



Journalist Fellowship Paper

Rowing together for better climate coverage

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Introduction

Come with me on an Oxford rowing trip. Imagine for a moment that we are part of a team, rowing down the Thames past boathouses. The team is in great shape, and we are gliding at pace. Suddenly you notice we are on the wrong track: we must stop the boat and turn back as soon as possible. You try desperately to warn the crew, but no one is listening. The boat keeps going, and it is getting faster. Despite your warnings, we are heading straight for a catastrophe.¹



The Oxford University rowing crew practice on the River Thames. REUTERS/Stefan Wermuth

Do you feel that anxiety? It is close to what climate scientists have been feeling. For decades they have told us we are heading towards a climate catastrophe and must act now. Waqas Ejaz, a postdoctoral research fellow working with the Reuters

¹ Idea from: Rogenhofer, K. Schleder, F. (2021) Ändert sich nichts, ändert sich alles.

Institute's Oxford Climate Journalism Network, told me he still feels like no one is listening.

I spoke to him about the floods in Germany, the wildfires in Greece last year, and the massive floodings in Pakistan last summer that 1,500 and displaced 7.9 million people. "We tried alarming people, we tried scaring people, we tried sending a hopeful message," he told me. "There is nothing left [to say] on our bit as scientists. But the question is, has this made any difference?"

Our conversation reminded me of this scene from the movie *Don't Look Up*.

Scientists: "Are we not being clear? We are trying to tell you that the entire planet is about to be destroyed."

News anchor 1: "Well, it's, you know: it's something we do around here. We just keep the bad news light."

News anchor 2: "Right, it helps the medicine go down."



Publicity still from *Don't Look Up* movie. Photo: Niko Tavernise/Netflix

As a TV journalist myself, the satire hit close to home. While no one would argue that climate reporting hasn't increased over the years, have we done enough? Mary Stanford, a researcher at the Social Data Science Programme at Oxford University, doesn't think so. "All newspapers today can point to articles they have written about

environmental issues and say: ‘Look, we are covering it’. But not to the extent [or] level of severity that perhaps it deserves,” she said.

In the light of the [IPCC’s findings](#) that we need to cut emissions radically, as well as the warnings of the [World Economic Forum](#) that failure to act on climate change is the most significant risk over the next decade, there is no doubt that the climate crisis is reshaping our understanding of all parts in our life – be it our work, our lifestyle, finance, mobility or health. ^{2,3}

But the news media still seem to be struggling to find its place. I spoke to Alexandra Borchardt, a journalist and senior research associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford. She recently published an [EBU climate journalism report](#) about how European public broadcasters are covering climate change.⁴ She interviewed journalists and media managers in Europe’s biggest newsrooms, and told me that she was shocked to find that, with a few exceptions, most newsrooms had no strategy for covering climate change.

In an [open letter](#) to her peers, Sara Schurmann, a German climate journalist, wrote: “As long as we don’t have a critical mass of journalists who understand this and focus their work accordingly, politicians won’t follow suit and take action either.”⁵

To tackle journalism’s changing role in a changing climate, I spent my fellowship at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism investigating the nature of the

² IPCC Report: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>, accessed 8. December 2022

³ Climate change impacts already “severe” across the globe (2022). Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/climate-change-severe-impacts-lives/>, accessed 8. December 2022

⁴ <https://www.ebu.ch/guides/open/report/news-report-2023-climate-journalism-that-works>

⁵ Schurmann, S. (2020) Journalist:innen, nehmt die Klimakrise endlich ernst! Available at: <https://uebermedien.de/52582/journalistinnen-nehmt-die-klimakrise-endlich-ernst/>, accessed 17. December 2022

challenges surrounding climate change journalism, and how newsrooms can meet them. I looked at five newsrooms that have made successful changes, interviewed leading researchers on this top, then surveyed my own newsroom in Austria. And I can tell you upfront that the good news is that we don't require more money or staff to make the changes outlined in this paper.

Let's begin by looking at how my own colleagues felt about the challenges.

Status quo: ORF Survey

I wanted to check on how my own newsroom was stacking up against these challenges. To do so, I conducted an online questionnaire with journalists who regularly contribute to news programming for *Zeit im Bild (ZIB)*.

