

Towards defining “potential centres of excellence” in African journalism training.
Paper submitted to World Journalism Education Congress

1. Introduction:

Most literature on journalism education still originates from within democratic countries of high media density, and pays scant attention to different conditions and imperatives in the rest of the world. One example is the debate about the ideal curriculum started at Columbia University (see Bollinger, 2002/3; Cunningham, 2002). Another is an “international seminar on journalism education” at the University of Tampere where most contributors assumed a generalised global condition (or at least future) for media (eg. The “economization of media”, Rau, 2005), or a universalisation of new media along broadly Western lines (Bender, 2005).¹ At any rate, in much literature on journalism education, the ethos is one of such institutions at large either following or needing to catch up on supposedly universal trends seen to be affecting media worldwide (see also Holm, 2005).

However, in contrast, de-Westernising media studies (Curran and Park, 2000) has become something of a movement in that body of academia studying the cultural and institutional context of journalism. It responds to growing multi-culturalism in the “first world”², but also picks up from old debates on the New World Information and Communications Order, in recognition of the uneven character of globalisation.³

In this context of global unevenness, despite the internationalisation of the Western media industry and its various models (including training), journalism education still needs to be

¹ One slight exception was the notion of a “clash of media civilizations” (Ekecrantz, 2005), which raises other issues for journalism education that merit exploration. It would be interesting to track the influence of Western training expertise into countries as diverse as Afghanistan (Deutsche Welle), Somalia (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Ethiopia (Norwegian Gimlekollen model), and international training by groups such as the Thomson Foundation, Knight Fellows of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), BBC World Service Trust, Reuters Foundation, Internews, and many many others.

² Although the author is well aware the limitations of such terminology, and related phraseology such as “developing countries”, these are used as short-hand in this paper to designate the difference between media-dense political democracies on the one hand, and media-scarce countries (many undemocratic) on the other. This is not, however, to ignore important differences within each camp, and especially not to assume homogeneity in Africa.

³ This unevenness can be seen in that while mass communications becomes an ever greater part of advancing information societies, it remains far less central in those many parts of the world which continue to have low media densities. And while corporatisation is often regarded as inimical to a democratic role of journalism in Western countries, it is the state rather than business that remains the obstacle in many other places. In the “first world”, blogging and citizen journalism is celebrated as evidence of the democracy of communications itself, and a flagging newspaper industry is obsessed with convergence. In the “third world”, basic connectivity, let alone broadband links, is barely available to the mass of people, while newspapering is still a growing industry.

interrogated as to its universality versus its locality.^{4,5} For instance, the relations between journalism schools, journalists, media industry and the state are likely to have different forms in the periphery, as compared to the centre. Meanwhile, the condition of many African journalism education institutions has been summed up by Mary Kizito of Daystar University as “ailing and limping” (cited in Ocholi and Lisosky, 2002).

Awareness of international communications differences, including especially international information flows, came to the political fore in the 1960s and 1970s, notably in UNESCO and the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO). With the boycott of the UN body by the UK and USA, the discrediting of stat-ism and eventually the collapse of Eastern European socialism, these concerns went onto the backburner for many years. More recently, however, the global rise of neo-liberalism and information society thinking (see the World Summit on the Information Society), and intensified globalisation in (and of) communications especially with Internet, however, has led to revived focus on whether the media are indeed, as Jeremy Tunstall (1977) long ago put it, American. Today, then, in some sectors, recognition of continuing unevenness and diversity is re-emerging, and the special case and needs of developing countries, is back on at least some agendas.

In this context, UNESCO has also made something of a comeback – rehabilitating itself to the West through championing the Windhoek Declaration (1991) and the subsequent institutionalisation of World Media Freedom Day on 3 May. And, as part of the organisation’s NWICO legacy, UNESCO commissioned research in 1996 to provide a model curriculum specifically for developing countries (Odhiambo, 2002).⁶ UNESCO also soldiered on with a workshop towards a curriculum on human rights journalism in Africa in 2002 (see Ocholi and

⁴ For purposes of this paper, no significant distinction is made between “journalism education” and “journalism training”, although in other contexts there are often meaningful differences to be made.

⁵ “It is important to know to what extent forms of journalism education which are highly contested in the dominant global north and the west are nevertheless being unproblematically exported to the global south and the east, through what mechanisms, and whether it is justifiable to talk of one journalism or many journalisms.” Bromley et al, 2001.

⁶ Significantly, this was not a narrowly journalistic curriculum, but a “communications” one – reflecting the “Communications for Development” ethos prevalent in many developing countries with health, agricultural and various other government communications agencies. The product (Odhiambo et al, 2002), concentrated on the ideal subject matter to be taught, but not on institutional bases or subject materials. The latter was worked on in an extensive study by Nordenstreng et al for IAMCR into what textbooks were being used in African journalism schools, although it seems that not much ultimately came of this in terms of new materials development. The initiative seems to have floundered along with the decline of the African Council of Communication Educators which lost funding support during the 1990s.

