June 2021

Journalism Education in Kyrgyzstan:
a Needs Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The needs assessment conducted on behalf of the Media Dialogue project has by necessity had a narrow and specific scope informed by the life cycle of the project in question, available resources and the context of the assignment partly dictated by the pandemic restrictions. Its primary goal was to identify realistic and achievable points of entry for instituting changes and reforms in the existing journalism education system in Kyrgyzstan. It did not extend its reach to cover more general media and communication courses such as public relations but focused on journalism as a key area related to the project's stakeholders and its goals and objectives. It did not limit itself, however, only to short-term measures but has aspired to use them as stepping-stones to more profound and far-reaching reforms in the future. This is reflected both in the structure of the present report and the methodology used during the needs assessment.

Based on the initial desk research and literature review, the needs assessment team made an assumption that the most effective way of initiating positive changes in the way journalism is taught in the context of Kyrgyzstan is to increase the amount of practice and applied skills in the existing curricula. That assumption was fully corroborated by the findings of the field mission which further confirmed the assumed needs for deeper and more meaningful engagement of and partnerships with the media industry, the key role of developing a modern system of work placements for students in quality media outlets, and the strategy of using guest lectures, masterclasses and workshops with industry professionals as a means of dynamising the existing teaching plans and infusing them with elements of practical work simulating authentic work environment.

The needs assessment has established that most journalism faculties and departments are quite ready and willing to introduce such changes as the first stage towards more profound and longer term changes and that external funding is crucial to initiate them without jeopardizing the positions and the stability within the faculties which in most cases operate on lean and strained budgets and low staff salaries. Many of the interactions that took place during the field mission stage revealed that some journalism departments had attempted or experimented with quite similar tools and instruments already but stalled mainly because of financial constraints.

The present needs assessment has been able to draw on the findings targeting ways of introducing more practice-based training and media industry-driven teaching and come up with longer-term recommendations for the future which are presented in the final part and reach out for resources and solutions achieved in Ukraine where work on journalism education reform is well advanced and has already achieved measurable and rewarding results.

The present needs assessment has also established and confirmed positive and constructive attitude to proposals and offers of change and reform on the part of both journalism faculties and the media industry, and brought into a sharp focus the crucial role of the international community and its implementing agents on the ground in acting as go-betweens and enablers for these two actors.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism education globally is being challenged by rapid technological developments and the new information ecosystem in digital space. Fake news, disinformation and propaganda - although not new in themselves, have acquired sinister dimensions through online dissemination augmented by social media. They contribute to pressures undermining independent journalism and create new ethical dilemmas for the media and journalists. Universities in many countries have been quite slow in responding to these challenges by swiftly modifying their curricula, attracting the right professionals or supplying ----contemporary equipment and infrastructure. In some countries, the media itself took it upon themselves to address these deficits with ad hoc and less institutional journalism education and training. This approach appears to be more adaptable and flexible being free of bureaucratic limitations such as external accreditation. It also seems to address better the issue of the shortage of educators fit for the digital age suffered by higher education institutions.

Journalism education in post-Soviet countries shares a number of common issues, including weak university-level journalism education, and Kyrgyzstan is not an exception. As a rule, it stems from political and economic adversities alike that lead to weak or dysfunctional media markets. The paucity of quality, well-resourced and independent mass media outlets abreast with global media trends has an impact on journalism education systems in those countries as well. Moreover, some countries remain in the Soviet-style paradigm of journalism education, which leads to the continuing dominance of theoretical disciplines in the curricula and teaching processes. In some cases, ideological considerations further hamper any efforts to shift emphasis on practical approaches to teaching journalism. The

A successful transformation of the status quo is possible with fast and systemic educational reforms. These, however, have turned out to be very hard to institute with both governments and universities' top management incapable of pulling them through institutionally in any decisive manner. Therefore, in order to break this continuing impasse, the present report advocates a strategy of immediate limited measures and targeted interventions in the existing systems and curricula with several instruments such as:

- ✓ academic staff retraining and short-term teaching contracts for industry professionals;
- ✓ introduction of the project-based and problem-based learning (PBL) approaches into the educational process with a practical element;
- ✓ relationship building with the media industry and engagement of students in the newsroom processes;
- ✓ keeping tabs on the global media trends.