ZIB has been running since 1955 and broadcasts daily news bulletins and news flashes on ORF 1 and ORF 2 in the morning, afternoon, and evening. It is the most-watched news programme in Austria.

The journalists I surveyed work across different desks, from politics to foreign affairs. I excluded editors and anchors from this survey, as well sports and lifestyle journalists who have different reporting lines. My respondents account for 27% of the total journalists working on *ZIB* (15 of 56), meaning these results should not be considered representative. It does, however, offer some insights.

Results

Of the 15 journalists surveyed, 12 said there should be more stories with a climate change or sustainability angle at *ZIB*. So, there is interest in covering climate issues. But only one person felt “very supported” to produce climate stories. More than two thirds (67%) felt “somewhat supported” and the rest (27%), said they do not feel very supported to produce climate stories.

How supported do you feel to produce stories with a climate change or sustainability angle?



While the majority felt “confident” about knowing what the audience needs to know about climate change, 40% said they were “somewhat uncertain” and 7% were “very uncertain” about that.

How confident do you feel knowing what your audience needs to know from you about climate change?



What about their knowledge about climate-related science? Among other things I asked them “how confident they feel to explain ppm (parts per million) to the audience”. Only one fifth (20%) feel “confident” to explain it.

One third (33%) feels somewhat uncertain, and another third (33%) feels “very uncertain” and 13% do “not feel comfortable at all”.

How confident do you feel explaining PPM (parts per million) to your audience?



When it comes to explaining what the IPCC is (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), 27% of those surveyed felt “very uncertain” about it.

Another 20% feel “not at all confident” to do so and 7% feel “somewhat uncertain”. So more than half of those surveyed felt a level of uncertainty.

How confident do you feel explaining what the IPCC is?



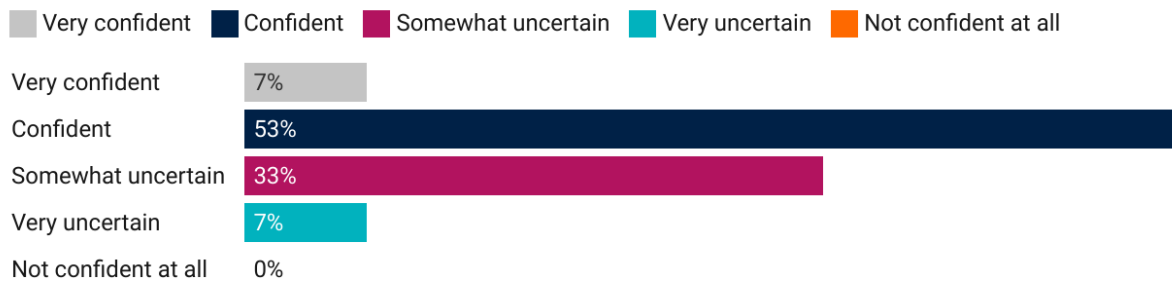
Only half of the journalists (53%) felt “confident” to explain the concepts of CO₂ mitigation to the audience, the rest feels “somewhat uncertain” or “very uncertain”.

How confident do you feel explaining the concepts of CO₂ mitigation to your audience?



Most respondents feel “confident” about explaining Austria’s energy mix to the audience. 20% feel “somewhat uncertain” about it and only one person out of 15 feels “very confident” about it.

How confident do you feel telling your audience the amount of Austria’s annual CO2 emissions?



There was also only one person out of 15 who felt “very confident” to explain the tipping points to the audience; 53% felt “confident” and 40% “somewhat uncertain”.

How confident do you feel explaining the tipping points in the climate system to your audience?



The challenges of climate reporting

The role of journalism is to provide facts, and offer space for criticism and debate, with the aim of informing people so they can make the best decisions. We are watchdogs who keep those in power accountable for their actions and decisions. And we have the power and responsibility to question common narratives.

So why are journalists so hesitant when it comes to climate reporting? Even climate reporting pioneers like *Time* magazine or *The Guardian* publish political or economic stories that completely ignore climate change. As Sara Schurmann puts it: “This is not a failure of individual journalists, it is a structural problem.”⁶

Lack of knowledge

I believe the main reason for incomplete or bad climate coverage is a lack of climate knowledge among journalists. No one can be an expert in everything, but the climate crisis impacts every area of our lives, which is why it warrants that we all be clued up.

