



INTRODUCTION

The education sector is rarely out of the media spotlight.

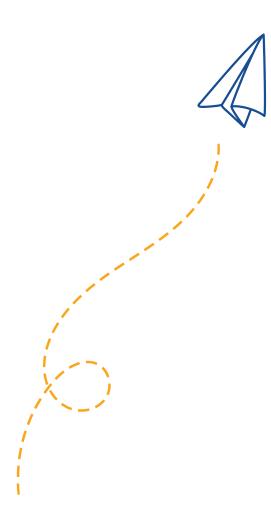
Whether it is stories about school uniforms, budget constraints, pay, admission policies, protests or tragedies, schools, colleges and universities are regularly the subject of journalists' attention.

But as well as responding to negative stories, headteachers, governors, principals, chancellors and academics also need to get media coverage for positive stories to boost the profile of their organization, generate funding and increase student numbers.

So, it is perhaps not surprising that we are increasingly being asked to deliver media training to this sector.

But our involvement doesn't stop there. Education stories have often featured in our regular media training blogs.

And we thought we would put them together in one handy place with our tips on how organizations in the sector can tell more media-friendly stories.



CASE STUDIES – THE POWER OF PERSONAL EXAMPLES

On our media training courses, we stress to our delegates the importance of painting pictures with words and taking the audience on a journey.

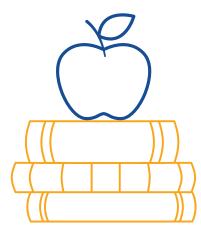
It plays a crucial role in bringing messages to life and helping those watching and listening to visualise the problem or solution that is being discussed.

One of the most powerful ways of doing this is through personal examples. Not only do they connect with the audience, but they help to create a human side to an organisation and help spokespeople sound more natural.

Siobhan Lowe, headteacher of Tolworth Girls School, gave a perfect illustration of how to do this during a radio interview on Radio 4's Today programme to discuss education funding.

The interview followed the news that 7,000 headteachers in England had written to 3.5 million parents saying schools are facing a 'funding crisis'.

And Ms Lowe's personal example, which she included in her first response, painted a clear picture of the hardships schools are facing.



CASE STUDIES – THE POWER OF PERSONAL EXAMPLES

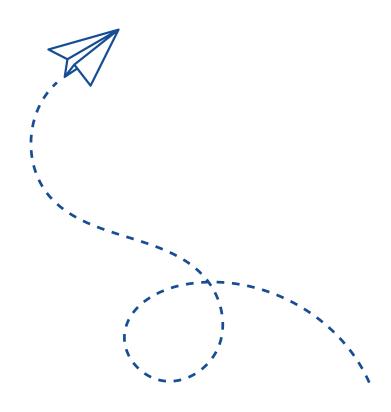
She said: "I have reduced the number of teaching groups. I have reduced the number of options the students have. I've increased class sizes. I've cut critical services such as student support workers that work with our most vulnerable. I've got increased numbers of students who have statements or educational health plans, but I've got a reduced number of teaching assistants.

"I personally have cleaned the school and washed the toilets. My girls are looking at me and feeling so sorry for me that they are picking up the hoover and doing it with me.

"I've cleaned doors, I've served in the school canteen."

The part about cleaning loos, in particular, stands out. It's attention\(\text{Mgrabbing because it feels unusual and suddenly the listener begins to picture just how bad the situation must be.

It takes the story beyond the 'funding crisis' headlines and enables the audience to see what the daily impact is on schools. And because they have been taken on that journey and can picture the issue, they are more likely to care about the outcome.



CASE STUDIES – THE POWER OF PERSONAL EXAMPLES

Another good feature of the interview was the emotion Ms Lowe used. This was particularly evident when she spoke about her 'embarrassment' of not having enough money.

She said: "As a headteacher, you are almost embarrassed to admit that you can't support the students in your school. It is a terribly embarrassing thing to admit that you don't have the money because you need to provide an education for the students."

What was noticeable about the interview was that Ms Lowe was asked relatively few questions. That was because her content was strong and informative and the reporter knew it would engage the audience. In short, she had control.

It is worth mentioning that parts of this live interview were used again as a sound bite clip on the same programme an hour later. And it formed the basis of an article on the BBC news website, under the headline 'Head teacher talks of cleaning loos amid funds shortfall', as well as in The Times.

Creating a repeatable sound bite from a live interview and generating content for other channels are signs of an interview done well. Top marks.



