

The Leveson Inquiry

Witness Statement of Sue Ryan

The Mail Trainee Journalist Scheme

1. I have been asked to provide the Inquiry with some information about the Daily Mail's training scheme for journalists. The scheme is the responsibility of the Mail through its managing editors and I am responsible for organising and administering the training itself. I am not employed by the Mail directly - I am engaged under a contract which requires me to devote a certain number of working days a year to the task.
2. The Mail Trainee Journalist Scheme began nine years ago. It is designed to provide reporters, sub editors and photographers with training and experience above and beyond what they will have learnt on post-graduate journalism courses or elsewhere. The scheme was initially for sub editors and was expanded five years ago to include reporters and, last year (2011), we added photographers.
3. The traineeship is for a year and the trainees get £18,000 living expenses during that year. A job at the Mail is not guaranteed but as long as the trainees do well their contracts are renewed at the end of that year.
4. The scheme is widely known among those interested in pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. We used to advertise in the Guardian media pages and we now advertise on Guardian online and Hold the Front Page. I also publicise the scheme by visiting several universities that run postgraduate journalism courses.

The nature and qualifications of successful applicants for the scheme

5. All the successful applicants have degrees, most from the top tier universities. English Language and Literature, Law, History or Politics feature the most and around half of the reporters taken on over the past four years (when the first reporters' course started) have achieved first class honours. The universities that have dominated are Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Leeds, York, Exeter and Edinburgh.

6. While a postgraduate qualification is not a prerequisite for entry to the scheme, we nearly always recruit from this pool as the applications from these candidates are stronger - they have learned more and there is more evidence of ability. The majority of those selected have postgraduate qualifications in journalism from City, Sheffield, Cardiff or Goldsmiths. A few have done the 20 week fast track courses run by PA or one of the approved NCTJ courses. Very occasionally we will take an outstanding student straight from university.
7. The academic background of the trainee sub editors is similar: undergraduate degrees for this year's intake were taken at Edinburgh, Oxford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Durham, Sheffield and Birmingham. Seven of them have postgraduate qualifications in journalism - five from City, one from Cardiff and one from Sheffield, while one did NCTJ training at Harlow.
8. Around half of every year's intake comes from City University. This is not necessarily because the teaching is better (although it may well be) but because their selection process is so rigorous and their reputation is such that the quality of students attending there is high. We nearly always take a couple from Sheffield, where I think the teaching is excellent, and most years we have had one student from Goldsmiths. We have been impressed by students from Kent University - we most recently visited them in January to talk about the scheme. We have interviewed students from Brunel and Kingston but their CVs are generally far less impressive. We have taken several candidates from Cardiff as trainee subs, but although we have shortlisted several students for the reporters' course, only one has made it onto the scheme so far. I understand that Ian Hargreaves of Cardiff told the Inquiry only one in 10 of their students went on to work for tabloids. I do not believe this is because they choose not to: rather, it reflects the amount of competition for places. David English, the head of the print course at Cardiff, has encouraged me to come and talk to his students, and when I did, the majority of those on the course applied.
9. It would be quite wrong to imagine that there are two parallel routes into journalism for broadsheets on the one hand and popular papers such as the Mail on the other. We both recruit from the same universities and the same journalism colleges. Almost everyone that applies to the Mail also applies to the Telegraph and the Times and sometimes the same candidates get offered jobs by all three of us. The Mail and the Telegraph use the same PA training teams - in September the two sets of trainees actually work in adjacent rooms in their offices in Howden, Yorkshire. Trainees from both The Mail and the Telegraph go to the same regional papers and sit by side in the offices of the Manchester Evening News or the Yorkshire Post.

The nature of the scheme

General

10. Because almost all of our trainees have previously undergone some form of journalism education and training, our scheme is designed to develop those skills and not just duplicate them. For example, when the trainees join our scheme, they have already been taught certain reporting skills and they have also been taught about libel, government and other legal matters. Our scheme builds on what they have learnt and takes them to the next level.
11. We have only ever recruited two reporters who have had no training and in those cases we have taken special steps to bring them up to speed. The first - now working on the City desk - did a correspondence course which included shorthand and law and we gave him a series of one to one training lessons whilst he was on the Manchester Evening News. The second is in this year's intake and we have put her on an intensive PA training scheme for 8 weeks and arranged for weekly one to one training when she is at the MEN.