For example, climate change affects business and political journalists when a new budget is passed that isn't in line with climate promises. It affects sports journalists when they report about a football World Cup in the desert. It affects local reporters doing research about a new construction project.

Survey your own newsroom, as I did mine, and you will find most journalists are not comfortable explaining the details of climate change or attempts to address it. The problem is, acquiring climate knowledge takes time and we all know that time is rare in newsrooms.⁷

⁶ Schurmann, S. (2022) Klartext Klima, pp.100-114 Christian Brandstätter Verlag, Wien.

⁷ Schurmann, S. (2022) Klartext Klima, pp.100-114 Christian Brandstätter Verlag, Wien.

False balance

Journalists are trained to give unbiased reportage. But misapplication of objectivity seems to be a huge obstacle when it comes to climate reporting. Journalists try to be fair by giving equal attention to different points of view. However, this leads to a [false balance](#) in many stories.⁸

Consider, for example, the ban on new combustion engines cars. Although there is scientific consensus about the urgent need to limit CO₂ and it is a fact that domestic traffic is one of the [biggest contributors of CO₂](#), in many reports that information is only half of the story.⁹ Lobby groups, like automobile associations, are given space or airtime to question this ban as the other half of the story. As a result, climate facts are treated like “another view” of the story. Representing points of view without classifying them as fact versus opinion is not objective, it is uninformed.¹⁰

Activism

When talking or writing about climate reporting, the debate surrounding activism versus journalism quickly comes up. Clearly naming the climate crisis and its effects will get you labelled as an alarmist or an activist. Accusations of activism are used to undermine journalistic work.

Alexandra Borchardt, an experienced journalist from Germany, told me: “As a journalist I can't be neutral on certain issues; I can't be neutral on democracy or human rights, because my job is to make sure that people are informed of their

⁸ Fahy, D. (2017) Objectivity, False Balance, and Advocacy in News Coverage of Climate Change. Available at:

<https://oxfordre.com/climatescience/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-345>, accessed: 4. December 2022

⁹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20190313STO31218/co2-emissions-from-cars-facts-and-figures-infographics>

¹⁰ Schurmann, S. (2022) Klartext Klima, pp.100-114 Christian Brandstätter Verlag, Wien.

opportunities in a democracy. Climate change has now become something that I cannot be neutral about. There is a scientific consensus that we are destroying the livelihoods of our planet and, yes, I am a journalist for preserving them.”

Further headwind: audience interest, language and leadership

Journalists covering climate change are often confronted with the argument from their news desk editor that climate stories may not interest audiences enough. Getting these topics onto the front pages or into primetime slots requires a lot of time debating the merits.

And the resistance doesn't end internally; many climate journalists must deal with disinformation campaigns and trolls. Here, it is [up to the leadership](#) to protect and support journalists.¹¹

Hans Cosson-Eide, a climate journalist from the public broadcaster in Norway, NRK, told me in an interview about his challenges when covering climate change. He points out that reporting on climate change requires a lot of time due to complex processes and terminology. At the same time climate change in its nature is slow and it's not going to meet the same news criteria as pandemic or war.

So how can we do better?

¹¹ Blau, W. (2022) *Climate Change: Journalism's Greatest Challenge - Wolfgang Blau* Available at: <https://wblau.medium.com/climate-change-journalisms-greatest-challenge-2bb59bfb38b8>

What does good climate change coverage require?

In short: climate coverage requires a reorganisation of newsrooms. But where should we start? There is no one-size-fits-all solution. But there are lessons we can share, and tools everybody can use.

Structure

Let's start with newsroom structures. Here, I turn to Wolfgang Blau who has worked in management positions for *Die Zeit* and *The Guardian*. Over the last few years, he dedicated a lot of work to understanding climate journalism and newsroom structures, and he is co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network.

