

Shifting qualifications in journalism education in Europe and Russia

Nico Drok¹

Introduction

Teaching journalism is not easy. And it probably never has been. Over the years there have been numerous and fierce debates about what expertise journalists should have. Whether their training should be *skill-based* or aimed at academic *reflection*, focused on *doing* journalism or on *researching* journalism. Whether we should educate for journalism *as it is* or for journalism *as we would want it to be*.

Different stakeholders have different views. Of course there is the classical divide between practitioners, who want full attention to the daily routines, and scholars, with their preference for research. Students, teachers, heads of schools and captains of media-industry: all have their own ideas and accents (Josephi 2009).² In part this diversity is due to the fact that the concept of Journalism itself is not unambiguous. And that it not distinguished clearly enough from related concepts like 'public communication', 'media' or 'the news'. *"Journalism schools for a long time have primarily been seen as educational institutions dominated by practitioners who do not place much emphasis on research. The conceptual, empirical and reflective work was left to media studies who failed to make their theories and results applicable to the realities of everyday news production."* (Hanitzsch e.a. 2005)³

But there are other causes. Over the last decades the borderline has been blurring between traditional and new media (*multiskilling*), information and entertainment (*infotainment*), journalism and the public (*user generated content*), sources and the public (*de-mediation*), journalists and publishers (*commercialisation*). On top of that social developments like *informatization*, *individualization*, *intensification* and *internationalization* created a new information and communication structure, fragmented audiences, a non-stop culture and globalized markets (Drok 2007).⁴ As a result, we are living in an age of radical change.

The European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), which was founded shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, has as its most important aim to stimulate pan-European cooperation in journalism education. The association unites sixty schooling institutes from 25 European countries and is characterized by diversity: different types of institutions, different types of media systems, different cultures and twenty different languages. Since its founding, the need for international cooperation has been growing all along. More than ever, students have to learn to think global and act local. Just as it was stated in the World Journalism Education Council's Declaration of Principles (Singapore 2007):

1 Professor Media & Civil Society, School of media, Windesheim University of Applied Science, Zwolle, The Netherlands. Leader of the European Competence Profile Project of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA). See also: Wyss, V. and C. Koch (2010). The weighting of different journalistic competences. Research Report EJTA/IAM, Maastricht/Winterthur.

2 Josephi, B. (2008). Journalism Education, in: Wahl-Jorgensen, K. E.a. (2008). The handbook of journalism studies. London: Routledge.

3 Hanitzsch, T. e.a. (2005). Building a home for the study of journalism. In: Journalism, 2005; 6; pp. 107-115. London: Routledge.

4 Drok, N. (2007). De toekomst van de journalistiek. Amsterdam: Boom.

“Journalism is a global endeavour; journalism students should learn that despite political and cultural differences, they share important values and professional goals with peers in other nations. Where practical, journalism education provides students with first-hand experience of the way that journalism is practised in other nations.”

In order to realize these ideals international student and teacher *mobility* is essential. But mobility needs some degree of standardization, however difficult in an age of change. It demands international recognition of qualifications, transparent and comparable degrees, international transfer of credits and an international system of quality assurance.

The competence project

All EJTA members recognize and understand the problems of defining Journalism in a world that is uncertain and volatile. But they also see the need for standardization, in order to help their students to exercise their right of free movement and promote supranational citizenship and professionalism. Furthermore, most journalism schools want to build bridges between theory and practice. Setting a joint quality standard for journalism education could help to protect their curricula from all too practical claims from the industry as well as from all too theoretical claims from the academic world.

In 2006 the European schools agreed upon the Tartu-declaration. It consists of ten central journalistic competences. Competences represent a combination of knowledge, skills and professional attitude that is needed to accomplish an important professional task.⁵ Each competence is built up of five qualifications. Qualifications are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning.

The Tartu Declaration provides a common vocabulary for exchange of views and a common guideline for the development of courses and curricula. The ten competences are formulated as follows:

After their education or training students possess the competence to:

- 1 Reflect on the societal role of and developments within journalism
- 2 Find relevant issues and angles, given the public and production aims of a certain medium or different media
- 3 Organise and plan journalistic work
- 4 Gather information swiftly, using customary newsgathering techniques and methods of research
- 5 Select the essential information
- 6 Structure information in a journalistic manner
- 7 Present information in appropriate language and an effective journalistic form
- 8 Evaluate and account for journalistic work
- 9 Cooperate in a team or an editorial setting
- 10 Work in a professional media-organisation or as a freelancer

⁵ Cf. European Union, Tuning educational structure in Europe. <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

