

Journalism 2004 Conference

“Getting Started”

29 October 2004

Merlyn Theatre CUB Malthouse

Kate Ashley-Griffiths

Chris McLeod

Robin Jackman

Tom Hyland

Bob Kearsley

BK: ... Some of the earlier sessions today may have inspired you even more than you were before to try to get into this business. I guess this is the pointy end of the whole process. How do we achieve that? We've got a very experienced panel here to help us explore various aspects of the job of getting a job. I'll introduce them. Starting from my immediate left we have Tom Hyland from *The Age*, next to him Chris McLeod from *The Herald Sun*, Robin Jackman from the ABC and Kate Ashley-Griffiths from *Leader* Community newspapers, all crammed the four of them into a table built for three, it seems. I'm sure they'll control their arm-waving to the point where they don't actually knock each other off their chairs. Perhaps the best way to go about this is a similar format to the one that was used in the last session. I'll ask each of the panelists to speak to you for a few minutes on their own experiences and the practices they're aware of, the opportunities that exist and the ways of crashing through the system to get that all important job. After that we'll go to your questions. I can throw perhaps in a minute or so on commercial television which is the bit I know best, if that's of any help to anybody. So perhaps I could ask Tom to kick proceedings off.

TH: Thank you. I'm the State News Editor at *The Age*. I've had that job since about February this year. I've been at *The Age* for seven years and I've been a journalist, I discovered today, for 25 years. I got into journalism when I received a letter from an old mate of mine who was in a paper in Mount Isa in far north-west Queensland and at the time I was a labourer in Tasmania where I'd gone to university, and he wrote to me and said if you want to get into journalism, come up to Mount Isa. We'll fly you up here at our expense. We'll give you absolutely no training and if you stuff up we'll fly you home within six months. Many's a time over that first six months I was hoping that I would stuff up so that I would be flown home. But it didn't happen, so here I am.

Last night in preparation for this session I sat down and did *The Age* Trainee Application test. Its 50 questions, basically facts, names, places, dates about current events. 50 questions of which I can answer 21. I can answer 21 accurately and the rest of them I couldn't even guess at. So I guess if I was applying for a job with *The Age* at the moment I wouldn't get one. I've since learnt from our Editorial Trainee that the people or the person who scores the highest in that entry test is very rarely hired. In fact there is no case where the person who got 50 questions actually made it onto *The Age* staff. That test is part of an ordeal to which we subject trainees over a, well would-be trainees, over a process of about six months which begins in June or July when Fairfax newspapers advertises for trainees for the following year.

That initial advertisement, or advertisements, attracts about 800 applicants, bearing in mind the six months later *The Age* may take on six or eight of those people. The initial application involves providing details of your CV, your educational level, and *The Age* requires that any trainee have tertiary qualifications, plus a 500 word essay about yourself and I'm advised by our Editorial Trainee that anybody who does that essay is advised to check and recheck and double-check. One recent applicant was excluded right at that first part of the process when they wrote in their autobiographical essay I am a very passionate parson. This person may have had aspirations to become the Religious Affairs Correspondent but we will never know. After that first application a short list, or a first short list is produced, which is about 400, that's 400 out of 800, who are called in to sit the test – that's the test that I failed. Plus the test involves writing two further essays. This year the question was 'What issue do you think will most polarize Australians in the next ten years?' and another essay which was 'What has been the biggest mistake of your life?'

By November the process enters stage three which is initial interviews for which 40 people are selected. So we've gone from 800 down to 40. From those 40, and by the way at that initial interview what we're really looking for, apart from basic literacy of course, is a portfolio of published work. So you can't say I want to get into journalism to write. We want to see that you've already written either in a student newspaper or a uni paper or school paper, sports magazine, street press, anything.

From those 40 who are given the initial interview, 20 are selected for a final interview which is by a panel of between about half a dozen senior journalists, editors and the Editor-in-Chief. So this is a six month process from 800 applicants down to half a dozen trainees. At the final panel we've got a fairly good idea of who we're dealing with but the key thing that the selectors are looking for is what sort of person is this? Is this person a resilient person? Can this person cope with the stresses that we're about to subject them to? Have they got the sort of broad range of experiences? Are they are well-rounded person? I can tell you that an outstanding applicant was recently interviewed and the first question to him was what was on the front page of the paper this morning? We will never know whether this person would make a great journalist because they'd never read the paper. They said they were sorry, they didn't have time. So if ever get to this stage read the paper. I should add that there's probably half a dozen, well more than that, there's probably scores of people in the newsroom right at this moment who haven't read the paper. But so it goes.

