

# DCU School of Communications

## Assignment Submission

Student Name(s): Kate Donoghue  
Student Number(s): 14700059  
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Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

# **Portfolio Report**

Kate Donoghue

14700059

28<sup>th</sup> April 2017

## **Summary**

This report sets out to synopsise the work completed as part of the assembly of my portfolio for module CM3750. Activities, functions and duties that were carried out by me within the allotted seven-month time frame will be explained, highlighting the time spent where relevant.

The report also aims to analyse what journalistic skills were called into play and what leadership roles, if any, emerged throughout the process. It will also reflect upon personal development gained from building a journalism portfolio, what was learned, my impact on the journalism workplace, challenges that were faced and what would be done differently, given the chance.

### **Items submitted:**

48 published articles

30 published images

1 letter of verification for public relations work

### **Link to portfolio:**

<https://katedonoghue.journoportfolio.com/>

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## Introduction

The vast majority of the published work featured on my portfolio came from my time spent working at the Liffey Champion. This wasn't planned from the start, my portfolio began to accumulate slowly, as I predicted in my plan submitted in October of 2016. I knew I wouldn't be able to get really stuck into it until the December/January period when we have a break from lectures. I was working almost full time in hospitality at the beginning of the semester which left very little wriggle room for getting work published, so I banked on utilising the extra time around the Christmas period.

In October, I got in contact with the general manager of Mayo University Hospital (MUH), Catherine Donohoe with regards to covering an event she was organising in the hospital on Quality and Patient Safety. It was to be featured in local newspapers as well as the Saolta Communications newsletter. My hope was that this would be a foot in the door at some of the regional papers, like the Western People.

As time went on and the grilling got worse in portfolio meetings, I realised I was too dependant on the MUH story and had all my eggs in one basket. So, in early November I approached the newspaper nearest to where I was living, the Liffey Champion. The Liffey Champion is based in Leixlip, County Kildare and covers north Kildare (including Leixlip, Maynooth, Enfield, Celbridge, Clane, Prosperous and Straffan) as well as the Lucan area of west Dublin. It was a brave (or maybe desperate) move on my part, being originally from Mayo and at the time very unfamiliar with local issues and politics. I had also never set foot in most of the towns mentioned above, let alone the surrounding areas.

Thankfully, editor Vincent Sutton still jumped at my offer to do some freelance work and I started pretty much right away. It is a weekly publication of on average 72 pages, roughly half of which are printed in full colour. It is a tabloid format publication, though in Sutton's own words, it often sways towards broadsheet style.

I spent five months working with the Liffey Champion. The first two were on a freelance basis and productivity was held back quite a lot by the learning curve that came with reporting on an area about which I knew very little.

In January, I was offered a part-time position as a staff-reporter. It was fairly demanding and I had to cover a lot of ground (even as a freelancer) but it meant I was usually publishing between 10 and 15 articles a week which was great for those portfolio grillings.

But coming on-staff meant I now had more responsibility with the paper. I was expected to put in at least 20 hours a week and to pull my weight when it came to covering events, attending meetings and so on. This did occupy most of my time alongside college and assignments. Retrospectively, had I remained freelance I would have allowed myself more time to diversify the publications I wrote for and/or work on multimedia pieces. But an actual job as a staff-reporter seemed too good an opportunity to miss.

## **Main body**

### Liffey Champion

Duties included:

- Monitoring the paper's emails for potential stories. It was signed up to pretty much every mailing list and press release available.
- Sourcing my own stories and making contacts.
- Updating the newsroom diary with events, making sure a reporter and/or photographer were assigned to the events as-needed.
- A surprising amount of administrative work. Reporters ended up playing receptionist quite a lot as the actual receptionist was also in charge of accounts and payroll as well as dealing with all advertising queries. This meant I got a good grounding in customer complaints and directing callers in the right direction.
- Setting up and conducting interviews.
- Providing images: Because I have my own DSLR I was often asked to photograph events as well as to provide copy which wasn't the case for other reporters. There was often a photographer and a reporter assigned to events but if not I was able to provide both. It was more work but great experience and I was happy to be able to get plenty of images published.
- Whenever possible, we were required to go and meet people for interviews, attend events and meetings and gather stories first-hand, rather than trying to cover an event in retrospect by making phonecalls. This did sometimes still happen occasionally because of being short-staffed but it was still Liffey Champion policy to source some relevant comment.
- Each Wednesday before the paper goes to print, proofing and sub-editing responsibilities were divided between two or three reporters as well as the managing editor. Once, ready the pages are sent for the final edits to be made before the paper goes to print. Because of the size of the paper, you get a taste of all aspects of the process of getting an issue from starting point to finished product.
- I was one of the page administrators for the Liffey Champion Facebook page. My duties here included helping to respond to the messages that came in via Facebook. Moderating comments sections and posting as needed. Moderating

usually just meant I would bring any potentially problematic comments to the managing editor's attention.