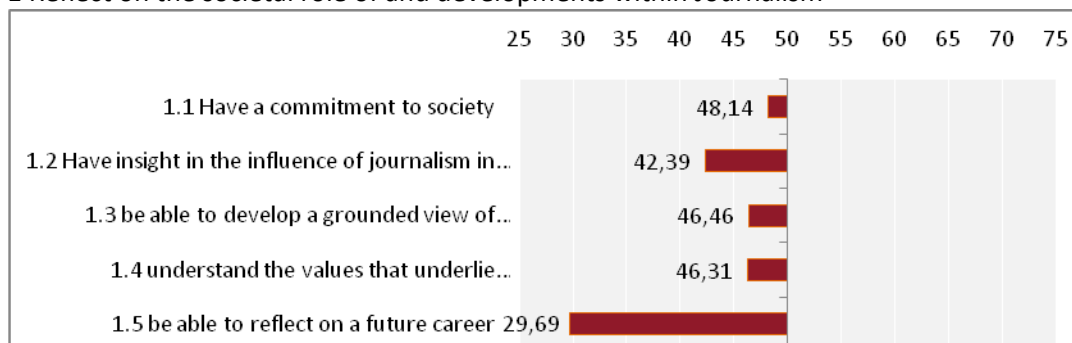
Although the Competence Profile has proven its importance, for instance in building the EJTA Mobility Catalogue (www.ejta.eu/mobility), it also has its limitations. The 10 competences as well as the constituent 50 qualifications are not weighted, which suggests that they are all equally important. Furthermore the profile is static, which suggests that there neither is nor will be any need for change. But, as was stated above, journalism is in the middle of thorough changes and there is a great need of rethinking the value of journalism in the 21th century.

Against this background the EJTA decided to launch a research project on how these changes might affect the competence profile – in the eyes of relevant stakeholders. The project consists of three phases. The first phase is a pilot study among the *EJTA-members* themselves. This phase was completed in 2008. The second phase is based on an online survey among *key professionals* (N=360) from over 20 European countries. This phase was completed in 2010. The third phase will concentrate on journalism *students and teachers* and will be completed in the fall of 2011.

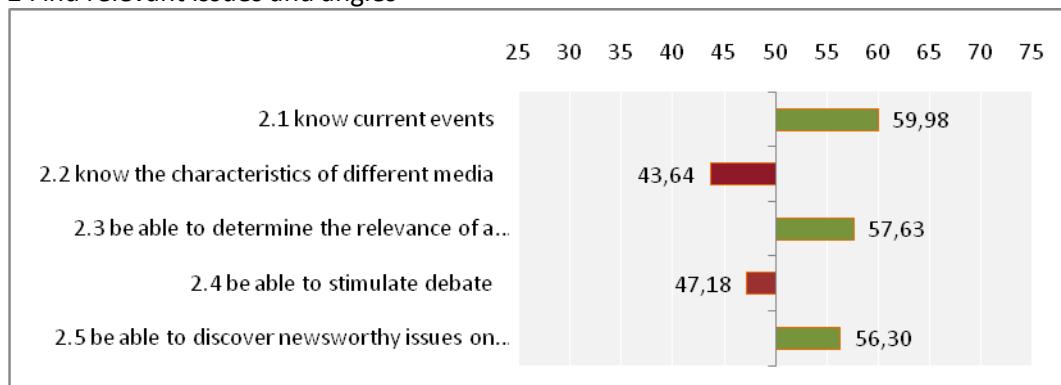
Research results of the second phase: Europe

The main research question was: According to the professional key persons in Europe, which qualifications and competences must be emphasized in future journalism education? The figures show the standardized scores of the European professionals.

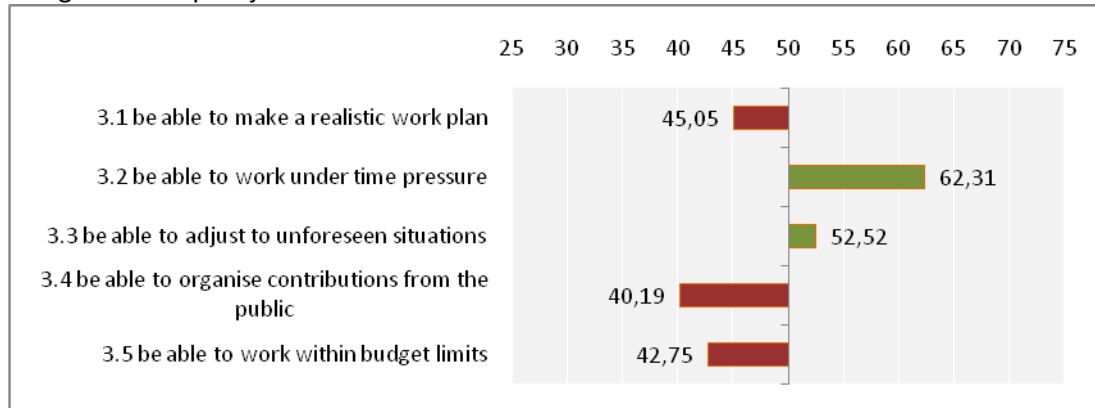
1 Reflect on the societal role of and developments within Journalism