Anyway that's the process. And then those six to eight trainees are then given a year long on-the-job traineeship in which they rotate through various sections of the paper. That's a rough outline of what *The Age* does to people.

BK: Tom, thank you very much. I think that sounds pretty formidable to me. I'm quite sure that I wouldn't have got through that process either. So it's lucky I came in another way. From the *Herald and Weekly Times*, a man who has a great deal with the training of people in that organisation here in Melbourne, a very experienced journalist too, Mr Chris McLeod. Chris.

CMcL: A question for you, anyone here sitting our test tomorrow? Okay. I'd better not give too much away. Just a little bit about myself. This is not to big note myself in any way but it's to give you an idea of how you do get started. I grew up in a small

country hamlet. We were seven miles from a town of 2000 people so it was pretty small. We were all probably related as well. I wrote to every newspaper in the country, interstate and everywhere, looking for a job. I was offered a Copy Person or back in those days it was a Copy Boy's job on the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney. But I would've been about \$100 a week out of pocket on their wages trying to pay board as well so that was out of the question. But I did get two offers from two country weekly's, one of which I, well they were in a straight line between where I lived in Sydney so I jumped in my little red Mini Minor and drove down the highway. The first editor wasn't there so I said that was a bad sign. He's arranged to meet me and hasn't turned up himself. I drove to the next town and they said you start Monday.

So you have to be prepared a lot of legwork and I only got those two offers because somebody who was a member of Country Press Australia put my name in their bulletin. So it's a very difficult thing to get into. I did a three year cadetship, not being a graduate but a school leaver at that time. It was a bit of an eye-opener on the Central Coast of New South Wales where you also the honorary police photographer. So at age 18 I got to take lots of pictures of gruesome stuff on the highways. We were up at the Calger Freeway. Any of you who are familiar of the history of that, it was a fairly notorious stretch of road. So being honorary police photographer involved me having to be dragged out at all hours of the day and night to go and take fairly unpleasant photographs. I don't think it's affected me much.

And on Sundays I had to cover six grades of local football starting at about eight o'clock in the morning and going through to twelve o'clock at night because I had also to process my own films. As well as reporting the games I had to take the photographs. So you reckon you've got it tough doing three years of university. I reckon that was pretty tough. And it's made me a little bit cynical, I guess, when I look at people trying to get into journalism these days but nevertheless I have a lot of sympathy for people who want to get into journalism these days and I really do want to encourage you. Unfortunately we don't have a lot of job opportunities either. We're looking at three or four at the moment where ten years ago we used to budget for a staff increase every January. We now don't budget for a staff increase but we have to take on cadet journalists, as we call them, we don't do traineeships. You get a cadetship with us, you've got a job. Therefore our process is quite thorough. We don't get as many applicants. We are also one of the few organisations that still consider school leavers. And there's a good reason for that. We like to look at school leavers because we're not entirely happy with what comes out of the colleges. Now if you're in a college, don't for a minute oh god I've done the wrong thing here. We still look at journalism college people obviously but just to highlight the differences, one of the questions I've asked in your preliminary exercise if you're doing our test tomorrow is on what basis could any journalist refuse an assignment? Twelve school leavers this year all said you'd want a pretty good excuse and you couldn't refuse but you should discuss it. Well university graduates gave me about a page and a half of reasons on why they wouldn't do a journalistic assignment. Now I've immediately marked those down and the reason is quite obvious. We're not looking for excuses. If you've got a problem we want you to discuss it, sure. So what impression you are getting of journalism I'm not sure but we still look at school leavers because they come to us with their sort of even naïve view if you like, but nevertheless it's a view that we want to say okay you're a chance because you've come to us without any preconceived ideas about what journalism is about.

Our process is a little bit complex and we don't get as many applicants as Fairfax does at HWT of course. We do our process a little later. You'll never be asked to write an essay for us because you won't be writing essays for the newspaper. What we ask you to do is a preliminary assignment that a few of you have done. That's to find out what you know about journalism. What you think about ethical issues? What you think the future of journalism is? What you think stops newspapers and journalists publishing whatever they like? Little tip here – don't say concentration of media ownership. Think about freedom of information, think about spin doctors, think about all those things. When you get through that process, we'll pick a number of people, about 30, I think will be doing the skills based test tomorrow.

It's a three stage thing, in fact. We grade your CV and your submitted published work. Like *The Age* we want to see you've gone out and done, what initiative you've shown and doing that sort of thing. Have you done volunteer work at a community newspaper? Have you written letters to the editor? Have you shown any interest whatsoever in being a journalist in the last few years? We realise you're all young, making career choices now but we're at News Group, and particularly HWT, we're looking for people who can (a) identify with our readership, and (b) know what news breaking is about.

