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**Media Graduates  
at Work**  
Irish Narratives  
on Policy, Education  
and Industry

Anne O'Brien  
Sarah Arnold  
Páraic Kerrigan

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# Creative Working Lives

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# Media Graduates at Work

Irish Narratives on Policy, Education and Industry

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CCI	Creative and Cultural Industries
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IFB	Irish Film Board
SI	Screen Ireland
SSI	Screen Skills Ireland
STI	Screen Training Ireland



## Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter introduces the key aims of the book, which is to systematically examine the various factors that shape media work, which include the state and its policies, industrial and organisational practices and cultures of media education. In particular, the chapter notes how the book does not take a typical political economic or even media industries perspective in this exploration. Rather, it innovatively traces how these forces are operationalised to shape media for the graduates who directly experience the outcomes of policy, education and industry cultures. The analysis examines the impact that policy, education and industry have in defining, redefining and shaping media work and what that means for recently graduated media workers. The chapter further explores the method deployed throughout the study, all the while defining creative work.

**Keywords** Creative Labour • Graduates • Media Education • Media Policy • Media Work

This book aims to systematically examine various factors that shape media work, which include the state and its policies, industrial and organisational practices and cultures of media education. However, the book does not take a typical political economic or even media industries approach to this exploration. Rather, it innovatively traces how these forces are

operationalised to shape media for the graduates who directly experience the outcomes of policy, education and industry cultures. The book examines the impact that policy, education and industry have in defining, redefining and shaping media work and what that means for recently graduated media workers. The book offers a new account of how media graduates interpret and negotiate changing understandings and expectations of them as media workers in media and non-media organisations and companies and how they see that those changes have been articulated within and across a number of social arenas.

This book makes a valid and unique contribution to the fields of Production Studies and Media Education Studies scholarship because it demonstrates the extent to which there is an interrelation between policies, industry norms and educational practice for the worker. The book offers insights on state policies that affect media education, on industrial and organisational practices within which media graduates are shaped and understood and on the ways in which education creates graduates who must negotiate entry into the industry. In this study we make sense of the broader contemporary media industries, the well-mapped patterns of media change and more localised trends by examining them through the lens of media work and the factors that shape it. In attempting to explore these factors we pay attention to the narratives of media graduates, media employers and educators all of whom play a role in shaping media work in Ireland. We also consider the media policy landscape in Ireland and see that as playing a key role in steering media education which, in turn, impacts on media graduates and the routes they take into media education. Throughout the book, we demonstrate the complexities of the sometimes-fraught relationship between the various actors involved in shaping media work. We note, for example, the tensions between educators and industry, the ambivalence that media graduates have about media education, and the sometimes-poor alignment between each. In considering how media work is shaped in Ireland, the book scrutinises the effects of systems of regulation, media education, media organisations and their associated cultures on becoming a media worker. Further, we explore the opportunities and barriers around different pathways into media work.

The book is a new departure, not only because its central focus is on the factors that create and shape graduates' working worlds; it is also innovative in its focus on a small nation case study. The majority of media work research focuses on political economic analysis in the Anglophone contexts of the US, the UK, Australia and Canada. This book argues that

these conclusions cannot simply be extended to other contexts like Ireland, because of some unique features of that case. Ireland's small nation status, its particular experience of and recovery from the 2008 global financial crisis and its dependency on foreign direct investment in its media sectors all shape the Irish media industries and consequently the nature of work for graduates within these industries. This book offers a localised perspective on Irish media work in a case study, which is in some ways unique but which also offers some generalisable findings that can assist other small nations to better understand how policy, educational practices and industry cultures and exigencies all combine to shape what it means to do media work in Ireland.

### DATA COLLECTION

The data for the book has been gathered through a mixed-methods approach that attempts to examine the ways in which the relationship between higher education, its media graduates and media industries has evolved. The research uses a case study of employers, discourse analysis of policy, qualitative interviews with employers, third-level media educators as well as interviews with media graduates to understand the ways in which graduates are discursively produced and shaped for work in the media industry. Given the small nation status of Ireland's media landscape, there are particular structural challenges which condition the labour market in Ireland. Further, given the small nation status, the sample presented here provides an exploration and analysis of the ways in which media education policy and industry shapes media graduates for work specifically within a regionally based media industry. Despite the large body of research on media industries over the last two decades, few studies have examined how these macro-level mechanisms of state policy, educational practices and industry values shape the graduates' experience and definition of media work. It is to that gap in the literature that this book is addressed.

In conducting our mixed-methods research for this book we were concerned with identifying and analysing some of the key shapers of media work and with developing an understanding of how they shape such work. We take as our object of study the Irish ecology of media work as constituted through policy, education, industry and graduates. We began this research by undertaking a series of interviews with graduates of media programmes that had sought work in the media industries. Our sample consisted of media graduates who were in the early stages of media careers

and we used institutional alumni contacts and, from there, snowball sampling to connect with other media graduates. Twenty semi-structured interviews took place across 2018 and 2019, which enabled us to develop an understanding of the factors that impacted on media workers as they navigated from media education to media work. Our findings, discussed in Chap. 5, pointed to the three factors of policy, education and industry as key shapers of media work and of graduates' experiences of media work. Following this discovery, we were interested to understand how each of these factors were interrelated. Since graduates reported ambivalence about their preparedness for media work, we sought to examine the role that media education played in producing media workers. Following a review of third-level media programmes in Ireland, we conducted interviews with 23 educators and programme coordinators. This helped us understand media educators' perceptions of the interrelation between media education and media work. Alongside this we conducted interviews with 13 media employers, again, with a focus on the expectations they had of media graduates and the role they saw media education and industry play in preparing media graduates for media work. Finally, we interviewed a small number of people involved in policy implementation and conducted an analysis of media policy to develop a broader sense of the role that policy plays in defining media work, of prioritising certain types of media work and in tasking media education with producing certain types of media workers. Collectively, this enabled us to understand how media work is negotiated, defined and practised through a number of different fields including policy, education and industry.

### KEY ARGUMENTS

In the chapters that follow we assess the interrelationship between policy, education and industry and consider the ways in which each of these shapes and complements each other or sit in tension with each other and, ultimately, how this affects the journey of students from education and into work. In Chap. 2, we discuss the 'education for industry' discourse that has emerged in cultural and media policy over the past 20 years. We discuss the ways that industry policies, in particular, have followed the human capital narrative of skills development and assess the discourses about media education and media graduates that subsequently emerged. Using the case of Irish audiovisual policy since the 1990s and, particularly following the national policy framework *Culture 2025* (2018) we identify how labour