### Saolta

The day I spent covering the Quality and Patient Safety Symposium at MUH was a lot more gruelling than expected. I offered a lot of services (text, images, video, live-tweeting) because I thought it would lead to a lot more opportunity.

In the end, the communications department within the hospital never brought the story to the local papers (they had said they would handle that) and the piece I wrote didn't actually end up getting published in the Saolta newsletter until April. Only two of about 20 images I sent to them got used and the video, which took a lot of editing, was not published.

I spread myself very thin for very little pay off. I also had to leave the symposium at 3pm and drive straight back to Dublin for the Cleraun Media Conference.

I will say it was a great experience to have just before Cleraun as attempting to do all those elements alone was a baptism of fire, whereas at Cleraun we were part of a team that could lean on one another.

### Images

By and large I was happy with the images I have features. It was great to be able to get so many published and it certainly afforded me plenty of opportunity to get over any reservations towards asking people if I could take their picture, doing so and then getting their details from them.

I had problems at times with a lack of equipment. Unlike the professional photographers who freelance at the paper, I don't have an external flash (for now) and I only have one 18-55mm lens. This meant photographing indoor events or anything with low-lighting became a bit of a problem and as a result, some images are a bit grainy and had to be fixed in post-processing.

Being able to take pictures did get the paper out of a hole on several occasions though when they didn't have enough photographers to cover everything on a given day. From that perspective, I can definitely see the positive impact I had on the workplace, aside from being an extra reporter.

## Personal reflection and conclusion

### I learned:

- I am not a prolific writer. It takes me a long time to write anything and I don't think I am ever truly happy with something I've written. I find it especially hard to write about things I am not particularly interested in. Working in a newspaper does not allow for this. Getting through volume was an issue for me from when I started and continues to be at present. I'd say there has only been a marginal improvement since the outset and that is probably being generous.  
I find it incredibly difficult to jump from finishing one story and moving straight into the next one. That was what needed to be done, there was too much of a workload to get through without being drained after one story. You need to keep moving and I don't think I am suited to that approach to writing. I don't believe it's a laziness thing either; I find writing to be really mentally draining. So, possibly the greatest challenge I faced in building a journalism portfolio was realising, right in the middle of the process, that I may not be cut out for a career in journalism.
- I do enjoy crafting a feature, once I'm interested in the topic. This was apparent to me while writing the piece on the fashion illustrator, Linda Byrne. Because of my own interest in art and design, Linda was a really easy person for me to write about. The craft of writing still appeals to me, but I am not good at doing it quickly.
- I also really like story-telling, particularly stories people care about. My experience at the Ahmadiyya Muslim new year party was pretty special. Because I went in with even a little research done about their community, they were really impressed and couldn't have been more welcoming. They really wanted to get their message across and were very happy that I helped them to do it. Sajida Aleem invited me to several more events after that and also let me interview her for an assignment in our Radio Reporting module. Another stand-out moment for me was after I wrote the story about children in Kilcock missing out on an education in Irish. Eventually, Scoil Uí Riada got



their third stream approved and they called the paper to let me know and thank me for covering the campaign.

#### Skills I developed:

- Research: from familiarising myself with local issues, news and politics to the individual research for articles, research was a skill I utilised a lot.
- Interpersonal: I had to approach SO many people while working at the paper. Sometimes it was fantastic and I would feel like I was doing a really good job of networking and making contacts. There were other times when it was something I would really, rather not have done. For example, I had to contact Independent TD Catherine Murphy after her mother died and try to get comment. My editor felt it would be remiss not to mark the passing of a local TD's mother and so it fell to me to call her. I had never spoken to Catherine Murphy before and it was a deeply uncomfortable phonecall. I got the comment but it was another one of those flags telling me I might not be the right person for this job.
- Organisational: I know I said I struggled with meeting the requirements of my workload but the experience definitely pushed me to try and improve. I had to keep a lot of plates spinning at once over the past seven months. I know for certain that better planning could have yielded superior results, but overall I am still happy with my efforts.
- Interviewing: I fumbled a lot when interviewing people at the start. I would fumble a lot, develop a speech impediment I had never before experience and struggle to ask the questions I needed to, usually only realizing this when at home, hours later. I definitely believe this is one of the areas in which I improved the most. Listening to recordings of interviews became far less cringeworthy as time went on. I became more relaxed and started to draw much better answers from people.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, to Mr Vincent Sutton, managing editor of the Liffey Champion, for all the patience during the extended learning-curve while adapting to local reportage and for teaching me more than I could have imagined.

Secondly, to the management of Mayo University Hospital for offering me the opportunity to cover their very special event. It was a pleasure.

And lastly, but by no means the least, my gratitude goes out to all lecturers and staff of the School of Communications in DCU, who answer any and all questions thrown at them, always offer assistance and push their students as much as they can.

Thank you.