Ninety-nine percent of applicants write to me and tell me that they love to write. I've been doing this for a few years now and I think next year I'm going to send stamps back to people and say here go write. What we want to see is people who want to report, who want to tell other people the news, who have this natural curiosity to be the first to know stuff and tell other people about it. That's what we're looking for. It might be too late for some of you here now but that's what we're looking for and you should realise that. So the second stage is that skills based test that's on tomorrow and that's to find out just exactly how you go about news gathering, news writing and other things – oh well, draw attention to is a question our preliminary assignment that says who would you like to interview and what are the five questions you would ask them? I don't say that that interview should be something we could publish but I don't mark highly people who want to interview dead people. And a lot people also want to interview Osama Bin Laden. There isn't a journalist on earth who doesn't want to do that. But what we're looking for is people who want to be realistic. One person out of 125 preliminary assignments I went through in the last couple of weeks, said because I think this would be a good story for *Herald Sun* readers. That's what we're looking for. People who want to know what our readers are and how they can serve them. I think that's all I want to say at the moment. I'll be happy to take questions later.

BK: Thank you Chris. Interesting to hear the divergence in approach from the two newspaper groups there but all with the common aim of getting the best people they can to serve the requirements of their readers. Moving along to our next panelist and into the electronic media, Robin Jackman from the ABC.

RJ: Hello. It's interesting sitting here, looking at all of you out there. Most of whom I presume are doing relevant degrees at the moment. Many of you in third year and many of you thinking well where is my career going to go and am I going to find a job and constantly hearing how difficult it is to get into this industry. About 20 years ago I did a similar degree at a time when journalism degrees were in their infancy and this

process was just beginning to start and has spread quite a bit in the intervening years. And I know exactly what it feels like sitting there, having gone through three or four years of study and wondering is there really a job out there for me at the end of the day? I got into journalism not in the way that I'd expected to. In my final year of study I did some work experience with an Australian Democratic Senator in Queensland during the '83 election campaign. As a result of that, after the campaign, his main media person decided to resign and they offered me the job. And after thinking about it for a little while I thought well that could be interesting. But it wasn't exactly what I was aiming for at the time. Anyway I took it and worked with him for about 18 months. The interesting thing about that it was a t a time when The Democrats had just won the balance of power so it was an intriguing time to be working for a Senator in a balance of power party. But after a while I realised I can keep doing this but the longer I wait the more difficult it's going to be to actually get into the profession. So one Christmas I sat down and I wrote ostensibly application letters to pretty much every major newspaper, television newsroom and radio newsroom in the country including regional areas as well and just post them out and hope something would come of it. In the end I got two or three promising replies and as a result of that ended up working for a local regional television station in Rockhampton run by a fellow who'd spent 25 years of his life working for newspapers, had been a major sub on the *Daily Tele* in Sydney. I think got a bit burnt out, went bush and found himself running a TV news channel. Interesting man, learnt a lot from him, but he knew nothing about TV so it was very much being thrown in the deep end and learning your craft any way you could.

Anyway there were two main things that I learnt from that experience and one was you've got to persevere and you've got to be dogged, and you take any opportunity that comes along and make the best of it. I guess the other thing I learnt was regional areas are a great place to start out whether they be in print or broadcast. Often you don't get the best training in these areas, particularly not so much in newspaper but certainly in the broadcast area and they work you till you drop. But you certainly pick up the craft very quickly and you learn how to process your stories in a very quick and efficient manner.

Similar to *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* we take on cadets. You probably are aware that a couple of years ago due to funding cuts those cadetships stopped. We've been able to reinstate them this year and in fact the process has just closed. It's a staggered reintroduction in that we're taking one cadet per state next year and we're hoping to lift that to two cadets per state and put us back in the situation before we stopped that cadetship program. We put them through a fairly rigorous process similar to *The Age*. You go to our on-line site you can have a look at the application and that's just the first part of the process. Once we short list we give you an array of tests including general knowledge, grammar, a writing test, a reading test and a camera test. And sadly I have to also admit that I have a sneak preview of these general knowledge tests and they're pretty scary. I think there's probably very little chance I would have got a job with ABC these days. So it is a fairly rigorous process.

People are always wondering what sort of people are we looking for? It's often very difficult to definitively define the qualities of the people we're looking for but broadly speaking we're looking for people who are passionate about journalism, we're looking for people who are particularly passionate about broadcast. A lot of people

these days have a lot of experience through their degrees in broadcast journalism and have gone outside the degree and have got experience in community television and radio or through work experience with various broadcasters. So a lot of them are coming to us at a cadetship level with a fair degree of experience and knowledge under their belt and any of you out there who are interested in a career in broadcast I would very strongly advise you to get any experience while you're studying that you can because you're going to be up against a lot of people who have extra experience on top of what you get out of your degree.

