

Table 14

Engaging with the media

Host: Brendan O'Malley, Editor in Chief, University World News

Rapporteur: Ella Ritchie Engaging with the Media

This session was led by Brendan O'Malley, Editor in Chief of University World News, the global online higher education publication, with Ella Ritchie as rapporteur. It was well attended by academics, administrators and students from a wide range of countries. The three groups focused in on a range of current issues facing Higher Education globally, from the perspectives of UWN, journalists more widely and academics and students. The key take-away messages were that journalists and academics could do more to understand each other's worlds, universities needed to be clearer and bolder about communicating their priorities and that UWN should engage more with the student voice from all levels of study.

Brendan introduced UWN by describing its origins, ethics, ethos and approach. Africa has its own edition, which also feeds Africa news into the Global edition. As far as possible UWN uses correspondents based in the countries it is reporting on all around the world and feedback from readers and the academic community is key. With no subscriptions, funding is a constant challenge. Currently funding comes from an angel investor, some international donors, advertising and partnerships with university associations and individual universities, which support UWN's independent commissioning of richer content on particular topics.

UWN needs to be high in the Google Rankings to continue to get seen by high numbers of readers but is also brought to new audiences via cross-promotional alliances. It has close to 5 million page views per year and 56,000 subscribers to its Global newsletter and 30,000 subscribers to its Africa newsletter.

UWN is pitched at university leaders, senior academics and researchers, administrators, policy makers and think tanks but also covers the student view and student affairs. Readership of UWN is 50% Professor level and above (especially senior leadership teams) but it was clear from our discussions that International Office staff, administrators and communication staff also find it extremely helpful. We had an interesting discussion about the way in which students acquire knowledge (typically in very short burst) and the importance of UWN understanding this and working with students to produce accessible material. From the other side it clear that there is a general problem for journalists to get clear, accessible and up-to-date information on research and teaching issues from the university sector.

For UWN there is a balance to be struck between acting as a 'Reuter's type' organisation breaking new stories and serving the academic sector. This plays out in a compromise between getting professional up-to-date information out quickly and taking the time to provide in-depth stories and wider analysis, which is a major strength of UWN. In discussion there was a consensus that the combination of comment material (often provided by academics) and news provided by correspondents on the ground worked well and could be extended to a wider group of academics, students, administrators and other HE sector stakeholders. There was also support for the way in which UWN tackled and clarified complex issues and trends such as the response to the SDGs and academic freedom and provided up to

date practical information on different university systems within their cultural contexts.

Recommendations

For UWN

- Have more 'Good News' stories
- Think through how to get more input from students
- More detailed material on mobility

For Universities

- Make access for journalists easier (use training and guidance more with academics)
- Communicate material clearly and give up to date contacts
- Think through who their audiences are and don't waste time promoting stories that are not of interest.