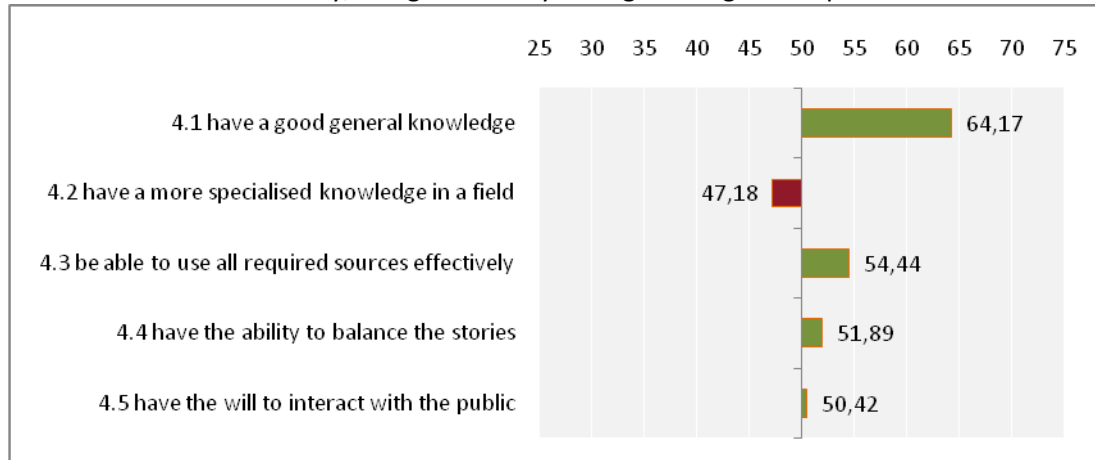
2 Find relevant issues and angles



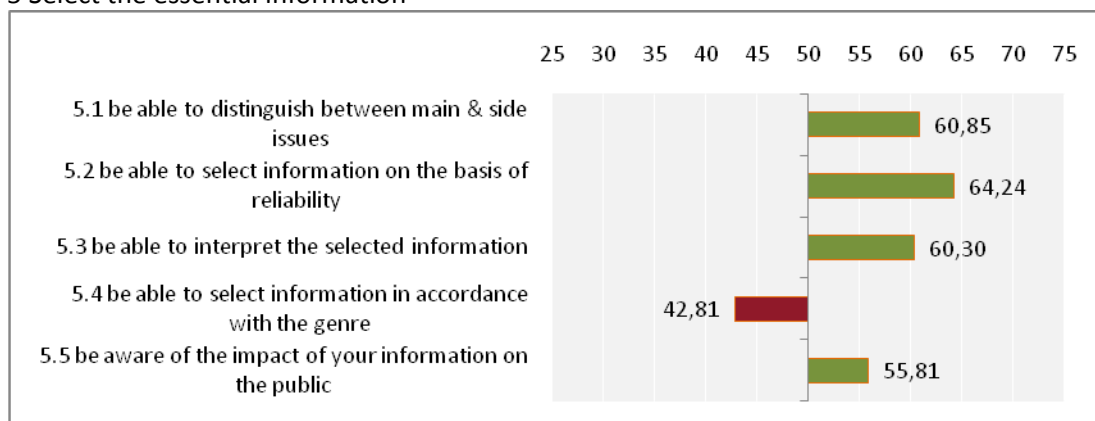
3 Organise and plan journalistic work



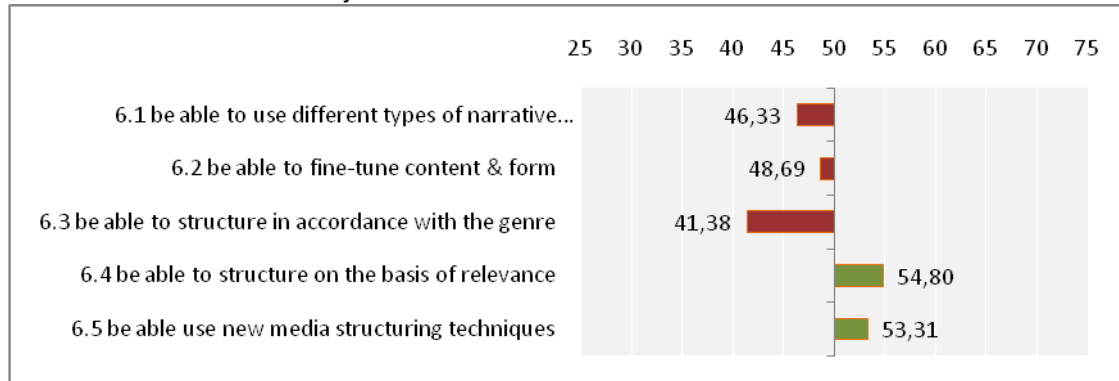
4 Gather information swiftly, using customary newsgathering techniques and methods of research