The implementation of these steps will gradually and more organically enable and lead to more fundamental and systemic changes in the overall journalism education system in countries like Kyrgyzstan in the future. The purpose of the present assessment has been in the first place to identify the best insertion points in the existing system of tools and instruments that will initiate deeper and more wide-ranging change in the longer term. It was conducted in the following stages: desk research and elaboration of a work plan based on liaising and communications with universities providing journalism education, followed by a field mission in Kyrgyzstan involving face-to-face meetings, visits to all participating universities, bilateral meetings with media outlets, editors, individual journalists and experts; a focus group with key faculty representatives and internal consultations.

The findings of the field mission were incorporated in the present report which in its first part identifies problems and issues to be addressed together with the methodology used followed by the results of the research and interviews conducted. The part entitled "The Roadmap for Change" presents briefly instruments and tools recommended for a short-term intervention which is meant to enable deeper and more comprehensive measures in the future.

Assessment

The assessment of the journalism education practical component in Kyrgyzstan's universities revealed the following trends and issues:

1. Journalism education model existing in the Kyrgyz state-owned universities is outdated, does not meet modern media industry standards and needs transformation.
2. The practical component in the curricula does exist in most curricula but is not enacted or is only nominal. In reality, elements described as practical are still dominated by theoretical approaches in teaching. Practical disciplines are not taught in the professional editorial or newsroom environment and have a substantial theoretical component (e.g., an emphasis on the theory of genres as opposed to the skills to be able to work in different genres). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen a practical component of the process of teaching journalism.
3. Journalism education in Kyrgyzstan is dominated by the humanities with too much curricular content focused on literary and stylistic components and language (including teaching foreign languages) and too little attention on contemporary journalistic subjects such as news reporting or data journalism.
4. Private universities supported by the overseas donors from the US or Turkey, such as the American University of Central Asia or Manas University do follow more western educational models or methodologies and tend to be better equipped, with more contemporary TV and radio studios. However, they tend to place more emphasis on strategic communication and PR, and less on journalism.
5. Substandard (and in some cases deteriorating) secondary school education has perpetuated the post-Soviet practice of addressing general knowledge deficits of students entering higher education with general education subjects and modules at the expense of specialist and substantive subject training at the undergraduate level - particularly in the first and second years of study.
6. There is no vision of actionable transition models to more practice-oriented teaching and building a reasonable balance between theory and practice in journalism education.
7. Some universities merge journalism and communications/PR subject matters. While this is a recent global trend, ideally, universities should offer separate courses in journalism and in public relations.
8. Low salaries and lack of capacity development opportunities demotivate faculty staff and impact negatively on the quality of teaching.
9. Universities lack modern journalism textbooks, especially in Kyrgyz language, that would reflect the latest media trends and be adapted to the Kyrgyz context.
10. Few universities target most promising and innovative media outlets for their industry cooperation and work placements with continuing emphasis on legacy media such as newspapers. Collaboration with new and successful journalistic projects that promote modern media models and quality journalism (such as Kloop Media) should be encouraged to strengthen the digital components of practical journalism education.
11. Kyrgyzstan's small and weak media market is not capable on its own of stimulating changes at the level of university journalism education and such a process needs to be externally supported by binding the two together.

Assessment Methodology

The assessment has focused on practical components of journalism education and the extent of its needs in this area for the benefit of the overall university level journalism education system of Kyrgyzstan. A team of higher education experts from Ukraine, United Kingdom and Kyrgyzstan conducted:
- ✓ interviews with the heads of the majority of journalism departments;
- ✓ interviews with senior editors and managers of many media outlets;
- ✓ focus groups with faculty staff of journalism programmes/departments;
- ✓ site visits to universities to assess their learning environments, teaching resources, technical infrastructure or the use of studios and other teaching spaces such as training newsrooms.