Lisosky, 2002)⁷. Many of its original communications issues thus retained relevance (see also Sosale 2003). In 2005, the organisation embarked on two new initiatives, again recognising the distinctiveness of developing countries' communication situations. The first was with moves towards drafting a model curriculum for journalism, expected to be completed during 2007 and presented at the World Journalism Education Congress in Singapore (UNESCO 2005). The second initiative is an attempt to identify “potential centres of excellence in African journalism training”. It is this activity which is contextualised and elaborated in this paper.

The “centres of excellence” issue was part of the agenda of an experts meeting convened by UNESCO in December 2005⁸. A discussion document preceding the gathering posed questions about the definition and rationale for centres of excellence, as well as possible criteria and indicators (see Tuazon, 2005). It also asked what rewards and benefits could be accorded to institutions selected as centres of excellence. According to a report on the subsequent discussions (UNESCO 2005), the organisation explained that it saw the concept as providing “a more efficient and systematic means of providing support to capability building activities”. A centre of excellence could, in its view, become a resource base for training other institutions within a particular country and region. Such a centre could also be tapped to develop courses (both conventional and online). Speaker N. Ram said such institutions could “also help set up and upgrade journalism standards”. The reason for establishing centres of excellence included: “(1) to reward excellence, (2) to create conditions for further investment, (3) to serve as nodal centres for quality education and training, and (4) to serve as training ground for excellent teaching and learning practices.” During the subsequent discussion, participants were divided on the proposal. Some argued in favour, adding that this would distinguish quality from inferior institutions, and upgrade the status of journalism schools within tertiary academic institutions. Dissent was based on concern that labelling could “create controversy in the professional community”, lead to favouritism, disadvantage newer institutions from competing with long established schools, and be divisive in general. There was also concern that the process of selection could be cumbersome, in turn prompting the

⁷ This gathering debated the extent to which there could be a universal curriculum, and whether there was an African identity or identities, but also made reference to a singular African values and ethics. In addition, ““It was proposed that issues of power also needed to be explored in the African context. Classes like Negotiation, Conflict Management, and Social Advocacy were suggested. Someone else proposed the inclusion of social marketing as a core course in the training programmes.” (Ocholi and Lisosky, 2002).

⁸ The idea was also referred to and supported by UNESCO representative Alonzo Aznar in 2002 (see Ocholi and Lisosky, 2002).

question whether it was worth investing in such an initiative in terms of bureaucratic administration and funds.

Other points of view proposed use of the term “hub” which implied a horizontal rather than hierarchical approach. “Centres of reference” was proposed as a neutral term. According to the report, the emerging consensus was that the concept needed further study. Further, “while it may help set standards of excellence, the concept is divisive and difficult to implement.” There were other alternatives to labelling that could deliver the same outcome.

Moving on from the discussion, however, UNESCO anyway decided to proceed with an attempted identification of African institutions that had *potential* to become “centres of excellence”. Bearing in mind some of the reservations cited above, it was decided that a peer-based approach could help to identify what the key criteria should be for recognising “potential excellence” in African journalism training institutions (see below). Feeding into such a peer-based exercise were ideas drawn from work done originally for much more detailed kinds of assessment. This work was done in the UK, US and Francophony in relation to quality audits of various journalism training institutions. However, these three international experiences do not reflect many specifically African contexts, and they are also much more all-encompassing than the more limited research focus of UNESCO. It was therefore clear that these experiences needed to be reinterpreted in order to develop appropriate and implementable criteria so as to meet the UNESCO objective.

It was also evident that this particular project was not doing the equivalent as a USA or Theophraste evaluation of institutions. Instead, it was a smaller scale and more tightly focused job, with a low budget and demanding timetable. Further, inasmuch as the project was to look at “potential”, this could well entail particular benchmarks such as the vision of the institution’s staff – instead of, say, a detailed study of staff CVs. The wider imperative that needed addressing by the initiative was “*potential*” to do what, and “*centres of excellence*” for what. That this is no easy matter to address is highlighted for instance by the question: “potential” to make an impact on continental hotspots of war and strife (often cross-border), or “excellence” in national terms in regard to, say, HIV-Aids programming carried by (state) broadcasters? Likewise, the initiative need to wrestle with whether “potential” had more to do

with quality of facilities, than with the volume of supply of trained personnel to the media?
Etc.⁹

2. Brief and process:

During 2006, UNESCO contracted the Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille (High School of Journalism in Lille) in France (ESJ), and the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University (Rhodes) in South Africa, to develop this project. The terms of reference were to rank the top 15 to 20 institutions and give a detailed description of their achievements and weaknesses, as well as concrete proposals for their development. To this end, the project was conceptualised as follows:

1. The first phase involved a basic mapping of the players in the field.
2. The second phase was a joint online brainstorming amongst whoever was interested about what criteria would constitute a “potential centre of excellence”.
3. Lastly, any institution that wished to be considered as a “potential centre of excellence” was to be invited to step forward with data related to the criteria agreed in the second phase. In many cases, this was projected to lead to a visit from either ESJ or RU for further discussions.

