



# NEWS ON STAGE

The News on  
Stage Project

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# The idea

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- Decline in trust
  - The town crier
  - Telling stories in person...
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- Joint project between City and Nottingham Trent University





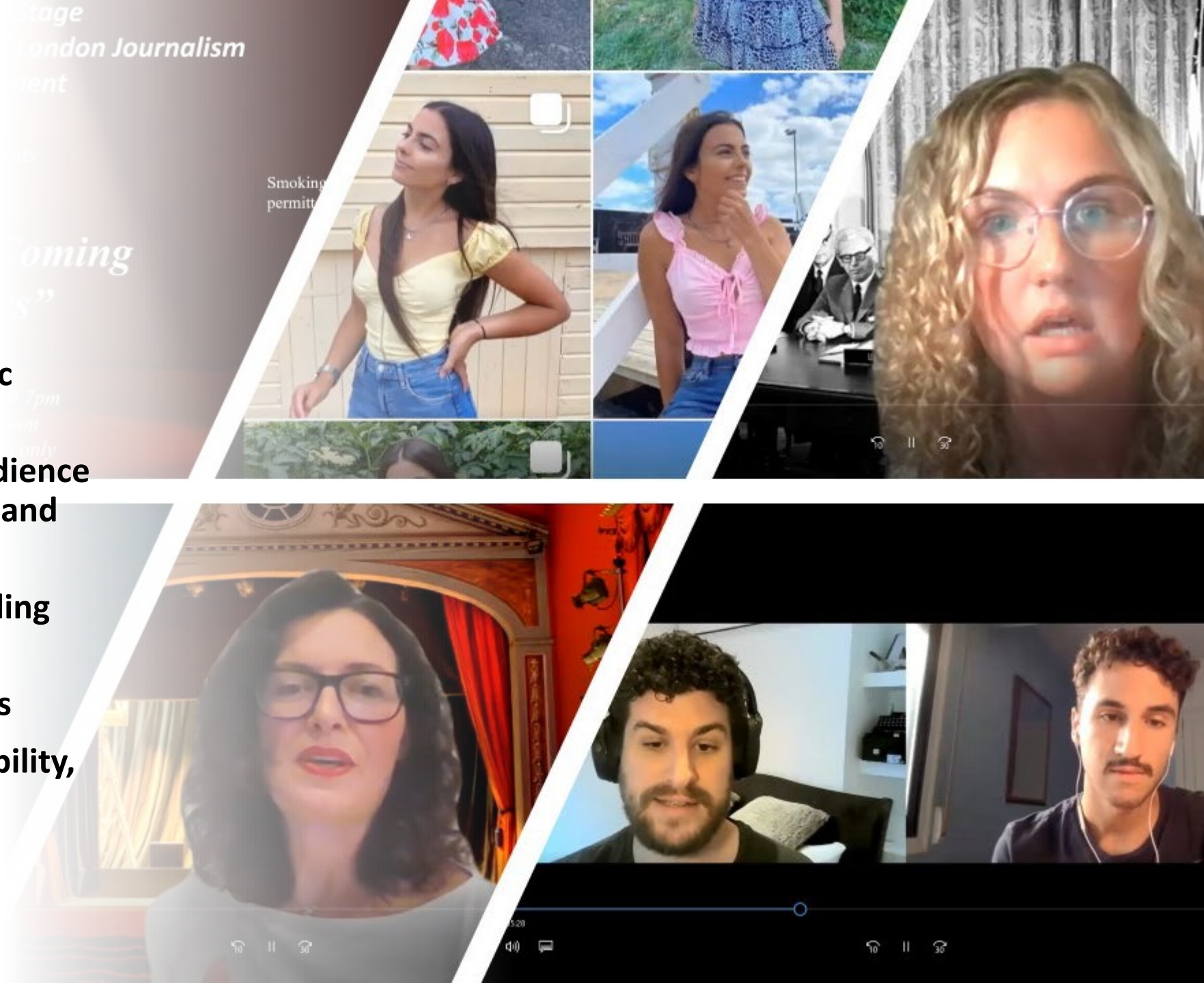
# Lit review

- **Trust** - fallen by significant margins in recent years (Fletcher 2020), important part of social cohesion, public agenda (Coleman et al 2009; Wanta and Hu 1994).
- **Role** of journalists – communities, identities, ‘convenors of social experiences’ (Usher 2017)
- The ‘**audience turn**’ – engagement, reciprocity, online and offline comparisons (Lewis et al 2014; Belair-Gagnon et al 2019)
- The growth of ‘**live journalism**’ around the world (Pop-up, BlackBox, Creative Storytelling Workshop, De Balie)
- Journalism as a **created, creative space** (Bernbaum 2010)