We're looking for people that are interested in people who are interested in telling stories and have good people skills. It's often very difficult being a journalist and try to persuade people to talk to you particularly if you work in television and you're shoving a camera in front of people's faces. We're in a fairly unique situation in broadcasting that we have a combined radio and TV newsroom and so often it's much easier to get talent to speak to our radio journalists than it is speak to our TV journalists and they can so often do it over the telephone which is less intimidating for people. But it is quite a skill to make people feel comfortable and make them feel comfortable talking to you and telling their story to you. And we're obviously looking for people that are interested in what's happening and in the news and some of the previous speakers mentioned it's amazing how many people don't even read a newspaper or watch a television news bulletin and don't seem to have that constant passion for news.

I suppose my biggest piece of advice for those who are looking, again particularly into broadcast is, you're going to be told a lot as you get closer to graduation of just how tough it is to get into this profession, how few jobs there are out there. It sounds all very depressing and deflating but if you're determined enough and you've got the ability and you keep at it, I'm convinced those are the people who eventually find their way into journalism. You've got to be prepared to take any opportunity that comes along. You've got to be prepared to look outside of the metropolitan area. And even if it's not your dream job and it's out the back of Burke and it doesn't seem like it's going to lead anywhere, any experience you can get is going to be very useful. One thing about the ABC is that we also have quite an extensive regional network and a lot of people lamented when we got rid of our cadetships and thought that that was the end of their likelihood of working for the ABC. But the reality is that we don't have a lot of cadetships and most of the people who find their way in don't get in through the cadetships. We've had some very good talented people who have not long been out of their degree who have found their way into our regional network. So there are plenty of other ways of getting into organisations apart from cadetships. But I can't stress strongly enough get as much experience as you possibly can and take the opportunities when they come along.

BK: Thank you Robin. Now our next and last panelist, Kate Ashley-Griffiths from Leader Community newspapers, who is Chief-of-Staff at Leader Central group here in Melbourne and has a big role to play in the hiring process at Leader.

KA-G: Just a bit of background on me. I actually started in journalism 15 years as a cadet. I was one of the few people at that time who hadn't done a university degree which even back then was fairly unusual. Basically you've heard a lot about how difficult it is to get in but I can't agree more with comments that have been made that

if you have the determination, enthusiasm, the passion and also curiosity is probably one of the important things you have to have. If you have those things along with the ability then you've got a very good chance of getting in.

At Leader I'm one of several people responsible for interviewing potential employees including cadets. The first thing I look for in CVs and I get a hell of a lot of them. They're very easy to flick through and discard. There's only a very few that remain in the pile and the first thing you look for is evidence that the applicant has experience, that is, that they've had a good range of work published. As Tom said it might be in a community newsletter, might be in a university newsletter, might be a letter to the editor. It doesn't matter. As long as you're able to demonstrate that you have gone the extra mile and had your work published already. That's going to leave you at the top of the pile.

If you're lucky enough after that to get to the interview stage, it's crucial to demonstrate that you have got the enthusiasm and also as mentioned by everyone here an interest in current affairs. I would expect at an interview that you would know what was on the front page of *The Herald Sun* and *The Age* for that day and also that you could name and talk about issues covered in your own local paper. I would also expect the applicant to know a bit about Leader. How many papers we have; the extent of our coverage across Melbourne. It's frightening the number of people who don't. You just wonder on their research skills how good are they? We get people who send CVs in to every single Editor in our group which is a complete waste of postage, paper and everything else. It only needs to go to one person. They haven't even been able to find out who it is. Very important to do that research.

But most importantly I think you must possess that sense of curiosity. The best journalists really are those with an insatiable curiosity combined with their passion and their interest in news and current affairs. You must be curious about everything and anything, and also be a natural observer of things that are going on in your community and be able to demonstrate that. We've got many examples of stories that Leader breaks stories across Melbourne every week. Many of those stories come from young journalists who are naturally curious and they're out there they're looking at things. Just as one example we had a young reporter who was sent out to the local railway station. She was there to cover a resident protest over planning issues which as you know are huge in Melbourne. While she was there she noticed a security guard sitting back on a deck chair watching the proceedings and she approached him and said what are you doing? And he said I'm sitting here guarding the new trains, Melbourne's new trains. Why? Well they can't get them on the track because none of the drivers have been trained to drive them. So it was just a great story that ended up leading on Channel 7 and was also followed up in the dailies that week. Again that story would not have come about without that journalist's curiosity.