In more detail, the first phase required a definition of who to include in the mapping. UNESCO deemed it relevant to include consideration of journalism schools (hereafter – j-schools) in every form – everything from higher educational institutions like universities through to private colleges and NGO bodies as well. This was in recognition of the range of facilities contributing to journalism education around Africa – in many cases, an absence or weakness of tertiary institutions has been complemented by donor-funded NGOs. It was agreed, however, that the research would not attempt to list each and every initiative, leaving aside for instance fly-by-night schools or places where media training was only a sideline (eg. Many HIV-Aids NGOs), and focus on what seemed to be the mainstream institutions.

It was a difficult exercise identifying and locating contacts for this preliminary research. Many of the institutions in the field, even in comparatively media-dense countries like Nigeria, have no web-presence whatsoever – an indication of just how different to First World

⁹ These issues are explored in Berger (2006), where it is argued that the quality of a journalism school in South Africa has to include measurement of its impact on “transformation” – including “transformation” of the media itself.

cases are conditions of media and journalism education in many African countries. It was thus necessary to resort to personal networks, including of journalists and academics in the diaspora, to locate at least some of those contactable by emails (often via yahoo addresses accessed at cybercafés). Many times these hard-found addresses would be defunct, and in more cases individuals also did not respond to the quest. One resource that was helpful was the BBC World Service Trust research (BBC-WST 2006). Nonetheless, the quest did manage to get data on 52 Anglophone institutions, 30 Francophone, and six Lusophone – a total of 88 schools. These were located in 36 of the 54 countries in Africa.¹⁰

After discussion between UNESCO, ESJ and Rhodes, it was agreed that the preliminary mapping cover basic information about contact details, status (tertiary facility, NGO, etc), acceptance criteria for participants, programmes offered, and annual graduate numbers.¹¹ Also asked was the proportion constituted by the practical component within the given period of study. Further probed was a subjective matter: how the institution regarded its standing with respected industry observers within the country, (eg. “As the top national institution”, “number three”, etc). Also in this vein, respondents were asked to detail their links with the national media – such as work experience / internships, involvement of working media professionals in curricula, and approximate percentage (where relevant) of students who are employed in media at the end of their studies. The point of all this was to provide the researchers with some indications of where they might wish to follow up with site visits. The final list is lodged with UNESCO, where it is hoped it will be made available online for interested parties.

The second phase involved joint brainstorming, online, about what criteria should define a “potential centre of excellence” for African journalism training. A discussion document was prepared for this purpose, to kick off the discussion. Subsequently, once the criteria were

¹⁰ The 18 countries that remained off the agenda with evidently little or no dedicated journalism teaching institutions were: Libya, Chad, Central African Republic, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan and the Saharwi Democratic Republic. Although it is known that Somalia and Sierra Leone have journalism programmes at university level, attempts to make contact with them proved fruitless.

¹¹ It was initially hoped to do two pilots in the research, but time constraints prevented this. As it turned out, there were numerous cases of confusion in responses to the questionnaire on the question: “Purpose: entry level education, and/or upskilling of already working journalists?” A number of respondents provided information here about their entry level requirements or about their courses, although these were covered in subsequent questions.

agreed, any institution that wished to be considered as a “potential centre of excellence” was invited to step forward with relevant data, and attract a follow-up visit from either ESJ or RU in some cases.

At the end of the process, ESJ or RU were to analyse the selected schools in relation to the internationally approved/recognised criteria and presented UNESCO with a shortlist of Africa’s potential centres of excellence in journalism training. At the time of writing this paper, it was not yet decided whether it would be possible to present the list “in order of priority” as required by the terms of reference. The difficulty was that the institutions might not be easily comparable. One example would be a university facility and an NGO which did different things – entry level and mid-career. Another example could be excellence in print and radio, but weak on the web – which would not be easy to rate in regard to a sister institution strong in print and online? Suffice to say therefore that there was awareness of the dangers of reductionism and misleading ranking within the shortlist, and a commitment to prioritising the specificities of each institution.

3. Summary of the discussion document:

The discussion document explained its genesis, and proceeded to summarise international experiences in assessing the quality of journalism schools. It noted that internationally, three systems were being used in accreditation and recognition practices - in the UK, US and Francophony countries. Details were supplied in an appendix (see Appendix A).