The following establishments have fully engaged with the assessment process:
- ✓ Kyrgyz State Arabaev University (KSU)
- ✓ Bishkek State University (BSU)
- ✓ Kyrgyz National Balasagyn University (KNU)
- ✓ Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University (KRSU)
- ✓ American University of Central Asia (AUCA)

The following media outlets and organisations have actively contributed to the assessment insights (the list is not exhaustive):
- ✓ Kaktus Media
- ✓ Kloop Media
- ✓ Politklinika
- ✓ Community Media Association
- ✓ School of Data (NGO)
- ✓ Association of Communicators of Kyrgyzstan

COVID-19 restrictions and the impact of the pandemic have been the main factor limiting the methodologies applied and the scope of the present needs assessment. For example, the Kyrgyz-Turkish University "Manas" has declined an invitation to meet and to engage meaningfully on account of the social distancing and lockdown-style restrictions applied by some universities. Time limits did not allow the team to cover higher education institutions outside Bishkek in physical terms but contacts and interaction with them did take place. The research did not include participant observation (e.g., attending classes to observe teaching and learning process), either. Given the limited time window, in-depth assessment of theoretical and practical disciplines was not possible, either. Therefore, the assessment did not include political or socioeconomic considerations but focused on practical and technical aspects. It notes, though, that the extent of the openness of universities and their intention and commitment to change remain crucial in trying to implement measures recommended by the present study.

The assessment has produced a blueprint for the *roadmap* to strengthen practical components of existing curricula, leading to future, more comprehensive and systemic changes in journalism education in the country.

Results

The assessment team identified the following general trends as a result of its inquiry:

Trend 1: Collaboration with the media industry

All universities generally collaborate with mass media outlets. University representatives mentioned invitations to attend university events, for instance, conferences. Three out of five surveyed universities organise guest lectures by practicing journalists and four universities have part-time teaching journalists. Only one university (AUCA) has practicing journalists teaching as faculty members.

There are several reasons why universities generally do not employ journalists full-time, such as low university academic staff salaries (too low compared to rates achievable in the media industry) or the red tape (academic degree requirements, publication of academic articles, or complicated time-consuming reporting system).

Universities are not proactive in attracting industry professionals to assist them in the development of teaching methods and updating curricula. Three of the five universities do consult industry representatives to help them develop teaching and learning methodologies and they also and collect feedback from them. Only two universities involve journalists or editors in testing and piloting new modules or techniques. In many cases such a collaboration remains rather formal to meet accreditation requirements and the sense of the benefits from stronger collaboration is not well articulated to impact on curriculum philosophy or teaching methodologies. Thus, expert meetings with media representatives to discuss curricula are not an established routine and are often limited to accreditation periods to tick the boxes. There are no institutionalized instruments to enable continuous collaboration with media outlets.

The understanding of what constitutes such collaboration varies. For some universities, it means inviting journalists and editors to ceremonies and conferences. But they admit that this helps manage relations but does not have an impact on the academic process or teaching. To make collaboration with the media industry meaningful, universities need to strengthen substantive engagement with media outlets with a clear goal of involving media professionals in actual teaching and assessing students' progress. . The industry also needs to get involved in experimenting with

new methods and developing prototypes of new collaborative models. In some countries, and notably Germany and the UK, major media outlets appoint mentors in charge of student work placements, for example introducing students to processes and operations of editorial newsrooms[1]. Mentors are tasked with continuous liaising with universities and providing feedback. Also, practical education in some German universities is implemented in collaboration with practicing journalists, editors, film directors, cameramen, etc. In Denmark, every undergraduate journalism student should clock up between six and twelve months of internship experience in media outlets as a mandatory component of the curriculum.[2]

Such models require strong and, most importantly, continuous collaboration between universities and media outlets, and often changes in journalism education management. The continuous collaboration between universities and media outlets should focus on:
- ✓ assessment of journalism curricula and their transformation to strengthen their practical component
- ✓ practical education of journalism students led by active media professionals
- ✓ development of assessment criteria for journalism students' practical work (outputs) being an integral part of curricular assessment process
- ✓ internships at mass media outlets and joint assessment of internship results.

