

From black art to black gown

Parliamentary reporting training in
the House of Commons, London

Back in the day...

- “Sitting with Nellie”
- Pitman’s shorthand school
- Stenograph school (CAT would be our saviour)
- In 1997 took a momentous decision — audio-only reporter training

Why seek validation?

- Restructuring and merger blues
- Codifying an already successful scheme
- Potential further use?
 - Short tailored courses
 - Accredited sub-editor courses
 - Language skills training for colleagues

Finding a partner

- Sub-editor who first mooted validation was “volunteered” to finding us a partner
- September '08 — City University
- Focus on business and professions; excellent school of journalism
- Law school

The hard preparatory work

- Submission document – over 20 pages and revised many times
- Assessment methods
- Descriptors of grades – how to distinguish between merit and distinction
- Agreed course content in April 2010
- Hopes for May 2010 training group
- But...

Moving towards success

- Dean of Validation at City fell ill
- Too much on the shoulders of one sub-editor
- We formed a committee!
- Further rewrites of submission document
- Surprise demands from the university — formal terms of reference; external examiner; assessment regulations

The eureka moment

- Meeting with validation committee at House of Commons 27 April 2012
- Former students spoke to the panel about their learning experience
- More discussions about the assessment criteria
- Finally, they agreed
- And here we have: the class of 2012!





Recruitment

- Person specification and written test
- Transcription test in Parliament
- Formal interview

Person specification

- Wide general knowledge and the ability to understand a complex argument and report it clearly and grammatically
- Ability to check references, quotations and other details reliably
- Demonstrable team working skills and the ability to work quickly and flexibly under pressure
- Good basic keyboard skills and familiarity with Windows-based software

Written test

- Current affairs knowledge
- Language skills
- Imaginary Minister: I understand that they are due to meet President Joseph Zuma, the South American leader, later this week.

Transcription Test

- Conducted in Parliament
- 60 candidates (800 had applied)
- 75 minutes to transcribe a five-minute speech
- Test marked by several sub-editors

Formal Interview

- 30-minute interview
- 12 candidates
- Panel consists of Hansard training manager, Hansard trainer and HR representative
- Four candidates appointed

Module 1

- Full-time over 12 weeks
- Parliamentary Reporting (Theory) in training room, but frequent visits to “live” events
- Group instruction using recordings; practice transcription; 1:1 coaching; shadowing; observation of live proceedings; independent study; knowledge reviews; copy analysis; Hansard expert presentations; learning logs; formal 1:1 meetings monthly

Key Learning Outcomes

- Follow complex, technical arguments made in Parliament
- Understand parliamentary processes
- Appreciate how developments in contemporary parliamentary politics inform reporting choices
- Knowledge of law making process
- Insight into contemporary politics and current affairs and how these influence and are influenced by official reporting processes
- Understand need for accuracy and impartiality in parliamentary reporting
- Recognise and critically apply different reporting styles in different parliamentary contexts
- Team working skills
- Advanced written and oral communication skills
- IT skills – Hansard Reporting System

Module 1 Assessment

- Four written exercises under controlled conditions - 2/3rds weighting
- Two-part multiple choice test on parliamentary procedure - 1/6th weighting
- Presentation based on individual research on a relevant topic - 1/6th weighting

Transcription Assessment Criteria

- Five minutes of recorded parliamentary material completed in 75 minutes
- Content is accurate, full and retains character of speech
- Member information is correct
- Copy is fluent, with repetition and redundancy omitted where appropriate
- Appropriate use of grammar, house style and punctuation
- Intelligent use of relevant documents

Module 2

- Trainees embedded in teams
- All live work – closely monitored and evaluated
- Regular feedback to trainees
- Final assessment by course tutors and director

Module 2 Assessment

- Trainees maintain a portfolio of work and commentaries demonstrating understanding and skills beyond what can be demonstrated in a set examination
- Continual assessment of portfolio/commentaries by tutors as part of line management process – 50% weighting
- Four written exercises under controlled conditions - 50% weighting

