The Leveson Inquiry portrays a false image of journalism. Journalism bashing is at the height of fashion. Charlotte Church, J. K. Rowling, and Steve Coogan have all given statements deriding the actions of over-zealous and under-hand journalism in the on-going Leveson Inquiry.

Church spoke about being offered money for a performance or “favourable coverage” from News International (who then ran a story in The Sun days before her sixteenth birthday about the dying seconds of her virginity), and Rowling talked about how one journalist attempted to contact her by slipping a note into her five year old daughter’s school bag. Each further statement brought before the Inquiry feels like nails in a coffin, as journalism’s image is reduced to shreds.

There’s a journalist stereotype starting to circulate too, in the concerning form of Paul McMullan. McMullan, ex-News of the World Features Editor, is the horrendous poster boy for this campaign against the bad journalism: the person that everyone loves to hate. The problem is that he is the exception, not the rule, and we shouldn’t be so quick to turn the results of the Inquiry back upon the wider work of journalists.

McMullan leapt at the chance for coverage when the phone hacking scandal first broke. He was, and remains, insistent on driving the resulting stereotype to excess and driving journalism’s image deeper into the quagmire. He became the icon for gratuitous tabloid journalism, and now the whole journalism industry has been marked with him; stained. The Leveson Inquiry seems to lack balance too, despite The Guardian’s Nick Davies, who initially broke the phone hacking scandal, being called to give a statement last week.

The emerging stereotype is one that we shouldn’t lightly accept, regardless of what the likes of Hugh Grant say. It’s good journalism that bought this saga to light in the first place. We’ve also seen stories unveiled through valiant journalism that fiction couldn’t invent; Wikileaks and the MPs’ expenses scandal to name but a couple from recent years.

The Leveson Inquiry is right to act as it does, but we the public shouldn’t lose focus of the purpose journalism serves; the benefits that a free press bring to our society.

Perhaps journalists were wrong to intrude in some cases. But if some aren’t prepared to look into the dark recesses of our society, too many important issues can be easily hidden from the public eye. And, after all, if it wasn’t for journalism, you wouldn’t be able to read headlines like “My lover and I had it off while my fiancée’s corpse rotted in the next room” in next week’s glossy Closer magazine. It’d just be government propaganda, and then where would we be?
11 comments

Ex-student

Nouse... preaching...

Nouse used to often phone people up late at night demanding a quote, then misquote the person after or simply invent a quote if it was not given and printing unsubstantiated rumours and mistruths. I don’t know if it is the same now, but I doubt much has changed.

This was all by ‘voluntary’ journalists... I don’t want to think what you’d be like with a serious budget.

Jonathan Frost

What a lovely sweeping statement. Thanks for taking the time to give us this valuable feedback.

Another Ex-Student

Jonathan Frost? Which is the sweeping statement?

“This Nouse used to often phone people up late at night demanding a quote, then misquote the person after or simply invent a quote if it was not given and printing unsubstantiated rumours and mistruths.”

This is the author asserting a fact. In what sense is it sweeping? It might be untrue – though in my experience it’s really quite accurate.

“This was all by ‘voluntary’ journalists...”

This is just a fact.

I don’t want to think what you’d be like with a serious budget.

This is just opinion.

You really don’t act to counter the points the author is making when you give a sarcastic comment like that.

Ex-student number 3

@ex-student and your mate (another ex-student),

I don’t understand how you find the time to read an article from your old university’s (I’m presuming) paper, work yourself up about it, and then comment on why you are so angry. Fair enough, you might have had a bad experience...once...maybe. But this should not reflect on the paper now. It seems to me that you’re either from Vision, or have a serious chip on your shoulder. Stop throwing the dummy out of your pram and get over it.

JC
Whatever the rights and wrongs of the opening comment – which I think was designed to illustrate that illicit practices in journalism go all the way to the grassroots (at worst a provocative debate opener, at best a stimulating one) – shouldn’t the author of the article be a bit more professional in his response?

The fourth ex-student

12 Dec ’11 at 11:23 pm

It always amuses me that Nouse always gets accused of being unprofessional, but when Nouse reviews of plays include that as a criticism, the same commenters come along and say “But they’re only students, it’s unfair to judge them to the same standards!!”

Massive BNOC

14 Dec ’11 at 6:05 pm

had to deal with this toilet paper journal for a few years now, doesn’t write articles that anyone cares about, and they do indeed wait until the day before print to call people for quotes on a story they already have an angle on before even getting the facts correct (which they also never do).

Ex-student

15 Dec ’11 at 7:46 am

Massive BNOC makes a good point – The authors of the articles often take the most inflammatory and sensationalist angle possible on a story and then shoe-horn quotes and the facts in after.

I guess this is all to attract the attention of such journalistic bastions of truth and justice as ‘The Sun’ for whom they wish to work for after graduating so they can continue to write articles that have little bearing and relationship to the truth.

PL

15 Dec ’11 at 1:46 pm

Agree with JC above. Nouse and Vision are dependent on readers just as much as NotW were, albeit on a minuscule comparative scale.

Bad practices occur throughout journalism, whether you’re a news writer for a student paper with a circulation of a few thousand or a national op-ed columnist writing to ten million.

I know for a fact that the practices described above have happened – a friend was rung up and pushed for a quote about a fellow student’s death. They weren’t aware it had happened until the call.

University is generally an interesting microcosm of society, and its journalism is no exception. The majority of articles are about completely trivial stuff and 1% or less of the writers will end up working in the field but similar temptations occur for student journalists and for the professionals.

KLH

15 Dec ’11 at 5:45 pm

@ex-student

“I guess this is all to attract the attention of such journalistic bastions of truth and justice as ‘The Sun’ for whom they wish to work for after graduating so they can continue to write articles that have little bearing
and relationship to the truth.”

Definitely a sweeping statement.

Ex-student

^^^

Possibly sweeping but not untrue.

Please look up the York graduate (who had worked on Nouse or Vision) that wrote about the Dale Farm protests for The Sun recently who revealed to us in it in an exasperated manner that some of the protestors were ‘SMOKING DRUGS’ as if she had never seen/been aware/possibly participated in such behaviour at university.