# Learning outcomes

- Importance of journalistic norms
- Engagement with the audience – who are our audiences and how do we storytell?
- Ethical questions that telling difficult stories bring up
- Creativity and playfulness
- Employability skills: flexibility, creativity, teamwork and presentation



# The Show

- **Up and Coming Stories**

- 5 student journalists, 1 actor/director, 1 actor
- Reimagining of their final year projects via verbatim theatre soundscapes, reconstructed interviews, characters
- Part of official 'Welcome Week' for our new students
- Live interaction with the audience took place through online polls and live Q&As (including the 'Virtual Café' element in which the audience could directly chat to the students after the formal performance).
- <https://newsonstage964645559.wordpress.com/up-and-coming-stories-videos/>





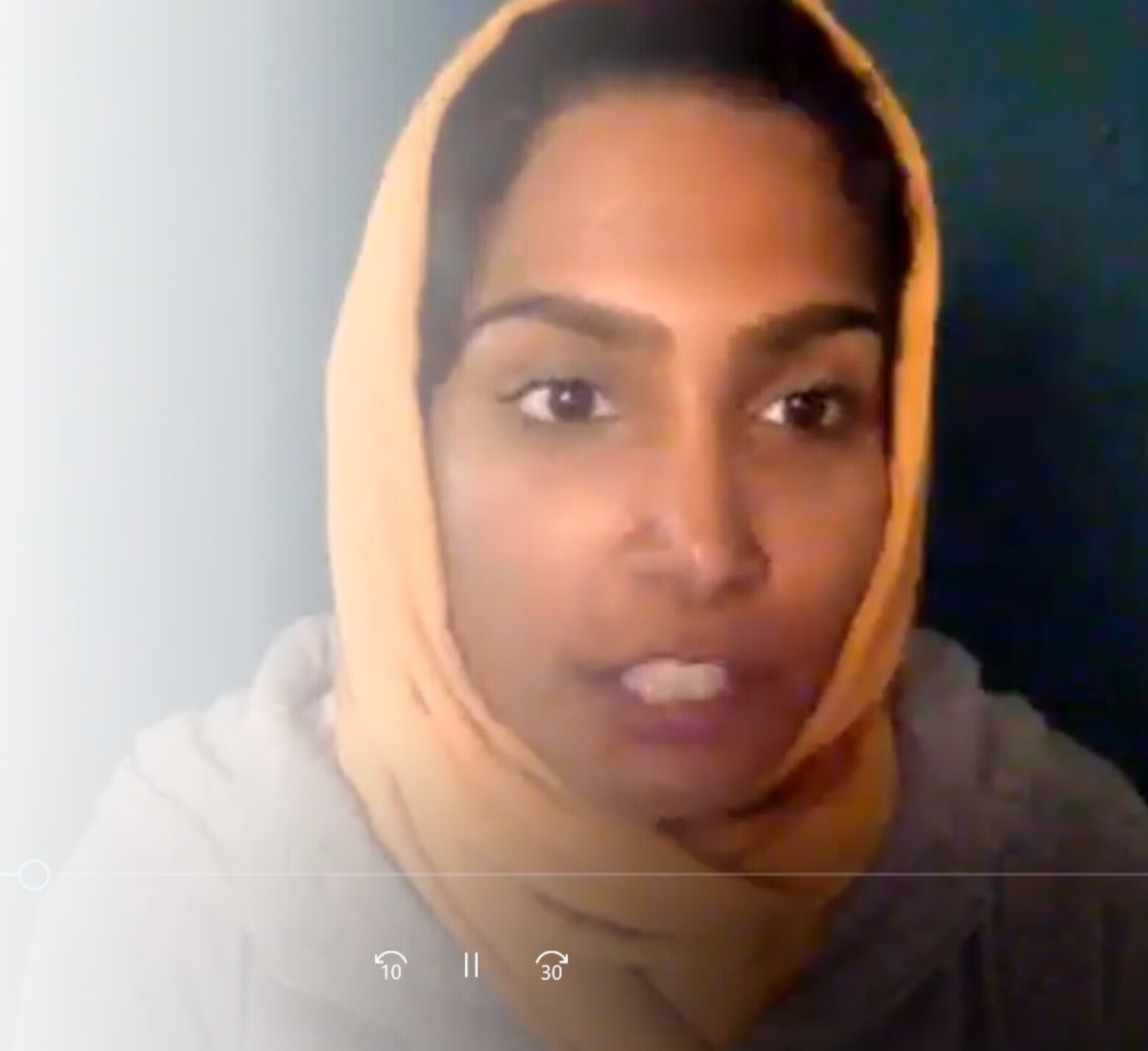
# Challenging students

- Brainstorming different ways to tell stories that would connect more with audiences.
- TED-X talks, soundscapes, verbatim theatre, reconstructed interviews
- ‘Never let good drama get in the way of the facts’ – reminding students of the primacy of journalism
- Allowing playfulness into storytelling
- Making them engage with their audiences – and be held accountable



## Engaging in trust/truth around journalism

- Translation of first person piece into verbatim theatre – a more dynamic and personal way of representing a story.
- What issues does dramatizing raise? (Make sure it is clear what is fact)
- “It felt very true to the original experience...Getting these one on one stories feels like you’re in the moment with them.” (UCS2)
- ‘You can add some flair but the truth of the story remains untouched’ (UCS1)



# Tackling sensitive subjects

- Reconstruction of interview with an abuse survivor