You can be pretty sure that once September comes around there will be a glut of school uniform stories.

These typically begin in the local media and sometimes move into national newspapers, radio and television.

One headteacher who found himself in the full glare of the media was Matthew Tate, of the Hartsdown Academy in Kent. He was compared to the 'Gestapo', after reportedly turning away 50 children on the first day of term for wearing the wrong uniform.

The media frenzy around the story saw him appear on TV as well as on Radio 4's The Today Programme, which can be a daunting experience for the most experienced of spokespeople.

But Mr Tate coped well.

From the start of his Radio 4 interview, he sounded calm, composed and completely unfazed by the sudden media focus on his school.



He quickly set-about dispelling some of the rumours and inaccuracies that had been reported, for example making it clear that police had not been called to deal with the situation, they had simply been 'passing' and offered assistance.

He outlined what some of the children who had been turned away were wearing (including a tracksuit) and quickly got to a human example to illustrate why he felt the uniform policy needed to be closely adhered to.

He said: "Two of our Year 11s talked to me yesterday about when they were in Year 7 and they came to school in perfect uniform they got bullied by other children because of the fact they were doing the right thing. We need to send that very clear message that I am standing by the majority of our children and the majority of our parents who understand this matters."

What was clear throughout the interview was that he had a clear message and he used it repeatedly – the majority of parents and children support this policy.



He said: "We had a tiny minority of annoyed parents. The vast majority of our parents, the vast majority of our children, did the right thing and their children came to school in the right uniform and had a great day at school."

Later he added: "We need to set a line that says this is the standard we expect at this school, we want this school to be a fantastic school and the majority of our parents and children are very happy with that and have been supportive."

Whatever your views on the uniform policy, Mr Tate's media performance was impressive and a great example of why it is so important to engage with the media when you are in the spotlight.

One of the challenges media spokespeople face is producing content which is memorable.

If it's a print interview, they need to come up with the messages that are going to make strong quotes.



MEMORABLE MESSAGES

In a broadcast interview, they should aim to come up with sound bites that are going to trigger a reaction from the audience and stick in their minds.

Dr Joanne Preston, a marine biologist from the University of Portsmouth, gave a great example of how to do this when she appeared on the Today programme to discuss regenerating oyster populations through sea bed cages.

With a complex subject like this, there is plenty of potential to overwhelm, confuse and ultimately lose the audience altogether.

But Dr Preston kept it simple from the start explaining that oyster grounds have been destroyed through over-fishing. "85 per cent of all oyster ecosystems globally are now extinct," she said.

And then she succinctly explained why this matters: "One of these critters could filter 200 litres of sea water a day. They eat the algae, the green stuff floating around the water that we don't like to have too much of, and they can clean the water. But more than that, they create a whole ecosystem."



Good stuff, but the best part was still to come. Asked what the university was doing to reintroduce them, part of her response included the line "we are hanging oysters in cages, like love hotels".

Why was this so good?

Firstly, it's unusual – who has heard of an 'oyster love hotel' before?

Because of that unusual element, it made me – and I'm sure many others – sit up and listen that bit more intently.

It's completely free of jargon and complex language – you could imagine Dr Preston using the same language if she was talking to a friend in a coffee shop. It's conversational English.

Additionally, it helps to paint a picture of what the university is doing.

It's also a funny expression which just lightens the tone – it even made the reporter laugh.

And finally, it's short and snappy – if this had been a print interview, you could easily see 'oyster love hotel' forming part of the headline.

So how can your organisation tell more media-friendly stories?



KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

It may sound obvious but before you tell your story and engage with the media you need to know who you want to tell it to. Without knowing who your audience is your message will fail and you will not succeed.

Think about who you want to hear and see your message.

Then put yourself in their shoes to gain an insight into what they need to know about you and what they want to hear from you.

It will help to look at who the audiences of the UK media are.

In the following pages of analysis, we'll focus on television channels, radio and national newspapers. This will help you begin to identify the media which is most appropriate for your audience.



WORDS AND PICTURES: THE FIGURES BEHIND TV NEWS

When it comes to news consumption, television is still the most widely used media platform, according to figures published by Ofcom.

70 per cent of adults in the UK report using TV as a source of news. And it increased to 75 per cent when on-demand content is included.

TV news is less popular among younger people (age 16-24), with fewer than half reporting that they use TV to access news - they are far more likely to use social media.