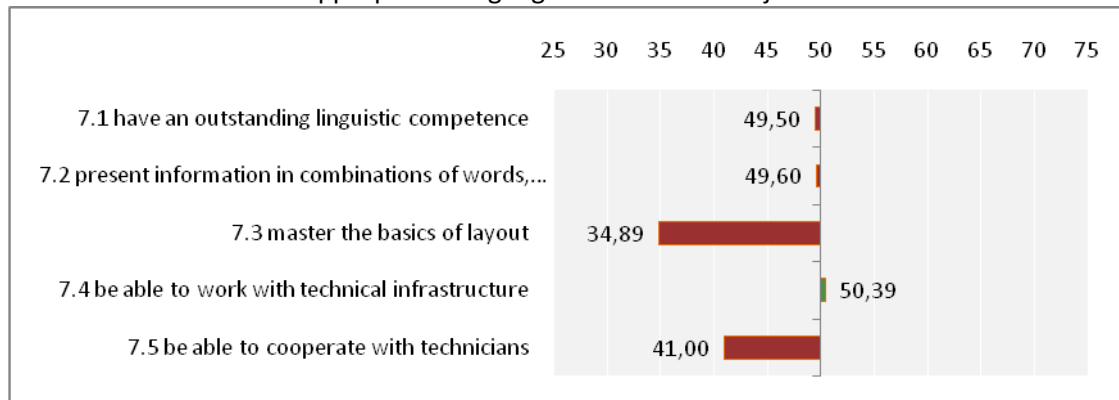
5 Select the essential information



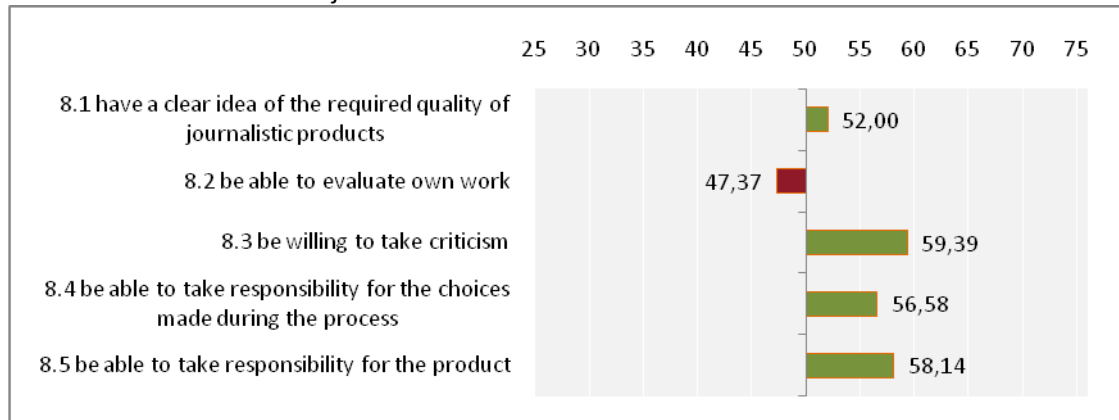
6 Structure information in a journalistic manner



7 Present information in appropriate language and an effective journalistic form



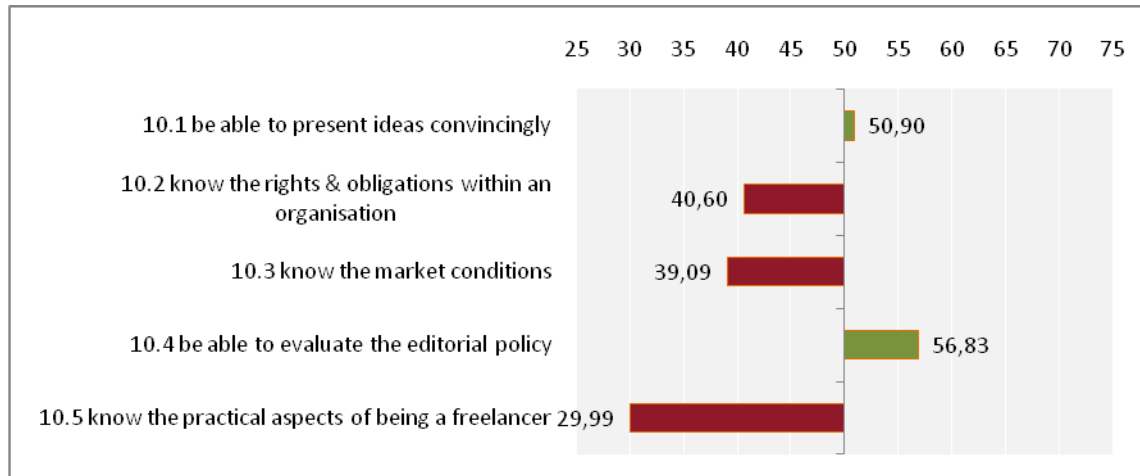
8 Evaluate and account for journalistic work



9 Cooperate in a team or an editorial setting



10 Work in a professional media-organisation or as a freelancer



The three *competences* that will gain most importance in the next ten years, according to the European professionals, are: selecting information, account for journalistic work and cooperate in a team. The three competences with the lowest support are: reflecting on journalism, presenting information and working as a professional.

