

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THE QUEST FOR THE PROFESSIONALISATION
OF JOURNALISM IN AUSTRALIA BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

The crisis of World War I, including the challenges of reporting from the fighting front, sparked public discussion about the reliability and status of journalism. In response, unprecedented changes to the education of journalists were introduced around the world, including in Australia. By the 1920s, the majority of Australian universities offered a Diploma in Journalism, developed in collaboration with the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA). Yet despite the AJA's commitment to developing professional standards, by 1945 these courses were either defunct or struggling. This article explores the introduction and subsequent failure of tertiary journalism education in the context of discussions within the AJA about educational 'relevance,' and whether journalists required improved 'thinking' or improved 'skills'. Analysis of the establishment of these university courses highlights debates around the professionalism, status, and ethical practice of journalism in the interwar years, at a time when the newspaper industry was expanding.

Writing on New Year's Eve 1919, British newspaperman William Kennedy Jones declared journalism was not a profession, which implied 'the existence of certain fixed principles, ascertained facts, codes of conduct, etc. knowledge of which could be acquired by study'. Journalism, he argued, was 'of too recent growth' to have these characteristics; to describe it as a trade 'came nearer to the truth'. Journalists required an innate 'news instinct', which could not be acquired by 'all the teaching of all the universities'; a journalist was 'born, not made'.¹ Jones was commenting directly on the establishment of a two-year journalism diploma at the University of London, introduced for returned soldiers in the aftermath of World War I. This was the first tertiary journalism course in Britain, although American

universities had been educating journalists since before the war.² During the 1920s, universities across Australia followed the University of London's example, and, by 1930, there were university journalism courses offered in Australia's major cities, with the exception of Adelaide.

The early celebratory history of the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA), Geoff Sparrow's official *Crusade for Journalism* (1960), considered interwar journalism education within broader moves to elevate the status of journalists.³ Both the professional recognition and education of Australian journalists were ongoing concerns well into the twentieth century, and have continued to attract attention from journalism scholars.⁴ American Fulbright scholar W. S. Holden's *Australia Goes to Press!*, published in 1961, first drew attention to the distinctive national approach. In a chapter on cadet training, Holden contrasted the ambivalence of Australian journalists towards tertiary education with the embrace of tertiary journalism education in the United States.⁵ By 1965, the first Professional Journalism Summer School was convened in Canberra to discuss the future of journalism education in the context of the post-World War II expansion of tertiary education.⁶

Our examination of journalism education immediately after World War I highlights the longevity of moves to professional journalism and the reasons why the AJA chose university qualifications over other models of training as a demonstration of their professional standing. Despite this, as archival sources demonstrate, newspaper proprietors and journalists during the 1920s and 1930s remained divided over the preferred education of journalists. These deliberations occurred at a time when technological advances stimulated by the military and economic demands of World War I, including in the field of communications, were transforming employment in Australia, resulting in new forms of professional expertise, organisation and training, and an expanded sphere of influence for universities and their graduates.⁷ In this context, tertiary education was seen not only as a

means to improve writing skills and equip journalists with an enhanced world view, but to provide them with the moral foundations to prepare responsible and truthful reportage of events, especially during wartime.

Professionalising Australian journalism

Australian journalists came together towards the end of the nineteenth century to maintain literary standards and improve pay and working conditions. The New South Wales (NSW) Institute of Journalists, formed in 1889–90, was based on the British Institute of Journalists (BIJ), established in 1884.⁸ The BIJ wanted to loosen the control of the newspaper proprietors by taking over training and preventing the employment of ‘amateur’ journalists. The NSW Institute, however, resolved: ‘to elevate and dignify the profession by methods that were not inimical to the interests of newspaper proprietors.’⁹ In spite of this overture, proprietors threatened to dismiss journalists who were members, and the Institute dissolved.¹⁰