Three of the universities surveyed in the assessment have reported that have signed agreements with media outlets on employment of their graduates. Four have declared on-the-job internships as a curricular requirement, but only one has a mentorship system. However, the editors interviewed as part of the assessment have confessed that the majority of students on internships tend not to treat them seriously and few show genuine interest in newsroom practice. They say their only goal for going on internships is to get the required signature from the media outlet in question to be able to pass to the next stage in their qualification. It means that the universities' internship quality assurance system is very weak – just like students, the faculties treat internships as a formality rather than a useful instrument to master practical skills. This clearly reflects the students' lack of motivation creating a context where in the words of the editor-in-chief of Politklinika, Dilbar Alimova, "they study at the national universities to get a diploma and not to become a journalist".

The reasons for the universities' weak quality assurance system includes:
- ✓ the academic process is not being focused on practice. Students who do not get real practical skills and knowledge of the newsroom processes at the university lack motivation for genuine rather than semi-fictitious internship experience. Internships are designed to reinforce skills taught at the university. But when such practical skills are not taught and do not exist, then student cannot relate them – and let alone apply them – to the real-world working environment encountered during internships.
- ✓ lack of motivation for self-improvement and professionalization among faculty staff on very low salaries and with excessive university workloads - often of administrative nature.
- ✓ lack of clear criteria for journalism students' internships at mass media outlets (vague requirements set by the sending institutions) and a formal approach to the evaluation of their quality. Formal reporting requirements resulting in no substantive assessment to replace formal routine paperwork.
- ✓ lack of communication and collaboration between students and mentors at a given media outlet (if they exist) at all. A process needs to be set up to take in the necessary time and resources to make internship experience meaningful and rewarding for the students and the receiving institution alike.

To improve a system of quality assurance for internships, a university should be in continuous communication with media outlets. More specifically, a faculty member of staff in charge of students' internships or work placements should be regularly in touch with the mentor at a given media outlet. Jointly, they should develop means of assessing the quality and effectiveness of the internship/work placement. Under normal circumstances, a typical internship should result in a portfolio of published outputs of each student taking part to be presented at the university as part of their assessment and

---

[1]Вальтер фон Ла Рош. Вступ до практичної журналістики: Навчальний посібник / За ред.. В.Ф.Іванова та А.Коль. - К.: Академія Української Преси, 2005. - 229 с.

[2] Актуальні аспекти реформування журналістської освіти в Україні. Спеціальний звіт. - К.:Телекритика. - 54 с.

be subject to peer-to-peer assessment in student group discussions. Thus, students can exchange their experiences from different media outlets and independently assess each other's work.

It has been established that all universities surveyed collect general information on their graduates after they leave their alma mater which is one of the accreditation requirements, but this does not extend to include surveys on alumni employment or their salary levels. This is another indication that universities do not have established working partnerships with the media industry. Helping them understand their country's media environment could assist in creating a work placement system that would incentivize students to actively take part in them. Again, such work placements must be an integral part of the curriculum and the assessment system.

Trends 2 & 3: Curricular content and teaching methods

A <u>formalistic approach to journalism education</u> is identified as one of the main problems at the majority of universities that follow strict accreditation requirements, but do not respond to the needs of the media industry and media development trends. The lack of flexibility in curricular amendments and reforms at state universities is also a major point of concern. Any desires for change are shackled by limiting accreditation requirements and severe funding constraints.