What about the *qualifications*? What are the most important qualifications for young journalists in the next ten years, according to the professionals? The top 10 of qualifications shows an emphasis on reliability, knowledge and skills to select information, sense of urgency and evaluation. It seems that for the respondents it is not only very important that (young) journalists can find the crucial information and are able to classify it, but also that they are aware of the responsibility they have in choosing, framing and interpreting the information.

Qualifications Top 10

Rank	Qualification	Ø
1	9.2 be reliable	70,7
2	5.2 be able to select information on the basis of reliability	64,2
3	4.1 have a good general knowledge	64,2
4	9.3 show initiative	63,8
5	3.2 be able to work under time pressure	62,3
6	5.1 be able to distinguish between main & side issues	60,8
7	5.3 be able to interpret the selected information	60,3
8	2.1 know current events	60,0
9	8.3 be willing to take criticism	59,4
10	8.5 be able to take responsibility for the product	58,2

At the bottom we find qualifications that may be of personal interest for the young journalist (their working conditions and future career), but which don't directly contribute to the daily journalistic production can be found at the end of the list: "know the rights and obligations within an organisation", "know the market conditions", "know the practical aspects of being a freelancer" and "be able to reflect on a future career". Qualifications which are directed toward the design and technical aspects are also weighted as less important. However, these results must be regarded with concern to the media type. Layout questions for example are not important for the electronic media. Surprisingly, also the qualification "have insight in the influence of journalism in society" can be found at the end of the list.

Qualifications Bottom 10

Rank	Qualification	Ø
41	1.2 have insight in the influence of journalism in society	42,4
42	6.3 be able to structure in accordance with the genre	41,4
43	7.5 be able to cooperate with technicians	41,0
44	10.2 know the rights & obligations within an organisation	40,6
45	3.4 be able to organise contributions from the public	40,2
46	10.4 be able to evaluate the editorial policy	39,6
47	10.3 know the market conditions	39,1
48	7.3 master the basics of layout	34,9
49	10.5 know the practical aspects of being a freelancer	30,0
50	1.5 be able to reflect on a future career	29,7

Comparison with Russian professionals and students

Do Russian professionals (N=32) have other priorities than their European colleagues (N=360)? Does their top 10 and bottom 10 of qualifications differ a lot from their European counterparts? The answer is no.

	1-10
	11-20
	21-40
	41-50

EUR Top 10	EUR	RUS
9.2 be reliable	1	3
5.2 be able to select information on the basis of reliability	2	1
4.1 have a good general knowledge	3	12
9.3 show initiative	4	18
3.2 be able to work under time pressure	5	4
5.1 be able to distinguish between main & side issues	6	8
5.3 be able to interpret the selected information	7	9
2.1 know current events	8	2
8.3 be willing to take criticism	9	13
8.5 be able to take responsibility for the product	10	7

Russian professionals have a lower ranking for 'showing initiative', 'taking criticism' and 'general knowledge'. Instead they score higher on 'determine relevance' (rank 5), 'specialised knowledge' (rank 6) and 'fine-tune content and form' (rank 10).

EUR Bottom 10	EUR	RUS
1.2 Have insight in the influence of journalism in society	41	31
6.3 be able to structure in accordance with the genre	42	28
7.5 be able to cooperate with technicians	43	30
10.2 know the rights & obligations within an organisation	44	34
3.4 be able to organise contributions from the public	45	24
10.4 be able to evaluate the editorial policy	46	47
10.3 know the market conditions	47	41
7.3 master the basics of layout	48	50
10.5 know the practical aspects of being a freelancer	49	48
1.5 be able to reflect on a future career	50	46

The largest difference in the Bottom 10 between Russian professionals and their European colleagues is the low rank of the 'linguistic competence' (EUR rank 28 , RUS rank 49) and the 'will to interact with the public' (EUR rank 24 , RUS rank 43).

How about Russian *students* (N=201)? Do *they* have other priorities than European professionals?

Here we see more and bigger differences. Students give ‘general knowledge’ and ‘showing initiative’ a lower ranking, just like the Russian professionals did. But they have a much lower ranking for ‘distinguishing main from side issues’ and for ‘interpreting the selected information’.

Instead, they believe the following qualifications will gain more importance in the next ten years: ‘responsibility for the choices made during the process’ (rank 6), ‘present ideas convincingly’ (rank 8), ‘adjust to unforeseen situations’(rank 9) and ‘show insight in own strengths and weaknesses’(rank 10).