The short-lived Australasian Institute of Journalists (AIJ) was established in Melbourne in 1892, during deep economic recession and industrial upheaval.¹¹ Also modelled on the BIJ, it had its roots in the Victorian Reporters’ Association, formed in 1890.¹² The Institute’s objective was ‘the elevation of the status and the improvement of all members’, alongside a benevolent function, akin to friendly societies of the time.¹³ After Federation, the Melbourne Press Bond formed, prompting the establishment of similar bodies in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland.¹⁴ When the NSW Institute re-formed in 1907, it was on the same principles as professional associations of doctors, accountants, engineers and ‘other professional men’. Like its predecessor, the Institute disavowed ‘being a trade union’ despite being influenced by Britain’s National Union of Journalists (NUJ), also commencing in 1907.¹⁵ Its objectives were wide, encompassing literary style, libel law, an employment register, a benevolent fund and loyalty to the interests of employers with the

latter demonstrating its non-union stance. Most importantly, the Institute began to tackle the issues of professional status and education.¹⁶

In 1910, the AJA was established as the federal peak body of the states' associations.¹⁷ Despite objections from press proprietors, it was registered as an employees' organisation under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1904).¹⁸ With the outbreak of World War I, twelve per cent of the AJA members enlisted in the military. Those who returned found improved employment conditions: in 1917 the Arbitration Court awarded the AJA nearly everything it sought, with the exception of a 44-hour working week (it remained at 46 hours). In making its decision, the Court found journalism was a profession *sui generis*, a unique occupation that could not be classified with other occupations.¹⁹ The 1920s were marked by the growth of the press, and the emergence of a new breed of "super senior" journalists, who were paid rates above the senior grade of the award.²⁰ In this buoyant time, AJA membership rose to 1900, about 90 per cent of all eligible journalists.²¹ Nonetheless, despite a steady gain in wages, solidarity within the AJA was hard to maintain, with the newspaper mogul Keith Murdoch especially adept at undermining the association's efficacy.²²

Since the late nineteenth century, Australians were, by international standards, extensive readers of newspapers.²³ During the 1920s, newspaper production expanded, the media dynasties of the Packer and Murdoch families were established and the number of local periodicals grew. Census figures indicate that the numbers of people employed as reporters, journalists and more generally as writers grew by more than 60 per cent between 1911 and 1947.²⁴ The economic Depression, which was particularly severe in Australia, hit the industry hard and newspaper proprietors forced the AJA to agree to a 10 per cent drop in salaries in return for job security. Employers imposed further cuts, and it was not until 1942 that the 1929 levels of pay and conditions were reinstated.²⁵ Across this period, the AJA still

resisted affiliation with the Trades Hall Council, arguing it was ‘better to be the lowest-paid profession than the highest paid craft’.²⁶ Concerns about professional standards, particularly in wartime, were partly allayed with the development in 1944 of a Code of Ethics, widely regarded as second only to formal education as a mark of professional status.²⁷

In the 1920s, the use of university qualifications to formalise and legitimise expertise was increasingly prevalent across both the ‘old’ and ‘new’ professions in Australia.²⁸ World War I had highlighted the need for expert knowledge and created the conditions for its expansion and application.²⁹ This was primarily, though not exclusively, in the fields of medicine, science and technology, and the contributions of chemists, engineers, doctors and nurses to the war effort were extensive. In these traditional professions, the conditions on the battlefield, the requirements of military strategy and the needs for increased primary and industrial production, also contributed to the invention and adoption of specialised techniques.³⁰ After the Armistice and through the interwar decades, many fields of employment were transformed through technological advances, often accelerated by the war. At the same time, ‘new professions’ emerged in such areas as town planning, public health and broadcasting.³¹

Australian universities played a key role in these changes through their research and teaching. World War I demonstrated the significance of applied scientific expertise, and saw the Australian government fund its first national research body, the precursor to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Council, to address economic development in the agricultural sector. In the 1920s, the university student body ballooned, including many returned servicemen and in some degrees a steady rise in the intake of women, although they were still a minority. Academic staff also increased as the tertiary sector doubled in size, enabling the teaching of new degrees, the establishment of new

professional qualifications and the capacity to offer a range of special diplomas – including in journalism.³²