Summarising, the document said:

- The UK system tends to assess an institution against its own stated objectives, rather than any external definition of excellence. This, however, does not easily allow for a comparison between different institutions. However, the UK does at least pay attention to what can be seen as performance against common standards of good educational practice and systems, and (often) the rate of employment of trainees.

- The US system, under the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), operates with nine criteria. It breaks these down into areas called “standards”, and it spells out “indicators” for each of these, as well as the kind of

empirical “evidence” that a j-school then needs to muster in relation being assessed on the indicators.

- The Francophone system (Theophraste Label, www.theophraste.org) categorises its criteria into three areas: criteria relating to the “Means of implementation”; criteria relating to “Training content”; and criteria relating to “Maintaining relevance”.

The discussion document proceeded to propose that, drawing from the three systems, the following areas could be put forward as important to look at in assessing the quality of a j-school:

1. Written *journalistic* mission (as distinct from Public Relations or general Mass Comm theory mission).
2. Curriculum with theory and practice, and specified learning outcomes.
3. Consultation with the profession on the development and the evolution of the curriculum.
4. Diversity in entry, content, teachers (and tools for selection of students, teachers and contents).
5. Systems to assess learning.
6. Systems to evaluate teachers and courses.
7. Student services.
8. Adequacy of budget and sustainability of sources of income.
9. Existence of a mid or long term strategy of development
10. Professional and public service.
11. Research output and dissemination.
12. External linkages and responsiveness to context and profession.
13. Tracking of those who complete the programmes.

From this background, the paper then went on to argue that the interpretation of some of these areas for African conditions would differ from that of, for example, the USA, where an indicator for resource and facilities is specified as a ratio of no more than 1 teacher to 15 learners. “Many African facilities cannot realistically come close to this. More appropriate indicators would thus be needed for Africa in regard to this issue.” It was also pointed out that some criteria – such as research output – were relevant for some higher education institutions, but not necessarily for NGOs. So a system for the current UNESCO exercise had to be broad enough to cater to all kinds of j-schools.

Noted as critical was the observation that the three international experiences summarised entailed very in-depth and time-consuming exercises for participating j-schools. For African

conditions, and for the purposes and deadlines of this project, a much curtailed and simpler system would be needed.

Moving on, the document then explored possibilities for adding African indicators. Verbatim excerpts follow below:

For a j-school to be “excellent” or even “potentially excellent” in Africa, it may be important for it to “achieve” in some areas that are not touched upon by the international experiences. One example is whether the institution’s training promotes fluency in national language as well as multi-lingual journalistic competency, given the rich diversity of languages on the continent.

There may also be a case to be made for rating whether the work of a j-school contributes to the challenges of democracy (including gender equity), and development (not least HIV-Aids). Further, the “African project” (as evidenced by the various drives to integrate the continent) is also something that might merit specific attention in assessing which j-schools are headed towards “excellence”.

The discussion document then focused attention on the fact that the UNESCO exercise was to identify “potential” centres of excellence. In order to eventually become such a centre, it was thus proposed argued that the following characteristics might need to be demonstrated:

- Sustainability of the institution (in conditions of donor dependence or instability);
- Leadership capacity and morale ambition of the institution to achieve “excellence”;
- Prospects to become a “centre”, implying to an extent a “centre of gravity” that also possibly even serves a wider constituency than the home-country, and possibly a wide range of journalistic specialisations.

Recapping these additional items to be taken into account, the discussion paper said that to the list drawn from international experience cited above, the following could be added:

14. Language relevance.
15. Democracy contribution.(eg. Promoting watch–dog/investigative journalism)
16. Development contribution. (Millenium Development Goals, Education For All)
17. Pan-Africanism.
18. Sustainability.
19. Leadership and ambition.
20. Prospects to become a regional and wide-ranging “centre”.

Two more criteria were also suggested for consideration:

21. An open-ended criterion: what sort of “plus” does the given institution contribute to the development of quality journalism?
22. How the institution assesses risks and obstacles that could prevent growth.

In concluding, the discussion paper asked journalism educators around the continent to comment on all this, and if need be to propose additional important areas that should be taken into consideration. A caution was expressed about the need for a manageable system for this project, and for prioritise from amongst the many areas of possible focus, as well as limiting the number of indicators. To this end, journalism educators were also asked to suggest approximately three key areas that were “mission-critical” for being a “potential centre of excellence”, although it was acknowledged that the figure of three was not “sacred”.