Ministerial level accreditation requirements envisage both theoretical (including foundational) and practical disciplines in journalism curricula but there is no specific guidance either on their proportion or level of integration in the programmes. On the declarative level, KRSU's curriculum consists of 70% of theory and 30% practice, while at other universities the proportions vary between 60 and 40% with a couple stating that the balance is 50-50. A closer examination of the teaching plans, interviews conducted with lecturers and informal discussions with alumni strongly indicate that many components described as practical are actually delivered as theory or in theoretical format. Therefore, an assumption must be made that, in reality, there is a lot less practical or practice-based teaching than officially stated.

The major systemic problem which requires a serious transformation of journalism education management, curricula and a massive transformational capacity development of journalism faculties is this discrepancy between what is stated on paper and what happens in real life. Most journalism departments happily maintain that their curricula produce industry-ready specialists with requisite general skills such as critical thinking, analytical and research skills, logical planning and project management. They are perhaps less confident about delivering specifically journalistic skills, such as news writing, editorial judgment or specific production skills in different media formats. It may be that some universities do not fully grasp the meaning of each skill of a modern journalist, and how to design curricula to develop such skills in students.

<u>Some universities do not teach news reporting at all</u> (KRSU and KSU). They do not seem to recognize its pivotal role in teaching other aspects and areas of journalism and, for example, put focus on analytical journalism or feature writing instead. KNU mentioned that news journalism is covered as part of other modules or subjects. AUCA's curriculum contains dedicated courses or modules addressing news such as Newswriting Skills or Advanced Reporting. As to the digital skills (mobile journalism, video and audio skills, multimedia and convergence journalism, social media, etc.), participating universities report that they do exist in their curricula but there have been limited opportunities to verify their extent because of the pandemic restrictions on face-to-face interaction on-campus. Journalism ethics is universally present in the curricula but it looks like it is a theoretical subject with little applied or practical dimension. AUCA delivers courses in data journalism – something also reported by a couple of others with little evidence of its existence in actual curricular practice.

In all cases, the quality of teaching is an issue. A <u>serious discrepancy between what lecturers can offer in terms of their skills and what the media market expects</u> is in clear evidence when analysing employers' testimonies on the low level of practical skills present in journalism graduates joining their workforce. <u>Editors of a number of media outlets have been quite critical of the extent to which arriving graduates are ready to rise to real-life challenges in the newsroom.</u> They say that most of such new employees must receive substantial top-up training before they can tackle reporting or basic newsroom editorial roles. The lack of journalistic sectoral specialization (such as business/finance; science/environment; politics/international affairs journalism) is quite striking and

in acute deficit. AUCA and KNU maintain that they teach some specialist journalism courses/modules. Also, KRSU and BSU have stated that they have journalism specialisms, but it is not clear whether it relates to specialist roles in different formats (TV, radio) or thematic specialisms mentioned above. These claims are difficult to ascertain given that most editors in media outlets complain that many journalism graduates lack even the basic knowledge of mathematics, domestic politics or public affairs which are seen as pre-requisites to any specialist reporting.

Teaching in Kyrgyz universities is still focused on relaying passive knowledge rather than on skills transfer and teaching problem-solving and know-how. Curricula are clearly loaded up with outdated and hardly relevant content. Teaching methodologies hardly meet European or Western standards. Universities note that their curricula follow contemporary practices of quality assurance and performance measurement such as intended learning outcomes, objectives, transferable skills etc. However, interviews with both faculty staff and media professionals (including university journalism graduates) have demonstrated that their delivery is not focused on practical skills (newsgathering, assessing information, script/article writing, video/audio production or field work) or applying journalistic standards and values in practice. Only one university (BSU) mentioned an approach simulating newsroom processes in its curriculum.

The assessment has identified a number of problems having an impact on any attempt to reform the system which are summarized below.

Problem 1: Soviet legacy – domination of literature and languages

There is a persistent culture at some universities of perceiving journalism as an extension of literature and literary activity. Such an approach is untenable in the reality of the 21st century where journalism is a par excellence interdisciplinary profession sitting astride many areas of human activity. It's a hangover from the Soviet era, when it was corralled into a narrow definition to make sure it does not grow into a threat to the system but serves as its instrument instead.