The wider technological and social change that took place from World War I and throughout the interwar period extended to the literary, publishing and broadcast spheres. But the impact on the ‘writing professions’, those overlapping spheres of authorship, journalism, publishing and librarianship, was to be mixed. As David Carter and Kate Darian-Smith have shown, attempts to organise these groups through the formation of associations and the accreditation of education and training, had begun before the outbreak of World War I.³³ Nevertheless, the experience of war did lead to a greater demarcation between ‘professional’ journalism and the much looser sphere of freelance or literary writing and ‘amateur’ journalism, although the distinction was by no means always clear and was subject to monitoring.³⁴ In 1921, acknowledging the shared interests between journalists and literary writers in relation to question of syndication and copyright, the AJA formed the Australian Authors’ Association, and many prominent writers soon joined up.³⁵ By 1930, however, the professional expectations of writers and journalists were seen to be so different that the AJA disbanded the association.³⁶ The interwar period also saw the rapid expansion of the advertising industry, which provided additional employment opportunities for writers (including former journalists) who were willing to embrace this new, commercial style of writing.³⁷

Educating journalists

Foreshadowing the rise of fascism in Europe, an international study published in 1928 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) argued that journalism was facing a moral crisis.³⁸ This was exacerbated by the ‘concentration of the press’ and the emergence of ‘newspaper kings’, both circumstances that challenged a free press. Australia, however, was found to be

relatively progressive, with its journalists ‘among the members of the [worldwide] profession possessing the most satisfactory status’.³⁹ The study credited the moves taken towards industrial organisation before World War I and the arbitration agreements reached in 1917 and 1924 for the comparatively high status of Australian journalism.⁴⁰

The ILO also noted the importance of the recent provision of journalism training by Australia’s universities.⁴¹ University journalism education had originated in the United States: in 1902, Joseph Pulitzer, proprietor of the New York *World* donated US\$3 million to Columbia University, New York for the first School of Journalism. This did not open until 1912, by which time the former journalist Walter Williams had established (in 1908), a School of Journalism at the University of Missouri.⁴² Williams would develop a long association with Australia, visiting the country in 1914 and again in the 1930s.⁴³ The University of Missouri course was highly practical, taught in both ‘lecture theatre and laboratory’ with the School run like a newspaper office; students published a daily evening paper.⁴⁴

Reports of these American initiatives drew repudiation from journalism experts in Britain.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in 1902 the City of London School introduced the Steevens Scholarship, a £400 annual travelling award for journalists funded by Alfred Harmsworth, owner of the *Daily Mail*.⁴⁶ George Warrington Steevens was an alumnus of the school and a ‘brilliant war-correspondent’, who died heroically while fighting in the South African War. Harmsworth’s donation reflected the values of British imperialism, envisaging the formation of a college of journalism that would ‘send forth men fit and determined to sustain ... [the] responsibilities of Britons as [the] leader of the press of the world’.⁴⁷ In 1908 Trinity College Dublin introduced a lecture series on journalism. J.A. Spender, the editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, used this platform to argue for the ‘very sound education’ provided by the path ‘from office boy to editor by way of the newsroom and the reporters’ room’. He called for a

style of journalism that ‘must respect its readers and widen their interests’.⁴⁸

Foreshadowing subsequent debates, Australian newspapermen, politicians and educationists were divided on these international developments. When Fairfax addressed the British Institute of Journalists in 1913, ‘pleading for the special education of journalists and the establishment of an efficient school of journalism’, he hoped to save the newspaper time and money in organising Fairfax’s own training.⁴⁹ Theodore Fink of the Melbourne *Herald*, though a noted educationist, opposed this push, believing degrees were a waste of time for journalists because they led students to assume employment would follow graduation.⁵⁰