BBC news remains the most used news source, followed by ITV. Facebook takes third spot.

One in five adults also name BBC One as their 'most important' news source.



RADIO - ON YOUR WAVELENGTH

Radio doesn't have the glamour of TV or the funkiness of the internet and neither does it often create the storms a strident newspaper headline or opinion piece can generate.

And yet, it can grab people's attention like nothing else.

Who hasn't stopped still in the kitchen because of something striking and perhaps moving that they've heard on the radio?

Or waited in their car that little bit longer before going into the house or office to hear the rest of an interview? As we say, the best pictures are on radio.

And more people are listening to radio than ever before. According to RAJAR – the organisation measuring UK radio audiences - 50 million adults tune into the radio each week. That works out as 89 per cent of the UK adult population.

Additionally, the average listener tunes into more than 20 hours of live radio a week.

Most radio stations only provide short bulletins once an hour. But it is worth noting that both BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 2 – mainstream music stations – feature in the top 20 sources of news, according to Ofcom.

Flagship news programmes continue to perform well. Radio 4's Today programme has 5.6 million listeners a week. Nick Ferrari's LBC breakfast show has 1.4 million weekly listeners. For Radio 5 Live's breakfast programme, the figure is more than 1.2 million people.

But BBC local radio, where regional content has been cut back, has seen a 10 per cent decline in its weekly reach year-on-year. That figure now stands at 4.8 million people.

The statistics also show that 33 per cent of adults listen to podcasts at least once a month, again highlighting the growing importance of the format. Global's The News Agents podcast, fronted by three former BBC journalists, surpassed 24 million downloads in 2023.



BLACK, WHITE AND STILL READ ALL OVER?

Print interviews continue to be a crucial component of our media training courses.

But do people still read newspapers? When was the last time you bought a paper?

Has print become a niche medium serving a rapidly shrinking audience?

Circulations have fallen and have been steadily declining for years.

But rather than dying out, newspapers have evolved and attract millions of readers online – alongside those who still want a newspaper in their hands - where their trust and prestige continue to appeal.

More than 24 million people read UK news brands – a term used to reflect how newspapers now reach their audiences – every day. That number swells to 39 million every week and 45 million every month.

And news brands appeal to the young, with 24 per cent of 18-34-year-olds consuming them daily.

So, there is still plenty of life in the old dog.

One of the things we notice during our courses is that it can be easy to put all newspapers – and their digital versions - into one basket.

But their readerships are different, and this may impact who you target and who might cover your story.



THE SUN

The Sun was the country's best-selling newspaper for 40 years. That changed in 2020 when it was overtaken by the Daily Mail amid changes in how newspapers report their circulations. The paper's owners have opted to make its circulation figures private. But before that decision, it had similar figures to the new market leader. The Sun says it reaches more than 31 million people across digital and print every month. A common misconception about The Sun is that it is the paper of choice for 'white van man'. But 32 per cent of its readers are from the ABC1 socio-economic group - the group made up of people with more education and better-paid jobs. And more than 400,000 readers have a family income of over £50,000.

THE DAILY MAIL

A paper that is controversial and popular in equal measure. It is now the country's best-selling paper. Like all newspapers, its circulation was hit by the pandemic. In March 2024, its circulation was just over 700,000. Circulation on Saturdays swells to over a million. Its digital version, Mail Plus, has a monthly average of more than 80,000 "actively viewed" copies. The Mail's website continues to be a big draw, with its mix of news and entertainment ensuring it has 24.7m monthly unique visitors. It is also the only national newspaper with more female readers than male (a 54 to 46 per cent split). The average age of a Mail reader is 56. And more than 80 per cent of Mail readers are believed to be homeowners, with 69 per cent owning their homes outright. The Mail also owns the popular This Is Money website.



METRO

This free morning newspaper had the largest distribution of any UK newspaper before the pandemic struck. With fewer people travelling to work, it has taken time to rebuild those figures. In March 2024, it has an average circulation of 950,000. There is success online, with more than 18 million unique visitors a month. The publication remains uniquely neutral on the big political issues and has no leading articles, opinion pieces or a Westminster reporter.

DAILY MIRROR

The workers' paper and the Labour party's most loyal supporter, the Daily Mirror was overtaken by The Daily Mail several years ago. And it has long since stopped being competitive with its old rival. Its circulation is now around 230,000. The picture is better online, with the website reaching more than 20 million people a month.