Many media houses answer the challenge of climate change coverage by setting up a desk. According to Wolfgang, newsrooms typically choose one of the following three structures when they want to expand their climate reporting:

- They decide to expand their existing science desk by increasing budget or staff. (Pro: prevents internal conflicts. Con: newsroom learning is siloed and slow.)
- Some newsrooms set up a new climate desk. (Pro: development of a new team, expansion of expert staff, and greater PR value. Con: internal frictions with the current science desk.)
- Others form an interdisciplinary “climate hub” with existing personnel. (Pro: progress made towards including climate-related elements in all stories. Con: There is no replacement for having scientific journalists and climate specialists.)

A fourth, less structural option, is to release new formats: such as podcasts or supplements dealing with climate change. (Pro: A good way to start the conversation about climate. An opportunity for hidden potential or talent in the newsroom to shine. Con: they cost time and, in many cases, do not deliver the expected output or reach the desired audience.)

Choosing any one of these strategies is commendable, according to Wolfgang, but in many cases the newly installed climate desks don't have the desired effect on the rest of the newsroom. Expertise and coverage are kept siloed on a story that will affect every part of our lives. Instead, Wolfgang suggests fostering a culture where "every story is a climate story".

In this way, climate change becomes not only an issue or a specific topic, but a rethinking of journalism in general. As a result, [all editorial teams](#) begin to include climate in their reporting, whether focusing on economy, finance, culture, lifestyle, technology, fashion, health or sports.¹²

A [sixth suggestion](#) comes from Sara Schurmann, who would like to see a temporary managing climate editor installed as part of the chief editor's team. The managing climate editor should take part in all relevant editorial meetings and make others aware of climate aspects in their story. This strategy ensures that there are no more stories online, printed or published that simply do not mention climate change aspects when they are necessary and appropriate.¹³

Knowledge

You can have a brilliant climate desk doing great and important work, but if business journalists in your newsroom are reporting excess profits of oil and gas companies without mentioning climate change, what is the point? Experts [agree](#): All journalists in the newsroom need basic climate literacy.¹⁴

¹² Contributor, W.-I.E. (2021) *Covering climate change requires newsroom change*. Available at: <https://wan-ifra.org/2021/09/covering-climate-change-requires-newsroom-change/>.

¹³ World News Day. *Covering climate change requires newsroom change*. Available at: <https://worldnewsday.org/covering-climate-change-requires-newsroom-change/>, accessed: 15. October 2022

¹⁴ Green Templeton (2022) *Wolfgang Blau on Climate change: journalism's greatest challenge*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Np1uZkIv3Fs>, accessed 3. November 2022

In a [CNN interview](#), Emily Atkin, a US-based climate change reporter, draws parallels with the COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis that affected every area of our lives. Our coverage of the pandemic was not outsourced to the science desk; the whole newsroom mobilised to cover that crisis.

“There is no excuse today for reporters who do not understand the basic scientific facts of COVID-19. Why is that different when it comes to climate change? Right now, everyone should be a climate reporter. And if you're not a climate reporter right now, you will be one soon, whether you realise it or not.”¹⁵

In a [lecture at Green Templeton College](#) in Oxford, Wolfgang said climate change will bring a system change to the news industry equal in severity to the digital revolution.¹⁶ And what journalist can still afford to boycott the internet today?

A final note on knowledge from Wolfgang: “You can have a lot of factual knowledge but still not appreciate how late the hour is. The location of the denial has shifted. It has shifted from denying climate science, and specifically that climate change since the pre-industrial age is human made, to denying how urgent our situation is and how little time we have left to avoid a much more dramatic course of events. The willingness to embrace the time pressure we are under is part of climate literacy.”¹⁷

Audience

Apart from structure and knowledge, a third ingredient for change is the way we understand and serve our audience. Newsrooms must know who their audiences are,

¹⁵ Zabriskie, M. (2021) *Climate crisis reporting: How to cover a “permanent emergency.”* Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/media/2021/07/04/climate-reporting-stelter-rs-vpx.cnn>, accessed 28. November 2022

¹⁶ See footnote 13

¹⁷ European Broadcasting Union (EBU) (2022b) “*We are looking at the biggest reconstruction story since World War II.*” Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2022/10/we-are-looking-at-the-biggest-reconstruction-story-since-world-war-ii>, accessed 15. October 2022.

what they want to know about climate change and how concerned they are about the climate crisis.

