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## **Landmark journalism report highlights need for investment and training**

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Researchers from the University of Sydney, University of New South Wales and The Walkley Foundation interviewed 100 editors, deputy editors and senior editorial staff from all major Australian metropolitan and national newspapers. They found an industry struggling to maintain quality in the face of aggressive cost-cutting measures by media organisations, measures that have led to the loss of up to 1500 editorial jobs and increased workloads for those left behind.

Backed by research funding from the Australian Research Council and The Walkley Foundation, the project set out to discover the extent to which journalism's democratic imperative - producing high quality, relevant content that keeps the public informed of issues of importance - was under pressure from the digital revolution in Australian journalism.

The survey found that:

- Two-thirds of respondents described the quality of online journalism in Australia as "average" or "poor" while only 14 per cent described it as "excellent"
- 62 per cent of respondents said the quality of newspaper journalism was "average" or "poor", compared to 34 per cent who said it was excellent
- 62 per cent of editorial executives interviewed said their main challenge was coping with tighter resources while 56 per cent said it was proving difficult to change the mindset of their staff and keep them motivated

On a positive note, the commitment to ethical, public service journalism remains strong: 75 per cent of senior journalists interviewed nominated informing the public as the most important role for journalists in Australia and journalism with a "strong element of public benefit" emerged as the most important characteristic of quality journalism.

The survey also flagged the rise of a new type of young journalist: when asked what they were looking for in new hires, digital media skills emerged as the most important qualification compared to only 28 per cent who nominated writing skills.

The report also found that Australian journalists are slow to adopt new digital tools and techniques, with a survey of Walkley winners finding that only about one quarter of them had used social media tools to research their stories and find sources, while only about 17 per cent said they had worked across platforms to produce multimedia news stories.

Many editors and senior journalists asked about making the transformation to digital news expressed concern that the main priority was speed of publishing, while traditional hallmarks of quality such as ethics, impact and public benefit came lower down the list.

The other major finding of the report was a crippling deficit of newsroom training that, the report's authors conclude, "arguably amounts to a form of de-professionalisation of the workforce".

The report makes several recommendations:

- Rather than judging "quality journalism" merely as something that readers will pay for, the industry needs to talk to readers about journalism standards and values, to ensure that they understand how the news process works and the constraints under which journalists operate
- Adequate training in best-practice digital journalism, rather than on-the-job training provided on an "as-needed" basis will be critical to ensure that the existing workforce gains a holistic understanding of how digital technology has changed journalism
- The Walkley Awards – and other journalism awards – should be used to showcase and encourage best practice digital journalism performance and standards and need to be reviewed in light of this critical role

For further information on tonight's release see <http://bit.ly/NRoVil> and to read a copy of the report see <http://bit.ly/OgXopJ>

For all questions on the *Journalism at the Speed of Bytes* report, please contact: Dr David McKnight 61-2-9385 8536(w), 0414 333 892 (mob) [d.mcknight@unsw.edu.au](mailto:d.mcknight@unsw.edu.au)

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