Also, I think this has been mentioned but I'll reiterate, it's important to realise that a good writer does not necessarily make the best journalist. Usually that's not the case at all. We don't need Shakespeare. We don't want great long essays. We want someone who can write fluently, clearly and succinctly, but more importantly as has been pointed out, who can get out there, get a story and is happy to report. They're happy to meet people. They can talk to people and get things out of them. That is the key.

Really I think most areas have been covered here but I will get in a bit of a plug for Leader as I do think it's one of the best places, if not the best place for a young journalist in Melbourne to start their career. Cadets at Leader have the chance to try their hand at anything and everything, and in fact they're expected to do so. And really that's the best way to learn and develop the knack of digging up your own stories. You also work on very localized publications, where your community trusts you and wants you to know what's going on so they do pick up the phone and ring their local paper. Quite different from a metropolitan situation where you're very much a small fish in a huge statewide pond. It's a great training ground and certainly why our most talented journalists who do aspire to move on to metropolitan daily media do tend to get snaffled away by the people here.

Having said all that, we don't have any vacancies for cadets at the moment. Unlike the others mentioned here we don't have an annual intake. We hire cadets throughout the year on a needs basis so we would very much look at if we had a vacancy arise, whether we could sustain a cadet on that publication, and we would then seek cadets from there. And generally we would be relying on CVs that people had sent in which we keep on a file. If we're impressed with them we keep them on a file and we would refer to those. I wish you all the best in your quest for a career in journalism.

BK: Thanks Kate. I think it's been perhaps instructive to hear many common threads coming through those stories of what people are seeking and why they're seeking those qualities and those kinds of skills. Just before we move on to questions perhaps I could just take a moment of your time to talk a little bit about commercial television and the hiring practices there. I'm referring particularly to Channel 9 which is where I work but what I have to say would apply equally well I'm sure to the other commercial operations certainly in this town.

I suppose too it's not terribly instructive to hear of the random ways in which many of us got into the business except that it does underline something that's probably always been true, that there isn't one chosen path. Just to bore you with my own story. Way back before the dawn of time I left school and approached *The Sun News Pictorial* for a job. In those days hiring was almost exclusively of school leavers. There was no formal degree course in Melbourne. There was a diploma in journalism course at Melbourne University which you could only do if you were already working and a cadetship was the only way to get into the trade. So I duly fronted up to 44 Flinders Street on the appointed day for an interview and had, in fact, several interviews with increasingly more important white-haired gentlemen in mahogany row in ever bigger offices and I thought boy this is good. I'm really getting a good entrée here. I was dimly aware that my father had a cousin who I'd never met and hardly ever heard of, who at one point a long time before that had been a senior press gallery journalist in Canberra. It so happened he was an exact contemporary of all those white haired gentlemen in the big offices and all I had to do was sit in their office across their big desk and listen to them reminisce about their early days. Anyway I got a job and I've always been suspicious that it was more to do with that than with anything that I had to offer at the time.

Be that as it may, commercial television is not in its hiring practice unlike the ABC,. The Nine Network is in the process of starting a limited traineeship operation which is

not just about journalism. It will apply to sales, to engineering, to programming and production.. They're beginning to advertise for some trainees now. We don't know what the numbers will be but I can tell you that they will be very limited. If we are able to take on one in Melbourne on an annual basis I think that will be as good as it gets in the journalism area.

Because we have quite small newsrooms, unlike the newspapers, we have never felt that we had the capacity to take on and train large numbers of people. So we tend to take people who have already got a foothold in the business and, as Robin said, very often they come to us from the regions. We are in partnership with WIN Television which has proved an excellent recruiting ground for us. There's no doubt at all that people who can get into the regional newsrooms, as Robin said, they'll work their legs off but they will learn an enormous amount. The training is sometimes a bit rough and ready but people who've got persistence and a bit of flair will come through that and that's where we generally look to find people at the newer end of our reporting teams. We also take on some students in their last years of their course, often in jobs that are support jobs rather than mainstream reporting ones. For instance in our library we have part-time people most of whom are third year students who are learning about news by being in the newsroom, but are not at that stage actively reporting. They may then move off into the regions, go to WIN perhaps and come back to us in a few years'time. After all by then we know them, we know what sort of people they are, and what they've picked up as they've gone along.

But it's a limited field. We don't have a big turnover of staff. We do occasionally hire via other methods like, recruiting from other stations, or from radio or newspapers when we see somebody really good who we think could have a future with us.. But there's not a lot of movement so it's not a huge area of opportunity. I think that's probably all I need to say about that. Let's have your questions please. Linda and Tom will move among you with microphones.. If you could just identify yourselves please and address your question to anyone in particular or everybody in general if you wish.