EUR Top 10	EUR	RUS STUDENTS
9.2 be reliable	1	4
5.2 be able to select information on the basis of reliability	2	3
4.1 have a good general knowledge	3	11
9.3 show initiative	4	14
3.2 be able to work under time pressure	5	5
5.1 be able to distinguish between main & side issues	6	21
5.3 be able to interpret the selected information	7	34
2.1 know current events	8	2
8.3 be willing to take criticism	9	7
8.5 be able to take responsibility for the product	10	1

EUR Bottom 10	EUR	RUS STUDENTS
1.2 Have insight in the influence of journalism in society	41	22
6.3 be able to structure in accordance with the genre	42	45
7.5 be able to cooperate with technicians	43	36
10.2 know the rights & obligations within an organisation	44	19
3.4 be able to organise contributions from the public	45	47
10.4 be able to evaluate the editorial policy	46	46
10.3 know the market conditions	47	37
7.3 master the basics of layout	48	50
10.5 know the practical aspects of being a freelancer	49	48
1.5 be able to reflect on a future career	50	30

We can conclude that all parties (EUR professionals , RUS professionals, RUS Students) stress:

- Reliability
- Sense of relevance and urgency
- Responsibility and accountability

The professionals (EUR and RUS) also stress :

- Analytical skills

Whereas students tend to stress:

- Personal skills,

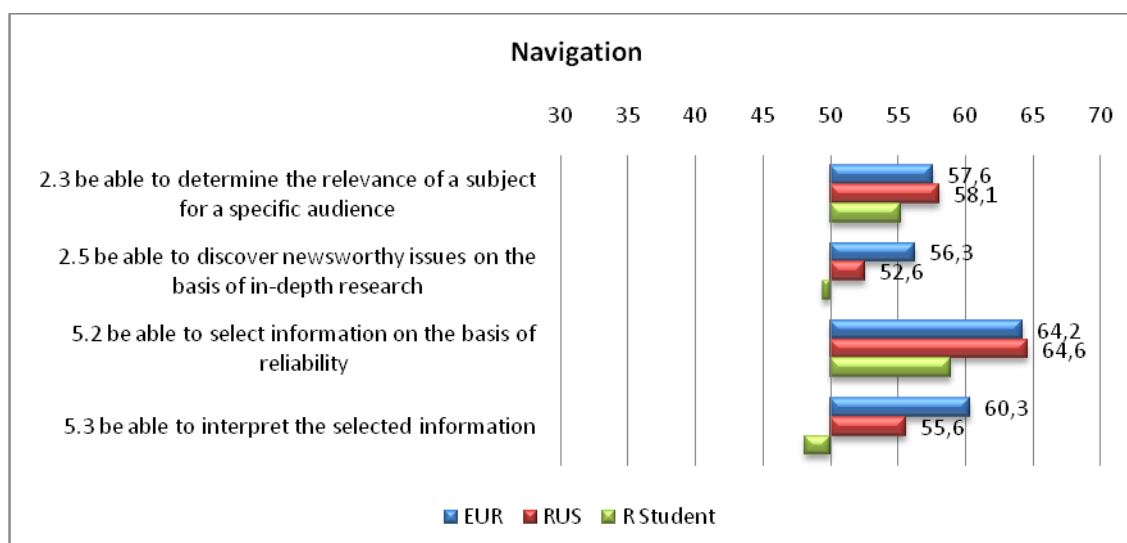
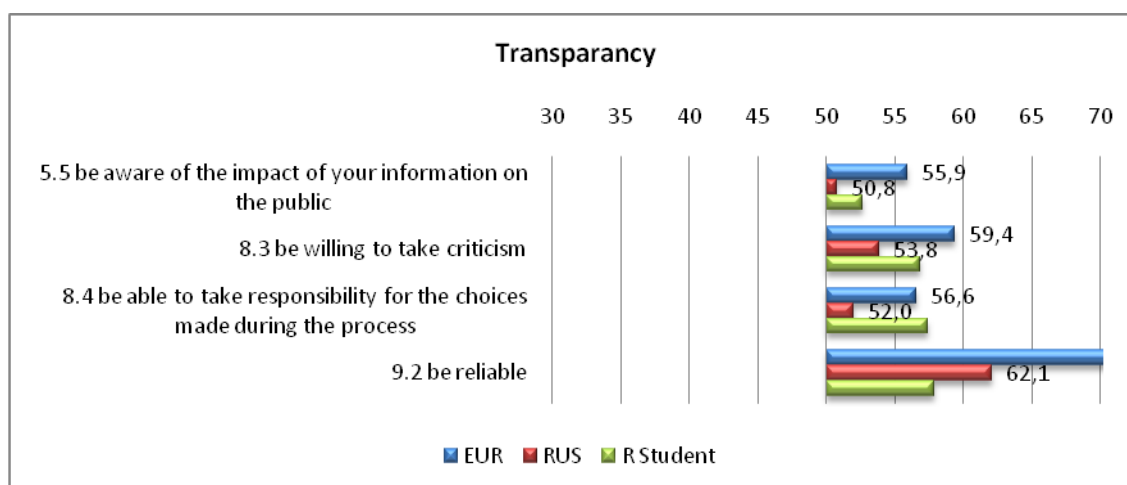
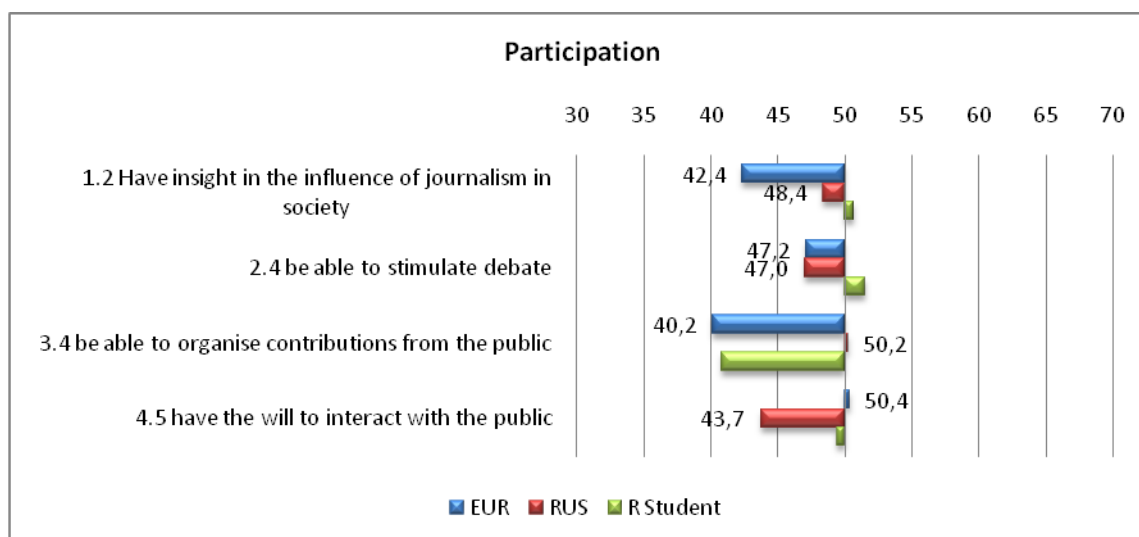
such as 'flexibility' and 'showing insight in own strengths and weaknesses'. In this respect Russian students differ from students from the Netherlands, which agree more with the professionals.

