

News groups cut media jobs

by Justin Latif

New Zealand's two largest newspaper publishers have announced staff cuts within the last month.

Fairfax Media, the country's biggest newspaper publisher, has announced it will cut 2.5 per cent of its 2700 positions.

About 67 jobs will be cut from almost all departments, including management, administration, sales and marketing, editorial and publishing.

Fairfax Media chief executive Joan Withers says the slowing New Zealand economy and a slump in advertising revenue are factors in the decision.

Rival publisher APN News and Media has cut more than 10 editorial staff from the *New Zealand Herald*. There are rumours a total of 30 jobs could go across the company.

Simon Collins, journalists' union delegate and *Herald* reporter, has noticed a decline in local news in the paper.

"Some days local news runs out at page six, and the paper has to be filled with international news," he says. "There's no doubt it reduces quality."

Collins says subeditors are being put under more pressure to edit work, but because there are fewer subeditors he believes the quality will be reduced.

One of his fears is that online

news may replace print.

"There's a growth of online journalism. I hope print remains popular as it's the best way to reach your communities," he says.

Media magnate Rupert Murdoch has been reported as saying print is on the decline due

to the growing popularity of internet classified advertising.

He once described newspaper classified advertising revenue as providing "rivers of gold". But he now says: "Sometimes rivers dry up".

So far he has spent US\$1 billion on new media and he now

claims to have the third largest presence on the internet with his US-based News Corporation interests.

Associate professor Wayne Hope at AUT University believes APN's job cuts will affect the quality of investigative journalism.

"The first thing is it reduces talent and resources available to do investigative stories," Hope says.

He also has a warning for prospective journalism graduates who are hoping to find work straight out of university.

"The brutal reality is that Bachelor of Communication students who are majoring in journalism have got to be looking at the Australasian market rather than just the New Zealand market," he says.

Hope sees the emergence of internet journalism as having a greater impact. He cites the recent mud-slinging in Parliament as an example where blogs were watched closely by journalists for extra scoops.

"What's happening in the blog-sphere is starting to influence mainstream news."

Columnist Frank Ahrens, of the *Washington Post*, believes there is a definite shift away from newspapers towards online news and radio.

"Under sustained assault from cable television, the internet, all-news radio and lifestyles so crammed they leave little time for the daily paper, the industry is struggling to remake itself."

He says declining circulation numbers over the last two decades is a sure sign newspapers are no longer an important part of people's lives.



Newsrooms 'a little pale'

by Helen Twose

A lack of Pacific Islanders in newsrooms is affecting coverage of issues within the community but few Pasifika students are being attracted into journalism courses, say current journalists.

Auckland Pacific community radio station 531PI's news editor Bob Wandstraat says newsrooms "are a little pale at the moment."

He says current big stories, such as health issues like diabetes and high-capacity power lines, have "all got a brown angle to them".

"I'm talking about news that people don't want you to know about. You have to be connected with the community," he says.

"Someone who already has a foot in the community is streets ahead. These stories are more than likely to be entrusted to someone who is already in the community."

Wandstraat says journalism schools need to get out into the Pacific Island communities and identify the "best and brightest" students.

A senior journalist with TVNZ's *Tagata Pasifika* and Pacific Islands Media Association (PIMA) chairman, John Utanga, says prospective Pacific Island journalism students perceive courses to be "too hard", particularly the writing component.

Utanga says the most successful period of attracting Pacific

Islanders to journalism was when the now-defunct journalism course was running at Manukau Institute of Technology in the early 1990s.

"Every working Pacific Island journalist I know came through that school," he says.

Manager of Auckland's Pacific Island community radio 531PI Sefita Hao'uli says attracting Pacific Island students to journalism courses is a complex issue and there is no "silver bullet".

"I don't think it is that easy to point the finger at one thing."

Hao'uli suggests that journalism courses focus on accepting Pacific Island "career changers" rather than school leavers.

"They don't tend to view a journalism career as aspirational."

He says people with previous career experience, such as teaching, have the confidence needed for journalism.

Hao'uli also believes current journalists and educators should be going into the Pacific Island community and shoulder tapping those with the skills to become good journalists.

"As a community we actually dropped the ball. We should know which people would be good at the job."



SEFITA HAO'ULI

Fairfax Suburban Newspapers editor-in-chief David Kemeys says the journalism schools need to shoulder part of the blame for mainly accepting "white, middle-class girls from good schools" and offering "mono-cultural" courses.

Kemeys says Pacific Island families focused on education want their children to become doctors, lawyers or accountants.

"They don't tend to view a journalism career as aspirational."

Fairfax Suburban Newspapers is now trying to reach the next generation of Pacific Island journalists by establishing links with low-decile schools with a large Polynesian roll, inviting students into its newsrooms.

AUT University's School of Communication Studies head, professor Barry King, says he accepts historically the Bachelor

of Communication Studies has sourced students from "Pakeha-type" schools in Auckland.

"We've relied on these as our bread and butter," he says.

King says the school is keen to reach out to South Auckland schools and form links with those offering media studies.

"Some of these schools are getting quite deeply into the media."

King says a proposed partnership with Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) and Manukau City Council could see pre-degree papers feeding students into AUT's journalism programme.

"Journalism is an area in which we'd have no contest with MIT."

AUT is also proposing to establish the Creative Industries Research Institute, which will include a Pacific Island media centre, says King.

The focus of the centre will be on post-graduate research and publication.

It will host the archives of the Pacific Media Watch, an independent website dedicated to examining media issues in the Pacific region.

Pacific Island students account for 5.7 per cent of those enrolled at AUT's communication school in 2006.

The remainder of the school's enrolments is made up of mostly Maori (9.9 per cent), Asian (7.5 per cent) and 72.2 per cent Pakeha.

Future of media up for debate

One of Britain's pre-eminent journalists will be the keynote speaker at an international media conference in Auckland in December.

The three-day JEANZ/JEA conference will see journalism lecturers from the region discuss the future of the media in the digital age.

The keynote speaker is Roy Greenslade, a journalism professor at City University in London.

A leading columnist and media commentator, Greenslade has worked for many of Britain's top newspapers and is a former editor of the *Daily Mirror*.

Conference convener and AUT University journalism lecturer Allison Oosterman says the conference is "a truly valuable opportunity for journalism professionals".

About 85 academics from as far afield as the US, Asia and PNG will attend. Morning sessions are open to the public.

Other speakers are Radio NZ chief Peter Cavanagh, Maori TV head of news Te Anga Nathan and William Akel on media law.

The conference is run by the Journalism Education Association of New Zealand, and its Australian equivalent.

More details at http://artsweb.aut.ac.nz/journalism_conference/index.htm

— Mathew Grocott