EVENING STANDARD

The iconic London title has fallen on hard times and its owners have announced plans to drop its daily print edition and go weekly later in 2024. The paper had become free of charge in 2009. But its circulation has dropped from 850,000 to 275,000 in the past five years, and it has lost £84.5m over the latest six years. Twelve million people access the Standard's digital platforms every month, with half of that traffic coming from outside London and overseas. In September 2024 the paper ceased its daily publication and became a weekly title.

THE TELEGRAPH

Telegraph readers are more likely to be Conservative, male and wealthy. YouGov research carried out in 2023 said 69 per cent of the paper's readership is male and that more than a fifth are affluent. It also says that almost half the readership (49 per cent) identify as Conservative Party voters. It is another publication that now chooses not to publish its circulation figures. But the last public figure, in December 2019, was 317,000. The paper's focus is now on paid subscribers, and in 2023 it exceeded its target of reaching one million subscriptions.



THE FINANCIAL TIMES

The 'pink 'un' was one of the first newspapers to introduce a paywall. And it hit a milestone in 2019, announcing it has one million paying readers, with digital subscribers now accounting for more than three-quarters of its circulation. Print circulation is now just over 100,000. But the publication says it reaches more than 22 million readers every month – seven million in the UK. Despite the complexity of some issues it covers, the FT has a reading age of around 12-14. Men make up an astonishing 81 per cent of its readership. More than 30 per cent of its readers are C-suite executives, and 75 per cent of readers work for international companies. The average reader income is £221,000.

THE GUARDIAN

The paper of choice for the intellectual left, healthcare workers and those in local government. It made its circulation private in 2021 when it had fallen to 105,000. Press Gazette estimates that if it followed industry trends, print circulation would now be 60,000. According to PAMCo – the audience measurement for publishers - The Guardian is the most-read quality news brand in the UK, cross-platform, with an average of 22.4 million unique visitors monthly.

THE TIMES

It is more than a decade since The Times put its online content behind a paywall. Now, The Times and The Sunday Times have more than 500,000 digital-only subscribers. While it has not revealed its print circulation figures since 2020, the paper says it reaches 840,000 readers Monday to Saturday. According to the British Business Survey, The Times is the number one daily newspaper for business readers and reaches 50 per cent more decision-makers than the Financial Times or the Daily Telegraph. Millennials make up a healthy fifth of its readership. Times readers have a mean family income of £55,885.

THE EXPRESS

A paper with a seemingly endless supply of Princess Diana and health-scare stories (it is sometimes referred to as the Daily Diana Express), the once-mighty tabloid continues to be a fading force. Circulation has now dropped to around 150,000. Its remaining audience is elderly and is mainly based in the north. It is still right-wing and Eurosceptic in its outlook. Migrants, pensions and the weather continue to be regularly covered stories.



DAILY STAR

The paper that takes a lighter-hearted look at the news and looks to lift the gloom from the news agenda. It describes itself as not being anti-Conservative or anti-Labour, but "anti-idiot". The paper has a circulation of more than 130,000, and screengrabs of its eye-catching front pages often go viral on social media. The paper achieved great success with its 'who will last longer' comparison between Liz Truss and a lettuce – a battle won by the lettuce.

CITY AM

Launched in 2006, City AM covers the latest financial, business and political news and had a circulation of around 85,000. Before the pandemic, it was distributed from 400 commuter hubs around London and the home counties and at more than 500 offices in the City and Canary Wharf areas. Its print operations returned as people came back to the office, and it now has a circulation of around 68,000. It reports its daily readership is just under 400,000. That readership is dominated by men, with a 60/40 male and female split. Readers have an average income of £85,000. More than 65 per cent of its readers are under 55.

i NEWS

Still the new kid on the block – as the short-lived New Day quickly passed into newspaper history – its circulation is around 125,000. The paper started life as The Independent's little sister but is now owned by the owner of the Daily Mail, who bought it for £49.6m in 2019. It is aimed at readers with limited time and attracts younger, metropolitan types, including students and those in their first job. Its website has more than nine million monthly visits.

INDEPENDENT

The UK's first national newspaper to give up print and go online-only, The Independent attracts more than 22 million monthly UK website visitors. It received more than two billion page views in 2023. Its bold move away from print has returned it to profitability as it has removed the costs of print plants and paper distribution. It has now recorded six years of profit in a row. It also runs the Indy100 website.



WHAT ABOUT THE SUNDAY PAPERS?