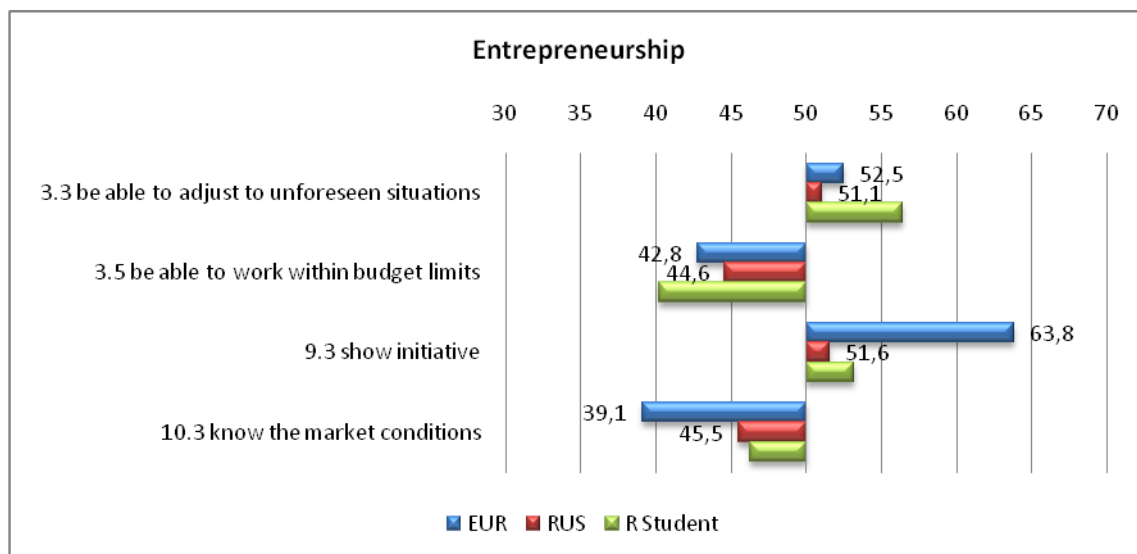
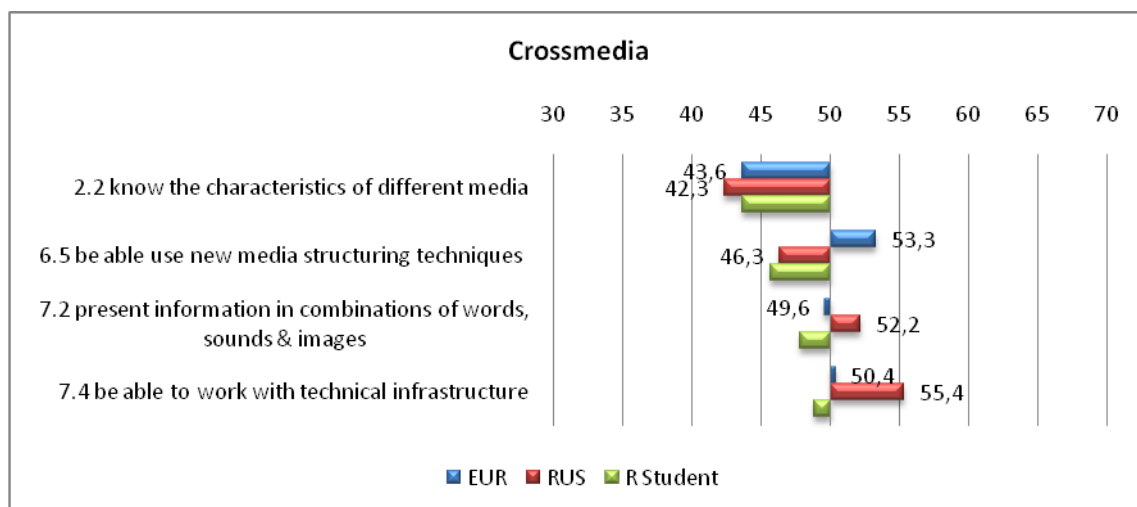
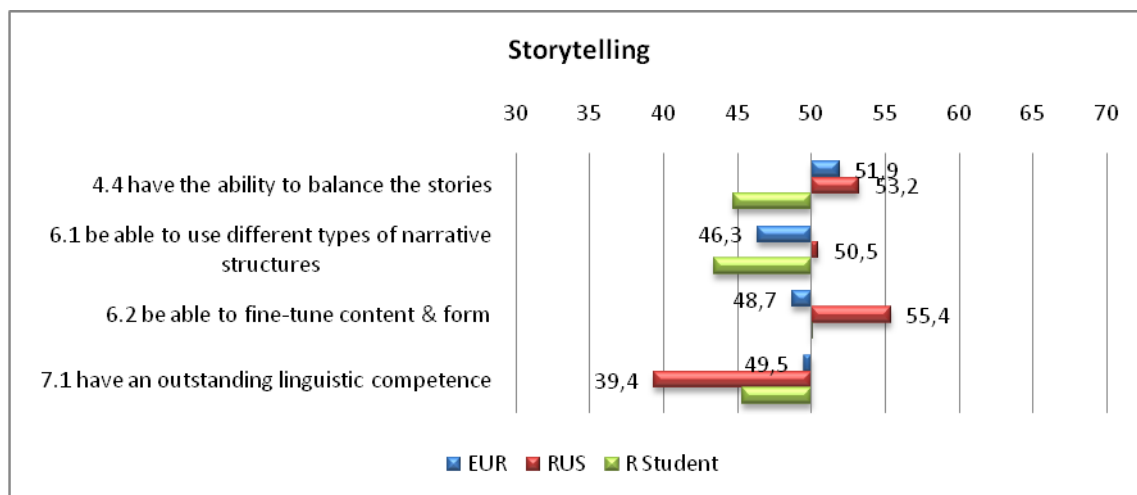
Innovations