Q: Hi. My name's Adam Johnson and I'm from United States. I'm working as a cadet with Leader for about two months now. I have a question for the gentlemen from *The Herald Sun* and *The Age*. As somebody from obviously a different country do you find that experience in a different market or foreign market or anything like that to be an asset or do you find that kind of irrelevant with regard to your own paper.

TH: I'm not sure I get the question.

Q: What I mean is that somebody who has perhaps worked in different markets, different countries things like that, do you find that to be good experience for them in hiring practices or do you think that's not really an asset to you. Does that prove that you can work in multiple environments and that sort of thing?

TH: If you're talking about experiencing working as a journalist elsewhere, for sure it would be an asset. If the key thing we are looking for as far as evidence of an aptitude is the fact that this person has already gone out of their way and has had stuff published they've obviously got a commitment to get into this industry. This is what they want to do and you don't grade someone higher simply because they've worked somewhere else but sure it's an asset if somebody had worked on a suburban paper or

submitted articles to a regional daily or had worked overseas. As long as they've got published work that's what you're looking for, not necessarily the location of it.

CMcL: One of the things I look for is life experiences. What have you done in your life that sets you apart from the other hundred or so people who are looking for this job? So if that's backpacking through Europe by yourself or manning a 24 hour service station and have been held up twice or you've worked for an overseas publication, I'll give you credit for that. That's a life experience that I think is valuable and will go to making you a better journalist. But you've got to look at the nine or ten other categories too that I'd been looking at. Can you actually string a few words together and do you know what breaking a news story is about and can you ask questions of our readership? There's all those sort of things. That kind of life experience is very important in setting you apart from 50 other people that I'm looking at applications from.

BK: Thanks Chris.

Q: Hi. My name's Erin. I've just finished Professional Communication at RMIT. I have two questions. The first one's for Kate. Does Leader accept much freelance work?

KA-G: Not really no. We don't have a budget for that so we don't accept freelance work. Sometimes people will off their own bat, students who want to get experience might get in contact with their local paper, speak to the editor there and sometimes, I won't say that there's any guarantee, but sometimes if you want to contribute an article it may be considered for publication. But you wouldn't be paid for it.

Q: This is just for the basically for print medium. I have a lot of broadcast experience out of uni, if I apply for a print job how much does that count?

KA-G: We've hired people with broadcast background. It depends what sort of job you've got available I guess. There's no sort of bias against or otherwise.

CMcL: I would add to that by saying that if your experience is in journalism and you've got a demonstrated ability to be able to interview people, dig up stories, it doesn't matter what your background is. We want to know that you can write. Most people have these days have got at least 12 to 18 years of education along the way. 18's a bit much, 15 can probably write. So we're not overly worried about that. We can usually pick that up from your initial letter. So what we're looking for is that ability, or signs of the ability to be a journalist, asking questions, getting to the bottom of things, conveying information. So if you can do that in broadcast and particularly radio where if you've got any experience there, where you've got about three seconds of airtime half the time, if you can ask the key question and get that to air, that's got a place in print journalism. No problem at all.

Q: Kate Stoeller, RMIT Journalism. How do you find in the selection process that journalism graduates compare with graduates who have other degrees say economics, law or science?

TH: Roughly half the applicants to *The Age* have a journalism degree and half have some other degree, the bulk of which would be arts or law or some combination. But also there have been applicants and trainees who have science or some other degree. There is a debate as you probably gathered from what Chris had to say in the industry about the quality of the courses, whether you need to have a journalism degree. There is a debate still unresolved in *The Age* as to whether we should revert to taking on school leavers because with some dissatisfaction that we've had in the past. But I don't think there is a bias towards journalism graduates. They may have some advantage if their course has been practically based. It may give them the advantage in that they've had stuff published. They have some better idea of what they're getting into. But it's 50/50 at the moment at *The Age* anyway.

Q: Hi. Alex Johnson from Melbourne Uni Media & Communications. I'm just weighing up whether to do an Honours year over going out and perhaps working for someone like Leader. Is post-grad work weighted in a favorable light?

KA-G: I don't think so really. It possibly would be. You would certainly look at that. It might make your CV stand out more if you have that experience as well. But it wouldn't necessarily add weight to you getting a job. I think as it's been discussed here, we often find that when we take on university graduates, we also take on school leavers. Although fairly rarely. But when we take on university graduates we often have to undo and re-teach a lot of the things that you've been taught because it's not academic. It's about getting out there and writing fiftieth wedding anniversaries and anything and everything. And sometimes people can be a little bit precious, if I can say that, about the fact that they do have this level of study etc. But it's not necessarily something that makes a good journalist.