4. Details on the consultation around criteria:

A copy of the discussion document was emailed to the African j-schools who had responded with information for the UNESCO map by the time the consultation phase of the process was scheduled to kick in, namely in early December 2006. The document was also put online on Yahoo groups.¹²

A small group of journalism teaching experts from outside Africa but with relevant knowledge was also invited to join the discussions. There was recognition of the predominance of males in this list, and an attempt was made to consciously correct it, although with limited success. Comments were invited during December 2006, and posted on the Yahoo group. For participants unable to access or post on the online discussion, their contributions were emailed to either Rhodes or ESJ directly who ensured these were put online. ESJ also arranged for translations into and out of French as relevant. Respondents were asked for four inputs: (i) to comment on the draft 22 criteria, (ii) to suggest additional ones where appropriate, (iii) to prioritise three criteria, and (iv) to suggest empirical indicators for the assessing the three.

Comments were received from representatives of 11 institutions surveyed for the map, and from three individuals approached for their expertise. The relatively low response reflects the time of year (December) and limited period for the consultation (both necessitated by the UNESCO deadlines), plus the difficulties of many institutions in utilising e-mail and the web.

¹² In retrospect, the choice of Yahoo may have been ill-considered given the controversy around the company’s collaboration with the Chinese authorities in terms of identifying a dissident using a Yahoo address. At the time, however, it seemed like one of the most well-used email addresses in the target constituency of African journalism educators, and therefore an easy extension of their web-use. Another critical consideration that emerged later, however, is that Google does not appear to list content on rival Yahoo – including the valuable contributions to the discussion.

The latter factor does not apply to some of the North African Francophone j-schools, whose lack of response could be further researched.

What became clear from the responses was the complexity of distinguishing amongst criteria in terms of levels of generality and specificity, and even more complex in regard to the difference between “criteria” and “indicators”. There was a substantial divergence in the comments as to how respondents treated these – upgrading points to general level criteria in some cases, downgrading them to more specific indicators in others. All this sensitised Rhodes and ESJ to the issue when it came to developing their own position. It can be noted that several of the comments also opposed the core attempt to develop criteria common to all variants of journalism teaching institutions – training centres, non-governmental organisations and universities. This response also added to existing sensitivity within Rhodes and ESJ concerning the difficulty in ranking institutions.

The contributions by respondents are all online at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UnescoAJ/>. Significantly, nobody took up the old chestnut of theory-practice divisions, reflecting that this tired debate has now moved beyond its historic capacity to elicit passionate – and polarised – responses. It seemed taken for granted that a j-school needed both; how these were integrated or bridged was not raised as significant to being a potential centre of excellence. Amongst other comments, issue was taken by Cameroon’s L’Ecole Supérieure des Sciences et Techniques de l’Information et de la Communication (Esstic) with the quest for “African criteria”. The organisation submitted:

It is clear to us that there does not exist an ‘African journalism’ nor a training in ‘African journalism’, different from international journalism or inferior to it. It seems in these conditions judicious to distinguish not African criteria on the one hand and criteria which apply to the rest of the world on the other, but criteria sufficiently generic to apply to all regions of the world and possibly adjustable from the point of view of their variables and indicators on the one hand, and on the other hand criteria which could apply to one region in particular (Africa for example) with regard to one or other of its sociological, political or economic characteristics.

This was in contrast to the point of view of several others, including Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa, whose representative argued: “... certain themes like the promotion of democracy, looking at social issues e.g. the HIV/Aids pandemic for one and the necessity of a free media should be core to the education of future journalists.” Esstic did,

however, also suggest a criterion about whether an institution taught journalism students to identify the social problems in a given society. This represented a deeper approach, but it would also be one likely to yield similar issues about the relevance of a journalism school's activities. Accordingly, the divide between these two positions was bridgeable – and African specificities taken into account. The concern could be accommodated in assessing the curriculum.

A more fundamental critique was made by Esstic of two of the proposed criteria that suggested rating a journalism school on how well it served the media industry. “In a professional environment that for the most part deviates from what is to be desired, as seems to be the case in Cameroon and several other African countries, it appears more opportune to emphasise the influence of the school on its environment,” was the comment made.¹³ The implication therefore was to turn the criteria around and assess whether a given school contributed to changing the media.¹⁴ This point lent itself to be taken on board in assessing whether the curriculum and external activities included a critical component¹⁵.

Another pertinent comment recorded by many respondents was a common feeling that a school's equipment was a necessary criterion. This was given the importance of a practical component in the teaching, the absence of equipment in the community, and the need to use ICT to link internationally. This could also be built into the curriculum assessment as an indicator covering what technology enabled the practical component of the course.

Also argued for strongly was consideration of selection processes, which it was argued should include signs of passion and commitment. “You can follow all the criteria you fancy, but if you do not have quality student material you will fail to deliver,” was the motivation from Tshwane University of Technology. However, the reality is that many African tertiary institutions have to take who applies, and the assumption is that applicants are interested.