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Like most Sunday newspapers, The Mail on Sunday relies on a mix of exposés and publicist-placed celebrity stories. Features about health and beauty are also prominent. Its current circulation is 600,000 – about half of where it was in October 2017. But it remains powerful and its coverage can often set the agenda for the week.

THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

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THE SUN ON SUNDAY

The phoenix that arose from the ashes of the News of the World, The Sun on Sunday has seamlessly inherited the older, London-based male audience of its predecessor. It no longer makes its circulation figures available, but the last published statistics showed a readership of just over one million. Press Gazette estimates that the figure would now be 600,000. Celebrities, exposés and football are still very much the order of the day.

THE OBSERVER

Stories about social injustice feature prominently in The Observer alongside extensive arts coverage. Its last circulation published circulation was 136,000 in July 2021. It is estimated that if its readership followed the trends of the rest of the industry, that figure would now be 80,000.



WHAT ABOUT THE SUNDAY PAPERS?

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

With a reputation for being more conservative than its weekly counterpart, it is perhaps not surprising that almost half of the Sunday Telegraph's readers are in the 65 and over age bracket. Its most recent circulation figures, published in December 2019, stood at 244,000. It is estimated that the figure would now be 125,000. Alongside investigative stories are features about the countryside and issues affecting the middle classes. Its business coverage is well respected. And its comment pages are favoured by the intellectual right.

THE SUNDAY MIRROR

The Sunday Mirror is another title with a worrying circulation fall, now standing at 175,000, falling below 200,000 for the first time in 2023. In 2000, it had a circulation of two million.

SUNDAY PEOPLE

Founded in 1881, the Sunday People is one of Britain's oldest Sunday newspapers. But its circulation has now fallen to 57,000, which is below that of City AM in London. The paper also now shares the same editor as the Sunday Mirror. And the two publications share the same content, with only front pages and pages four and five changing.



ONLINE NEWS

As you can see from our newspaper guide, while circulations are dropping, there is massive demand for news online.

In fact, figures from Ofcom show online sources are the second most used platforms for news behind broadcast TV and are used by two-thirds of UK adults.

And more than 80 per cent of 16-24 year-olds consume news online. They tend to find that news via social media rather than going directly to websites.

Related to this, TikTok has been growing in popularity as a source of news, reaching 10 per cent of UK adults.

The BBC website has the highest reach among those using online sources for news, according to Ofcom.

Press Gazette lists Reuters and Forbes as the UK's most popular websites for business news, reaching 3.8 and 3.4 million people respectively.

They are followed by The Financial Times. Insider Inc (2.9m), Bloomberg (1.8m) and Investing (1.2m) also rank highly.

Are they media outlets you target?



ABC SOCIAL GRADE CLASSIFICATIONS

A Higher managerial, administrative and professional

- 4 per cent of population

B Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional

- 23 per cent of population

C1 Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional

- 28 per cent of the population

C2 Skilled manual workers

- 20 per cent of population

D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers

- 15 per cent of population

E State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

- 10 per cent of population



TRADE PUBLICATIONS

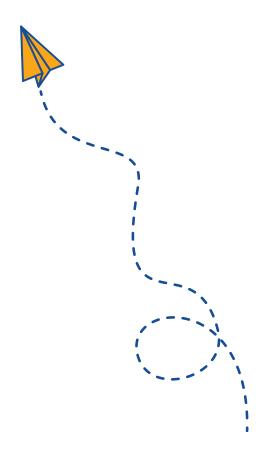
Our analysis has not focused on trade media but that does not mean you should ignore them.

Trade publications may not have the mass audience appeal of television, radio and national newspapers, but they have the power to position your organisation as an industry expert.

Publications like The Educator and Education Today cover the sector in far greater depth than mainstream media.

They will also be read by the sector's decision-makers.

During our media training, it's often really obvious which clients have invested time briefing their spokespeople to manage both trade and consumer-based media.



THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE ONLY MEDIA

Two thirds of adults in the UK now use the internet for news, according to Ofcom, putting it just behind TV as the most used source.

It is the most-used platform for news consumption among 16-24 yearsolds and those from a minority ethnic background.

Around two thirds of online news users use the BBC website and app and one in five use Sky News. Increasing numbers of people are also using Google as a news source.

Equally, bloggers are now as popular as journalists in some sectors, often carrying hundreds of thousands of followers and fans. Their influence is likely to continue to grow. @TeacherToolkit, for example, began as a humble Twitter account and now boasts 10 million website readers.