As was stated earlier, journalism is in a process of fundamental change due to technological, economic and social developments. We must rethink the value of journalism in the digital, global, postmodern age. There is a need for innovation of journalism in all of its elements: *public*, *process*, *product (content)*, *product (form)*, *platform* and *profession*. For each of these elements one major innovation can be distinguished.

	Concerns	Innovation	Description
I	<i>Public</i>	Participation	Making use of user generated content or knowledge, whether or not through social media or internet communities.
II	<i>Proces</i>	Transparency	Guaranteeing accountability and a trustworthy, open working method.
III	<i>Product Content</i>	Navigation	Offering a relevant and reliable content, whether or not through in-depth research, and putting it in a meaningful context.
IV	<i>Product Form</i>	Storytelling	Using narratives in an attractive and user-friendly way to weave together fragmented observations to construct meanings.
V	<i>Platform</i>	Crossmedia	Dividing content over different media in the most effective way while stimulating interaction.
VI	<i>Profession</i>	Entrepreneurship	Being focused on innovation of product, process and platform for the benefit of the public with regard of the economics of the profession.

How do the different stakeholders (professionals, students) judge the future importance of the qualifications that can be linked to these innovations?





In general, European professionals are more outspoken than Russian professionals or Russian students. This is especially the case with qualifications 9.2 'be reliable' and 9.3 'show initiative'. The opposite is the case with qualification 7.1 'having an outstanding linguistic competence'.

Apart from that, there seems to be a striking consensus about the successive innovations. All stakeholders give full support to *Transparency* and *Navigation*. And they all have doubts about *Participation*, *Storytelling*, *Entrepreneurship* and even *Crossmedia*.

Conclusion: Back to Basics

Professional journalism faces a double crisis: a financial crisis and a functional crisis. The main question on the financial level is: how can we *reach* more people? The main question on the functional level is: how can we be more *useful* to people? Does this double crisis call for a paradigm shift or should we go back to the core business and stress basic principles?

Despite the many differences in view on the future of journalism, there seems to be a large consensus among professionals and students about what will be the key competences and qualifications for young journalists in the next decade. They prefer a 'back to basics'- strategy and especially support qualifications that are linked to Transparency and Navigation:

1. Reliability
2. Accountability
3. Analytical skills
4. Sense of relevance and urgency