¹³ This is a sentiment sometimes expressed in the literature concerning first world journalism education (see Craft, 2005; MacDonald, 2006), and has also been argued by Berger (2006, 2006/7).

¹⁴ Proposed indicators here were:

- Rate of take-up by the world of work of alumni of the institution.
- Offer of continuing/in-service training to practising professionals.
- Activities and actions by the school aimed at professional circles (symposia, lectures, events...).
- Number of media organs created or directed by professionals trained by the establishment.

¹⁵ This is a dimension argued for in general by writers like Adam (2001), Reese and Cohen (2000) and Skinner et al (2001).

Further, much training of working journalists is for a range of reasons decided by the employer, and thus issue of the passion of the personnel is out of the hands of a j-school as such.

Tracking of those who complete the programmes was argued for in a number of responses as being critical. However, this is an unrealistic criterion given its resource-intensive character and the state of underdevelopment of most institutions, and is therefore not conducive to assessing potential to be a centre of excellence.

In January 2007, ESJ and Rhodes began to identify points of commonality, while also signalling where there were differences. Many of the initial 22 criteria and the additions could be aggregated as indicators under a much narrowed number of criteria. Three draft criteria, with related indicators, were initially proposed by Rhodes to ESJ and Unesco. They covered, at the general level, (i) curriculum with theory and practice, and specified learning outcomes (and some of the indicators arising in discussion of the feedback noted above); (ii) professional and public service and external linkages and responsiveness; and (iii) the existence of a mid- or long-term strategy of development. This document (see Appendix B) was a starting point for what would go into a second round of discussion around mid-January 2007.

By the end of January, on the basis of the 2nd round of comments, a final set of criteria and indicators were due to be sent out by ESJ and Rhodes. The plan was for these to go hand in hand with an invitation to any interested institution to submit evidence on how they rated in regard to these criteria and indicators. It was recognised in all this that the exercise should be relatively easy to do, and that a burden should not be imposed on already-stretched j-school staffers. By mid-February, Lille and Rhodes were due to have issued a shortlist of approximately 15 institutions where more detail might be required. They also called on these institutions for suggestions as to the further development of their potential. By 15 March, a draft report was due to go to UNESCO, with the final report by April 15. At the time of writing (early January 2007), clearly these steps still lay in the future.

5. Conclusion

There were several challenges associated with the endeavour described in this paper. One was to develop a system that was both suitable and appropriate. To that end it made sense to tap into the “wisdom” of the institutions on the ground in the diverse parts of the continent. Another challenge, however, was to ensure that the results would have a degree of legitimacy. For example, Rhodes could not be both “player and referee” within South Africa, so it was agreed that ESJ would do the follow-up site visits with journalism schools in that country. The wider concern was that an external imposition could generate a lot of contestation, for instance Rhodes and ESJ being seen as arrogantly – and even self-interestedly – deciding who would count as a potential centre of excellence.¹⁶

Apart from the status stakes, there was also the possibility that UNESCO would prioritise those on the list for collaboration in various kinds: in other words, resources might also be implicated by the exercise. Although UNESCO has quite limited means of support, that does not mean there is not competition for these. With all this in mind, and again to avoid controversy, the conclusions were to be sent to the affected schools, and their responses sought for inclusion in the final report. It would then be up to UNESCO to assess any discrepancies between the Rhodes-ESJ analysis, and the institutional responses. What was important to avoid any perceptions that there was bias or that ESJ and Rhodes were having the absolutely last word.¹⁷ In this light, a consultative, open and transparent process was seen as the way to establish maximally-consensual criteria, so that application would be primarily a technical process. Further, the notion that participants first self-review in the light of the final criteria, and then have the opportunity of submitting independent responses to the ultimate ESJ and Rhodes findings, was guided by the need for fairness and legitimacy.

There was also a third purpose to the consultative methodology of the project. An eye was kept on the longer term prospect of building peer networks of journalism teaching institutions in Africa, and even ultimately a peer review system, akin to the US and Theophraste models,

¹⁶ For instance, Tshwane University of Technology noted: “We will not be the only ones being uncomfortable with this ‘King of them all’ approach that seems to feature very strong in the material thus far. Rather make it clearer that all will benefit from the various inputs by comparisons being made.”

¹⁷ The delicate nature of assessing and ranking journalism schools was signalled in the 2002 skills audit for the SA National Editors Forum. There, the authors noted: “(O)ne of the objects of this audit when it started out was to identify ‘centres of excellence’ for education and training in journalism. What follows should not be seen as the first or last word spoken on this issue, but as a very impressionistic evaluation of what the researchers found in their interviews with the editors and news-editors regarding the question: “From which tertiary institutions do you get your best beginner-reporters?” (Sanef, 2002).

coming out of this.¹⁸ Probably the priorities in Africa are less an agreed accreditation process (which is inevitably resource-intensive) and more one of promoting collaborations in teaching and research.