A report titled *Global Warming's six Americas* from researchers at Yale University and George Mason University found the audience can be divided into six categories: alarmed, concerned, cautious, disengaged, doubtful, and dismissive.¹⁸

To grasp information in climate crisis reports, the audience needs at least a basic knowledge of climate change. As in the COVID-19 crisis, journalists should select climate-specific key figures and terms to explain, repeat and update frequently.¹⁹ For example, news outlets might publish the daily CO₂ amount in PPM, explain the energy mix of a country in percentages, or host an interactive dashboard on their website. Some outlets already do this: see *Bloomberg Green* for example.²⁰

Leadership

Every new structure or strategy depends on the engagement and commitment of a newsroom's leadership team. If the editor-in-chief and their team do not see climate change as a systemic issue across all desks, climate editors and reporters will find it difficult to have a significant impact.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) emphasises this in their [most recent report](#). One of their preliminary key findings is that change will be impossible without engagement of editors.²¹

¹⁸ Global Warming's Six Americans. Available at: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/global-warmings-six-americas/>, accessed 19. December 2022

¹⁹ Green Templeton (2022) *Wolfgang Blau on Climate change: journalism's greatest challenge*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Np1uZkIv3Fs>, accessed 3. November 2022

²⁰ <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/climate-change-data-green/#xj4y7vzkg>

²¹ European Broadcasting Union (EBU) (2022) *Climate journalism - what works?* Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2022/10/climate-journalism---what-works>, accessed 15. October 2022

Moreover, when it comes to handling accusations of bias or activism, management must be responsible for responding. Codes of ethics should state clearly that climate journalism and the reporting on scientific fact is not activism.²²

Carly Wallis, BBC's sustainability project lead, told me getting senior sponsorship can help to open doors when hitting blockers. Having a senior champion is a massive help, she said. Forward-looking management can also be a competitive advantage that attracts younger audiences and future employees. Hans Cosson-Eide, a climate journalist from Norway's public broadcaster NRK, agreed: "When you prioritize climate journalism, you get that step ahead of your competition."

Alexandra Borchardt, EBU report author, added: "Here's a topic that young people are interested in, so you can kill two birds with one stone."

Reimagine how we pitch and present climate stories

If climate change news is consistently bad and hopeless, editors and audiences tend to turn away and begin ignoring it. So how should we tell climate stories?

In our interview, Hans Cosson-Eide from NRK told me the stories that work best are news stories that people do not necessarily see as climate stories. Simon Mundy from the *Financial Times* echoed this: "When pitching a story, it is not mandatory to claim it as a climate story; the key question is why somebody should care."

Additional levers

There are five additional levers – all existing tools – to consider when formulating the right environment for good climate coverage:

²² UN-KlimareporterIn (2022) Über uns. Available at: <https://klimareporter.in/ueber-uns/>., accessed: 28. November 2022

- Newsrooms need a plan for dealing with online trolling and coordinated discrediting of journalists. See the [roadmap for digital security](#).
- Newsrooms need a strategy around visuals used to illustrate climate change stories. A helpful resource is [Climate Visuals](#).²³
- Journalists will need good access to scientists and sources. See [Global South Climate Database](#).²⁴
- Attribution science is critical but not easy. Not all extreme weather events are caused by climate change. See the [World Weather Attribution](#) project.²⁵
- Sometimes climate stories are not given top billing because editors are afraid they do not perform well. This is a result of relying too heavily on performance metrics instead of impact metrics. These are harder to measure but more instructive to long-term strategy. The mere existence of climate stories, pushed out during off-peak times to tick a box, should not be considered a climate strategy. See Gamperl's [Metrics Anxiety](#).²⁶

²³ <https://climatevisuals.org/>

²⁴ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/global-south-climate-database/>

²⁵ *World Weather Attribution – Exploring the contribution of climate change to extreme weather events* (no date). Available at: <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/>, accessed 15. October 2022

²⁶ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/how-calm-your-newsrooms-metrics-anxiety-and-use-analytics-grow>

The ABCs of Climate Coverage excellence

When it comes to good climate change coverage, there is no need to reinvent the wheel: there are many pioneers and best-practice examples that we can use as a guide. Let's start with lessons from the ABCs: AFP in France, BBC in the United Kingdom, and CBC in Canada.