Its perpetuation in today's reality distorts the purpose of journalism as a whole and creates a significant obstacle to effective education of future journalists. Journalism graduates who became editors and journalists have reported in the assessment interviews that the Soviet past is still a huge factor singling out the impact of Soviet-era journalism and literature to this day. Interestingly enough, some lecturers would refer back to Lenin and his work when making a point about the role of the press in society during interviews and the focus group. Several expressed a degree of nostalgia about the times when state universities were fully funded by the state and well resourced.

Literature and language courses (either Kyrgyz or foreign) cannot offset the lack of modern professional practical disciplines. Another negative trend is very poor mastery of languages, especially Kyrgyz, because of the weak general education system in the country. That's why some universities additionally introduce Kyrgyz language into the curriculum. However, journalism graduates with the command of the Kyrgyz language sufficient to work in Kyrgyz media outlets are quite rare. Editors and journalists have also signaled this issue and complaints about the quality of the Russian language among graduates have similarly been articulated by some of them.

Problem 2: Confusing journalism with PR

Kyrgyzstan is not the only country where the traditionally apposite disciplines – journalism and public relations, have started to overlap and partly blend under the influence of online convergence tendencies and the more general hybridization in the information space. Although separating the two is considered good practice, there is a growing tendency globally to combine at least some journalism education with PR given that they share a lot of skills and digital instruments, particularly when it comes to social media. There are also economic imperatives whereby many struggling journalism departments found it easier to recruit students with the PR banner attached to their faculty. This practice is in evidence at some Kyrgyz universities as well, where curricula can be partly or fully merged to achieve economies of scale and to attract more students. For instance, BSU has branded its former journalism department as "Journalism and Public Relations", openly reflecting the new reality in media and communication education. While this is an unfortunate development from the point of view of the values and ethos of journalism, it also constitutes added difficulty for any

attempts to modernize and reform journalism alone in a more converged context. This is because journalists and PR specialists have different professional goals with emphasis on different skillsets and their application professionally. Ideally, the training and education of the two cohorts of students should follow different strategies and paths which does not seem to be the case at Kyrgyz universities.

Problem 3: Lack of specialization

The assessment has established through interviews with media professionals that Kyrgyz journalists often lack sufficient knowledge of a subject matter they report on. Quality reporting on politics, economics, finance and business, healthcare or science requires dedicated and longer-term training. In the Kyrgyz context, it is quite hard to obtain specialist training while already working in the media industry which survives on low margins often complemented by donor support or reliant on political masters. Training provided by Western NGO's is usually ad-hoc, short-term and rarely embraces journalistic specialisms valued within the media market.

The best space to provide such specialist training is before entering the job market which makes the university a crucial player in the provision of specialized skills and know-how. Sadly, there is very little to indicate that the participating universities are equipped to provide any specialized training at all. While specialist training may be present on paper within a given curriculum, it takes little time to verify that there is no staff capable of delivering it meaningfully or at the right professional level. For instance, at one of the universities, the delivery of specialism described as "International Journalism" boils down to studying a foreign language and stops there. It does not include studies of modern geopolitical trends, international relations and other disciplines that could have allowed a journalism graduate to navigate through complex issues of the world politics, economics and other topics. Economics and finance are another notable example. Editors have complained that the quality of graduates joining their outlets does not allow them to consider them for development into specialist reporters in this area. One editor said that graduates lacked not only specialist knowledge but had problems with numeracy and reasoning skills and were unable to look at complex issues holistically and present them in an accessible way to a general audience.

Problem 4: Technical and institutional Infrastructure

Four of the universities surveyed for the needs assessment (KRSU, KNU, BSU, KSU) that have been visited during the assignment turned out to have very poor technical infrastructure. The equipment such as computers, video cameras or editing suites is seriously outdated and makes it virtually impossible to create modern, digital content. AUCA has the best technical resources of them all.