Of course, institutions rise and fall, and what may be at the top of a list one year may well be displaced a few thereafter. However, the point of this UNESCO project was to see which institutions were positioned for a period of sustained growth, development and impact. Whether investment in them does occur, and whether any such investment yields results, is of course not evident at the time of writing this paper. Much depends on what the listed schools will make of the exercise – not only for marketing purposes, but also in terms of using the information to reflect on their trajectories, assess gaps between where they are and where they want to be, and prove able to turn shortfalls into opportunities. In its response to the discussion document, Esstic said that the final document could help guide African journalism establishments “in their choice of programme content, management of human and material resources and relationship to their environments”. The outcome could also “make identifiable and transparent the strengths and weaknesses of each existing journalism training establishment in Africa and to allow UNESCO and other aid and financial institutions to develop more relevant policies towards these establishments by intervening in the genuinely problematic aspects of the operation and performance of these training centres.” In addition to these points, one can note that if, at the end of the day, there is an increased sense of community among African journalism educators, and an enhanced sense of collaboration and competition, that can only be good for their performance.

What the initiative represents, in wider terms, is an endeavour to develop journalism education in relation to the distinctiveness of its particular environment. The exercise was not one promoting African autarchy, but of drawing from some international experience and subjecting it to rigorous and collective interrogation in terms of appropriateness to the diverse conditions around Africa, not least the challenges of relevance. What might emerge out of it is a more sustainable, if gentle, movement to address additional issues, concretely, and in an organic way. The old issues of international news flows, development communication, appropriate textbooks, may find themselves reinvigorated as a result.

¹⁸Berger 2006/7 touches on the prospects for accreditation systems to develop in southern Africa.

APPENDIX A

1. UK assessment systems

The UK has had a state agency for higher education that conducts audits of journalism training at British universities. There does not appear to be a standard set of criteria used: mostly the facilities are assessed against their own institutional mission statements rather than any more universal standards. Amongst the points that have been examined (piecemeal, in various locations) are how a given facility shapes up in terms of:

- Systems for monitoring and reviewing the teaching
- External examination
- Student representation
- Feedback from graduates
- Feedback from employers
- Rates of graduate employment in the media
- Diversity of intake of students

There seems to be no consistent and across-the-board assessment of whether programmes encourage a critical approach to media, or of community/industry service, or actual impact on industry.

2. US system

The US (voluntary system) is done by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Like the UK system, they look at higher education institutions. The vantage point is to assess how an institution meet's its own standards, but they also go further and focus on standards which they think are needed

ACEJMC regards nine areas to be of importance, and they also spell out indicators in each. These are (in summary):

- Standard 1. Mission, Governance and Administration
- Standard 2. Curriculum and Instruction
- Standard 3. Diversity and Inclusiveness
- Standard 4. Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty
- Standard 5. Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity
- Standard 6. Student Services
- Standard 7. Resources, Facilities and Equipment
- Standard 8. Professional and Public Service
- Standard 9. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Seen with the indicators:

STANDARD examined	INDICATORS and EVIDENCE

*Standard 1. Mission,
Governance and Administration*

	A mission statement
	Oversight of institution
	Avenues for staff and student participation
<i>Standard 2. Curriculum and Instruction</i>	
	Includes the values and laws of free speech, ethics, historical role of media
	Literacy: visual, maths, ICT use
	Balance of theory and practice
	Student:teacher ratio of 15:1 in skills classes
	Recognises students' external learning
<i>Standard 3. Diversity and Inclusiveness</i>	
	A plan covering curriculum, staff, students
	Syllabi and other course materials
	Records on hiring, promotion, student recruitment, visiting teachers
<i>Standard 4. Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty</i>	
	Course evaluations are done
	Annual review of teachers
<i>Standard 5. Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity</i>	
	Support for research, creative activity and/or professional activity.
<i>Standard 6. Student Services</i>	
	Communications with students
	Analysis of enrolments, retention, graduation
<i>Standard 7. Resources, Facilities and Equipment</i>	
	Is a detailed annual budget
	Adequate equipment and library services
<i>Standard 8. Professional and Public Service</i>	
	Active engagement with alumni & media
	Involvement in civic activities in journalism
<i>Standard 9. Assessment of Learning Outcomes</i>	
	A written statement on competencies
	A written assessment plan
	Assessment records
	Use of these records to improve

3.3 Francophony

The Theophraste network of journalism educators in French-speaking countries has developed an evaluation system with possible certification.

