

Aims & Objectives of the NCE for Sports Reporters

THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION FOR SPORTS REPORTERS

This new qualification is aimed specifically at Sports Journalists and is designed to give them the ability to qualify without having to leave their sports desk role.

It is designed to examine all-round competence in a range of fundamental skills at a level appropriate to a sports journalist who has completed the basic training programme, gained the NCTJ Certificate in Journalism qualification - including 100wpm shorthand, news writing and portfolio, both media law exams and both public affairs exams - and attained 18 months experience of working on a sports desk. Students may also have completed the NCTJ's sports journalism preliminary exam, although this is not a compulsory requirement for sitting the NCE.

They will also have completed the sports reporters' logbook, including new tasks aimed at demonstrating their aptitude and ability for basic sub-editing and new media (online) journalism.

A successful candidate will be able to demonstrate they have the all-round skills, knowledge and journalistic ability to cope with the daily rigours of working on a busy sports desk.

These skills include:

- Working under pressure and to tight deadlines.
- Filing match reports for both online websites and newspapers to tight deadlines – including pre-match reports, half-time reports and a full-time round-up.
- An in-depth knowledge and understanding of a wide range of sports.
- Writing accurate and readable stories about football, rugby and cricket, as well as a cross-section of other less mainstream sports.
- Producing stories that are appropriate for each point of the news cycle. The ability to preview and review matches – for both newspapers and online - exploiting them to their maximum potential before, during and after a match.
- Writing stories away from match reporting on matters that require an understanding of political, administrative and other issues relating to sport.
- Handling press conferences and interviews effectively. The ability to extract information by good interview technique; to take selective but accurate notes; to understand what is said and written, and to reproduce it in concise, balanced, well-marshalled reports with a feeling for news value. And to produce reports to deadline and to required length.
- Writing a range of sports features.
- A firm grasp of the importance of sports contacts, the internet, fanzines and supporters' groups, and how to use them to maximum effect when writing reports and features.

- A good working knowledge of major sporting bodies, their hierarchy, how they operate and what they do.
- A sound working knowledge of media law and public affairs and how these should be applied to sports reporting.
- The ability to work to deadline and to a stipulated length without sacrificing accuracy and vital content.
- Writing in a clear, flowing style that attracts the reader with a crisp intro and sound story construction.
- An understanding of online video techniques and the ability to produce video clips, with interviews, voice-overs or pieces to camera.

Each section of the National Certificate Examination has a specific purpose:

Sports Interview:

Candidates must demonstrate the ability to interview a sporting figure with firmness and confidence but without aggression; assimilate a briefing containing information from a number of different sources and consider pertinent lines of inquiry; formulate and work from a basic framework of questions; see the story in the round; follow up leads without losing the main thread of the story; ask questions in a form that encourages the interviewee to talk freely; think clearly under pressure; record information satisfactorily and unobtrusively without interrupting the flow of the interviewee; and produce accurate and well-written copy.

Candidates will be asked to write copy to a set length and to a deadline for either their newspaper or online website – dependent on what is asked for in the examination.

Sports Report (Speech/Press Briefing):

Candidates must demonstrate the ability to report the spoken word accurately and with an appreciation of news value; understand the sense and purpose of a speech by a sporting figure and take a selective note of its essential parts; write a report that is a balanced summary of the speaker's own words (using an appropriate number of quoted passages) and conveys the meaning that the speaker intended to convey, and render reported (indirect) speech in an acceptable form.

Candidates will be asked to write copy to a set length and to a deadline for either their newspaper or online website – dependent on what is asked for in the examination.

Newspaper Practice for Sports Reporters:

Candidates must demonstrate they are conversant with day-to-day newspaper practice inside and outside the office; that, having completed a broad-based training programme, they have a sound working knowledge of practical journalism, enabling them to respond to any given sports editorial situation; that they are able to apply to sports reporting the principles of media law and public affairs; that they have a good working knowledge and understanding of a wide range of sports including football, cricket, rugby (union & league), athletics, golf, tennis, hockey, judo, squash, badminton, horse racing, fishing and motor racing (this can include car and motorcycle racing, rallying and speedway); and that they are able to brief senior and junior colleagues in clear, concise terms.

Candidates will be required to answer one media law questions and two follow-up questions.

Sports Logbook – Schedule of Training & Experience:

This record of work and portfolio of cuttings is specifically aimed at the candidate demonstrating they have covered a wide-range of sports desk duties, including live match reports, previews and reviews, collating round-ups, feature writing and basic subbing. The logbook should contain examples of work for both newspapers and online new media.

The sports logbook is an integral part of the NCE for Sports Reporters, and carries the same 60 per cent pass rate as the other sections of the NCE.

The object of the sports logbook is to ensure that all sports trainees gain sufficient and relevant sports desk experience during their first eighteen months to two years at work to prepare them to take the NCE with confidence. Most candidates should have no difficulty in completing both the assessment and key task sections of the logbook. However, success depends to a very large extent on the help and co-operation of editors, sports editors and in-office trainers.

As well as providing evidence of a competence in live match reporting, the sports logbook will demonstrate the candidate's breadth of knowledge about a wide variety of sports, the ability to interview, use a wide range of contacts and sources, the ability to write clearly and concisely, the ability to complete basic subbing and the ability to work online and with video.

The Exams:

- **Newspaper Practice for Sports Reporters** **Time allowed: One hour**

Three questions to be answered.

Part A: Candidates must answer one of two law-related questions, testing their knowledge of defamation, contempt and copyright laws as they apply to sports reporting. **(50 marks)**

Part B: Candidates must answer two of three questions, testing their knowledge of major and less mainstream sports, sports bodies, politics and public affairs.

(25 marks each)

Total 100 marks

- **Sports Interview** **Time allowed: 1 hour 50 minutes**

Candidates are given a briefing note and told they have been given an interview slot with a major sporting figure. Candidates have 15 minutes to read the brief, 20 minutes for the interview, and then 75 minutes to write a 400 word story capturing the main elements of the interview.

Total 100 marks

- **Sports Report (Speech/Press Briefing)**

Time allowed: 75 minutes

Candidates are given 10 minutes to read a briefing note and told they are attending a press conference with a major sporting figure to which rival newspaper, sports agency and broadcasting media have been invited. They will then listen to a speech lasting for five minutes, making a note of that speech. Candidates will have one hour to write a 300 word story for the newspaper.

Total 100 marks

- **Sports Logbook:**

The sports logbook requires candidates to gather two pieces of published work for 18 different categories over a period of 18 months on-the-job training.

The categories should demonstrate the candidate's ability to produce stories and features covering a wide variety of sports. It should also demonstrate the candidate's ability to produce work for both newspapers and online websites. And it should further demonstrate their basic subbing skills.

Examiners take into account at which stage of a candidate's training examples of work were produced and expect a higher standard from candidates at the end of their training than at the start.

Ten of the 100 marks available are awarded for presentation. The other 90 marks are awarded for the Key Tasks, up to five for each one.

Total 100 marks