AFP, France

In January 2022 the French news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP), reorganised its newsroom in Paris to strengthen its coverage of priority topics. The agency has created eight new hubs, among them a planet hub, where 20 journalists focus on climate change, environment, energy, industry, transport and agriculture.

The reorganisation allows journalists to deepen their knowledge and share their expertise and sources with colleagues throughout the AFP's network.

Phil Chetwynd, [AFP's Global News Director](#), explained: "This reorganisation reflects our changing editorial priorities that increasingly focus on issues that affect everyone on the planet – the digital transformation of society and the far-reaching implications of climate change."²⁷

BBC, United Kingdom

At the BBC, sustainability training is mandatory for all staff in News and Current Affairs. The training is designed to give people a basic understanding of the topic, according to Carly Wallis, BBC's sustainability project lead.

²⁷ AFP. *AFP reorganises its Paris newsroom into specialised hubs*
<https://www.afp.com/sites/default/files/afpcommunique/202201/pdf/prafpreorganisesitsparisnewsroom.pdf> (accessed 29 October 2022)

There are different training courses, some with an operational focus, and specific trainings for journalists. Carly Wallis calls the training a “massive engagement foundation stone”. “You can’t achieve any of the big things if you don’t do this first,” she told me. “So, this training is kind of a foundation stone for doing that. It is about getting everyone talking, understanding, and thinking about what we are doing inside the BBC, because it is really important that we walk the walk and don’t only talk the talk. We need to take these steps and measures as a public service broadcaster.”

On top of the basic, mandatory training, BBC has begun to host further specialist sessions for journalists on sustainability related topics. On their homepage they state: “We have a responsibility to help our audiences understand the impact of climate change and the steps we can take to transition to Net Zero.”²⁸

CBC, Canada

Canada’s public broadcaster CBC rolled out an initiative called *[Our Changing Planet](#)*. It is a hub that gathers all ongoing reporting of the effects of climate change and investigations of what solutions are offered.

CBC says climate stories are not only environmental stories: they are also about health, economy, jobs, energy, food, water, security, geopolitics, justice and equity, so its effects will be felt in every sector.

“Our pledge is simply that climate change and the endeavours to mitigate its effects will get the sustained journalistic focus and attention they deserve at a time most experts describe as an inflection point for the planet.”

²⁸ BBC Environmental sustainability. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/reports/policies/sustainability>, accessed 5. December 2022

Deutsche Welle Germany

At Deutsche Welle, part of the public broadcaster in Germany, climate journalism is already part of all departments and collaboration between desks is encouraged.

They hired an additional 60 journalists on the environment desk but include climate correspondents in other departments. They all work together. DW says good climate coverage has also become a [recruitment tool](#) to attract talented journalists.²⁹

On their YouTube channel [DW Planet A](#) they do explainer videos designed to appeal to younger users. They focus on solutions journalism and tell stories about people who make things more sustainable.

NRK, Norway

Norway's public broadcaster NRK has worked out a strategy for preventing climate knowledge silos in their newsroom. They installed a climate desk, but instead of assigning one team, their journalists work the desk on shifts. This allows journalists from different desks to deepen their knowledge and spread climate literacy all over the newsroom.

Their office in Oslo covers daily climate news, while climate journalists in Bergen focus on investigative stories. Bergen-based journalists find they are less likely to be asked to drop their work on a climate story for breaking news.

²⁹ European Broadcasting Union (EBU) (2022) *Climate journalism is definitely a way to attract talent*. Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2022/11/climate-journalism-attracts-talent-people-tell-me-if-an-organization-produces-something-like-that-i-would-like-to-work-there>, accessed 15. November 2022

There is a downside to this approach: NRK-journalist Hans Cosson-Eide told me it is hard to keep continuity in the group. If a journalist cannot finish a story on time, they must wait till their next shift at the climate desk to pick it up again.