Given the historical and geographical specificities that influenced the formation of the modern professions during the early twentieth century, the processes of journalism professionalisation in Australia – including tertiary education – were not exactly analogous to those in comparable countries such as Britain or the United States.⁵¹ When Australian newspaper proprietor James O. Fairfax spoke in favour of university journalism education in 1913, the world’s first labour party majority government had only recently been narrowly defeated after three years in power supported by a relatively well-established radical press.⁵² Six years later, a committed Socialist, the future Labor Prime Minister John Curtin, led the push for the first university journalism lectures to be established.⁵³ While Australian newspaper proprietors and their editors might well have joined their British and USA counterparts in seeing university education as a means of reining in bohemian or radical journalists, they were less likely than their overseas counterparts to express this as their key motivation because in Australia purportedly radical political ideas had already achieved mainstream acceptance.

Nevertheless, the responses of newspaper proprietors to the gains made by Australia’s precocious labour movement seem to have encouraged moves towards university education for journalists. At the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in 1917, the AJA achieved

‘increased salaries, shorter hours and other benefits’ for its members; press owners expressed concern that such ‘arbitration awards would stifle ambition and kill incentive’. The AJA’s subsequent investigation into education in 1919 suggested tertiary training would combat any such complacency, presumably by making entry into journalism more competitive.⁵⁴

By the early twentieth century, university education was increasingly perceived as conferring legitimation on professional claims to what Larson has called ‘cognitive and technical superiority’ and the social and economic benefits that followed. The traditional pathway into a career in journalism, with initial employment as a ‘copyboy’ followed by an often perfunctory cadetship, was no longer seen as sufficient.⁵⁵ Anxious about the future conditions for their members, the AJA saw university qualifications as the quickest, most efficient way to acquire higher status.⁵⁶ Australian universities were also willing to partner with the AJA at a time when they were asserting a more prominent role in Australian society and government. As the universities opened their doors to returning soldiers under a national training scheme, the AJA was keen that specialist courses for journalists be offered.⁵⁷

The AJA’s Central Committee discussed a potential Diploma of Journalism in 1916, acknowledging the public attached ‘weight to these diplomas which supply proof that the possessors are masters, at least of the theory of their science or art’.⁵⁸ Support for the proposal was conditional on the need for a practical element to journalism training. In New Zealand, where a diploma of journalism had been instituted, it was noted ‘a candidate who had not been “through the mill” of working at a newspaper would fail miserably’.⁵⁹ The NSW Education Minister, A.C. Carmichael, a former journalist, argued for intending journalists to be taught at secondary schools, with universities providing courses to ‘finish them off’. Improved skills in the expression and grammar of the English language, and in critical thinking, would help journalists stand above populist appeals and boost their ‘professional honour’.⁶⁰ An editorial in the AJA publication, the *Journalist* supported a

diploma, arguing that teaching young journalists to think would equip them better to deal with ‘the ponderous municipal councilors’.⁶¹ However, support from within the AJA was far from universal. Writing in the *Journalist*, the University of Melbourne’s Professor of History, Ernest Scott, also a former journalist, doubted ‘whether you can teach practical journalism anywhere else than in a newspaper office’.⁶²

The impact of World War I on reporting both during the fighting and into peacetime gave a fresh momentum to these debates. Australian journalists resisted acknowledging the suffering they witnessed at the front. Instead, they joined some elements of the British press in embracing the role of war propagandist, publishing exaggerated reports of German atrocities sent out by London-based news agencies, such as Reuters and Murdoch’s United Cable Service.⁶³ By stoking fear and panic amongst the civilian population, the press served government efforts to shore up support for the war.⁶⁴ In November 1918, the Australasian magazine the *Triad* claimed the ‘yellow press’ was undermining the reputation of the Anzacs. In ‘booming the Australian as the one super-soldier’ – which was ‘an absurdity and an unseemliness’ – the press would create a ‘great reaction’ against Australian soldiers.⁶⁵ The British Labour MP Arthur Ponsonby was later to reflect: ‘there can be no more discreditable period in the history of journalism than the four years of the Great War.’⁶⁶ In 1921, Sir Philip Gibbs, one of the five official British war reporters, told the journalism students at London University:

Before the war there was a certain assurance that the presentation of facts by the special correspondent and by the ordinary reporters presented a fair and accurate picture of the world. Since then the public feel ... that their paper does not give them an accurate presentation, that the facts themselves have been doctored, and that each paper selects those items of news to suit its policy, and by that they create a false image of life.⁶⁷

Gibbs' speech was widely reported in Australia, and its sentiments echoed in the local press. For instance the Australian Catholic newspaper *Freeman's Journal* argued that Sydney journalism was following the 'sensational American yellow newspapers' and pandering 'in a very gross fashion to the depraved tastes of certain classes of the community'.⁶⁸

For those concerned about the standing of journalists in society, such as R. L. Curthoys of Melbourne's *Argus* and William Farmer Whyte (editor of Brisbane's *Daily Mail* and the Chairman of the AJA's Education Commission), improved education was crucial to maintain journalism's reputation.⁶⁹ Responding to these concerns, the AJA set up a subcommittee to report on education at its conference in 1919. After consultation with 'university professors, newspaper managers, leading journalists, commercial men and publicists', it recommended the establishment of a special three-year diploma at Australian universities. From the start, the diploma was seen as supplementary: it would not replace the current entry into journalism through an informal apprenticeship but would help develop deeper knowledge.⁷⁰ The response from senior newspaper figures was mixed. Fairfax's W.G. Conley supported the move, arguing that there had been 'a movement for education' in 'every trade, calling and profession during the last 20 or 30 years', and journalism should 'keep pace with this upward movement'. The *Sun*'s Adam McCay disagreed vehemently. A university diploma 'pretending to be a certificate of excellence ... would be a farce. There was only one training school for journalists, and that was the actual practice of journalism.'⁷¹ Curthoys countered that 'defined conditions of entry' and standing would place journalism 'on a firmer footing and a better standing in national life' (Curthoys went on to advocate for the scheme to the Victorian branch of the AJA).⁷² Others compared the university education of journalists to that of medical practitioners or lawyers as being 'only fair and reasonable'.⁷³

In the immediate post-war years, the AJA continued to monitor university international journalism education, particularly in the United States where the training was generally vocational, but also in countries such as France and Norway.⁷⁴ In 1921, the AJA's Federal president, Herbert Davies of the *Argus*, returned from the World's Press Congress, held in Honolulu, Hawai'i, impressed by the standard of the delegates from Japan and China, who were 'nearly all' men of university education.⁷⁵ By this time, three Australian universities had introduced journalism courses: the experiment was underway.

At the time of World War I there were six universities in Australia: the universities of Sydney (established 1850), Melbourne (1853), Adelaide (1874), Tasmania (1890), Queensland (1909) and Western Australia (1911). These were small institutions, with the three oldest the most sizeable; in 1915 the total Australian university student population was only 4,297.⁷⁶

Support for journalism education came first in 1919 from the newest institution, when the University of Western Australia (UWA) introduced special extension lectures for journalists.⁷⁷ The president of the Western Australia District of the AJA, John Curtin, drove the initiative, arguing that "a love of knowledge represents the urge without which no man or woman can succeed in journalism".⁷⁸ The course was 'largely conceived' by Walter Murdoch, Professor of English Literature and E. O. G. Shann, Professor of Economic History. Neither thought universities could or should teach journalism: Murdoch worried that the universities' "prevalent mania for examinations" would shut out "boys capable of first-class journalism" who were not equipped to pass University examinations.⁷⁹ Commenting on the establishment of diploma courses at Melbourne and Queensland, Shann observed that, based on the experience at the University of Western Australia, working journalists were unable to commit to attending two weekly lectures. He recommended that the AJA maintain control of the courses and avoid "stereotyping the plan it so many University regulations and

so much University routine". Experiment and adaptation, he argued were "the very essence of these classes of ours".⁸⁰ Murdoch and Shann did believe however, that a series of lectures might stimulate working journalists in 'political and economic history', thereby improving their education levels. Tutorial classes were held in English, History of British-Colonial Policy and Economics. By 1928 the lectures were replaced by a university course supported by the AJA and the Newspaper Proprietors Association.⁸¹ According to student Paul Hasluck, the future Governor General of Australia, it was 'an easy course of one academic subject a year for four years plus a series of lectures on subjects closely related to newspaper work'.⁸²