- More interaction with the survivor about how he wanted his story to be told
- A chance for the audience to see how an interview unfolds
- The survivor had the chance to answer questions
- Important questions for students about how to treat interviewees





## Students' reaction to the event

- 'I've never done anything like this before. It was so fun being able to act and educate others on something I'd researched and written.'
- *"I loved the interaction with viewers and how creative some of the pieces were. Sometimes when we read the news, we can't connect personally with the characters involved. News On Stage means you can fully connect with the people that these stories are about."*
- "It gave me a chance to prove myself and push myself out of my comfort zone."





## Audience reaction

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- Audience also had a positive reaction to this.
- Rise from 33% to 55% in those who trusted journalists a lot, 88% found the event very interesting and 55% took an active role (eg asking questions, filling in the snap polls etc).
- ‘Students felt the face to face conviction and [the] passion of the journalists came across, and this brought the stories home.’ (survey)



NEWS  
ON  
STAGE



# Translation to classroom teaching

- As a result of the success of News on Stage, I and my research partner ran 2 half day workshops at City for a first year news writing module, using drama to engage ethical issues around news values and news aggregators
- Part scripted/part unscripted, students played roles of journalists in a news conference and discussion about the angles of stories
- Learning outcomes: to understand the role of aggregators; consider news values and priorities; the problem of churnalism; exploring different roles in newsrooms; considering financial pressures on newsrooms