CRITERIA AREA	ELABORATION
MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	
1. Journalistic identity	Admission and curriculum are journalistic in character
2. Functioning	Autonomy of institution
3. Adequacy of budget	Detailed and sufficient budget for aims
4. Technical capacity	Appropriate facilities
	Library and internet access
TRAINING CONTENT	
5. Access and entrance procedures	Minimum qualifications
	Transparent, non-discriminatory procedures
6. Relevance of curriculum to outcomes	Defining competency outcomes
	Theory-practice balance
	Law, ethics, economy, history
	Critical approach to media
7. Evaluation of teaching and follow-up	Formal systems like student logbook, representation
8. Matching training to context	Responsiveness of training to profession
	Views of alumni and professionals of course
9. Composition of teaching body	Mix of academics and professional skills
MAINTAINING RELEVANCE	
10. Teaching environment	Staff meetings, adequate premises
11. Staff selection and development	Trainers upgrade, share content, interdisciplinary
12. Environment scan and adaptation	Monitoring changes and updating
13. Research capacity & publications	Research and dissemination proportionate to capacity and vocation
14. Openness to outside	External links, incl with foreign partners
15. Follow up and integration of leavers	Tracking and support

Theophraste acknowledges that there will be different emphases for universities and professional centres.

Appendix B:

PROPOSED PRIORITIES FOR IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN AFRICA (FIRST DRAFT)

1. Curriculum with theory and practice, and specified learning outcomes.
2. Professional and public service and external linkages and responsiveness.
3. Existence of a mid- or long-term strategy of development.

PROPOSED INDICATORS FOR THESE THREE CRITERIA

CRITERION 1. CURRICULUM WITH THEORY AND PRACTICE, AND SPECIFIED LEARNING OUTCOMES.

INDICATORS:

- Written journalistic mission
- A written statement on competencies
- Includes the values and laws of free speech, ethics, economics, historical role of media
- Critical approach to media
- Democratic component (eg. Media freedom issues, ethics, investigative journalism, critique of bad journalistic practices)
- Balance between theory, practical application and reflection – praxis
- Linkages between conceptual and contextual knowledge, and practical journalistic skills
- Adequate technology to learn the practical dimension
- Staffing ratios
- Range of media platforms covered
- Internet access
- Opportunities for practical media production (eg. School media)
- Languages are learnt
- Content includes how to recognise and report on key issues (like HIV, Pan Africanism, indigenous communication systems).
- Pan-Africanist focus in terms of how curriculum responds to the continent's language diversity, democracy, development challenges.
- Systems to assess learning
- Systems to assess teachers and courses
- Quality assurance mechanisms in place through peer reviewed teaching and examination systems.

CRITERION 2. PROFESSIONAL AND PUBLIC SERVICE AND EXTERNAL LINKAGES AND RESPONSIVENESS.

INDICATORS:

- Mechanisms for interaction with the profession.

- Rate of take-up by the world of work of alumni of the institution.
- Offer of continuing/in-service training to practising professionals.
- Activities and actions by the school aimed at professional circles (symposia, lectures, events...)
- Involvement by teachers in productions for the media industry.
- Involvement in international and regional journalism associations
Number and level of external projects established;
- Level of participation by alumni (participation in meetings, responses to needs, to requests from institution etc.);
- Links with the private and community sectors
- Development of academic regional lecture visits
- Public commentary and critique of bad practices regarding media, or violations by diverse agencies of media freedom
- Publications and webpresence of institution
External networking on partnerships; bursaries; competitions.

3. EXISTENCE OF A MID OR LONG TERM STRATEGY OF DEVELOPMENT: (POTENTIAL)

INDICATORS:

- Annual or medium-term plan
- Developed internal communication systems
- Budget per student
- Numbers of graduates
- Enrolment and completion rates
- The type of support and level of financial participation by the state;
- Affiliation to training networks
- Diversified national and international partners
- Internal – external finance ration
- Organisational innovation and ability to adapt
- Expansion of programmes
- Development of staff through constant retraining, staff exchange and the like
- Trainer collaboration and interdisciplinary activities
- Participative governance and transparency
- Review mechanisms and use thereof to improve
- Monitoring changes and updating
- Dissemination of knowledge externally, proportionate to capacity and vocation

CONCLUSION

There may well be different views to the view described here as to what the top three criteria should be, and also what is indicator and what is criterion. Then, there is also the issue of what indicators there should be, and whether they should be in a given order.

It is also immediately evident that there are still *too many* indicators listed in the section above. Bearing in mind the need not to overburden j-schools in submitting their evidence, there is a need to cut back to five or six indicators, so that it will not take more than an hour or

two for a j-school to compile and submit their evidence. Of course, the researchers can then follow up later with those schools that which make the grade to be on a provisional shortlist. The final shortlist will then include the follow-up information (and responses to the report).

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