Oxford Climate Journalism Network

The Oxford Climate Journalism Network is a six-month rolling programme at the Reuters Institute that connects cohorts of 100 journalists from all over the world looking to improve their coverage of climate change.

The programme includes seminars by experts, discussion groups, and peer support. Participants have been seen to go on to change their workflows, and even their newsroom structures and policies. It's a demonstration of how much can be accomplished when you feel you have a [whole community](#) on your side.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ K. Dunn and D. Arguedas Ortiz, "Four takeaways first semester oxford climate journalism network" <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/four-takeaways-first-semester-oxford-climate-journalism-network>, accessed October 15, 2022

Discussion of ORF survey results

While the results of my questionnaire cannot be considered representative, I do think they offer some important points my newsroom can take action to address.

I am most struck by the tendency among my colleagues to feel some degree of uncertainty about basic climate facts every journalist should know. More than half of those surveyed did not feel confident explaining relevant organisations and sources like the IPCC. 79% felt uncertain about explaining parts per million, which is a way to measure and express the amount of CO₂ content in the air.

It goes without saying that without this knowledge it is very hard – perhaps even impossible – to cover or analyse news information related to EU climate targets, the energy crisis, government plans, and other related stories. The good news: ORF already has climate training available. It's currently available on a voluntary basis.

We should be encouraged that most journalists surveyed said there should be more climate stories, but equally concerned that only one person felt “very supported” in doing climate stories.

Far too many were uncertain about what our audience needs to know about climate change. Both issues can be solved, however, through dialogue with editors and other newsroom managers. That brings me to my four key recommendations.

Spread climate knowledge

Climate training should be mandatory, because:

- Good journalists need good general knowledge, and that includes climate knowledge. Whether in an interview, at a press conference, or in a meeting: good knowledge is required for balanced, professional reporting.

- Climate training can help journalists to avoid mistakes like creating false balance in a story. It can also help journalists identify greenwashing.
- Good training will inform journalists about what their audience needs and wants.
- Climate training helps journalists to identify adequate visuals and sources.

Rethink newsroom structures

Climate coverage requires a reorganisation of newsrooms. It doesn't have to be a climate desk, but every newsroom needs a specialist group dedicated to the most important topic of our time.

Ideally, this group should be hybrid and open, it should include experts like meteorologists, journalists from the science desk, and ambitious journalists from different desks all over the newsroom. It is important that this climate group is not isolated from the rest of the newsroom. There should be one constant group and other journalists from different desks joining and leaving for a daily or weekly shift. Public broadcaster NRK has made this model work.

The climate group should be the first point of contact for journalists for questions and uncertainties when covering stories with a climate angle. (And remember: a lot of stories do have a climate angle!) The climate group provides information, sources, knowhow, and it can also pitch ideas and stories to different desks. Collaboration is the keyword.

Think local

When covering climate change, it is important to offer solutions, and it is important to tell stories that are close to the people. Therefore, local reporting provides a great opportunity to make complex issues tangible. ORF, with its nine local offices all over Austria, is already set up to do so.

Spotlight good leadership

All suggestions to improve climate coverage stand and fall with good leadership.

Journalists need supportive bosses when it comes to commissioning important stories that won't please everyone. They also need back up when it comes to trolling or accusations around activism.

Conclusion

Coverage of climate change news brings many challenges, chief among them is the need for more knowledge of the science, a keen eye for false balance narratives, and an understanding of the audience and their informational needs.

Newsrooms also face missing structures, a lack of collaboration, and the need for clear, committed leadership.

We know that money and time are tight in all newsrooms: editors and journalists often work in a hamster wheel, focusing on the next story, the next show, at the expense of long-term focus. But news media are also required to keep their finger on the pulse: to know the latest science, and the most important issue of our time.

There is a lot we can learn from others: from communicating clear commitments like CBC in Canada, to installing a climate hub like the APF in France, from creating a hybrid Climate desk as Norway's NRK did, to making climate training mandatory as it is at the BBC.

Now it is time to right the course of our boats, so to speak. Whether we are rowing or covering climate change, to be successful we will need training, clear structures, a motivated team, and good leaders.

Yes, climate change is a big challenge, but we are all in the same boat. So, grab your paddle, your pencil or microphone, and let's turn this boat around.