Low salary levels are another factor impeding the successful delivery of the curricula. Staff retraining and development is not a priority and there are very few resources to support and staff development plans. In most cases, such opportunities boil down to participation in conferences and other events. At best, lecturers may be lucky enough to be offered trainings organized by international organizations. Many journalism lecturers have never worked in the media or have no or little practical journalistic experience. Most have not been exposed to the global media context or immersed in the media industry processes.

The Roadmap for Change

The needs assessment has split its recommendations along the time axis into short-term and long-term ones. As a pre-requisite to successful and lasting change, universities and media outlets should become real partners in the education process. The starting point must be strengthening ties and selecting most suitable collaborative models.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

To be implemented in the next 4-6 months

The assessment team designed four mechanisms for the collaboration between universities and the media aimed at the development of practical skills for students:
(1) internships/work placements at media outlets;
(2) Practical seminars, workshops and masterclasses by guests a visiting media practitioners inserted into existing curricular points and integrated into the teaching plans (targeting mostly elective modules but also including mandatory ones);
(3) Mentoring programmes and collaborative projects with the media industry;
(4) media production hub (media-lab) for several universities.

All four models have been offered and presented to both universities and media outlets in terms of applicability, organizational preparedness and absorption capacities of participating institutions. Mechanisms 1 and 2 have been accepted and found most realistic by all participating universities. The implementation of these mechanisms does not preclude other instruments or mechanisms such as (3) and (4) and actually enhances the context for their future implementation. The mechanisms can be set up and launched gradually, starting with pilot media outlets and increasing the number of media partnerships step by step. This will offer placement opportunities to more and more students. To make internships meaningful, students should be required to create a portfolio of work produced and published during their work placement.

These short-term steps will help current journalism students master the skills vital for work in media outlets. Universities will reassess their approach to collaboration with the media industry. However, these steps cannot change the system as a whole. Therefore, a number of long-term recommendations could become part of future projects aimed at transformation of journalism education in Kyrgyzstan.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment did not address the legal or institutional foundation of journalism education transformation. It requires a separate inquiry and analysis. The assessment recommends looking at the following areas that can lead to positive changes in journalism education:

1. Revision of the internal monitoring system of the quality of journalism education.

Effective higher education quality monitoring system impacts the education process and makes universities change. However, such a system requires complex changes involving many stakeholders, including the government. Promoting such institutional changes is a long process which is problematic for many projects funded by international organizations with relatively short project cycles of up to two-three years while a typical comprehensive overhaul of a curriculum may take up to five years including final testing for quality assurance purposes. For this reason, addressing quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation internally for each university is much more appropriate for donor-funded projects with shorter life spans.

International development projects can help design modern internal journalism education quality monitoring system via:
• International experts and consultants (in monitoring of quality of education);
• strategic sessions (involving Kyrgyz experts, Western consultants, universities and media industry representatives) and facilitation of development of such a monitoring system;
• civil society organizations that would create an independent rating of journalism departments (to spur competition for quality education).

2. Modernization of university journalism curricula.

Post-Soviet universities have traditionally resisted significant change requiring stepping out of their philosophical foundations and for many they have been deemed unreformable. The usual mantra heard in defence of keeping to their old ways has been the red tape such as formal accreditation requirements. But there are numerous examples of successful reforms in a number of countries, including Ukraine, Georgia and in Russia itself.

International development projects can help universities (taking account of accreditation requirements) revise syllabi, link them to the profession and necessary modern journalistic skills to work in media outlets via:

- Western experts (in media education and media industry with design-thinking skills);
- strategic sessions with journalism departments to revise their syllabi.

