME (2015-22) – SELECTED MARKETS



Q6_2016_1. Thinking about news in general, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? – I think you can trust most news most of the time. Base: Total 2015–22 samples (n=2000).

Journalism Education: what if we were to start from scratch?

Journalism education faces challenges on many fronts - perceptions of journalism is just one.

Moving forward how do we respond?

This project will seek to speak with journalism educators as it moves forward, if you would like to participate please let me know: Margaret.hughes@uws.ac.uk

THANK YOU!