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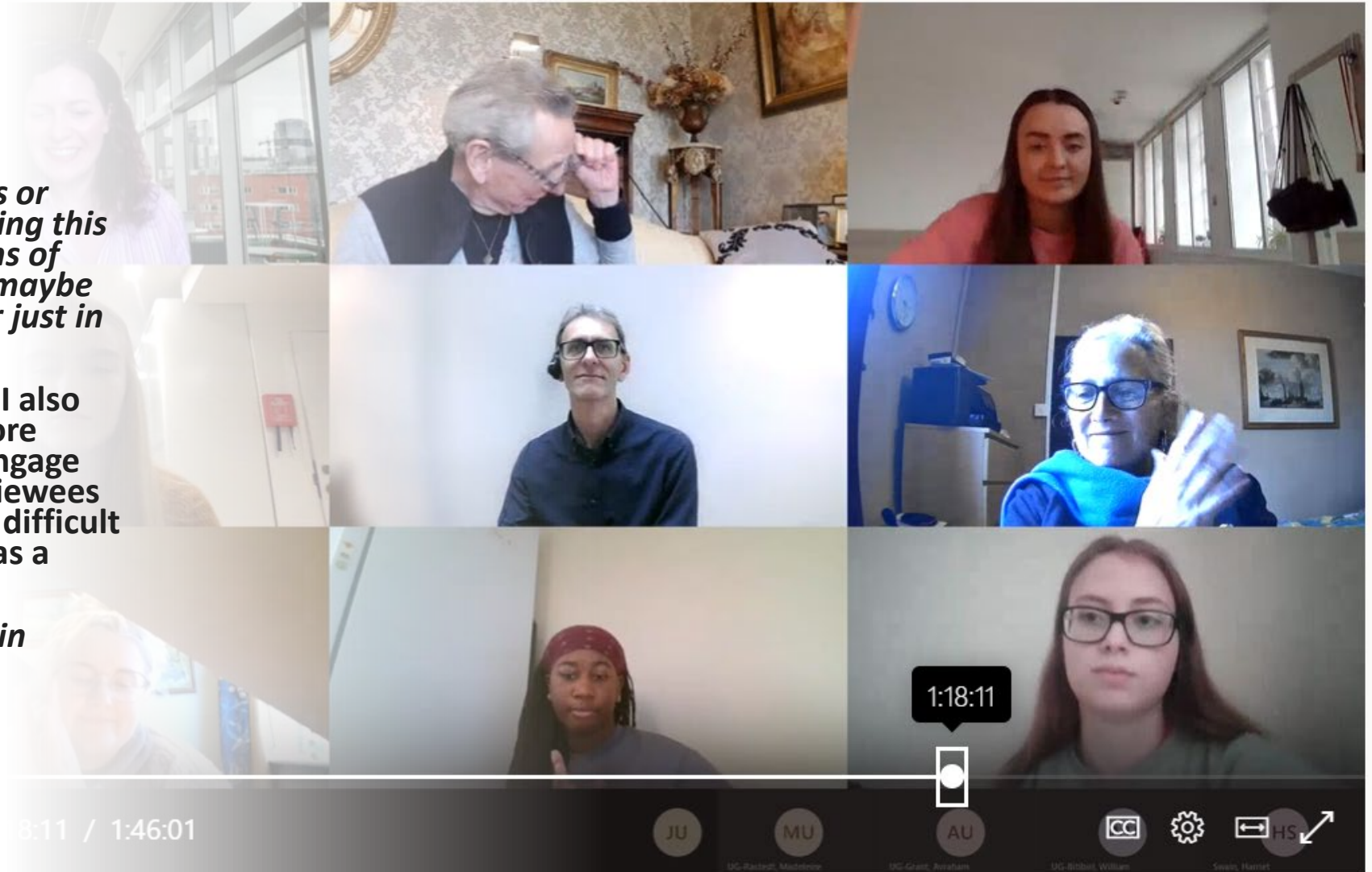
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# Students' reactions

- *Maybe how to find interviews or conduct them - i feel roleplaying this would be really useful in terms of how to speak to people that maybe don't want to be spoken to or just in general*
- Aside from the ethics aspect, I also think that we should have more writing exercises where we engage with people acting like interviewees and the like as it is extremely difficult to get someone to interview as a student
- *Underrepresentation of certain groups in the news room*
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The background of the slide is a photograph of a stage. On the left, there are dark red, vertically pleated curtains. The floor is made of light-colored wooden planks. A bright spotlight shines from the top right, creating a circular pool of light on the wooden floor and casting a soft glow on the adjacent wall. The title 'Beyond journalism' is written in a large, black, sans-serif font in the upper right area of the slide.

# Beyond journalism

- Role play of situations allowed students to explore in a safe space difficult issues that may come up in their future career
- Putting together a show inspired creativity but also teamwork (rehearsals, helping others with Zoom problems), allowed them to improve presentation skills
- This could be useful for other subjects beyond journalism



# NEWS ON STAGE THE NEWS CABARET

NEXT DATE: 8 JULY



SEE ALL DATES

## Watch out! Live Journalism!

Join us for a night of journalism, comedy and improv. Hear exclusive stories told by journalists for the first time. Meet a real-life war correspondent, a mudlark, a stand-up comedian and The Plague Doctor, face-to-face.

And watch out for breaking news...

Other acts include true tales of online dating as a gay South Asian man, the highs



Thank you for listening!

Questions, thoughts, comments?  
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