Reporters

12. The format of the training for the three different groups is as follows. The reporters come to the Daily Mail offices in September for the first two weeks for an intensive period of training headed by Peter Sands, who helped to set up the Press Association's training programme and has been training journalists for about 30 years. I am also there every day so I can assess strengths, weaknesses and gaps in knowledge. I also use my time to observe individuals' characters so that I can make sure I feel confident they are all to be trusted.
13. We cover everything from writing skills and news sense to law. There is a strong focus on ethics throughout these two weeks. Around 20 Daily Mail executives and writers come and talk to the trainees, including Quentin Letts, the Mail's Parliamentary sketch writer; Keith Poole, assistant editor; Ben Taylor, the news editor; Alex Brummer, the City editor; Neil Darbyshire, Assistant Editor, News; David Williams and Christian Gysin, senior reporters; and Alex Bannister, the managing editor. An important purpose of these talks is to give the trainees a sense of what the Mail is and central to that is integrity. One of the strongest messages is "never do anything that you feel uncomfortable about". Ben Taylor's message is "you have to look yourself in the mirror every day and you must never do anything that makes you not like what you see." The trainees are taught never to break the law or the

PCC's code of conduct. The senior reporters talk to them about getting information legally, what to do and what not to do. A lot of stress is put on the need to be ethical both for their own sense of self but also to reflect well on the newspaper. They are warned that unethical behaviour would result in the loss of their jobs and that is underlined in their contracts.

14. Peter and I also talk a lot about the importance of the data protection and bribery laws and the PCC code. This year, as well as the speakers in September, we have arranged a two day course in February to be devoted entirely to ethics and the law. Among those speaking are Phil Harding, former Controller of Editorial Policy at the BBC, and Bob Satchwell from the Society of Editors. Bob and I are on the training committee of the Society of Editors and point one of what that committee has agreed is to emphasise the importance of ethical conduct by encouraging training institutions to teach ethics and law rather than law and ethics.
15. After the two week period in Derry Street, the trainees are sent to local papers for a minimum of four months. The papers are selected because of their ability to train and we do not restrict the papers to those owned by the Mail group. I have formed a good relationship with the news editors of, among others, the Manchester Evening News and the Yorkshire Post and I feel I can trust them to train our recruits and not just use them as free labour.
16. While our trainees are working at the papers, I visit them there and talk to the news editors and address any concerns before bringing them into the paper. Once I feel confident that they have reached a certain level, they come to the paper and department heads are given the responsibility of mentoring and supporting them.
17. In the case of the trainee without a postgraduate qualification, he continued his regional training for eight months - but at the end of it he had done well enough to be given a staff job by the City editor.
18. At the paper, the trainees generally move around departments and the brief is to do that in accordance with what is best for their needs - rather than where a department is short of staff and needs an extra pair of hands.

Sub editors

19. The sub editors, who need to be taught more technical production skills, have a longer training period - five weeks - and this is done by the Press Association at their offices in Howden in Yorkshire. It includes several sessions on law and ethics and they also have several visiting lecturers from the Mail including someone from the Mail's legal department. They then spend around five months on regional papers.

Photographers

20. The photographers' scheme was new last year. They joined in the same two weeks as the reporters and peeled off for separate sessions including a day of ethics and law.

Cost

21. The trainee scheme costs the Mail well over half a million pounds a year. I know of no other newspaper group that spends anything like this sum training its journalists.

My contact with trainees and how the trainees develop

22. I am in regular contact with the trainees both throughout the year and to a lesser extent afterwards, as is Peter Sands. The 9 pm call is a regular event in our household but it is nearly always about a personal or financial matter, or seeking knowledge about how they are doing or whether they will be moving to another department. At no time has any of them raised any ethical issues with me or expressed unhappiness about what they have been asked to do. I do believe if they were unhappy or unsure they would speak to either myself or Peter. On the contrary most of the emails I receive from them are about how much they love the job.
23. An enormous number of Mail subs who came up through the trainee system have been headhunted by the Telegraph. One of the trainee reporters from the first course four years ago is now working at the Times and I believe was also offered a job at the Guardian. She took a while to make the decision as although she had always wanted to work at the Times, she felt the training by the Mail and the help her colleagues gave her had been so professional she was in debt to them. Like several of our trainees she had been a recipient of the Guardian's Scott Bursary scheme. I don't think she has found the basics of working in their newsroom significantly different from the Mail. As former head of news at the

Telegraph, I do not think there are any strong cultural differences between the Telegraph and the Mail.

Comparison with other newspaper training schemes

- 24. It is acknowledged in the industry that the Mail's training scheme is among the best in the newspaper industry. The feedback from Mail trainees is very positive - particularly in terms of the help senior colleagues give them. They feel part of a well-supported team.

My background

- 25. My own background is as follows. I did my NCTJ training in the seventies followed by a two year indentured period on a regional newspaper after which I joined the Mail as a reporter and later the Mail on Sunday as deputy news editor. I have also been head of features on Today, contributing editor on The Observer and then head of news and managing editor at The Telegraph for six and eight years respectively. I am on several industry bodies including the Society of Editors and the Journalists' Charity.

I believe the contents of this witness statements are true.

Signed

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Date

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