The University of Queensland introduced a trial diploma course in journalism in 1921.⁸³ Five students enrolled, including G.R. (Dick) Tainton, who reported on the course for the *Journalist*.⁸⁴ A committee of university staff and the AJA administered the course. Students were required to pass four subjects and complete three years of professional experience (with AJA certification) to qualify for the Diploma in Journalism. Tainton described being 'whirled into a vortex of hard work, lectures, reading, writing'. He studied European and English History, Colonial Policy and Economic History, and Drama: William Farmer Whyte was a fellow student. Classes were offered in the day or evening, with fees at £8 8 shillings for the academic year.⁸⁵ The Queensland diploma was reviewed in 1926, with newspaper interests arguing for greater emphasis on the English language and 'an ability to marshal facts'.⁸⁶

The University of Melbourne's Diploma in Journalism also commenced in 1921.⁸⁷ Students had to pass six subjects and produce evidence of four years' experience in practical journalism, with fees of £1 9 shillings for each subject.⁸⁸ A Joint Committee of university and AJA representatives oversaw the curriculum.⁸⁹ Enrolments fluctuated greatly: twenty students enrolled in 1921, but only nine completed the year. There were just eight enrolments in 1922, and eleven in 1923. Disappointed with this attrition and the small numbers, the AJA

encouraged newspaper proprietors to support the studies of their staff.⁹⁰ The first graduate (in 1922) was Allan Frederick Burbury, a journalist at Melbourne's *Herald* who later worked for *The Sun*, Australian Associated Press in London, and Brisbane's *Sunday Mail*.⁹¹

The University of Sydney established its Diploma in Journalism in 1926, having first discussed the possibility in 1919, following the announcement of the University of London course.⁹² Requirements were two-fold: attendance at prescribed lectures, passing examinations and not less than four consecutive years of professional work. Examiners included Charles Bean, Australia's leading war correspondent, and W. P. Tiernan, president of the AJA's NSW District.⁹³ Once again, these arrangements received mixed responses. Academics were reluctant; Professor of English, Mungo McCallum observed that 'a journalist ought to be a graduate in the "faculty of things" in general'.⁹⁴ Given the requirement of four years' practical experience, the necessity for university study was questioned. J. Fitz-Alees, a Sydney pressman, wrote in the *Journalist*:

Because a doctor is a member of a profession and has to pass an examination to be recognized as such, it does not follow that a journalist should be made the same way. The fact is, he can't be. If a diploma is necessary – which it ain't – then why not a diploma of experience.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, those enrolling in the first year of the Sydney Diploma were an illustrious group and included Clive Evatt, barrister, politician, and brother of the future Labor leader H.V. Evatt; Ross Gollan, the *Sydney Morning Herald* political correspondent; Geoff Hawksley, son of George Hawksley of the *Evening News*, and Vice President of the Journalists' Institute; the *Daily Telegraph*'s Robin Slessor; Neroli Whittle, who went on to work as a journalist in Britain; the writer G.W.R. Southern; and Elinor Wren, daughter of the notorious