3. Create opportunities for cooperation between universities and the media industry.

International development projects can

- create thematic training programmes (e.g., on economic or political journalism, etc.) to invite for coteaching both journalists and subject-matter specialists. Such trainings can be tailored for both faculty and students;
- collaborate with universities at the institutional level (including through additional funding) to attract practicing journalists for teaching journalism (either coteaching with the faculty or teaching elective courses; or practical journalistic workshops);
- help establish collaboration with such companies as Google (they can provide free trainings on their services, such as information search, etc.);
- stimulate media industry to provide scholarships for talented journalism students;
- create professional journalism competition, with a special nomination for students and young promising journalists (e.g., "Honor of the Profession" in Ukraine (http://www.konkurssmi.org/) funded by donors and sponsors.

4. Retraining of the journalism faculty.

International development projects can

- develop a certified training programme for journalism faculty capacity development to include:
    a) modern teaching methods, focused on problem- and project-based learning (PBL) approaches;
    b) modern approaches to assessment of journalism students' knowledge and skills;
    c) methods of online learning;
    d) practical journalism disciplines teaching models;
    e) creating teaching materials in multimedia formats.
- conduct a cycle of trainings for journalism faculty by certified trainers, which would result in modernization of individual syllabi of the faculty and improvement of journalism courses;
- organize an internship system for the faculty in media outlets, both in Kyrgyz and, if possible, international (e.g., BBC or Deutsche Welle);
- help the journalism faculty participate in international media forums and other events, like the World Newspaper Congress or the World Editors Forum held by WAN-IFRA (World Association of News Publishers - https://wan-ifra.org/), or Lviv Media Forum in Ukraine (https://lvivmediaforum.com/).

5. Production of textbooks (including in multimedia formats).

International development projects can

- develop textbooks and manuals for both journalism faculty and students;
- adapt modern online-textbooks being developed in other countries;
- translate textbooks and manuals published in English and other languages.

Samples of textbooks and manuals in multimedia format created in Ukraine:

- online course News Literacy at https://video.detector.media/special-projects/novynna-gramotnist-i22
- online course Basics of Journalistic Investigations at https://video.detector.media/courses/zhurnalistski-rozsliduvannya-osnovy-i14
- online manual on media literacy Media Driver (also used as an introductory course for freshmen journalism students) at http://mediadriver.online/
- trainers' manual on How to Teach Conflict Journalism at https://www.jta.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Conflict-journalism_A4l-small.pdf

Samples of free online courses with Russian subtitles on Coursera platform:
- Michigan University's course *Become a Journalist: Report the News! Specialization* // https://www.coursera.org/specializations/become-a-journalist
- California University's course *Data Visualization with Tableau Specialization* // https://www.coursera.org/specializations/data-visualization
- Michigan University's course *Photography Basics and Beyond: From Smartphone to DSLR Specialization* // https://www.coursera.org/specializations/photography-basics
- Northwestern University's (Illinois) course *Fundamentals of Digital Image and Video Processing* // https://www.coursera.org/learn/digital

6. Create an environment conducive to professional development of journalism faculty

International development projects can
- fund/create a website for the journalism faculty, which would (a) host teaching guidance and other supporting materials; (b) inform of modern trends in development of both global education system and media industry; (c) serve as a platform for discussions and exchange of experience;

  For example, such a website has been created by Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communications funded by Deutsche Welle: https://www.jta.com.ua/

- organize regular regional conference (which would convene at least once every two year) on problems/ development/ trends of journalism education. The conference would invite faulty and experts from different countries, as well as media industry representatives.

7. Renewal of technical infrastructure of journalism departments and divisions.

Journalism departments of the Kyrgyz state universities are in dire need to create media labs with modern equipment. Not all universities have their own TV or radio studios. And the existing ones are very outdated and do not meet modern requirements of the media industry (hence, it does not make any sense to teach students on such equipment).

International development projects can:

- help journalism departments find ways to cooperate with big tech companies (e.g., Microsoft) that have special social programmes to help the public and education sectors. For example, they can provide licensed software for free or even equipment;
- develop a technical standard for working in modern newsroom, help journalism departments equip their modern media labs in line with this standard (funding can come from different sources, both donors and sponsors).