Q: Eliza from RMIT Journalism. To Robin, do the people in the regional newsrooms in the ABC have any influence in terms of hiring people or is it all centralized in Melbourne or Adelaide or wherever.

RJ: No it all comes through the Melbourne newsroom. Basically Margot Bass is our State Editor and myself are responsible for that area. We do have some input, depending what the region is. Some regions they're one person bureaus. In the larger regions they tend to be two person bureaus with a Senior Journalist. As to what sort of applications we get and how many. intriguingly in the last 18 months we had a job that was available in Wodonga which is certainly one of our larger offices, and a fairly large town and not a particularly unpleasant place to live. But despite two attempts at trying to fill that, we couldn't find a suitable applicant. In the end we sent one of our cadets who'd finished their year of training and moved them up there. Then, in the last six months we advertised a job at Horsham, which I would've thought would've been somewhat less attractive, and got something like 60 applications for it. So, go figure. I can't work it out from job to job. But we do often have a look at who's available in that region who may be working for other media, particularly local newspapers, who may have an interest in getting into broadcast. And we recently employed one young journalist, six months out of their degree, who is doing a cadetship at one of the local papers.

Q: Nicola , Year 10 Wesley Grammar School. I was just wondering for people who are still in secondary school but do have aspirations to go into print media as a

journalist, what would you suggest that you could do to just get experience and stuff. What would you look for when it comes a time when someone such as myself ends up trying to go for a cadetship? Is there anything that I could do to gain experience while I'm still in Year 10 and at school?

TH: I'd talk to your Work Experience Coordinator first of all and say I want to get work experience the next time we do work experience in a newsroom. Any newsroom, anywhere – a suburban paper, *The Age*, *The Herald Sun*, Channel 9, the ABC – anywhere. And I would try and do that more than one year. I'd do it Year 11 and 12 as well. That's the first thing I'd do. You might discover you don't want to get into this business. The second thing I would do is start writing stuff for your school magazine or school newspaper or whatever or for your local community paper. You will discover whether you've got an aptitude for this, whether you in fact like it, whether you're good at it. And then a few years down the track when you're finishing school or you've finished university you will have a body of work that you can show somebody. I have proved or I have evidence here that I want to get into this business and I know what I'm getting into. That would be my advice to you.

CMcL: That I think is quite good advice. It is a little bit more difficult of course if you're in metropolitan Melbourne to do that sort of thing. We've found that some of the school leavers who come from the regions find it a bit easier to be able to do that volunteer work at a local newspaper. We've just about to lose one of the better recruits we've had straight out of high school but he spent the last two years at high school reporting for his local newspaper. Interestingly enough it's been Bob's outfit that have poached him. But because he was in a rural area he was able probably to get that volunteer work a little more easily than he might in the suburbs, certainly in the city. What Tom has said is exactly right. Try to get that experience. Take advantage of any placement you can get or any work experience you can get and see if you can get things published. It's difficult but that's the way to go.

KA-G: Can I just add to that too that I think if you can get work experience, and Leader does have an extensive work experience program for Year 10 students as well as university students, so we are taking on people at that level and my background, I don't really think I explained at the start, how I got into journalism, but I did work experience at both of my local newspapers. When I was in Year 10 I had a week at each. I had stuff published. I was thrilled to get my name in the paper and it just cemented that that's what I wanted to. And I maintained relationships with in fact it was the Leader paper at that time, the editor of that paper. And I would just give her little stories from the school, if there was something on and was able to maintain that relationship for two years until I left school and then had the job. So if you can do that, it's just great.

BK: I could just add that we do have a work experience program at Channel 9 as well. It takes in both some Year 10 people and some people during their university courses. The only difficulty with it is that we do get an awful lot of applicants and if anybody is thinking of heading in that direction, it's important to get those bids in very early in the year, in your Year 10 year or your final year at Uni.. There's just not enough weeks in the year for us to get everybody in who wants to come.

Q: Hi I'm Lucy from University of Queensland studying journalism and PR together. I understand the significance of experience while I'm at Uni but I'd like to know is what would be a part-time job while I'm at uni that would be beneficial for our future in journalism? There was a mention about working in the library and I was just wondering how these jobs were advertised and how you would actually approach the companies to actually get this sort of experience? Directed at all of you, by the way.

BK: Well I mentioned that particularly and really it's just a matter of writing in. They don't come up terribly often I have to say. But they do come up occasionally and it's a matter of getting the old persistence trick again and letting us know you're out there. Give us a rundown on what you do, what you want to do, why you want to do it and so on. And occasionally an opportunity will come up. But it's not guaranteed by any means.