Melbourne bookmaker John Wren.⁹⁶

What was notable was the large number of female students these courses attracted: at the University of Sydney women outnumbered men three to one in most years.⁹⁷ Women journalists had been guaranteed equal pay in the 1917 decision of the Arbitration Commission but were usually confined to lower status work, and generally writing for the ‘women’s pages’.⁹⁸ In the interwar years, some middle-class women (including married women – for unlike the Australian public service there was no requirement for women to leave journalism on marriage) sought alternative pathways into journalism including tertiary study.⁹⁹ It took two decades before the first woman, Lynette Yvonne Walker, graduated with a University of Melbourne Diploma in Journalism.¹⁰⁰ She had joined the *Argus* in October 1937 as the University correspondent, and then moved into general reporting. While at the University, Walker co-edited the student newspaper *Farrago*.¹⁰¹ How many other women who undertook university study in journalism found employment is difficult to ascertain, not least because bylines were yet to become common; many women worked as ‘casual contributors’ or freelancers.¹⁰² Greater autonomy for women, including access to newspaper cadetships, arrived with the upheaval caused by World War II. As male journalists enlisted, some women took the opportunity to move permanently beyond the women’s pages and be assigned to general reporting, although they remained a minority in the industry.¹⁰³

When the Sydney Diploma of Journalism was discontinued in 1931, there had only been one graduate, Kenneth Hutton Wilkinson, the son of the renowned journalist Frank Wilkinson, and the film and dramatic critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, by 1938 there had been only 25 graduates of the university Diplomas in Journalism nation-wide. Despite the support of the AJA, the newspaper industry had failed to embrace university journalism courses, though the economic conditions of the 1930s also contributed to the downturn in enrolments in the university courses.

Debates conducted in the pages of the *Journalist* in the 1920s show journalists divided on the efficacy of university education for journalists.¹⁰⁵ Underlying these debates were anxieties about the standing of the journalist in society coterminous with those anxieties expressed immediately after the war. Of particular concern was the maintenance of journalistic writing standards in the face of the 'New Journalism'. Those who argued for increased standardisation, including prescribed training, were especially concerned with the status of professional journalists in the shifting media environment of the 1920s.¹⁰⁶ The status of journalists was threatened, they argued, by two types of outsider: the 'bohemian' writer whose work introduced creative uncertainty to the profession, and the amateur journalist, including those trained in university courses, whose writing was perceived as 'stilted'.¹⁰⁷ Linked to this was the hope that standardisation might ensure the maintenance of award rates of pay: the willingness of amateur or freelancer writers to accept lower rates of pay or, in the case of academics to write for no remuneration, reduced opportunities for the professional journalist.¹⁰⁸ Reflecting a similar debate in the advertising industry (was advertising a science or an art?¹⁰⁹), those who resisted calls for the standardisation university training would deliver argued that journalism could not be compared to 'the recognized professions' (law and medicine) because it was 'essentially' useless, having 'no mission to educate or assist humanity'.¹¹⁰ Underlying the debates about the advisability of tertiary education were uncertainties about the future of journalism: what skills would the next generation of journalists require in the rapidly changing media environment? Should they be trained to think critically, or should they continue to learn 'on the job', as so many had in the past?

Australian journalists were divided on this, as were editors and proprietors. The *Herald and Weekly Times* had supported the establishment of the Melbourne diploma in 1921, immediately setting up a support scheme for staff who wished to enroll.¹¹¹ Conley had spoken up in support for tertiary education, as had James Fairfax. Yet the establishment in

1921 of Fairfax's Herald School (later known as the Instruction Department) in Sydney delivered a rather mixed message. On the one hand, it demonstrated a strong organisational commitment to education for Fairfax employees beyond technical training. Between 1921 and 1947, 426 apprentices at the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Mail* were educated in-house at the *SMH*. They were drawn from the Composing, Clerical, Electrical, Lino Engineering, Stereo, Process Engraving, Machine, Messenger, Accounts, and Advertising sections.¹¹² They attended classes where subjects such as English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Drawing, and Physiology were taught using a series of pocket-books — *English Grammar, Notes I and II* (1924) *Pronunciation* (1929), and *Words with Notes on Spelling and Usages* (1934), for example — compiled by the School's "headmaster", F. G. Brown (BA, B. Sc.).¹¹³