Research which bloggers are writing about your industry and think about how they could cover your story. Then get out there and build a relationship with them.

Online only media is growing in importance and you cannot afford to leave it out of your media strategy.



TRUTH

Once you have identified the audience, you need to put yourself in the journalist's shoes and understand what they are

looking for in a story. We describe it as the TRUTH:

T topical, of the moment, and something people are talking about

R relevant to a specific audience

U unusual. Not what people already know or expect

T trouble. Show how you are solving a problem. Or, if your story is not strong enough, a journalist will look for their own trouble angle

H human interest. What is in it for people? What impact will it have on your customers and the journalist's audience?

If a story includes at least four of the five elements of TRUTH, you have the basis of something which could attract the interest of the media and become impactful.

The human aspect is absolutely crucial. The most common phrase you will hear in a newsroom is 'so what?' Journalists will look at a potential news item and ask 'so what does this mean for my audience?'

At the very least they will want to know who the people are behind the story. Take a look at any newspaper, news website or news programme and you will find all the stories have a human angle.

The reason is simple – people are fascinated by stories about people, not policies, initiatives and protocols. So, try to include the human factor in your story and, if you can't, consider how what you are saying will impact your customers.

Facts and figures are also vital. They help to illustrate and strengthen your points.

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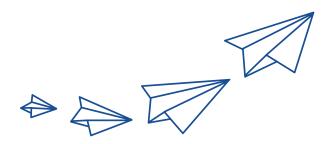


TRUTH

Once you have T.R.U.T.H in place you need to carefully consider how you are going to tell your story. The key here is to use simple language.

The education sector, like many others, is full of abbreviations (in fact it probably has more of these than most), acronyms and phrases which, while meaningful to an internal audience, mean little to a wider one.

Using these in a media interview will infuriate journalists and ensure your message does not get heard by your audience



CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

Organisations in most sectors often assumer their leaders will be their spokesperson and in education, it is typically the head-teacher, principals and vice-chancellors who front media activity.

But they may not always be the best person to be put in front of the media

You need someone who is compelling and enigmatic who will be able to connect with the audience.

We often find on the courses we run that it is not the most senior or confident member of the team who performs best in front of the cameras and microphones – sometimes the rising stars of the organisation can be the most captivating.

The spokesperson you choose needs to have a detailed understanding of the organisation and the education sector and it is essential they have had recent practical media training with current working journalist tutors.

Strong body language and a professional appearance are also important. Regional spokespeople help you engage and win the trust of the audience and show a commitment to the area and people who live there.

WHO HAVE WE WORKED WITH IN YOUR SECTOR?

Here is a small selection of the organisations we have worked with in the education sector.

"Thank you so much for organising my media training yesterday. It was probably the most productive day's training I have ever done. I can highly recommend it to others."

Carolyn Taylor, Clinical Research Fellow, Nuffield Department of Population Heath, University of Oxford

"I just wanted to drop a line to say thank you to everyone involved for a really good day of crisis media training. Most of the attendees were very nervous about the day, and although quite tired by the end, they all got a great deal out of it, and their confidence in dealing with the media has grown massively. The tutor's flexibility came into its own when we had to change the second part of the crisis scenario at the very last minute. I'm extremely grateful for their adaptability and calmness in dealing with this – they are true professionals and their expertise shone through."

Rowena Walters, Compliance and Communications Officer at Northern Education Trust "Media First provided an excellent day of bespoke media training for our communications team. The trainers on the day were fantastic, their experience shone through and all of the team came away with increased confidence in not only speaking to the media, but also in public speaking."

James Durrant, Press and Public Affairs Officer, UCAS

"I thoroughly enjoyed the day and found it very helpful. I can honestly say that I feel much more confident."

Lisa Edwards, Policy and Communications Officer, University and College Union Wales



ABOUT US

Media First has been delivering bespoke media, presentations and communication training for more than 40 years.

In that time, we have delivered and developed a range of practical media training techniques and courses that use experienced professionals, such as practicing journalists, to explain how the media works and to allow individuals to cope with its demands. We have worked with press and communication teams alongside their spokespeople in over forty different sectors, including in education.

Our media training courses work because they are realistic and authentic.

If you would like to find out more about our media training courses, please get in touch on 0118 918 0530, hello@mediafirst.co.uk or visit www.mediafirst.co.uk