RJ: Similarly the ABC has some jobs in that area. Mostly they're called News Operation Assistants. Basically that means they work on the production desk and put links and details of stories into air queues that come via interstate for our wire system in the computer. So they're really there assisting producers with that technical side of getting material into the rundown. So it's not exactly intellectually challenging but it does really give you a good introduction to the newsroom and particularly how the production desk operates. We don't generally advertise those positions and again if you're interested in anything like that, it would be good just to write in. Write to me and when those sort of positions come up, we haven't in the past targeted tertiary students or potential graduates but it's something that I'd like to move this towards because it makes a lot of sense for people who want to get in particularly into broadcast and want some experience in a newsroom that they do those sort of jobs. So it's a matter of writing in and letting us know you're there.

BK: We've got time for just a couple more before we all are encouraged to move into the auditorium for the last session of the day. So just a couple of quick questions if we can.

Q: Steven Clarke, Diploma of Broadcasting at Holmesglen TAFE. If students are particularly interested in a specialty type of reporting, sports writing, business, politics, is there any point them talking about that when applying to you or are they going to be forced to be generalists anyway at the start?

TH: With *The Age* we're looking for generalists. That doesn't mean that we don't want people who have ambitions to be Laurie Oakes. But we want people who can do hard slog in the newsroom which means people who are willing to learn the trade or the craft or whatever you want to call it which means putting in for several years. It's possible that a trainee within two or three years could be reporting state politics or could be in Canberra or could be on the sports desk. But my advice would be in your initial application don't narrow your field because we want people who can have a go at anything at least initially, at least.

BK: Okay just one last question perhaps.

Q: Olivia Jackson from Monash University. I just wanted to ask you've expressed some dissatisfaction with some graduates receiving from universities, and I'm just wondered exactly what those dissatisfactions were.

CMcL: Maybe I should take this up. It's not so much dissatisfaction with graduates per se. It's more about you the individual. What we see in graduate journalism courses whether they're journalism majors in arts or journalism majors in communications, large number of people studying journalism in some form. What we don't understand from that is, and neither do the people who run the courses and I'm sure all of us here have had some input with various universities over a period of time on their courses. Universities have to consult with industry, so we've probably all had some input. But what we don't see from the universities are people who, sorry universities who don't understand which of their students actually want to be journalists, but those members of their courses who are doing journalism because it's just a bit sexy or it's a bit different or whatever. What we're trying to get the universities to do is say look you have to come to grips with this. You need to determine which of your students actually want to be journalists. Then you should come to us and say these are the people who want to be journalists and we're willing to have their internships count towards their course. Now this is one of the big problems. There's only one university who sends people to us and asks for a feedback report from me. And that's Melbourne. Why don't the rest of the universities want to know how their students went while they were with us? What they learned? What they didn't like? What they wanted to do more of? Why is that? Now it's not something I can answer. It's a question I've asked all those universities over a long period of time. Nothing has changed. There's still only one university who wants a feedback report. And we actually do an exit interview as we would do with an ordinary employee with those people. Universities tend to, and it's not entirely their fault, it's the nature of the education system, they have to have broad based education. That broad based education involves all aspects of media and it tends, we think, to turn people out all on the same level. When we look at the university graduates and see BA (Journalism) we've probably got 100 people. How do we determine which is better than the next? Which is why we go through this comprehensive testing process. Which is why as Tom said, I think it was Tom, go through a kind of a re-education process. We do that too because basically we feel the universities are turning out people who are all the same. They don't focus on the individual. Your course coordinators should be talking to people like myself every other week saying I've got so and so here who's a very good prospect, very interested. Can you do something? Those conversations never happen. As I said Melbourne University is the only one I have regular dialogue with and I run our employment programs. Now I don't know what happens with other publications and broadcasters, whether they have ongoing dialogue. But News Limited is the biggest employer of journalists in the country. Why wouldn't you be talking to me? We try to talk to them. We've got people on course accreditation committees, we provide guest lecturers, we do all that sort of thing. But we don't get any feedback from any universities. So I mean we've developed our own training course now. We're going to try to get that accredited as something that's equivalent to a university course because we just don't feel the universities are paying enough attention to what it is we are looking for.

BK: We have to leave it there. I hope it hasn't too depressing an experience. It is worthwhile. You've had advice and information from people with a great deal of

experience. They know what they're talking about. If it is a tad depressing it's certainly realistic. That's the situation as far as all our organisations are concerned. But don't give up. Get on with it and good luck.

Thank you.