On the other hand, the establishment of the Herald School allowed Fairfax to control both its content and emphasis, ensuring the material covered in lessons would be of use on-the-job. The School also provided opportunities for company bonding: annual prizes were awarded with the financial support of the Herald Chapel of the Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia (PIEU), and members of the Fairfax family attended prize-giving nights.¹¹⁴ It is unclear whether any of the technical staff who completed the lessons later worked as journalists, but mobility within the organisation was common: Charles Theakstone, for example, the *SMH*'s Chief Sub-editor, had started as a compositor.¹¹⁵

Despite the failure of the AJA's work with the universities to develop a vibrant program of journalism education, there were educational alternatives. The privately-run business colleges that existed in Australian cities — Stott's Technical Correspondence College, Bradshaw's Business College, the International Correspondence School — had taught advertising writing (copywriting) since before World War I. After the war, they expanded their offerings to include 'Literary Training', correspondence courses designed to equip

Australians with the skills required to secure paid work in the swiftly expanding writing professions.¹¹⁶ Subjects included Journalism and Story Writing, Radio Play Writing, Radio Continuity Writing, and Freelance Journalism.¹¹⁷ Specialist journalism colleges also opened: the Australian Institute of Journalism and the Metropolitan School of Journalism, for example.¹¹⁸ How successful the graduates of these colleges were in the industry is unclear, but the prominent Stott's College advertised regularly in the *Journalist*, as did other private colleges.¹¹⁹ By 1945 those Diploma in Journalism courses at Australian universities that were introduced with such optimism at the end of World War I were either cancelled or struggling, although Melbourne and Queensland limped on into the 1960s.

Conclusion

In 1965 the renowned political scientist Henry Mayer reflected on the reasons for the failure of the university courses for journalists introduced in the aftermath of World War I. Echoing the opinion of Professor Shann in 1920, Mayer blamed long working hours which prevented cadets from attending lectures, as well as the questionable professional relevance of the university curriculum.¹²⁰ The courses were not essential for a career in journalism: diplomas were not required for entry, graduation was not tied to promotion, and there were no sanctions against cadets who dropped out. To change these circumstances required industry-wide commitment, and this proved impossible given the belief of some proprietors and senior journalists that tertiary education for journalists was not essential or even desirable.

Ideally, perhaps, Australian universities could have provided both liberal education and practical training to journalists as they did in the United States, but in a country without a tradition of philanthropy, investment in this development was unforthcoming.¹²¹

Nevertheless, these Australian university courses were to make a significant contribution to the continuing advocacy for the improved status and professionalism of journalism. With the

emergence of a new type of reportage in the aftermath of World War I, shaped by advances in technology and communications and social change, the interwar debates in the pages of the *Journalist* about the value and efficacy of university training provided a forum for journalists to discuss their current practices and their aspirations for the future of the press in Australia.

1. “The New Journalism,” *Australasian*, 22 May 1920, 42; Jones, *Fleet Street*, 178–80.

2. “The Journalist: Talk with Professor Williams, A World Mission,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1914, 12; Oliver Hogue, “An American Journalist: Australia Under the Microscope. Williams’s World Mission,” *Journalist*, 25 March 1914, 27–9.

3. Sparrow, *Crusade for Journalism*, 72.

⁴ Tunstall, “Journalism as an Occupation,” 87–101; Henningham, “Journalists and Professionalization,” 15–20; Adam, “The Education of Journalists,” 315–39; Aldridge and Evetts, “Rethinking the Concept of Professionalism,” 547–64; Tumber and Prentoulis, “Journalism and the Making of a Profession,” 58–74; Elsaka, “New Zealand Journalists,” 73–86; Nolan, “Professionalism Without Professions?”

5. Holden, *Australia Goes to Press*, 185–97.

6. Hudson, “The Education of a Journalist”; Robertson, *First Summer School of Professional Journalism*.

7. See Darian-Smith and Waghorne, *The First World War*.

8. “An Association of Journalists,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 1889, 4;

<https://cioj.org/history-of-the-cioj>. Accessed 25 November 2019.

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9. Lloyd, *Profession Journalist*, 31.
 10. Lloyd, *Profession Journalist*, 31.
 11. “News of the Day,” *Age*, 11 January 1892, 4.
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